

NORTH-WESTERN EUROPEAN  
LANGUAGE EVOLUTION

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*University Press of Southern Denmark  
Campusvej 55, DK-5230 Odense M, Denmark*

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VOL. 45 OCTOBER 2004

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NOWELE

UNIVERSITY PRESS OF SOUTHERN DENMARK

ROBERT NEDOMA, *Kleine Grammatik des Altisländischen*. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 2001. Pp. 144.

*Reviewed by* SVERRE JOHNSEN

Two grammars of Old Norse in non-Nordic languages were published in 1999, Álvarez' *Antigua islandes. Historia y lengua* (which has not been available to me) and Barnes' *A new introduction to Old Norse. Part I: Grammar*. Robert Nedoma, Vienna, has taken on the task of writing a new grammar of Old Norse, in German.

This grammar does not aim at enlightening scholars of Old Norse, but is 'als Lehr- und Lernbehelf für den akademischen Unterricht konzipiert' (back cover). The book must therefore be judged in that context.

#### *General remarks*

I discovered quickly that the description is traditional in the sense that a chapter on the historical phonology precedes the morphological description. This is the appropriate presentation, since an understanding of the sound changes in the earlier stages of the West Nordic language facilitates the understanding of the morphological system of Old Norse. Although the chapter covering this is short (12 pages), it manages to cover all the essential sound changes.

Also the morphological part of the book follows the traditional description, both in the order of the morphological categories, as well as in the naming of the different declinations and conjugations. This tradition was set by the neogrammarians in the late 19th century, and keeping to this tradition has its definite perks, in that (1) Those students familiar with grammars of other languages do not have to struggle with a different description in addition to a new language, and (2) Those students who want to move on to larger grammars of Old Norse (like Heusler 1932 and especially Noreen 1923) can easily look up forms, knowing where to find them.

After the seven classes of ablaut verbs, there is an ablaut/umlaut list in which the student might find the infinitive to the verbal form he

has found in the text. I am sure that this list will come in very handy for a beginner in Old Norse studies.

In addition to the morphology, the book has a short chapter on syntax, which is only meant as 'eine Art Wegweiser' (p. 107), and I think it fulfils this task. The final chapter is a four-page long appendix on Old Norwegian listing its main differences from Old Icelandic.

Throughout the book there are references to special literature for students wanting to dig further into a certain aspect of the language. These references are mainly to recent literature, making them a useful starting point for the student. The book finishes off with a bibliography with the main books for Old Norse studies, and these books are commented on and evaluated. I think this is an excellent bibliography, especially the part covering grammars and dictionaries,<sup>1</sup> and it should prove to be invaluable to the student who wants to move on after the introductory course.

#### *Specific remarks*

There are but a few typos. An /ɔ/, i.e. *q*, is missing in the vowel paradigm on p. 18. The plural of *hond*, *hendr*, is misspelt *hændr* (p. 43), and *sumar* is misspelt *sumur* on p. 44.

(p. 21) The pronunciation [ç]/[x] of /g/ does not belong to classic Old Icelandic, but is rather a later development in Icelandic. This pronunciation appears when /g/ is followed by a voiceless obstruent, such as n.nom.sg. *heilagt* to *heilagur*. In Old Icelandic, however, the pronunciation of /-gt/ is [-kt], obvious in writings such as *land* or *heilact* (Grímnismál 4.1, Bugge 1867:77).

(p. 21) The claim that <v> is 'inlautend (nur intervokalisch?) zunächst wohl noch labial-velar (phonetisch [w])' as opposed to the development to [v] elsewhere, is incorrect. The transition [w] > [v/v] occurs *first* in intervocalic position, when a form such as the old *sævar* (gen.sg. of *sær*) is replaced by *sæfar*. After a consonant other than *r* and *l*, however, the pronunciation [w] is upheld throughout Old Icelandic, in forms such as *kjǫtvi* (dat.sg. of *kjǫt*).

(p. 25-26) To exemplify umlaut, the author uses the noun *bógr*, correctly reconstructed as *\*bōguz*, a *u*-stem. Its nom.pl., on the other hand, is reconstructed as *\*bōgiz*. A nom.pl. ending *\*-iz* belongs only to

the consonant stem. This is a slip in the reconstruction which leads him to construct the plural *\*bōgiz* to a non-existing Old Norse form *bōgr*. The correct form is a regular *u*-stem plural *bōgir*.

(p. 27) The reconstruction of the m.nom.sg. *n*-stem ending *-i* to Proto-Germanic *\*-ǣ* should be dated by now. The Illerup findings with proper names ending in *-ō* lead to the conclusion that the original ending was *\*-ō*, and corresponding with West Germanic. This was later replaced by an analogical ending (from the oblique cases) *-a* (in several runic findings), and finally by Old Nordic *-i*. The origin of this *-i* is, according to Lid (1952:239), the *ijan*-stem, where the nom.sg. *\*-ija* regularly becomes *-i*.

(p. 33) The forms *bitt* and *batt* (to *bindan*) do not belong to the subparagraph §11.2, as the neuter forms *mitt* and *eitt* are a result of an assimilation in unaccented position, whereas *bitt* and *batt* have *\*nt* > *tt* as the regular development in an older stage of the language. They rather belong to the next subparagraph, §11.3, where they actually reappear in Anm. 15.

(p. 46) The zero grade of the *n*-suffix in the plural of the *n*-stems did not appear only in the genitive. This is clear from the fact that some old *n*-stems have become *u*-stems in Old Norse (such as *orn* 'eagle' *u*-st. ← *ari* 'id.' *n*-st.). This could only have happened when the zero grade *\*-n-* appeared before an ending with a syllabic nasal, giving the sequence *\*-nuN-*. This must have occurred in the acc.pl. *\*ar-n-ŋz* and possibly in the dat.pl. *\*ar-n-mz*.

(p. 50) It should be mentioned here that the neuter adjective ending *-t* is lengthened after a vowel, as in the book's paradigmatic example *grár*. The phenomenon occurs also in the 2.sg.pret. of the strong verbs, and in this connection it is mentioned on p. 74.

(p. 71) This is the only place where Proto-Indo-European forms are used, *\*h<sub>2</sub>es-* and *\*h<sub>3</sub>s-*. It would have been better to stick to Proto-Germanic (PG) forms as elsewhere in the book, especially when PG forms are used below in the very same brevier. PG *\*es-*, *\*s-* serve his point equally well.

(p. 81) That the verbs *bresta*, *bregða*, *skreppa* and *spretta* have suffered metathesis of *\*-er-* to *-re-* is a personal opinion that does not belong in an introduction, especially when it is unaccounted for.

(p. 81) The claim that *sofa* and *vefa* originally belonged to verb class V is based on the idea that the roots of class IV must end in a liquid

or nasal. The only difference between class IV and V is the perfect participle form with zero grade in IV, but full grade in V. This split originates in the fact that some roots could appear in the zero grade, whilst others could not (e.g. IV *borinn* < \*br̥-, V *gefinn* < \*geb- ← \*\*gb). In this connection it is important to realize that the roots \**sweþ-* and \**weþ-* could appear in zero grade, as \**suf-* and \**ub-*. That these verbs are conjugated in class IV in Old Norse might therefore be an archaic feature instead of an innovation.

Amongst the other inaccuracies in the part covering the strong verbs is the claim that the pret.pl. *kváðu-* (to *kveða*) is the regular form (p. 83), but this has rather analogical *-vá-*. The regular form is the form mentioned as the side form, *kóðu-*, with what Nedoma calls 'verstärktem *u*-Umlaut' (§9.3). Further, *sveipa* is not conjugated as *heita* (p. 85), since the pret. follows verb class I, that is pret.sg. *sveip*. And I feel that it must be mentioned that the present tense of *hanga* follows the weak conjugation (p. 86).

(p. 127) The writing <a> in old East Norwegian manuscripts where classic Old Icelandic has *ǫ* is not a sign of lacking *u*-umlaut, but just another orthographic representation of the vowel /a/ before a following /u/. That the vowel was mutated is particularly evident from the modern East Norwegian dialects (see Johnsen 2003:54, 61 for an elaboration).

(p. 128) Housken (1954:17) says that the vowel harmony in South-East Norwegian diplomas is 'tydelig' [clear], as opposed to Nedoma's claim that South-East Norwegian lacked it.

(p. 129) The claim that Old Norwegian *-mn-* has replaced *-fn-* through assimilation is only partly correct, since original \**bn-* and \**mn-* has coalesced both in Old Icelandic and Old Norwegian, in the former into *-fn-*, in the latter into *-mn-*. In his two examples, *jafnan* comes from \**bn-*, whilst *nafn* comes from \**mn-*.

I have, however, no reservations against recommending this book for introductory courses in Old Norse. This goes mainly for the German-speaking countries, as in many ways this book is a German version of Iversen's *Norrøn grammatikk*, which is used in Scandinavia.

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## Notes

1. Under 'Runenkunde', however, I miss Moltke's *Runes and their origin. Denmark and elsewhere* (1985) and Krause's introduction *Runen* (1993).

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