Pétur Knútsson
Dealing with systematic coincidence:
Pythagoras in the runes
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I am going to examine Einar Pálsson's observation that the first 6 staves of the runic alphabet, *fuþark*, correspond in an uncanny way to the name Pythagoras.

Π Υ Θ Α Γ Ο Ρ

pi<>fehu
upsilon<>úruz
(theta<>þurisaz)
alpha/omikron<>ansuz
gamma<>kaunaz
rho<>raidó

I shall look at how close this correspondence is, how it fits in with what we know of interlinguistic correspondence in Germanic proper names, and what conclusions we might draw concerning the issues of coincidence and causality which these correspondences throw up.

It must be said that I cannot definitely attribute this idea to Einar Pálsson. It does not, as far as I know, occur in any of his published writings. Some time shortly before his death I came upon him walking out on Grótta. I broached the subject of the string "fuþark" and asked him whether he thought it had any significance. He stopped dead in his tracks and looked at me witheringly. You lot are all the same, he said. You teach your students the First Germanic Consonant Shift and never dream of

drawing the most obvious conclusions. An he turned on his heel and walked back to his car, and I never dared mention the point again. It was not until some time after his death that I saw where he was leading. Pálsson's published works have a lot to say about the role of Pythagorean numerology in the topology of the Icelandic settlement and the mythology of the Sagas. When he died, the walls of his office were lined carpet to ceiling with rows upon rows of clip folders of unpublished typescript. One day, I think, someone will find in there what he thought of Pythagoras in the runes.

Let me begin my discussion by reminding you of the anomalous status of proper names in language: noun phrases which include or consist of proper names have a tendency to behave differently from other noun phrases in a number of surprising ways, both syntactically and otherwise.[1] More interestingly for my argument here, proper names refuse to obey normal linguistic rules when they move between languages or language varieties.

Bush   runni
Gül   rós
Cicero   kjúklingabaun

President Bush does not translate into Icelandic as Runni forseti; Abdullah Gül of Turkey is never referred to as President Rose, nobody thinks of Cicero as Mr Chickpea. Jacques Derrida in his essay on translation, Des Tours de Babel, suggests that proper names, being pure signifiers with reference each to a single being, are untranslatable (166), and even speculates on whether they are really a part of language at all. (171).[2] Now of

course translation is only one of the modes in which languages come into contact and interpenetrate each other, but other forms of dialinguistic activity, loans, calques and various cross-linguistic effects, entail metamorphoses very similar to translation.[3] Proper names however show an insistent tendency to break the rules of established conduct at points of interpenetration between different varieties of language.

The name of the English king Æþelstán (whose gift of silver to an Icelandic terrorist named Egill has had a lasting effect on the Icelandic psyche) occurs in the Icelandic sources as Aðalsteinn.
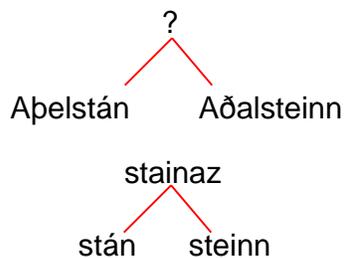
Now when an ordinary noun shows this type of correspondence, we usually invoke the tree-diagrams of the Neogrammarians to suggest channels of genealogy; the existence of *stán* in Old English and *steinn* in *Icelandic* leads us reconstruct a common earlier form *stainaz*; and we would do so even if the form did not survive in inscriptions.[4] But when we find both Æþelstán and Aðalsteinn in the sources, we are not entitled to assume the existence of a Primitive Germanic gentleman called Aþilostainaz. [5] The perfect etymological correspondence between Aþelstán and Aðalsteinn does not derive from a genealogical tree but

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Aþelstán ⟶ Aðalsteinn

stainaz

stán   steinn
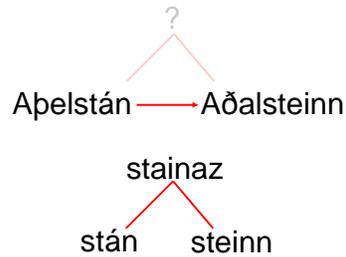
from lateral movement across the branches.[6] But this is not what we should expect from such lateral movement.

Old English *bát*

Aþelstán ⟶ Aðalsteinn

bát ⟶ bátr

Aþelstán ⟶ *Aðilstánn?

migrates to Old Norse as *bátr* , without a change of vowel, as do a host of other words[7] – so why does Æþelstán not become Aðilstánn, or something similar?

Although the answer to this question may seem obvious I would like to suggest it is not trivial. There is a remarkably large corpus of proper names, personal and place names with corresponding forms in Old or Middle English on the one hand, and Norse on the other.

Townend, Matthew 2002. *Language and History in Viking Age England*.

Hockett, C.F. 1987. *Refurbishing Our Foundations.*   **"switching code"**

Milliken, M.E., and R. Milliken, 1993.'System relationships in Dialect Intelligibility'.   **"dialect congruity"**

Matthew Townend (2002) [8] invokes Hockett's (1987) concept of a 'switching code', and Milliken and Milliken's (1993) concept of 'dialect congruity', to suggest that speakers of phonemically congruous language varieties apply systematic decoding techniques to understand each other's speech (Townend 2002:44-5). As we know, generative dialectology postulates a series of switching rules between dialects which correspond largely to historical linguistic developments; in the same way Hockett's 'switching code' reflects the past history of the varieties in question.[9] I quote a few of Townend's examples, working from Fellows-Jensen's corpus of English place names; modern name first, followed by medieval variants, which show the movement from English to Norse, and sometimes back again to English:

- **ác <> eik**
  Akefrith: Okesfrith Akefrith Eichefrid
- **án <> einn**
  Ainsty: Anestig Ainesti Einesti
- **éast<>austr**
  Austwick: Estewich Ovstevvic Austwich
- **eofor<>jöfurr/jórr**
  York: Eoforwic eorc
- **réad<>rauðr**
  Rockcliff: Redeclive Roudecliua

ác <> eik
Akefrith: Okesfrith Akefrith Eichefrid
án <> einn
Ainsty: Anestig Ainesti Einesti
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Austwick: Estewich Ovstevvic Austwich
eofor<>jöfurr/jórr
York: Eoforwic   eorc – doesn't mean that York had an I-E name!

réad<>rauð
Rockcliff: Redeclive Roudecliua

These then are the same movements as Æþelstán<> Aðalsteinn.

Aþelstán Éadwearding

Aþelstán <> Aðalsteinn
Éadweard ⟶ Játvarðr
          <> *Auðvörðr

                        ᚴ

And now let us return briefly to good King Æþelstán, whose full name was Æþelstán Éadwearding. In Eigilssaga he is known as Aðalsteinn hinn mikli Játvarðsson. It seems that Hockett's switching code has failed here in both elements of the compound. The first is radical: the connection éad<>auð has been lost and the OE form has been transferred phonetically; subsequent changes in the Icelandic diphthong has obscured this phonetic similarity. (Incidentally I find interesting the evidence that the final –d in éad is unvoiced.) In the second element the vowel has been normalized weard<>varðr (instead of >vörðr).

As I have shown elsewhere,[10] phonetically similar non-cognate transfer of this sort is a common occurrence in translation between closely related languages instead of the 'correct' cognate form another morpheme with a similar sound is selected, often but not always with a similar range of meaning. Townend cites a number of examples in place-names. Here are some of Townend's examples from the same corpus:

béc 'beech tree'<>bekkr 'steam'

Beckwith: bec wudu, Beckewith

ears 'arse'<>ey 'island'

Caldy: Calders, Caldei

gár 'triangular piece of land' = geir <>garðr

Plungar Lei: Plungar Plumgard

Hóc personal name, = Haki<>haukr

Hawkswick: Hochesuuic Houkeswyck

dative –um confused with hám <>heimr

Holtham: (æt holtum) Oldham Oldheim

wíc<>viðr

Cotttingwith: Cotingwic Coteuid Cotingwith

(although elsewhere usually wíc<>vík and wudu<>viðr)

This type of non-cognate substitution is also evident in personal names: perhaps the canonical example is

Ongenþéow ⟶ **Ángantýr**
                <> ***Ánganþér**

Oswiu ⟶ **Ósvífr**
Toirdelbach ⟶ **Kerþjálfaðr**
Napoleon ⟶ **Naflajón** (Ben. Gröndal)

Ongenþéow<>Ángantýr (instead of the expected *Ánganþér).
The tendency to substitute native morphemes is also evident in
transfer of personal names from less closely related languages:

 Oswiu<>Ósvífr[11]
Toirdelbach,<>Kerþjálfaðr[12]
Napoleon<>Naflajón (Ben. Gröndal)

Earlier times

Let me see now if I can start knitting these threads together. We
see that when full or fragmentary cognate correspondence occurs
between personal names in related languages this does not
(necessarily) indicate an hierarchic[13]genealogical relationship:
the lineaments of genealogy also quicken in lateral[14] movement
between the branches. (And if anyone here is thinking now of
Deleuze and Guattari's ideas of rhizomic and arboreal structure –
then so am I.)

This possibility of synchronic lateral movement seems
sometimes to be overlooked. Thus the celebrated correspondence
between

Harvaða- <> Karpates

"among the strangest fossils in the
whole range of Norse" C. Tolkien

"Ekki er laust við að einhver
ótrúleikabragur sé á þessu" Jón Helgason

ⴽ

Harvaðafjöll<>Karpates in Hlöðskviða, first I think suggested by
Finnur Jónsson, is often discussed as implying that the name
goes back to a time before the First Consonant Shift, which

would be a remarkable perspective indeed. Thus for instance
Christopher Tolkien in his 1960 edition of The Saga of King
Heidrek the Wise alls it "among the strangest fossils in the
whole range of Norse" (1960:xxiii). Jón Helgason is of
course sceptical: "Ekki er laust við að einhver ótrúleikabragur sé
á þessu "(1067:158). Interestingly, Jón's objection is
geographical, not phonological: the Carpathians are too far
away.[15] He finds no fault with the etymology of
Harvaða<>Karpates, and indeed how could he? I have the
feeling that it is not only the geographical distance which
worries him, but the time-scale: are we really looking down the
long corridors of time to the dialects of Indo-European? But of
course as we have seen the mere fact of etymological cognation
in proper names is not an indication of great ancestry but a
commonplace of language interaction. And let me repeat that the
languages themselves do not have to be closely related for this to
happen. We need only look at the bilingual place names of
modern Finland such as

> **Harvaða-** **<>** **Karpates**

> **Porvoo** **<>** **Borgå**

> **Carlsbad** **<>** **Karlovy Vary**

Porvoo and Borgå – you'll have to go back to the apes if you
want to find a time when Swedish and Finnish were the same
language. Bilingual place names such as Carlsbad and Karlovy
Vary are a commonplace everywhere.

So we have to face up to the fact that

harvaþ <> **karpat**

fuþark <> **puþagor**

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🔲 fuþark<>puþagoras is no less likely than harvaþ<>karpat. We
may agree with Jón Helgason and find an unlikely flavour to the
idea, and I can sympathise with that, especially if you have
rejected Einar Pálsson's cosmology. But in fact this is another
example of the dislike of distance: not geographical this time, or
chronological, but simply imaginative: it stretches belief a little
too far.

On the other hand we cannot deny the diaphonemic
correspondences. The fact that the correspondence between 🔲

Π Υ Θ Α Γ Ο Ρ
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ᚲ

þ<>Θ is not regular, or that -gor- is metathesized to -rk- , do not
cause any problems to the analysis but accord perfectly with
what we know of dialectal switch-coding. In fact manuscript
variants of Höðskviða show the same metathesis of r
(Hávarðafjöll), and we might speculate on the existence of -th-
in the international spelling of Carpathians – obviously a lateral
movement. Ongenþéow<>Angantýr has a similar problem with
þ.

 Coincidence and causality

pk 11

It is of course perfectly logical and perhaps even sensible to assume that the coincidence is merely fortuitous. I have a lot to say at this point on the distinction between mere coincidence and causal relationships, and the status of the readerly analysis, but unfortunately my time is limited. For the record I feel that that the notion of mere coincidence in this case is a radical and far-fetched hypothesis: instead I would say that, since we can read these correspondences into these forms today, it's not unlikely that other people could also do so at other times.

And so now I'm going to enter an area of speculation upon which I think we might disagree: was there a time in the intercourse of Germanic and Greek speakers when the two languages allowed switching effects of the same sort as those between Old English and Old Norse? A switching code which would allow a correspondence between

> **harvaþ** <> **karpat**
>
> **fuþark** <> **puþagor**
>
> **wulfilas** <> **vulpecula**
> 'little fox'

ᚲ

harvaþ and karpat and fuþark and puþagor? If this time ever existed, it would have been an early period when Germanic peoples were showing an interest in Greek and Latin culture, science and religion. We started this symposium on the subject of the Goths, and I am going to end it in the same way, by asking Ulfilas what *fuþarc* might have meant to him. Since our Gothic is a little rusty we would have to speak to him in Latin, and as soon as we do this we see that he must have been used to switch-coding between Latin and Gothic, particularly in proper names,

particularly in his own name. For we would of course address him in Latin as Vulpecula, the little fox.

Ulfilas then, I suggest, was used to switch-coding with his own name. I haven't given myself time yet to look at the Germanic names in Tacitus and others to see whether a switch-code is in operation there; perhaps there are people in this room who could say something about that. We have to bear in mind the unconscious nature of the switch code born of interaction between the dialects, which explains why it does not occur in Saxo, who is too late to switch *unconsciously* between Germanic and Latin . But my point is that there would have been a time when the Germanic branch was achieving or had recently achieved some sort of an independent identity, when it was still close enough to other dialects for a switching code to be commonplace. If that happened at a time when the runes were being developed then that may explain the order of the first 6 of them.

1105/20=105

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Þess galt hon gedda
fyrir Grafár ósi
er Heiðrekr var veginn
undir Harvaða fjöllum
Tolkien 45
"The most remarkable of the place-names in this part of the saga is perhaps *Harvaða-fjöll*, which occurs in a half-strophe (74) that must be among the strangest fossils in the whole range of Norse" .... The view is not challenged, I think, that *Harvaða-* is the same name in origin as 'Carpathians'" xxiii

Carpathians, Karpaty, **Carpaţii**

Wikipedia: The name 'Karpetes' may ultimately be from the Proto Indo-European root ***sker-/*ker-***, from which comes the Albanian word ***karp***ë "rock", perhaps by Dacian cognate which meant 'mountain,' *rock*, or *rugged* (cf. Old Norse *harfr* "harrow", Middle Low German *shcarf* "potsherd", Lithuanian *kar~pas* "cut, hack, notch", Latvian *cìrpt* "to shear, clip"). Archaic Polish word ***kar***pa meant "rugged irregularities, underwater obstacles/rocks, rugged roots or trunks". The more common word ***skar***pa is sharp cliff or other

vertical terrain. Otherwise, the name may instead come from IE *kwerp* "to turn", akin to Old English *hweorfan* "to turn, change" and Greek *karpós* "wrist", perhaps referring to the way the mountain range bends or veers in an L-shape[1].^ Room, Adrian. *Placenames of the World*. London: MacFarland and Co., Inc., 1997.

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Charles Lock
Deleuze and Guattari
Geir Svansson – Rísóm etc

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[1] The grey dog – the Black Prince
and their turbulent syntactic semantic and prosodic properties can cause havoc in the stagnant backwaters of language which are the preferred haunt of generative linguists.

[2] In qrammatological terms we would say that just as common nouns *can only be translated*, and can only exist in translation (so Walter Benjamin in 'Uber der Sprache') so it is with proper nouns that they *are already translated*.[2] These concepts are important to writers such as Walter Benjamin, discussed by Derrida, or Charles Lock ('Translating the Silence'),

[3] Knútsson, xx and xx

[4] for example on the Krogsta stone

[5] We are no longer working arboreally, that is to say along the lines of the tree-diagram (borrowing the terminology here from Deleuze and Guattari).

[6] A movement which Deleuze and Guattari call *rhizomic*.August Schleicher 1868, Die Deutche Sprache, posits and idealised Stammbaum
Johannes Schmidt, Die Verwantschaftsverhältnisse der indogermanischen Sprachen 1872.
Illustrated by Bloomfied 1936:316 Wellentheorie

[7] lávarðr, lafði, bóc, blek

[8] makes use of this corpus to demonstrate the high degree of mutual intelligibility that he suggests must have obtained between English and Norse speakers of the time

[9] appears to rely on the diachronic information enshrined in the DNA of the language varieties in question.

[10] Knútssson qq,qq

[11] Knútsson Líadan qq

[12] Knútsson 2004 (int):52

[13] arboreal

[14] (or rhizomic, to borrow Jacques Deleuze and Félix Guattari's terminology)

, even Poland is too far away: "En spottakorn er þaðan til Íslands og líklega fá dæmi þess að andlátsfregn einnar geddu hafi borizt aðra eins leið." (158-9). Þetta er flott hjá honum en fullkomin rökleysa.