

**A TAU STAFF WITH RUNIC INSCRIPTIONS
FROM BERNSTEBUREN (FRIESLAND)**

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1. Introduction

Through the years, runic inscriptions have been discovered on several archaeological objects from the coastal area of the Northern Netherlands. They constitute the earliest linguistic sources in these parts, and have often been the subject of scholarly study. On several combs the runes had been engraved in thin, inconspicuous lines, which meant that for many years they remained unnoticed.¹ This is also the case with the inscription discovered recently on the present staff, which has been in the Fries Museum for over a century. The staff is described by the first author, the inscription by the second.

2. The staff from Bernsterburen

In 1881 Jan Honig Janszoon (1847-1902), a Menmonite minister at Balk, donated to the Fries Museum a broken walking-stick made of bone. The object was initially included in the historical collection as number 1123a, before being recognized, presumably by P.C.J.A. Boeles, Curator of the Fries Museum from 1897 onwards, as an archaeological item. It was included in the standing exhibition of the museum under number 44B-2. Although Baard had been given as its provenance in the List of Acquisitions of 1880-1881,² the inventory of the Archaeological Department, drawn up later by Boeles, says that the staff was found in excavated *terp* soil from Bernsterburen (municipality of Rauwerdhem). This *terp* or dwelling mound, also known as Baansterburen, is situated on the eastern shore of the former Middelsee sea inlet (Map 1). Presumably, although this is not explicitly mentioned, Boeles received this further information from the Rev. Jan Honig. Both were members of the "Friesch Genootschap van Geschied-, Oudheid-, en Taalkunde"

(Frisian Historical, Archaeological and Philological Society'), so they may well have been acquainted. From 1873 to 1875 Rev. Jan Honig was in charge of the parish of Baard, 7 kms from Bernsterburen as the crow flies.³ If it was in this period that Honig obtained the staff, his domicile may have been confused with the place where it was found in the published list of acquisitions.

Of the *terp* of Bernsterburen it is known that its soil was commercially dug off in the years 1877 and 1882-1897.⁴ In 1885 the filling in of 166 m of canal at the levelled *terp* of Bernsterburen was contracted out.⁵ The Fries Museum possesses a few objects from Bernsterburen.

The staff and its crown are made of whale bone. Given its length, only the jawbone of a large whale species can have been used. A closer determination of the species is not possible. The outside of the often large, thick whale bone is very compact, soon becoming porous towards the core. This shows clearly on the staff. Whereas one side is smooth with a clear design (and the inscription), the other side is rough, with a less clearly defined decoration. Several objects of whale bone have come to light in the Northern Netherlands, among them a number of weaving battens which correspond to Early Medieval parallels otherwise encountered only in northern Norway.⁶ It is possible that Early Medieval artifacts of whale bone were brought to our region from areas where whales were regularly caught. Intensive Early Medieval trade connections between the Dutch coastal area and, among other regions, Scandinavia, are well documented.⁷ Yet the staff may also have been made in Friesland, from the jawbone of a whale washed ashore. Large whales washed up on the Dutch coast have been regularly recorded from the Middle Ages onwards.⁸ This is likely to have occurred in the Early

3. F.S. Knipscheer, "Jan Jansz. Honig", in: *Nieuw Nederlandsch Biografisch Woordenboek* (Leiden, 1933), vol. IX, p. 403.

4. G. A. Wumkes, *Stads- en dorpskroniek van Friesland (1800-1900)* (Leeuwarden, 1934), vol. 2, p. 412; H. Halbertsma, *Inventaris van tempen en wierden in de provincien Friesland en Groningen*. Typescript (in Library of the Biologisch-Archaeologisch Instituut, Rijksuniversiteit Groningen), *terp* nr. 783.

5. Wumkes, *Kroniek*, p. 492.

6. P.C.J.A. Boeles, *Friesland tot de elfde eeuw*, 2nd edn. (Den Haag, 1951), p. 421; V.T. van Vülsteren, *Het benen tijdperk* (Assen, 1987), Fig. 115; T. Sjøvold, "Whale-Bone Tools in the Iron Age of North Norway", in: *Actes du VIIe Congrès International des Sciences Préhistoriques et Protohistoriques Prague 21-27 Août 1966*, ed. J. Filip (Prague, 1971), pp. 1200-04; T. Sjøvold, *The Iron Age Settlement of Arctic Norway* (Tromsø/Oslo/Bergen, 1974), vol. 2, pp. 249-53, plates 16 and 58.

7. Boeles, *Friesland*, pp. 361-5, 398-9; W.A. van Es, H. Sarphatij and P.J. Wolterring, eds., *Archeologie van Nederland* (Amsterdam/Amersfoort, 1988), pp. 170-72.

8. Cf. A.B. van Deinse, *De fossiele en recente Cetacea van Nederland*. Diss. (Utrecht, 1931).

1. P. C. J. A. Boeles, "De runen-inscripties van het Fries Museum", *De Vrije Fries* 35 (1939), 83-95; K. Düwel and K.-W. Tempel, "Knochenkämme mit Runeninschriften aus Friesland. Mit einer Zusammenstellung aller bekannten Runenkämme und einem Beitrag zu den Friesischen Runeninschriften", *Palaeohistoria* 14 (1970), 353-91.

2. *Lijst van voorwerpen aan het Friesch Genootschap van Geschied-, Oudheid- en Taalkunde geschonken of in bruikleen gegeven of aangekocht 1880-1881* (Leeuwarden, 1881), p. 17. (= 53e Verslag van het Friesch Genootschap van Geschied-, Oudheid- en Taalkunde, 1880-81, p. 31).

Middle Ages as well, even though we lack written records. At the time Van Giffen described three finds of whale material: sperm whale teeth from the *terpen* of Eenum and Enumerhoogte, and from the *terp* near Schettens a *humerus*, *radius* and *ulna* of a killer whale (*Orcinus orca*).⁹

Four parts of the staff have survived (Fig. 2). The upper two joining sections have a length of 40 cms. The third is 7.5 cms and the fourth, the lower end, is 8.5 cms long. The two last-named pieces do not join up with the upper two, which means that a part of unknown length is missing, and that the total length of the four pieces, 56 cms, is not the original length of the staff. The top ended in a narrow peg of which a stump of 0.5 cm remains. By means of a tenon-and-mortise joint the crown could be attached to the staff. At some point a piece was sawn off the third fragment, presumably in an attempt to study the composition of the material.¹⁰ The fourth piece is the lower end of the staff. It is somewhat thinner than the other pieces and the end is abraded, while the decoration on the porous, cancellous side has completely worn away.

The staff is decorated with bands of triangles and a chequered design. The pattern is accentuated by hatching in alternate spaces. The hatching consists of parallel lines connecting rows of triangular stabs. Between the bands of decoration are narrower zones, some of them undecorated, some with a design of alternating, triangular stabs between two parallel lines, at times producing a zigzag effect. This style of hatching and the zigzag effect of triangular stabs between parallel lines are not unique on bone implements in Friesland.¹¹ Tempel, on the evidence of comb finds, dates this decorative technique to the eighth century.¹² The bottom end of the staff is decorated with a lattice design which is often encountered on combs of the seventh and eighth centuries.¹³

Of the crown of the staff, a crosspiece has survived with a length of 9.6 cms, consisting of two opposing, single, stylized animal heads. Mouths and snouts are clearly recognizable and the eyes are marked by dots-and-circles. Ears are lacking. The crown is decorated with the same hatched design as the staff. The crosspiece is perforated by a

9. A.E. van Giffen, *Die Fauna der Wûrtjen*, Diss. (Groningen, 1913), pp. 102-08, Taf. IV.6, Taf. V.7/8.

10. This must have been done before Boeles, *Friesland*, plate 44.1, was made.

11. A. Roes, *Bone and antler objects from the Frisian Terp-mounds* (Haarlem, 1963), plates 21.3, 32.9 and 34.13.

12. W.-D. Tempel, "Die Kämme aus der frühgeschichtlichen Wurt Elisenhof", *Die frühgeschichtliche Marscheniedlung beim Eisenhof im Eidersiedt*, Bd. 3 (1979), pp. 149-74 (= *Studien zur Küstenarchäologie Schleswig-Holsteins*, Ser. A3).

13. A.E. van Giffen, "Een Karolingisch grafveld bij Godlinze", *Derde en vierde jaarverslag van de Vereeniging voor Terpenonderzoek* (1920), 39-97, plates I-XVI.

rectangular, tapering slot, by which it may have been attached to the peg on the staff, the join presumably reinforced with an iron rivet. The underside of the crosspiece features several holes and an iron rivet, pointing to some kind of attachment. This may have been a plate, possibly also of bone, maybe of metal. Because the nature of the plating is unclear, the crown may have been less in the form of a T than it now appears. The crown does in a way resemble the hilt of a sword, and although nothing points in this direction, the staff and crown might yet belong to two different objects. Boeles compared the crown to a sword pommel from Burial 14 at Hintschingen (*Kreis Tuttingen*, Baden-Württemberg).¹⁴ This grave dates to the mid-seventh century.¹⁵ The likeness of the staff crown to this sword-pommel is not so striking that similar dates must be assumed. The animal heads on the staff are very simple, and so far no immediate parallels have been found. Animal ornamentation is very popular in the early Middle Ages, but often the design is far more elaborate than that on the crown. The decorative technique suggests that the staff should be dated to the eighth century.

In three blank spaces on the staff there are runes; their exact locations are indicated with arrows in Fig. 2. The first inscription is set in a square space, the second in a triangle and the third in another square. The inscriptions are executed in very thin lines and quite inconspicuous. With the aid of blown-up photos and a microscope, a drawing was made of the inscription (Fig. 3). The photographs revealed that the inscription had worn together with the surface of the staff. The grain of the bone, and the wear and damage made it hard to read, especially on the triangular space. The decoration was not designed so as to allow for an inscription, which must have been added afterwards, possibly when the staff was already in use. Perhaps, the thin, scratched lines were intentionally inconspicuous. The inscription will be dealt with in detail in the following section.

Runic inscriptions in thin engraved lines have been encountered on several combs and comb-cases of antler in the Northern Netherlands (at Ferwerd, Kantens, Hogebeintum, Toornwerd and Oostum). These inscriptions, like the one on the staff, were only discovered later, in the museum.¹⁶

As far as we know, no comparable object has survived from this period. In Scotland and Ireland Tau staves are known from contempo-

14. Boeles, *Friesland*, p. 539.

15. J. Werner, *Münzdatierte Austrasische Grabfunde* (Berlin/Leipzig, 1935), pp. 101-2, Taf. 31.4b; W. Müller and M. Knaut, *Heiden und Christen, archäologische Funde zum frühen Christentum in Südwesdeutschland*. Kleine Schriften zur Vor- und Frühgeschichte Südwesdeutschlands 2 (Stuttgart, 1987), p. 16.

16. Boeles, "Runen-inscriptions", 89-92; Düwel and Tempel, "Knochenkämme", 355.

eighth century or later; presumably the staff was in use around AD 800.

3. The Runic Inscription

As so often with Frisian runic inscriptions (e.g. Westereinden B), the runes on the Bernsterburen staff may be derived from several futhorks. The *a*-runes, \mathfrak{N} , shows the Anglo-Frisian connection, while the *k*-runes, \mathfrak{V} , comes from the younger (Scandinavian) futhork. Even a so-called short-twig rune (Scandinavian *stuttrune*) appears to occur, viz. the Swedish-Norwegian \mathfrak{s} . Two similar *k*- and *s*-runes can be seen on a rune-stick found in Hedeby (Haithabu) with an inscription completely carried out in short-twig runes.²³

The younger futhork emerged in the early Viking Age; this futhork of sixteen runes was completed at about 800 AD. The Hedeby inscription mentioned above also originates from that time. We can therefore decide on a *terminus ante quem* for the Bernsterburen inscription: the second half of the eighth century.

There are nineteen runes on the Bernsterburen staff. They read from left to right and are carved in three successive undecorated parts, as follows: part one: four runes; part two: eleven runes; part three: four runes.



Transliterated: (a) ÆUDA/TUDA ALUDUKIUSU TUDA
(b) ÆUDA/TUDA AWUDUKIUSU TUDA

On the first square part there are four fairly legible runes: \mathfrak{A} \mathfrak{U} \mathfrak{D} \mathfrak{A} . The first rune, however, offers a problem because it cannot clearly be seen whether it has one or two side-strokes at the top right-hand corner. If there are two, then we have the *æsc*-rune, \mathfrak{F} , (= /æ/). It is quite possible, though, that there is a sidestroke on both the left and the right-hand side, \mathfrak{A} , in which case we are dealing with a *t*. In the first case the transliteration is ÆUDA; in the second case TUDA. Preceding

rary rock-carvings in which they are a sign of authority for a bishop or saint.¹⁷ In Western Europe, as well as in Scandinavia, several abbot's and bishop's staves of the Tau type have been preserved, dating from the eleventh and twelfth centuries and made of ivory, bone or bronze.¹⁸ The cross-pieces of these staves have animal heads on their butts. These staves could be a younger form of the staff discussed here. The use of these staves was not restricted to spiritual leaders; worldly rulers too were depicted with crowned staves. An episode is known from Harald Hårdrådes Saga, ch. 23, in which King Magnus shares land with Harald. This was done with a staff as a symbol of the king's power.¹⁹ The Bayeux tapestry (second half of the eleventh century) shows King Edward the Confessor holding a staff.²⁰ The number of examples of medieval kings and rulers represented with staves can be easily multiplied. Of course, there are also walking sticks with Tau heads, but these are simpler of execution than the Bernsterburen staff.²¹

The Bernsterburen staff dates from the period when missionaries from Anglo-Saxon regions were active in Friesland, but given the nature of the inscription it is unlikely to have been an ecclesiastic attribute. Staves are universally used as signs of authority, and certainly were also in use among the pagan natives. The long-scepters held by the gold figures of Sorte Muld in Denmark may serve as an example.²²

The whale bone staff of Bernsterburen is a remarkable object, which given its shape and decoration is likely to have served as a symbol of authority. The runic inscription suggests that it belonged to a secular rather than to a spiritual leader (see below). The decoration points to the eighth century, whereas the inscription may date to the close of the

17. F. Henry, *Irish Art in the Early Christian Period (to 800 AD)* (London, 1965), pp. 123, 125, Fig. 15a; J. Lanting (BAI, Groningen) showed a drawing of the Frisian staff at the Meeting of the Irish Association of Professional Archaeologists, Birr, November 1989 - the archaeologists present deemed it unlikely that the Bernsterburen staff would have come from Ireland.

18. See e.g. J. Braun S.J., "Bischofsstab", in: *Reallexikon zur deutschen Kunstgeschichte*, vol. 2 (Stuttgart, 1948), pp. 792-808; F. Henry, *Irish Art in the Romanesque Period (1020-1170 AD)* (London, 1970), p. 99, pl. 19; M.H. Longhurst, *Catalogue of Carvings in Ivory: I: Up to the Thirteenth Century*. Victoria and Albert Museum (London, 1927), pp. 13, 83-84, 94, plates 64, 68, 69; K. Eldjarn, "En Tau-stav fra Island", *Kuml* 1970, 65-81, gives a review of these Tau staves.

19. *Leksikon for nordisk middelalder* (Copenhagen, 1971), vol. XVII, pp. 71-84.

20. M. Rud, *The Bayeux Tapestry and the Battle of Hastings 1066* (Copenhagen, 1988), pp. 56-7.

21. Cf. N.K. Liebgott, "Ornamentalt Tilbageblik", *Skalk* 1978, no. 5, pp. 10-15; E. Grochowska and R. Sachs, "Vom 'Lanzenschuh' zum 'Stabdom', Bemerkungen zur Geschichte einer Theorie", *Zeitschrift für Archäologie des Mittelalters* 8 (1980), 57-63, figs. 4 and 5.

22. M. Watt, "Guidageren", *Skalk* 1987, no. 2, pp. 3-9.

23. E. Moltke, *Runerne i Danmark og deres oprindelse* (Copenhagen, 1976), p. 24.

the first rune we find a short slanting stroke, which I consider to be a sign that opens the inscription.

Comparing the runes of the first part of the inscription with those of the other two parts, especially the last one, we may notice that the first one is carved in a far less skilled and unsteady way. Especially the *u*-rune shows miscuttings. I therefore seriously take the possibility into account that the first part of the inscription was cut by "a second hand" after the TUDA inscription further on. Presumably, one should read TUDA here. But as I am not entirely convinced, I will also take the ÆUDA-reading into consideration here.

Æuda is probably a personal name. PGmc **au* generally becomes OE *æa* and subsequently *ea*. Campbell²⁴ clearly states that "... the West Gmc diphthong **au* might be expected to develop to OE *æu*, and we find such spellings in early texts. Afterwards *æu* became unrounded to *ea*". Æuda could therefore be an early form of *Eada*. This name is attested from Mercia in 624 AD as the name of a witness, while also Alcuin had a friend bearing this name.²⁵ (*Eada* might be a woman's name; on the bracteate Overhornbaek II the name *Auþa* appears, although scholars disagree as to its meaning.²⁶ Furthermore, the runic inscription on the Mortain Casket contains the name *Eada*.²⁷)

Tuda is a male personal name, attested from Lindisfarne in 664 AD, for instance.²⁸ Although not attested from Frisia in that time, Æuda and Tuda may well be both English and Frisian names. Especially Tuda might be an abbreviated form of such names as *Thiadrík*, *Thiadbald*, *Thiudgrím*, *Thiadwold* and *Thiaddag*, all attested from Frisia in the eighth century.

The second inscription, in the triangle about 4 cms further on, numbers eleven runes. The first two have been badly worn away. The first rune shows only its headstaff, one clear slanting sidestroke to the right and the first beginning of a sidestroke pointing downwards from the top to the right, *f*. What is left of a corner of this top-side-stroke and the extension of the stroke bending upwards can only be vaguely perceived under a microscope. These are the worn-off contours of the Anglo-Frisian *ac*-rune, *f*.

24. A. Campbell, *Old English Grammar* (Oxford, 1959), p. 15.

25. W.G. Searle, *Onomasticon Anglo-Saxonicum: A List of Anglo-Saxon Proper Names from the Time of Bede to that of King John* (Cambridge, 1897), p. 175.

26. W. Krause, *Die Runenschriften im älteren Futhark. I. Text* (Göttingen, 1966), p. 265.

27. The runic text reads: Good helpe Æadan þiosne ciismeel gewarhtæ, cf. B. Bruggink, *Runes in and from the British Isles*. Unpubl. M.A. thesis, University of Amsterdam (Amsterdam, 1987), pp. 184-5.

28. Searle, *Onomasticon*, p. 460.

The second rune vaguely but undeniably shows its headstaff and at the top a first beginning of a small sidestroke is engraved, although not clearly visible. The weathered surface of the bone is confusing, so that there might be an *l*-rune, *f*, here. Yet it is equally possible to read a *w*-rune, *f*, here.

A sequence which is more clearly legible follows: $\text{h} \times \text{h} \text{h} \text{h}$, transliterated UDUKIU. But after this we are presented with the next problem. At first it seems that another *i* follows, but its staff does not run through the whole length downwards when compared with the head-staffs of the other runes. It ends about half that length and therefore has the form of the Swedo-Norwegian short-twig *s*-rune.

We may be surprised at the occurrence of a short-twig rune in a Frisian runic inscription as runes of this kind have as yet not been recorded for Frisia. But it may not be quite unlikely, as we find a short-twig *s*-rune in the inscription on the rune-stick found in Hedeby. In the early Middle Ages Hedeby (Haithabu) was a very important trading town and an intermediate station between Scandinavians and Frisians, halfway between Dorestad and Birka. In the sequence clearly legible $\text{h} \text{h} \text{'pu}$ follows.

The third part of the inscription is by far the most distinct, and reads TUDA. This name may occur twice on the staff.

4. The interpretation of the inscriptions

If we take into account the uncertain reading of the second rune of the second part of the inscription (*l* or *w*), the following transliterations are possible:

- (a) (Tuda/Æuda) aludukiuspu Tuda
 (b) (Tuda/Æuda) awudukiuspu Tuda

The string as in (a). *aludukiuspu*, when split into comprehensible parts, yields either (1) a *ludu kius pu* or (2) *Aludu kius pu*.

4.1 Possibility (1):

As an adverb *ā* < Gmc **aiw-* both in Old Frisian and Old English means 'eternally, always'.²⁹ As a noun, *ā* in Old Frisian means 'law, justice'. This *ā* is represented by the new Anglo-Frisian rune h , and exhibits a phonological development typical for both Old Frisian and

29. J. de Vries, *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 2nd edn. (Leiden 1962), p. 680; W.P. Lehmann, *A Gothic Etymological Dictionary* (Leiden 1986), p. 22.

Old English: $\tilde{a} < \text{Gmc } *ai$. Runic inscriptions that show a combination of a - in this case partly - Frisian linguistic feature, $\tilde{a} < *ai$, with a meaning found only in Frisian, 'law, justice', in combination with a rune from the new Anglo-Frisian *futhorc* can be considered to be Frisian.³⁰

Ludu may be a male personal name, of which both the nominative and accusative end in unaccented *u*. This is a feature that frequently occurs in names in Frisian runic inscriptions. Some examples are Oostum: Habuku, and Westeremden A: Adugistu.³¹ Next follows *kius pu*, which can be translated as 'you choose', an imperative singular of 'to choose'. A survey of the Germanic cognates of this verb may give an indication of its meaning here: Got *kiusan* 'try, test'; OWN *kiōsa* 'choose', also 'choose by means of drawing lots', hence the meaning 'perform magic'; OSwed *kiusa* 'work magic', 'choose'; OS and OHG *kiōsan* 'choose, try';³² OFris *kiāsa* 'choose, elect', 'establish as a right, as a custom';³³ OE *cēosan* 'accept', 'choose, elect', 'decide', 'test'.³⁴

This Tuda, or Ludu for that matter, may be the *asega*, that is the 'lawspeaker'. Or the one may have been the judge and the other of the local chief's messenger. One of them may even have been the chief himself (*dix* or *comes*, as the Frankish sources call such leaders), which would mean that Ludu or Tuda was this local chief. The fact that Tuda is mentioned twice on the staff may indicate that he was the more important person of the two. If so, we may be dealing here with a hitherto unknown Frisian *dix* from about 800.

If we insert an *i* into ludu, we get *liudu*: OFris *liud(e)*, OE *leod(e)*, pl. 'people, nation'. If a second *i* is added, we obtain *liudiu*, with the instrumental singular ending *-iu*.³⁵ The result is the following reading: "the law/justice by the people/nation/tribe, you choose!, Tuda".

4.2 Possibility (2):

Alu is a magic word that has frequently been found in runic inscriptions from 200-700 AD in Scandinavia and in Schleswig-Holstein. Its meaning

30. H.F. Nielsen, "Unaccented Vowels in the Frisian Runic Inscriptions", in: N. Århammar *et al.*, eds., *Miscellanea Frisica* (Assen, 1986), pp. 11-19.

31. Nielsen, "Unaccented vowels", p. 11.

32. E. Seebold, *Vergleichendes und etymologisches Wörterbuch der germanischen starken Verben* (The Hague, 1970), p. 293.

33. F. Holthausen, *Altfriesisches Wörterbuch*, 2nd, improved edn. by Dietrich Hofmann (Heidelberg, 1985), p. 134.

34. J.R. Clark Hall, *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 4th edn. (Cambridge, 1960), p. 67.

35. J.H. Gallée, *Altsächsische Grammatik*, 2nd edn. (Halle/Leiden, 1910), for instance on pp. 79, 80, and 209.

is uncertain, but may have something to do with magic, performed in ecstasy.³⁶ Alu is used as the first part of a personal name, as for example in *Atusa*, *Atuca*, *Aluuda* (a monk's name) and *Aluuid* (a girl's name).³⁷ There is an *Alw(at)du(s)* known from coins. Furthermore there are two runic inscriptions with names that partly consist of *Alu*, such as *Alugod* on the *Væriløse* brooch and *Aluko* on a stone weight from *Fórde*.³⁸

So Alu as the first element of a personal name is possible. The feminine suffix *-du < -þō*, (voiceless) or *-ðō* (voiced) $< \text{IE } \tilde{a}$ may be taken as the second element.³⁹ Aludu may then be a woman's name in the nominative. So we get: 'Aludu, you choose!, Tuda'. The idea of having here two personal names - one of a man, the other of a woman - is of course quite attractive and interesting. Especially if we take the act of choosing to refer to a marriage proposal, in which the staff symbolises the function of a go-between.

(b) *AWUDUKIUSÞU*. Again we find two possible readings: (1) a wudu *kius pu* and (2) *awudu kius pu*.

4.3 Possibility (b1):

wudu can be OE nom. or acc. of 'wood'.⁴⁰ In this case we might read: "The law/justice. The wood you must choose". Does wood here refer to a court of justice, or is it used here as a metaphor for a person's exile? There is actually a term 'woodgoer': OE *wealdgenga*, ON *skóggangsmadr* and Franco-Latin *homo qui per silvas vadit*. This term describes the situation of the suspect before his condemnation: when a person flees into the woods and thus escapes his trial, he loses the King's protection.⁴¹

If we consider the ancient Germanic custom of doing justice in the open air,⁴² 'wood' is not an unlikely interpretation.

36. Krause, *Runeninschriften*, p. 239.

37. Searle, *Onomasticon*, pp. 6, 67-8, and 207-08.

38. Krause, *Runeninschriften*, pp. 33 and 109.

39. W. Meid, *Germanische Sprachwissenschaft. III: Wortbildungslehre* (Berlin, 1967), p. 141, §118.

40. P. Stiles, "The Attestation of Early Old English wudu 'wood': a Note on the Evidence for the Date of Combinative Back-Mutation", *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 84 (1983), 415-8, at 415.

41. K. von See, *Altmodische Rechtswörter. Philologische Studien zur Rechtsauffassung und Rechtsgestaltung der Germanen* (Tübingen, 1967), p. 12. Von See quotes Von Amira who wanted to demonstrate the *Waldgänger* to be a common Germanic phenomenon. Von See: "Aber *wealdgenga* wird in den aengl. Gesetzen gar nicht verwendet, und dort, wo der Ausdruck vorkommt, bezeichnet er den 'Räuber, Wegelagerer'".

42. K. von Amira and K.A. Eckhardt, *Germanisches Recht* (Berlin, 1967), vol. 2, p.

4.4 Possibility (b2):

awudu may have something to do with the verb 'show, prove', as in OFris *awia*, *awa*, *awwa* 'show, reveal, present' and OE *ēawan*, *īewan*, *ēawian* 'idem'. OFris *āwa*, n. 'presentation, proof'.⁴³ The past tense of OE *ēawan* is *ēawode*, p.p. *ēawod*. For OFris the p.p. is *awwed*, *awwed*; the past participle, when declined as a strong neuter adjective nom. and acc. pl. might be **awdu*.⁴⁴ This could be a contracted form: OFris **awedu* < **awudu* < **awodu*. (OE *ēawod* < *ēawud*).⁴⁵ The meaning of *awudu* would then be 'what is presented, the presentations, the evidence'. As regards the inscription we may thus read: 'the evidence you must accept', or: 'what is presented you must choose'.

Another interpretation of *awudu* may find support in OE *æwda(mar)*, 'witness, conjurer, oath-helper'. The simplex *æwda* occurs three times in the Anglo-Saxon Laws,⁴⁶ once as dat.pl. *æwdum* (Hl. 2.4.), and once clearly as a weak acc.sg. (Wihtræd 23) "hæbbe him in aðc eðirne æwdan godne" ['have for himself for his oath a second good conjurer'].

The Old Frisian *Brocmonna Bref*,⁴⁷ a legal text dating from the thirteenth century, employs in both MSS B1 and B2 the word *ēth* in the meaning of 'oath-helper':

wersama sprech vmb e ne ofledene binna wagum . sa skalma there dede vnd vnga mith sex *ethum* . there lemethe mith tueluf *ethum* . thes daddelis mith fuwer and twintich *ethum* .

[In Buma's translation: 'Wenn jemand wegen eines Bandenangriffs innerhalb der Hauswände klagt, so soll man der (Strafe wegen) Verwundung mit 6 Eiden (=Eideshelfer), wegen Lähmung mit 12 Eiden, wegen Totschlags mit 24 Eiden entgegen'.]

Especially the use of both *etha* and *hand* in the Frisian law texts as *pars pro toto* for 'oath' and 'oath-helper' suggests that there was no specific word current for 'oath-helper'. There is indeed a span of six hundred years between the Anglo-Saxon lawtexts of the early Kentish kings

150ff.

43. K. Freiherr von Richthofen, *Altfrisisches Wörterbuch* (Göttingen, 1840), p. 615.44. Campbell, *Old English Grammar*, § 643, pp. 266-7. The weak participles in *-ed* and *-od* are declined like neuter *halig*, *haligu* in nom.acc.pl.45. Campbell, *Old English Grammar*, p. 333.46. F. Liebermann, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 3 vols. (Halle/S, 1902-16).47. W.J. Buma, *Die Brokmer Rechtsandschriften* (The Hague, 1949) section 49, p. 31/2.

Hlothære and Wihtræd and the earliest written vernacular Frisian law-texts.

The possible loss of the concept of 'oath-helper' may have something to do with a change in legal practice under the influence of Christian views. We may therefore take a look at the Old High German *Muspilli*, written around 800, where the struggle between good and evil is personified in the fight between Elias and the Antichrist, subsequently followed by the last stand of the earthly sinner, who has to plead before the Judge at the Last Judgement. It is clearly stated that one will have to stand alone, with no help of whomsoever, and with emphasis on the fact that no kinsmen will be able to help.⁴⁸ "Kinsmen were responsible for seeing that an accused member came forward to answer a charge, and if he did not, and became an outlaw by default, they were forbidden to harbour him under pain of heavy penalties", as Dorothy Whitelock states,⁴⁹ and: "It is possible that at one time they acted as oath-helpers to support his oath of his innocence". This may remind us again of *Muspilli*:⁵⁰

...uerit denne stuatago in lant,
uerit mit diu uuuru uirho uuison:

dar ni mac denne mak andremo helfan uora demo muspille.

[... comes the day of judgement into the country, and seeks for the people with fire: there one kinsman cannot help the other in the face of the *Muspilli* (court of justice ?⁵¹)].

48. Cf. F.V. Spechtler, "Altes und neues Recht", *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik* 15 (1980), 39-52, at p. 49: "Und Gottesurteile wie Eidhilfe sind ja springende Punkte beim Aufeinanderprall alter und neuer Rechtsordnung (vor allem Prozessordnung): sie wurden im 9. Jahrhundert heftig diskutiert, sie waren entscheidend für alle Betroffenen".49. *The Beginnings of English Society* (Harmondsworth, 1952; 1987), p. 45.50. W. Braune, *Althochdeutsches Lesebuch*. 15. Auflage, bearbeitet von Ernst A. Ebbinghaus (Tübingen, 1969), p. 87, ll. 55-7.51. We think 'court of justice' a not unlikely translation for the second part in *Muspilli*, in view of some discussions of *Spilli*. In her essay "Zur Deutung des Ortnamens 'Spielberg', *Sprache und Recht*, Festschrift für Ruth Schmidt-Wiegand (Berlin-New York 1986), I, pp. 98-133, Irngard Frank presents a remarkable etymology concerning 'Spielberg': *Spilli* ('Spiel') may be derived from its OHG meaning of 'speech, especially speech in front of the court of justice'. See further R. Vollmann, "Spiel in Ortsnamen", *Zeitschrift für deutsche Altertumskunde* 61 (1924), 82-92; by the same author: *Flurnamensammlung in Bayern* (Munich, 1926), p. 52.A *Spielberg* might basically mean 'hill/mountain of justice', 'place of justice'. Frank thinks of a possible connection with the word 'speleology', from Greek *spelaton* and Latin *spelunca*. She points out that there is a striking connection with the occurrence of caves in mountains called 'Spielberg'. Actually one of the greatest caves in Germany is inside a 'Spielberg'! 'Tatsache ist, dass das Appellativum *spel* in allen germanischen Sprachen vorkommt, und dass eine Umdeutung von **Spelberg* 'Höhlenberg' zu **Spelberg*

Liebermann mentions that *æwda* is known as a gloss for *aydo*, which is found in Langobardian law-texts as *aidos*, 'oath'.⁵² Van der Rhee⁵³ states that:

auch die anderen germ. Sprachen kennen das Wort: got. *aþs*, an. *eiðr*, ae. *ðð*, afr. *éih*, as. *éð*, ahd. *eid* (< **aipaz*); es ist ein wichtiges, vielleicht aus dem Keltischen entlehntes, gemeingermanisches Rechtswort, das dieselbe Bedeutung hat wie nhd. 'Eid'. In R 359 [edictum Rothari] wird es aber für die Person des Eideshelfers gebraucht (... ad euangelia sancta iurit cum duodecim aidos suos...).

It is this legal term which we find used in the Brocmonna Brief as *éih*. OE *æwda*, however, is not derived from **aipaz*, but from **æ(w)* > **aiw*- 'law, justice'. How can this difference in usage be explained? Presumably the Anglo-Saxon oath-helper was in the first place considered to be a servant of the law. According to Liebermann:⁵⁴

Wenn auch *aþ* und *æw* etymologisch nicht zusammenhängen, so stehen die Begriffe 'Recht' und 'Eid' einander so nahe, dass *iurare* aus *iūs* floss, Nord. *lag* und Mlat. *lex* sowohl 'Eid' wie 'Gesetz' heissen kann. So konnte ein von *æw* abgeleitetes Wort, das vielleicht ursprünglich bedeutet hatte: 'berechtigt, legitimiert, gesetzmässig gemacht, echt' (mhd. *ewigen* 'gesetzmässig machen', wovon *acht*, afrs. *aft*, *eff*) synonym werden mit einem von *að* abgeleiteten, das ursprünglich 'Eidleister' bedeutet hatte".

OE *æwian*, *æwnian*, according to Holthausen⁵⁵ has two meanings: 1) 'despise' and 2) 'marry'. I think it is this second meaning we should take into account when considering *æwda*. 'Marry' has an inherent meaning 'legalize'. Legalizing is exactly the task of the oath-helper as he swears an oath to the credibility of his party. The law prescribes a certain number of oath-helpers, conditioned by the nature and the severity of

⁵² 'Redeberg' von Anfang an sprachlich und sachlich begünstigt wurde. [By way of an intermediate meaning of 'Spiel': 'play, dance', which, in connection with a cult-place, could gradually develop into a place of doing justice, T.L.J.] Die Germanen glaubten dass die Seelen der Abgeschiedenen in die Berge eingingen und dass in den Bergen Geister und Götter lebten". Indeed, the Frisians thought that their King Radbod after his death lived on a) under a cliff in Gaasterland or b) under the 'Hasseberg', a boulderclay hill on the border of the province of Groningen and Germany.

⁵³ Liebermann, *Gesetze*, II, p. 8.

⁵⁴ F. van der Rhee, *Die germanischen Wörter in den langobardischen Gesetzen* (Rotterdam, 1970), p. 20.

⁵⁵ *Gesetze*, III, p. 19, Hl.2.5.

⁵⁶ F. Holthausen, *Altenglisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Heidelberg, 1934), p. 14.

the charge involved. So, the mention of a number of 'oaths' such as in the Frisian text quoted above, is actually a metaphor for the number of persons performing an oath.

According to Holthausen, *æwda* derives from **aiwida* (m.). *Æwda* is a weak masc. noun; *awudu* in our inscription is, considering the ending -u, certainly not a weak masc. noun; it must be a strong masc. noun in the nom. or acc. singular. OE *æ(w)* < **aiwi*, **aiwa*; **aiwi* is strong feminine. Oicel *æwi*, *æfi*, *æ* < Gmc **aiwi* is strong feminine, i-stem. OS *ēwitha* and OHG *ewida*, 'eternity' are also strong feminine nouns.⁵⁶ With Holthausen in mind, *awudu* is not likely to be the cognate of OE *æwda* < **aiwida*. The most obvious solution is to start from Gmc **aiw-*, which according to Klaus von See:⁵⁷

sowohl dem rechtlichen als auch dem religiösen Bereich angehört und 'Gesetz, Rechtsbrauch, göttliches Gesetz, Kultbrauch' bedeutet. Die Etymologien sind ziemlich unsicher. Meist verbindet man es mit IE **aiu* 'lange Zeit, Ewigkeit' und kommt damit zu der Grundbedeutung 'ewige Ordnung, alte Gewohnheit, seit langem geltendes Recht'.

I would suggest that both words, Gmc **aiwida* as well as OE *æwda*, may be considered to be derived from Gmc **aiwi* or **aiwa*.

A specific Old Frisian denomination for the oath-helper appears to be lost, but it may have been *awudu*. In this case we may think of an agent noun from **aiw-* plus vowel plus a masc. suffix *-ðu < IE -tu. Or an agent noun from the weak verb *aiwia* with a suffix **ōðu* or **uðu*.⁵⁸ Thus we get **aiwōðu*/**aiwūðu*: Gmc. nom. sing. **aiwōðuz*/**aiwūðuz*; and declined like *sunu* < Gmc **sunuz* we find the ending -u in nom. and acc. sing.: *awudu*. With regard to our inscription we would thus get: 'an oath-helper you must choose'.

There may be some more possibilities; for instance: 1) a derivation from the weak verb *aiwa* or *aiwa* with a suffix -ðu: *aiwadu*. The medial vowel becomes -u- after a long syllable: *awudu*, as in runic *adugistu* < **auda-* (Westerenden A). (Especially with weak verbs like *aiwia* the ending -uðr < **uðuz* is productive in ON: *varða*, *vorðuðr*.)

2) We can take *awudu* as a personal name.

5. Reflections and considerations

The combination of staff and inscription suggests the interpretation of

56. Lehmann, *Gothic Etymological Dictionary*, p. 22.

57. *Alt nordische Rechtswörter*, pp. 92-3.

58. W. Meid, *Germanische Sprachwissenschaft. III Wortbildungslehre* (Berlin, 1967), § 124, z. Nomina agentis, p. 159.

the runic legend as referring to 'law' or 'justice'. The staff particularly points towards the ancient Germanic legal system. Amira/Eckhart⁵⁹ describe the legal customs, in which a staff is used as a 'Gerät zum Wahrzeichen', as a medium between creditor (Gläubiger) and debtor:

Bei der Wadiation, vom Schuldner dem Gläubiger zum Weitergeben an einen Dritten eingehändig, vermittelt er [der Stab, JHL.] den Bürgschaftsauftrag des Schuldners an den Dritten und die Bürgschaftsübernahme des Dritten gegenüber dem Gläubiger.

On the same page the staff is further described:

Das meist verbreitete ist der kurze Holzstab oder die Rute, die später bald ornamental stilisiert wird, bald auch durch einen Halm vertreten werden kann. Der Stab ist von Haus aus Gehstock. In heidnischer Zeit bezaubert, in frühchristlicher besegnet und einem Boten mitgegeben, dient der (weisse, d.h. geschälte) Stab zu dessen Legitimation, (...) und auf diesen Botenstab gehen alle Amtsstäbe zurück, vom Weibelstab bis zum Herrschersstab [e.g. the Bernsterburen staff was made of whale bone and therefore quite white].

As comparative material - both with respect to staff and inscription - is lacking, we have to choose from the various options supplied by the staff itself. I think that object and inscription should be regarded as coherent and should be interpreted accordingly. It goes without saying that the staff, an expensive object, was a symbol of power. In order to be able to decide whether the staff had a secular or a clerical function, we have to know what precisely this function was.

If we take the inscriptions into account, part of the possible interpretations significantly point to legal practice. On the other hand some possible readings may provide us with just an enumeration of names which will not enlighten us much.

6. Conclusions

The following interpretations are presented here:

- (1) a: **Tuda/Æuda A Ludu kius þu Tuda. Tuda/Æuda. The law/justice.**
Ludu you must choose. Tuda.
b: **Tuda/Æuda Aludu kius þu Tuda. Tuda/Æuda. Aludu. choose!**
Tuda.
c: **Tuda/Æuda A l(i)udu kius þu Tuda. Tuda/Æuda. The law**

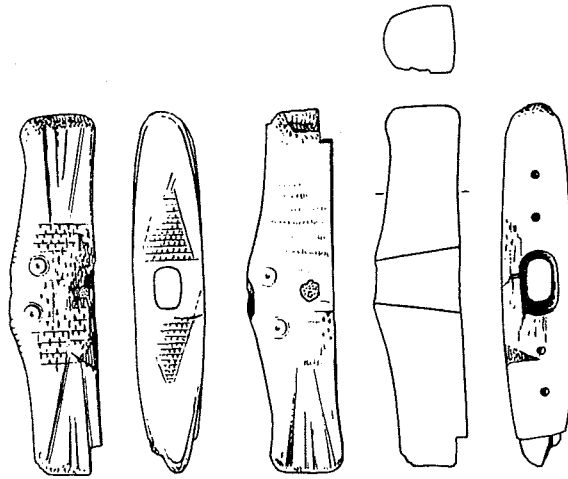
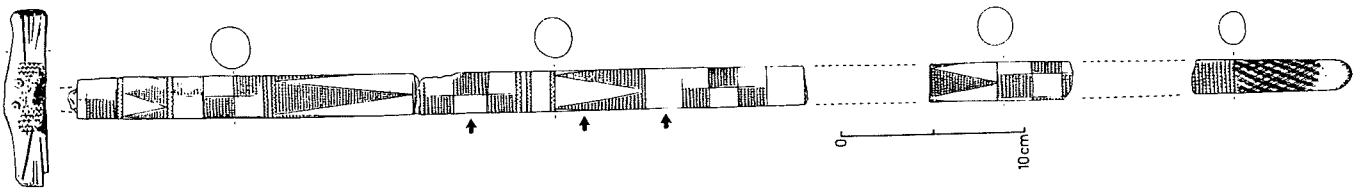
by/with the nation/tribe you must choose/accept. Tuda.
Tuda/Æuda A wudu kius þu Tuda. Tuda/Æuda. The law/justice.
The wood you must choose. Tuda.

- b: **Tuda/Æuda Awudu kius þu Tuda. Tuda/Æuda. The presentations/ evidence or an oath-helper you must choose/accept. Tuda.**
(Or, if Awudu is a name: Awudu choose/accept!).

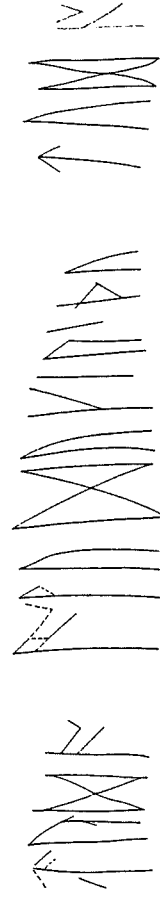
Owing to the amount of unknown or uncertain features of the Bernsterburen staff it is not yet possible to draw definitive conclusions about its purpose, usage and identity, as the exact cultural and social backgrounds are unknown. The various possible readings of the inscription (and I do not pretend to have presented all possibilities) do not suffice for such conclusions. The date - possibly the close of the eighth century or later - does not provide much evidence, but indicates that the staff, if it was operative in Frisia, may have been used in an already christianized setting.

As regards the runic inscriptions and the language, which shows features that can be found both in Old Frisian and Old English, the staff may originate from either Frisia, Northern Germany or perhaps England. Yet, taken together, most of these features point to a Frisian origin. Both the names and the readings l(i)udu, awudu, kius þu, provide sufficient evidence that the inscription can be considered to be Frisian. Contacts existed between the countries bordering on the North Sea. As the material of which the staff was made, whale bone, could also be found on the Frisian coast, we would suggest that Frisia itself is the most likely place of origin for both the staff and the inscription. The latter was probably made by a Frisian runemaster, who may have had contacts with Haithabu. The second best solution is to consider Haithabu as the place of origin of the Bernsterburen staff.⁶⁰

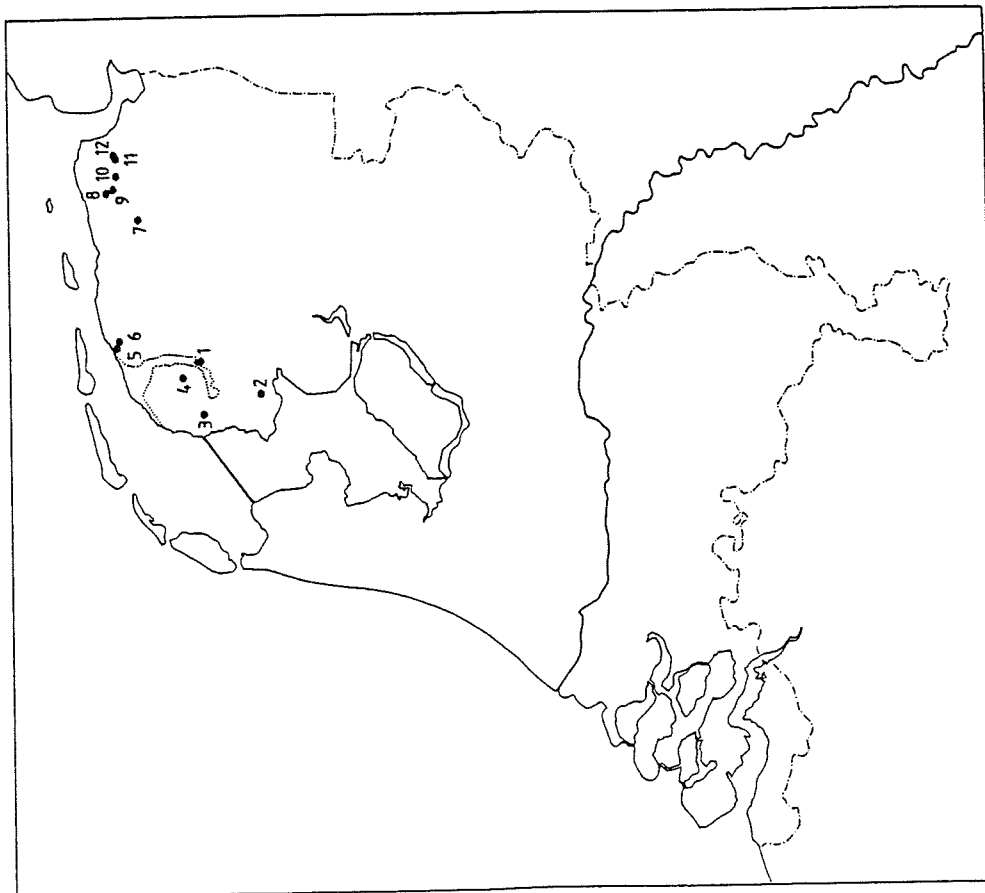
60. Acknowledgments: Prompted by a letter from Professor J. Werner (Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften), Professor H.T. Waterbolk (Biologisch-Archaeologisch Instituut Rijksuniversiteit Groningen = B.A.I.) brought the staff to the attention of the first author, leading to the discovery of the inscription. The authors further wish to thank Mr E. Kramer (Archaeological Department, Fries Museum), Dr A.T. Clason (B.A.I.), Dr T. Hofstra (Old Germanic Studies, Rijksuniversiteit Groningen), Dr R.A. Ebeling (Regional and Agronomic-Historical Studies, Rijksuniversiteit Groningen), Mr D. Stapert (B.A.I.) and Professor J.R.J. van Asperen de Boer (Rijksuniversiteit Groningen), Mrs J.L. Wynia-Gils (University Library, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam), Ms A.C. Bardet and H.J. Tonkes.



IV. The Bernsterburen staff. The arrows point to the location of the inscriptions. On the right: the crown seen from the front, from above, from the rear, in section and from below (scale 1:2). (Drawing by H.R. Roelink, BAI-RUG).



V. A: Photo of the first part of the runic inscription on the Bernsterburen staff. Enlarged. B: Drawing of the entire inscription made with the aid of microscope photography. (Drawing by H.J.M. Burgers, AI-VU).



3. Locations of findspots in the Northern Netherlands mentioned in Knol's part of Knol & Loojenga: 1. Bernsterburen; 2. Balk; 3. Schettens; 4. Baard; 5. Ferwerd; 6. Hoogeteintum; 7. Oostum; 8. Kantens; 9. Toornwerd; 10. Westeremden; 11. Enum; 12. Enumerhoogte. (Drawing by H.J.M. Burgers, AI-VU).