

NORSE PHILOLOGY ANNO 1570



By Marita Akhøj Nielsen

In the 1570s the Danish humanist Anders Sørensen Vedel (1542-1616) studied Old Norse and left behind extensive notes on the subject, to which he referred as Gothic, identifying the language with that of the famous ancient people. His main source was a medieval manuscript of the Norwegian kings' sagas, Eirspennill, but he also excerpted Norwegian Renaissance works. His aim certainly was to understand the historical sources, but also to collect material for a description of the language, underlining linguistic affinity between Danish and Gothic. Besides, he used some of the words in his writings because of their archaising effect. On his portrait he had some words from Eirspennill painted in runes that were generally thought to be Gothic letters.

Eirspennill and Anders Sørensen Vedel

In May 1570 the promising young historian Anders Sørensen Vedel came into possession of an old folio manuscript containing the Norwegian kings' sagas written in the original medieval Norwegian-Icelandic or Norse language. This parchment manuscript is still extant and today comprises one of the treasures of the Arnemagnæan Collection in Copenhagen.¹ On its medieval binding there are the remains of a brazen clasp, which has given the manuscript its alternative name *Eirspennill* ("brass-clasp").²

On the last page of the manuscript, Vedel has written "26. Majj / Anno 70 / a B: A:" (26th May / Year 70 / from B: A:). This probably means that he acquired the manuscript on 26 May 1570 from Bjørn Andersen.³ Bjørn Andersen Bjørn belonged to a group of aristocrats who were interested in history, and who supported the middle-class court preacher Anders Sørensen Vedel (1542–1616). The young university master's literary talent and historical knowledge had roused great expectations, and he did indeed publish a series of works that cover a broad range of subjects and are composed in both Latin and Danish. Posterity has primarily valued his Danish transla-

¹ Shelf mark AM 47, 2°.

² Cf. Kålund 1889, 33-35.

³ This interpretation was first put forward by Storm ed. 1877, 45.

tion of Saxo Grammaticus' Latin history of the Danes from c. 1200, *Den Danske Krønike* (The Danish Chronicle) (1575),⁴ as well as his edition of Danish folk ballads, *It Hundrede vduaalde Danske Viser* (A Hundred Selected Danish Ballads) (1591).⁵ In his translation of Saxo, Vedel developed a rich and decorous prose style, which has stood as an illuminating example of classic Danish prose ever since. With his edition of Danish folk ballads, he guaranteed the genre's status as literature of high artistic quality, whilst also creating the principal source for folk ballads.⁶

However, he saw it as his life's mission to compose a vast history of Denmark spanning from ancient times to his own day. The work was never completed, but he left behind extensive drafts and preliminary notes, which nowadays are nearly all housed in The Royal Library, Copenhagen. Several plans for the work have been preserved, and from them it is evident that he not only wished to deal with kings and wars; his history was also intended to provide a broad description of the country, population and culture. For the subject of this essay, Norse philology, it is particularly interesting that he wanted to subject the Danish language to an investigation: "De lingua qua vsi sunt, et huius immutatione acris instituatur inquisitio" (a keen investigation will be carried out of the language that they used and how it has changed).⁷

Vedel's Old Norse research

Today it is broadly known that Danish historians during the Renaissance had access to Old Norse source texts. Within modern Norse philology it is, however, maintained that they were unable to read them, and the seventeenth century is considered the period when the earliest post-medieval information on Icelandic pronunciation appeared as well as the first grammar and dictionary.⁸

This view is not correct, as Vedel has left behind very extensive notes on Old Norse in a manuscript in which he collected linguistic notes. The manuscript is today housed in The Royal Library in Copenhagen with shelf mark Rostgaard 219,4^o. In addition to the Old Norse sections, the manuscript contains collections of Danish etymologies, selected Danish expressions, barba-

⁴ The work has more recently been published as *Anders Sørensen Vedel: Den Danske Krønike. Saxo-oversættelse 1575*, København 1967.

⁵ Recently published as *Anders Sørensen Vedels Hundredvisebog*, København 1993.

⁶ Cf. Lundgreen-Nielsen 2002.

⁷ "Commentariivs de Scribenda Historia danica", MS Gammel Kongelig Samling 2437,4^o, 12^vf. In the Danish version of the text, "Om den Danske Krønike/ at bescriffue", MS Gammel Kongelig Samling 2435,4^o, the corresponding passage can be found on fol. 17^r. Both manuscripts belong to The Royal Library in Copenhagen.

⁸ Cf. Jón Helgason 1931 and Jakob Benediktsson 1991, 95 and 101.

risms and proper nouns. On the first page containing selected Danish phrases (p. 169), Vedel has written the year 1572. Immediately below this, he has added notes that build on the Old Norse records or possibly the preparatory studies for them. From this, his pioneering studies in Old Norse can be dated to some time between 1570 and 1572.

Parts of the manuscript's contents have attracted the interest of Danish language historians, who have pointed out that Vedel's highly lauded style has one of its roots in the word collections in Rostgaard 219,4^o.⁹ In my thesis about his philological works,¹⁰ I have, among other things, investigated his Norse notes. My findings are presented below.

Norse and “Gothic”

The six quires in Rostgaard 219,4^o that contain Norse material are referred to in the manuscript's two lists of contents as “Nomenclator linguæ Gothicæ antiquæ” (the old Gothic language's name-giver) and “Isagoge Linguæ Gothicæ” (introduction to the Gothic language), respectively. At first glance, the term *Gothic* to refer to Old Norwegian-Icelandic seems surprising, but it can be explained by the period's fascination with the Goths, that warrior people who had migrated from Scandinavia in ancient times and conquered almost the entire known world.¹¹

The politically strained relationship between Denmark-Norway and Sweden in the sixteenth century had an off-shoot in scholars' competing to incorporate the Goths into the history of their fatherland at the same time as contesting any connection between the Goths and the neighbouring country.¹² On several occasions, for example in a paper on the etymology of the name *Denmark*, Vedel shows himself to be a patriotic historian by including the Goths in Denmark's past. One of his arguments is the language:

Vnius enim originis esse Cimbros, Daos, Gothos, Celtas, Vandalos & Sueuos, conuincunt tum profectioes iunctim susceptæ, tum lingua eadem & mores minimè dißimiles. Variet certè Dialecti sermonis, rerum nomenclaturæ ratio natiua eadem est.

(Cimbrians, *Dai*, Goths, Celts, Vandals and Sweas have, in fact, all the same origin. This is proved on the one hand by the joined migrations, and on the other hand by the same language, as well as customs which differ minimally from each other. Even if the dialects of the

⁹ Cf. Agerschou 1941, Skautrup 1947, 223-30, and Dalhoff 1969.

¹⁰ Nielsen 2004.

¹¹ Cf. Svennung 1967 and Brough 1985.

¹² Cf. Johannesson 1991 and Ilsøe 1973.

spoken language are different, the original system of naming things is the same).¹³

Vedel does not offer any precise demarcation of Gothic. A single, rather obscure note in Rostgaard 219,4^o perhaps reveals his idea that Gothic was, what we today would call a language family: “Gothica lingua amplissima quo ad climata non nationes vel populos *quæstio*” (Question: Is Gothic a very extensive language as regards territory, not nations or peoples?).¹⁴ His language use, as is sketched below, corresponds to this broad meaning of Gothic.

In the preface to his edition of Danish folk ballads, he mentions “Landskaff ... som Danske eller Gottiske sprog haffue brugt” (Countries ... that have used the Danish or Gothic language) (p. 31b). The literary monuments that are listed immediately below this, are all German and date from the Middle Ages. He also uses *Gothic* in the meaning of “Old German” in Rostgaard 219,4^o, where the Gothic sections comprise two short word lists with both German vocables (p. 57) and Greek words with an ostensibly German etymon (p. 62).

He also refers to Icelandic as *Gothic*. In his eulogy to King Frederik II (1559–88), whose kingdom included not only Denmark, but also Norway and Iceland, Vedel mentions among his majesty’s many outstanding initiatives the printing house in Iceland, which produces books in the language of the local population, “*quæ Gothica est Cimbrica prima & antiquiſſima*” (which is Gothic, the first and most ancient Cimbrian).¹⁵

Yet he does not use the designation *Gothic* for Norwegian of his own time. Norwegian is not mentioned in the list of old languages that are related to Danish, and the reason for this is that, according to Vedel’s understanding, in a not so distant past, Norwegian was identical to Danish. This view is shown by his deliberations on how a history of Denmark should be properly written; the historian must go back to the original sources, as well as to the history of neighbouring countries:

Ad hanc rem cognitione linguarum opus est, non latinæ aut græcæ tantum, sed et vetustæ quoque nostræ Danicæ. Ea enim conscriptæ sunt historiæ Noruagicæ amplissimæ, quibus nullo modo carere possumus. Atque optandum erat deligi ad harum translationem, homines eius idiomatis egregiè peritos.

¹³ Vedel 1584, *Oratio de origine appellationis regni Daniae*, A 4^r.

¹⁴ Rostgaard 219,4^o, 3. The note has been incorrectly written: the original has “*amplittana*” for “*amplissima*”.

¹⁵ Vedel 1580, *Oratio panegyrica, oblata serenissimo ac potentissimo Regi Daniae, Domino Friderico II ...*, E 1^v.

(For this, a knowledge of languages is necessary, not just of Latin or Greek, but also of our old Danish. Because it is in that language that the particularly extensive Norwegian histories have been written. We cannot do without them in any way, and we can but wish that men who are very knowledgeable in this tongue be chosen to translate these writings).¹⁶

Similarly, he writes in the preface to his edition of the folk ballads: “hine gamle Skialdrer (som de kaldis paa gamel Dansk eller Norsk Maal)” (the old skalds (as they are called in the old Danish or Norwegian tongue)) (p. 33a). The identity of Norwegian and old Danish was apparently so obvious to him that he did not find it necessary to discuss it.

Thus, Vedel uses *Gothic* for the medieval language period of German, Danish, Norwegian and Icelandic, and also for Icelandic of his own time. As a result of the political climate, Swedish is banished from the noble circle of Gothic languages.

The nature of the Norse notes in Rostgaard 219,4^o

The manuscript’s Norse material is collected on pages 52–142. They are not particularly extensive, however, as many pages have, in fact, been left blank. Nonetheless, it is a very varied collection of notes. First of all there are some short, coherent texts. The main section is a glossary arranged alphabetically (pp. 63–140), followed by lists of particles, synonyms and abbreviations (pp. 141–42). The entire section concludes with some systematic observations (p. 142).

The texts

The section is introduced by a title written on its own on page 51: “*Lex GOTHICA ANTIQVA Cuius vsus in Noruagia et Islandia : et vestigia quædam in legibus Danicis*” (An old Gothic law, its use in Norway and Iceland, and some traces of it in Danish laws). The formulation reveals the Renaissance historian’s interest in legal codices as key sources, and the wide dissemination of the law in question makes it a suitable tool in efforts to claim the Goths as Danes. On the following page is the law text itself with the heading “*Leges Suenonis Spurij Canuti Cognomento Diuitis*” (The laws, given by Sven, illegitimate son of Canute nicknamed the Rich) (p. 52). The information is correct: these are indeed the laws of Canute the Great’s son, Sven Alfivason, as they are reported in the Norwegian kings’ sagas. The text is a

¹⁶ “*Commentarivs de Scribenda Historia danica*” 18^v. The corresponding passage in “*Om den Danske Krønike/ at bescriffue*” can be found on fol. 25^f.

verbatim copy of *Eirspennill*, where the laws appear on fol. 1^v.¹⁷ Not only is the copy word for word, it has also taken over a series of abbreviations, unusual letter forms and spellings from the original. Even if it is not a flawless copy, the level of ambition is high. A single, very rare word, *homlor* (ropes for fastening an oar to the gunwale), has been provided with a gloss, viz. *frihed* (freedom), which quite obviously is not correct, but is a good guess from the context.

On page 54 there is a copy of a later passage from *Eirspennill* (fol. 102^r)¹⁸ with the heading “Oratio Regis Suerj contra Ebrietatem” (King Sverrir’s speech against drunkenness). With his heading, Vedel has highlighted the genre *speech* and also underlined the section’s subject matter – drinking, which was very topical in his day. In his funeral sermon for Frederik II, he formulated, with appropriate caution, his theory concerning the reason for the king’s death: his majesty could have lived many more days, if court life had not forced him to consume large quantities of alcohol on a daily basis.¹⁹ Generally, the section is of the same character and quality as the law section. However, it contains many more glosses, not fewer than twenty-seven in the rather short text. They all provide a Latin translation – remarkably correct translations – and a couple of them expand abbreviations; thus, *eda* (or) is glossed *eda vel* (or) (p. 54).

By all accounts the two texts were to serve as a preliminary introduction to West Scandinavian. The copying and commentary have been executed with much diligence and show a knowledge that Vedel himself could hardly have acquired without the help of an Icelander.

A definite clue to a living connection with Iceland can be found on page 56 in Rostgaard 219,4^o. Here is a short poem, which, unlike the rest of the manuscript, was not written by Vedel himself. The letter forms and spellings reveal the author to be an Icelander (who cannot be identified). Two further modern Icelandic texts on the same page, two proverbs and a verse with several metrical subtleties, must also derive from a contemporary Icelandic source.

Despite their brevity, the Norse and modern Icelandic texts when viewed as a whole provide a broad cross-section of West Scandinavian literature. Important genres, such as laws, speeches, poetry and proverbs, are all represented. The aim of Vedel’s notes was probably to learn the language, but additionally he may have wished to collect different types of sample texts, which could be incorporated into a description of both the old Gothic lan-

¹⁷ Cf. *Eirspennill - AM 47 fol - Nóregs konunga sögur Magnús góði - Hákon gamli*, ed. Finnur Jónsson 1916, 1f.

¹⁸ Cf. p. 353f in Jónsson’s edition.

¹⁹ Vedel 1588, *En sørgelig Ligpredicken ...*, C 4.

guage and its contemporary manifestation in a distant, but fascinating corner of the Danish king's domain.

The glossary

Vedel gave the Norse glossary the title “FAX ANTIQVÆ LINGVÆ GOTHICÆ” (the old Gothic language's torch) (p. 63), a title that plays on the image of being enlightening and inflaming. In its design the dictionary is quite extensive, as seventy-eight pages divided into two columns have been set aside for it. However, only five or six pages have been filled in. The 148 articles in the glossary have been added on a number of separate occasions, as can be seen from the colour of the ink and the ductus, but the glossary is not dated. In its current format the little dictionary is a private work tool, far from ready for publication.

The structure of the articles is simple, and rather fixed. After the lemma comes the translation equivalent(s). Then Norse material that is related to the lemma is sometimes mentioned. Vedel now and then explains the lemma's etymology or gives other information of historical and philological relevance, for example etymologically related words in other languages. No article includes all of these types of information, but they can be exemplified with a handful of articles:

aul /: øll (beer, i.e. *beer*) (p. 63).

fystis :/: cupere fyst/ cupiditas. Libido (to desire, i.e. *to desire*; desire, i.e. *desire, lust*) (p. 83).

Hird :/: kongehoff a tuitione Regia (the king's men, i.e. *court*, from the protection of the king) (p. 91).

at tiallda :/: tabernaculum collocare: *quiescere*. tiel (to pitch a tent, i.e. *to pitch a tent, to rest*; tent) (p. 133).

The selection of lemmas demonstrates a dependence on as well as an interest in historical sources. The *Hird* article cited above is one such example. Another that unequivocally points to the Norwegian kings' sagas is the article on the *birch-legs*, as the supporters of King Sverrir (c. 1151–1202) were known, who sought refuge in the forests during periods of unrest:

Birkebenerne :/: krigsmend a ligneis calceis. soli Suere seruiebant (the birch-legs, i.e. *warriors*, from birch-boots; they served only Sverrir) (p. 67).

A number of quite usual words have been excerpted, for example *Mader* (man) (p. 107), but it goes without saying that a great many frequent words have not been included in the dictionary. The reason is probably that Vedel understood them without any problem. It is not surprising that he has noted rare words, for example *olteiti* (in high spirits from drinking) (p. 115). Sometimes he appears to have noted words that could contribute to his

Gothic project by demonstrating striking similarities between Danish and West Scandinavian. This could explain why he gives both a Danish and a Latin equivalent in the following article:

orden *:/*: vorden factus (become, i.e. *become, become*) (p. 115).

The lemma in this article is a preterite participle, and such unlexical forms are not uncommon among his keywords. A number of them are combinations of more than one word, for example:

Mæli maltz *:/*: modius hordej (measure of malt, i.e. *measure of barley*) (p. 107).

Without doubt, the source language in by far the majority of cases is Norse. Some lemmas have, however, been Danicised to varying degrees, for example *Birckebenerne* for Norse *birkibeinarnir, fjør oc fæ* (p. 83) for *fjör ok fé* (life and property) and *Quersette it skib* (p. 123) for *kyrrsetja eitt skip* (to sequester a ship). Influence from post-medieval West Norse lies behind forms such as *glæper* (wickedness, sin) and *goruilligster mader* (the most capable man) (all on p. 87), where the medieval morpheme for the nominative singular masculine *-r* has been realised as *-er*. The spelling is predominantly known from Norwegian texts, but there are also Icelandic examples from this period, even though the modern Icelandic svarabhakti vowel between a consonant and a final *-r* was normally realised as *-u*.²⁰ In so far as Vedel's *-e-* is of Icelandic origin, it is probably best explained as a Dane's interpretation of the final syllable's "murmur vowel," supported by the adjective ending *-er* found in Danish at that time. Nonetheless, influence from contemporary Norwegian cannot be ruled out.

The translation equivalents are Latin or – more rarely – Danish, and sometimes a combination of both languages, as can be seen in the examples quoted above. More than two thirds of the equivalents are correct, in so far as they reproduce at least one of the lemma's principal meanings. It is clear that Vedel did not have ambitions to refer to the words' polysemy; he limited himself to noting those definitions that he found surprising or relevant. Less than 10% of his translations are decidedly wrong; not a bad achievement, in view of the fact that he was working with medieval manuscripts without grammatical or lexicographical aids.

The Norse material that is related to the lemmas is of various kinds. Vedel has noted the inflectional forms in only a few cases; most fully in the article for *Bu* (accommodation), where, in addition to the nominative singu-

²⁰ Cf. Mundal 1997, Christiansen 1976, 101-107, "Islandia", in Abrahamus Ortelius, *Additamentum IV Theatri orbis terrarum* (Antwerpen 1590), no. 14 (facsimile edition Reykjavik 1978), myndblað 1), and Wessén 1975, 43.

lar, he gives the nominative and dative plural (p. 67). For *yfuerhofn* (overcoat) he cites a synonym after the Latin equivalent: “faut aliàs dicitur” (otherwise called *föt*) (p. 140). Collocations appear quite frequently, and they can explain apparently strange forms of the lemma, like in the article for *ky-lino*, which is the definite form in the dative singular of *kýli* (abscess); here we find the phrase “greip a ky-lino” (touched a sore spot) (p. 99). Finally, he sheds light on word formation in some of his articles; for example, the compound *kennemenna* (priests) has been added under *kenna* (teach) (p. 99). With this sort of information he has moved beyond creating a simple translation aid, and has collected material for an actual description of the language.

Some of Vedel's etymologies in the glossary stay within Norse, as is the case with the explanation of *birch-legs* quoted above. In other cases he takes the opportunity to broaden the perspective to embrace wide historical connections. Thus, he derives the tribal name *Langobards* from *Barde*, the preterite of *berja* (to beat) (p. 67). The explanation *robusti milites* (strong soldiers) is added to the name, by which he was probably indicating that the etymon is a combination of the Danish word *lange* (long (time)) and a hypothetical *barder*, the meaning of which is along the lines of “beating (warriors).” The etymology of the name of this tribe was disputed during the Renaissance, something Vedel would have known from, among others, the slightly earlier German historian Albert Krantz, who examined the possibilities in his history of Scandinavia.²¹ According to Krantz, the word may have its origin in “long-beard,” or in the north German place-name *Bardorum uicum* (Barth?), or – and this is his favourite explanation – in the characterisation *longi barbari*, which the Italians gave the invading people on account of their height. Against this, Vedel could now propose his far more heroic interpretation of the name's origin – an etymology that had been worked out by a good patriot and philologist, who was as scholarly as he was creative.

The parallels between the old Gothic language and other languages are not just apparent from the etymologies, but also in more poorly integrated juxtapositions. One such example is in the article for “at tiallda” [to pitch a tent] given above; it ends with the Danish word *tield* (tent) without further comments, a discrete underlining of linguistic affinity. In addition to Danish, connections are made to German, English and Scots, but in contrast to Danish, each of these languages is included only once (pp. 83 and 75). It is more noteworthy that Swedish is also mentioned only once, namely in the listing of terms for “outlawed” (p. 137) in the three mainland Scandinavian languages: Swedish *vildlager* (mistake for *biltoger* or similar), Norwegian

²¹ Krantz 1560, *Chronica regnorvm aqvilonarivm*, 72f. (first edition Strassbourg 1546).

vdsleger, and Danish *fredløss*. This failure to mention Swedish must be a symptom of the polemic, anti-Swedish aim of his research into Gothic. Ignoring the huge number of parallels between Swedish and both West Norse and Danish in every linguistic period required real ill will on Vedel's part.

To assess the merits of Vedel's Norse glossary, it is necessary to know his sources. The main source for his Norse material is, without doubt, *Eir-spennill*. Of the Norse words quoted so far, the manuscript has, among others, *aul*, *ólteíti*, *göruiligsti maðr* and *greip ... a kylino*.²²

Nearly all the Danicised lemmas are excerpted from three works which were created by the Norwegian Renaissance movement: Mattis Størssøn's abbreviated version of the kings' sagas, Absalon Pederssøn Beyer's description of Norway, and the translation of the Old Norwegian *Hirðskrá* (The law of the king's men).²³ Among others, *birchebener*, *quersette ... skip*, and *fiør och fee* derive from these three works.²⁴ It is not only the lemmas that Vedel has taken from these sources, but also the explanations of the words' meaning and origin. We might be puzzled by the fact that Vedel incorporated material from near-contemporary works in his glossary of old Gothic, but we have to make allowance for the fact that all of his excerpted words are attested in the medieval language.

In spite of an exhaustive investigation, it has not been possible to identify all of his sources, and it is possible that they are no longer extant. The fact that only later examples of one of the words, viz. *rækall* (p. 63), can be found in dictionaries, only serves to add to this worrying thought. The word is used as a synonym for *andskoti* (adversary, often about the devil), and can be identified as a contracted form of *rægikarl* (slanderer), a direct translation of the Græco-Latin *diabolus*. The full form is first attested in the eighteenth century, and the shortened version in the seventeenth at the earliest.²⁵ Now the word's use in written language can be dated back to c. 1570.

The shorter word lists

As a supplement to his glossary, Vedel produced two shorter word indices, one a list of very frequent particles, the other an overview of common abbreviations (pp. 141 and 142). Both collections consist of Norse material which differs strikingly from Danish. The lists were evidently drawn up at

²² In Jónsson's edition pp. 5, 147, 5 and 148 respectively.

²³ The first two have most recently been published as Størssøn ed. 1962, *Den norske krønike*, and Beyer 1895, "Om Norgis rige". As far as the translation of *Hirðskrá* is concerned, the nearest parallel to Vedel's source is in a manuscript in the Arnamagnæan Collection in Copenhagen, AM 107,4°.

²⁴ The three words are quoted from Størssøn p. 93, Beyer p. 20 and AM 107,4° fol. 17^v.

²⁵ Cf. Ásgeir Blöndal Magnússon, 1989, 785. I am indebted to Allan Karker for having identified the word.

about the same time as the glossary, with the purpose of creating a quick overview of frequently occurring expressions which were not immediately understandable. His commentaries to the excerpts show that he had a good understanding of the material.

Just as in the glossary, certain spellings in these lists reveal a knowledge of post-medieval Icelandic, viz. *ie* for medieval /ē/ in the pronouns *sier* (oneself (dative)), *pier* (you (plural)), and *pier* (you (dative singular)) (all on p. 141).²⁶ One note deals explicitly with pronunciation: alongside the abbreviation “*pat*” (it), Vedel has added the comment “*tad legunt*” (they read *tad*) (p. 142). This information on pronunciation is clearly strong evidence that he had contact with an Icelander. The verb *legunt* also gives us an impression of how they worked together: the Icelander would have read aloud the text that they were both looking at, and judging by the plural form of the verb, he must have told Vedel that that was the usual pronunciation among his fellow countrymen. The representation of the original *p*- by *t*- is striking, and is probably the result of Vedel’s not knowing the phoneme /p/ from his mother tongue, and therefore his reproducing the sound with the obvious choice, *t*. He does this several times in his glossary, and it is quite a sensible practice considering that Icelandic *p*- corresponds to Danish *t*- in the vast majority of words. It is more interesting that he describes the pronunciation of the final *-t* in *pat* as *-d*, because this corresponds to the modern Icelandic development of weakly stressed /t/ to /ð/.²⁷ This short note is one of the very oldest statements concerning modern Icelandic pronunciation.

The source for the two lists cannot be identified with any certainty. Almost everything could have been taken from *Eirspennill*, but also from many other texts, since most of the items occur very frequently in Norse.

However, *Eirspennill* could hardly have been the source for the two remaining word lists. The one is a numbered list with sixteen Norse words meaning *king*, the other contains two kennings for ships. They have a different written style than the rest of the Norse section, and may date from a later time. Vedel probably came across the words in these lists in connection with his historical studies, and found them to be so interesting that he incorporated them in his Norse notes. He had to squeeze them in where there was room left, and that happened to be the case at the bottom of page 141.

The systematic observations

At the end of the Norse part of Rostgaard 219,4° (p. 142), Vedel has noted scattered observations of general differences between West Norse and Dan-

²⁶ Cf. Stefán Karlsson 1989, 8.

²⁷ Cf. Wessén 1975, 47.

ish. A formulation of correspondences between letters, such as “a pro e” (*a* for *e*) and “au pro ø” (*au* for *ø*), is of very great interest. He does not write explicitly what he means by this formulation, but from the final correspondence in particular, it appears that he is drawing up a contrastive overview of autographemes in West Norse and Danish. Unfortunately, he does not provide any examples, and so the scope of his observations cannot be determined. However, we can be sure that he was on the scent of important phonological developments, namely both the Danish weakening of unstressed vowels to a neutral vowel (realised as *e* in writing), and the East Scandinavian monophthongisation of all Common Scandinavian diphthongs. Even the lenition of plosives in Danish, by which intervocalic plosives were voiced and then fricativised, has been noted: “k pro g vt taka” (*k* for *g* as in *to take*); however, he does not mention the fact that /p/ and /t/ underwent a similar development.

In the middle of these observations that all build on *Eirspennill*, Vedel has added a piece of information about correct pronunciation: “a vt au legendum” (*a* must be read as *au*). The information must have been provided by an Icelander, as the diphthongisation of /ā/ is characteristic of modern Icelandic.²⁸ The choice of the word *legendum* is an indication that Vedel only intended to use Icelandic for reading (aloud), and not for conversing.

There is one explicitly diachronic observation: “pluribus quam nunc vsi litteris in syllaba vna crassius locuti” (they used more letters in a syllable than now, corresponding to a coarser pronunciation). Behind this somewhat vague formulation there is probably an understanding that the introduction of the svarabhakti vowel, a rather late occurrence, resulted in more syllables, and so each had fewer letters than previously.²⁹

The systematic observations are scattered and rather haphazard, but they are the result of Vedel's pioneering work. Given the conditions and times he was working in, he was a brilliant observer of linguistic phenomena.

Vedel's Norse notes and contemporary linguistics

Vedel's exploration of medieval Norwegian-Icelandic is an expression of the interest in the earlier periods of vernacular tongues during the Renaissance. This interest came about through a combination of two popular pursuits during the period: studying the history of the fatherland and the cultivation of language.

The closest parallel to his Norse notes can be found in the contemporary editions of older vernacular texts, with some of which he was acquainted. In

²⁸ Cf. Wessén 1975, 47.

²⁹ Jonna Louis-Jensen proposed this interpretation which in my opinion is convincing.

a bibliography of a somewhat later date, he mentions Matthias Flacius Illyricus' edition of Otfrid's evangelary from 1571.³⁰ This edition is constructed in a very pedagogical manner: before the Old High German text itself there is a glossary by Achilles Pirminius Gassar, a short sample text with an interlinear translation into German, and finally Otfrid's vernacular preface with a synoptic translation into modern German, followed by his Latin preface.

The glossary contains a bit more than three hundred articles, thus it is about twice the length of Vedel's. As far as the ordering of the material and lemmatisation are concerned, the two word lists are very similar. In Gassar's glossary the vast majority of articles consist only of lemmas and translation equivalents; judging from the standards of later times, the quality of the translations is variable.³¹ Word formation, synonymy, etymology and relationships to other languages are examined only in exceptional cases; the vocabulary is decidedly intended as an aid to understanding the text that follows. Although incomplete, Vedel's West Scandinavian glossary is every bit as good as Gassar's work.

Of the short sample texts in Rostgaard 219,4^o, Sverrir's speech with its many glosses is particularly reminiscent of the introductory texts in the Otfrid edition. It was generally popular, both in historical and linguistic works, to present language samples in the form of short, known texts, such as the Lord's prayer or the creed, in different languages, among others Icelandic.³² These texts are often accompanied by translations or at least furnished with occasional glosses, corresponding to Vedel's own approach.

Vedel's use of the Norse notes

The very nature of Vedel's Norse notes suggests that one of their purposes was to serve as an aid in understanding historical sources. To what extent they actually did help him cannot be determined, because he never completed his history of Denmark.

Another aim was the use of the Gothic collections as an argument for affinity between Danish and a series of other languages. This affinity was supposed to prove a common prehistory of the peoples in question. But in his speech on the etymology of the name *Denmark* he only makes sporadic

³⁰ Otfrid, *Evangeliorvm liber: ueterum Germanorum grammaticæ, poeseos, theologiæ, præclarum monimentum. Euangelien Buch/ in altfrenckischen reimen*, ed. Matthias Flacius Illyricus (Basel 1571). The work is mentioned in the youngest version of Vedel's outline of the material that was relevant to his history of Denmark, Ny kongelig Samling 884,4^o in The Royal Library, Copenhagen, 27.

³¹ Cf. von Raumer 1870, 36.

³² For example, Konrad Gesner 1555, *Mithridates. De differentiis linguarvm ... Obseruationes*, 40^r.

use of his notes, and he does not make systematic use of the knowledge of West Norse which he had so laboriously acquired.

Nonetheless, the Gothic sections in Rostgaard 219,4° have left their mark on the works that Vedel actually did complete. From the glossary – or perhaps from the excerpts that it builds on – he has collected a series of stylistically characteristic words and turns of phrase which he makes particular use of in his historical writings. A couple of examples will serve to illustrate his practice.

On the basis of the glossary's *tiallda* (to pitch a tent), he appears to have created the verb *tjælde*, the earliest occurrences of which can be found in his translation of Saxo (pp. 311 and 387). There he uses the verb solely about covering ships; the meaning has thus been narrowed, compared with the West Norse original.

The phrase *fiør oc fæ* (life and property), which is unknown in Danish before Vedel, is introduced in a very pedagogical fashion in his translation of Saxo, where the unusual phrase follows the translation the first two times it occurs: “liff oc gods/ fiør oc fæ” (life and property, life and property) (p. 4, cf. p. 36). Subsequently, the order is reversed, but the explanation is kept: “Fiør oc Fæ/ det er/ Gods oc Liff” (life and property, that is, property and life) (p. 100), after which the phrase is considered so well established that it is cited alone: *Fiør eller Fæ* (life or property) (p. 331, cf. int. al. p. 394).

Vedel uses the phrase *Quersette it skib* (to sequester a ship), which is not previously attested in Danish, a number of times in historical contexts. Each time it is one's own ships that are being sequestered,³³ so that the meaning must be to ‘bring ashore’ or something similar. It implies a deviation from the equivalent in the glossary, *anholde* (to detain, to arrogate), as well as from the substance of the Norse word, to “confiscate.” This development in meaning shows that, in all probability, he was more interested in style than philology. The word *kvær-sætte* sounded good, and the compound was immediately transparent to a contemporary Dane, who would have been able to recognise the two elements as common words. That the meaning was “wrong” with regard to the lending language was altogether a matter of secondary importance.

As to the sources of the West Norse words that Vedel incorporated into his own language, it is noteworthy that the largest group was excerpted from the three Norwegian Renaissance works mentioned above. In these texts the Old Norse words were Danicised, and it is probably this polishing that made them usable in his eyes.

³³ Cf. the translation of Saxo 136, 184 and 449.

For Vedel, the greatest stylistic asset in incorporating West Norse words and phrases was most probably their archaizing effect. Furthermore, the expressions often occur in paratagms where they give the description body or are used as alternative expressions for a nearby synonym. Breadth and variation are characteristic for his style, and both ideals must have made him interested in enlarging his vocabulary. He was, however, not logorrhoeic, and this is also evident in how he treated his Gothic notes: he was choosy in his selection and only let a few of the words into his language.

As far as we know, Vedel was the first to enrich the Danish language by deliberately importing Norwegian words and phrases. Even though he is also a pioneer in this respect, the adoption of Norwegianisms occurs to such a modest extent that augmenting the Danish lexicon can hardly be proclaimed as his sole purpose. He uses the West Scandinavian words as elements in stylistic efforts, which rather than being defined as dependent on his interest in Norwegian sources, are better understood within the context of Renaissance rhetoric.³⁴

The Gothic letters: runes

In the sixteenth century great interest was attached to the runic alphabet.³⁵ As is the case with his contemporaries, for example the Swedish historian Johannes Magnus, Vedel describes runes as old Gothic letters.³⁶ There are two runic alphabets in his papers,³⁷ but strangely, they have not been incorporated into the Gothic collections in Rostgaard 219,4^o, where there are no notes on runes. In this manuscript they are only mentioned in the etymology of the name for the Germanic prophetesses, “*alirunæ quia totæ in runis*” (*alirunæ* (prophetesses) because *al-i-runæ*, *all in runes*) (p. 63); his idea may have been that the *alirunæ* framed all their messages in runes.

The old runic inscriptions in Scandinavia fascinated scholars at Vedel's time, and he mentions such texts in several connections. Nevertheless, we have no evidence of his having deciphered runes himself. He was, though, presented with a very special inscription by Frederik II, namely a herring on whose sides a crown and some old Gothic letters could clearly be made out. Vedel offered no reading of the runes, but interpreted the strange animal as

³⁴ Cf., for example, Erasmus of Rotterdam 1534, *De dvplici copia Verborum ac Rerum Commentarij duo*, 16-25.

³⁵Cf. Nielsen 2007.

³⁶ Among other places in his preface to the planned history of Denmark, MS Gammel Kongelig Samling 824,2^o in The Royal Library in Copenhagen, 38^v; cf. Johannes Magnus 1554, *Gothorum Sveonvmqve historia*, 24f.

³⁷ Viz. in MS Gammel Kongelig Samling 2414,4^o, 54^vf., and MS Additamenta 121,4^o, 9f., both in The Royal Library in Copenhagen.

an omen of fish death – and when the king died shortly afterwards, it was also taken as an omen of his imminent death.³⁸

Among scholars in Scandinavia, runic script was sometimes used for private notes and as a secret code. Vedel did not belong to the runic enthusiasts, but he nonetheless used this old Scandinavian script in one conspicuous place. In 1578 he had a portrait of himself painted by the prominent artist Tobias Gemperle. This beautiful picture is today to be found in The National Historical Museum at Frederiksborg Palace north of Copenhagen. In the foreground of the painting there are three sheets of paper or parchment, on two of which runes are written. Until now they have been viewed as a collection of meaningless symbols,³⁹ but when they are deciphered using Vedel's own runic alphabets, they make perfectly good sense. The transcription of the text on one of the sheets reads "Sigvarð Iorselafar fregðer maðer" (Sigurðr Jórsalafari, a famous man), and the other reads *Birkbene* (birch-legs). The first text is clearly Norse, whilst the other is, if anything, sixteenth-century Norwegian. But both make use of the words which were gleaned from the Norwegian kings' sagas, and in Vedel's opinion, they were both Old Gothic as is shown by his glossary in Rostgaard 219,4°. In the painting he could render the language in that form which he undoubtedly viewed as original: the Gothic alphabet.

The portrait had an important representative function. It presents Vedel as he would like to be seen by his contemporaries and future generations: a scholarly historian who mastered Norse, the language of his sources, his mother tongue in its venerable ancient form.

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³⁸ Cf. Vedel's funeral sermon for Frederik II fol. E 4^v (Vedel 1588). The somewhat rambling tale about the omen of the herring is told in Petersen 1855-56, 394-96, 399f., and Vigerust 2005, 17-19.

³⁹ Cf. Lundgreen-Nielsen 2002, 247, and Bæksted 1939.

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