

**RUNES AROUND THE NORTH SEA AND
ON THE CONTINENT AD 150-700;
TEXTS & CONTEXTS**

Proefschrift

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door

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14. *Britsum* (Friesland), a small yew-wooden stick, found in 1906. Seen at the FM, Leeuwarden. No date. Most of the runes are carved in three, four, five lines, which reminds of the inscriptions on the *Lindholm* amulet and the *Kragehul* spearshaft (Danish Corpus). On one side is carved LID in what looks like Roman lettering.

ÞYHFBMRMTWNN
IMWYRYB: LID

One of the runes has the form of a younger-*futhork* k, or else the so-called English 'bookhand' s. Both transliterations meet with difficulties; one would get **þkniaberetdud** or **þsniaberetdud** on one side; on the other side, running from right to left: **ln:bkrrkdm** or **ln:bsrsdmi**.

Neither of these sequences allow for a meaningful interpretation. The rune Υ probably represents a vowel. For instance, Bugge (1908:176-177) took it as representing *i* or *e*. Odenstedt (1989:158) proposed to take it as a variety of the Anglo-Frisian $\bar{\alpha}$. Bugge (1908:177-179) read **þin i a beret dud LID** "Trage immer diese Eibe, darin liegt Tugend. LID". The second line would go thus:

ln bered mi or **ln birid mi**, which Bugge interprets: "N.N. trägt mich". Odenstedt (1989:158) read **þon i a beret dud //n borod mi liu**, "always bear this yewstave against paralysis (or drunkenness), NN perforated me. liu". Obviously Bugge read LID as Roman letters, whereas

Odenstedt took the signs for runes. **borod**, according to Odenstedt (1989:159), can only be the 3rd pers. sg. pres. of a verb like OE *borian* (< **borōan*) 'bore, perforate, make a hole in'. There is, however, no hole in the stick, therefore this reading must be rejected.



The Britsum Yew-wooden stick.

A solution may be, to take it to represent *æ*, a variant on the Danish *æ* †. I suggest to transliterate: **þæn i a beret dud]n bæræd mi.**

þæn dem. pron. acc. sg. 'this'.

i refers probably to the piece of yew wood, also in the acc. sg. masculine. This part of the text must be the object.

beret is plural imp. 'bear' of OFris inf. *bera*.

When interpreting **a** < **aiwi* 'always', we find an instance of monophthongization of Gmc **ai* > OFris *ā*, represented by the **ansuz* rune, or the Anglo-Frisian *æsc* rune, which, accordingly, should be transliterated *æ*. If so, it should represent another sound value than *æ* in **bæræd**. To avoid confusion, I transliterate it **a**, although this might be misleading.

dud has several interpretations, such as a PN, according to Gijsseling (1980:7). Bugge (1908:179) interpreted **dud** as 'virtue', **dud** would be a contraction of *dugup*. Arntz (1939:1-67) proposes 'Kraft' or 'Betäubung'. Buma (1951:316 ff.) connected **dud** with OE *duguð* 'the warriors who sit near the king in the hall', 'the tried warriors' (Beowulf 359), which means the king's *comitatus*, see also Campbell (§ 345 and 588,5).

bæræd I read as *bæ-ræd* 3 sg. pres. ind. of the inf. *bæ-rædan* 'to prepare' (Holthausen 1963:252 lists OFris *bi-ræda*), perhaps in the sense of carving the runes? It could otherwise be 3 sg. pret. ind. of the strong verb Gmc **rēdan*, OFris *rædan* 'to guess'.

mi is dat. sg. pers. pron. 'me'.

LID is in Roman lettering and means 'ship' (Holthausen 1963:201), or 'retinue', according to De Vries (1962:354). The text may be interpreted as: 'warriors: bear always this yew stick (on the) ship (or in the retinue, a metaphor for 'on the warpath?'); ...]n prepares me, or]n guessed = read me'. Possibly the stick is a kind of amulet.