**PUNCTUATION MARKS ON VIKING AGE RUNE STONES**

by Jan Meijer †

1. Introduction

In his discussion of the Glavendrup rune stone (DR 209) Michael Lerche Nielsen (1997) discusses, among other things, the use and absence of punctuation marks. The text on face A has no punctuation mark between *stain* and *þansi*, which can be accounted for by the fact that the two words form a close group, but as there are more instances of absence of punctuation marks in this part of the text, the author thinks this absence is rather due to a lack of space. Note, incidentally, that the last line of face B has its runes quite close together as well and yet there are word dividers between all the words. Nielsen finishes his paragraph on the punctuation matter with these words:

> Pladsmangel er en almindelig grund til udeladelse af skilletegn i runeinskrifteren.

This last remark made me go more deeply into the matter. In doing so, I found that, apart from Glavendrup, there is only one Viking Age rune stone inscription, viz. Tälje bro, Nä 11, in which punctuation marks occur between only a certain number of the words; their absence is coupled with the runes being close together. As an example of how easily a relation between spacing and the absence of punctuation marks may be stated without being solidly based on facts, I may refer to van Friesen’s (excellent) “Uplands runstenar” (1913, 85), where the author discusses the absence of punctuation marks in connection with lack of space. While I was studying these possible links between the presence and absence of punctuation marks and runes being widely spaced or not, I found that the study of rune stone punctuation has a far wider scope. I hope that this article may offer a few aspects that have not yet got the attention that the subject deserves.

A punctuation mark in my definition is a mark that may be used as “ingress sign”, as “end punctuation”, as a word divider, as a mark to separate the elements of compound words and as a dividing mark between several parts of a sentence.
2. Material used

I limited myself to the regions dealt with in DR and SRI, the latter with the exception of Gotland (because of the specific character of most of the Gotland inscriptions), Öland (on account of this volume of SRI being too dated) and Östergötland (for the same reason). I did, however, study the Östergötland inscriptions that are dealt with as newly found stones in Fv. All other new finds discussed in both Fv and Moltke (1985) were incorporated in my study. I left out of consideration those cases which are dubious (cf. 4.3). As regards the Danish inscriptions I did not treat those belonging to the so-called Helnæs-Gørlev group, on account of the transitional character of these inscriptions. Although there are fairly great differences in the runic tradition in Denmark, I dealt with the inscriptions in DR as belonging to one region.

The total number of inscriptions studied amounts to 830. These are spread over the different regions as follows: DR 139; Gs 7; Nä 13; Sm 44; Sö 146; U 398; Vg 68; Vs 9; Ög 6.

I shall relatively rarely refer to one of the most extensive articles on punctuation marks in runic inscriptions, viz. that by Nils Jörgenson (1973). The reason is that this author uses arguments for the use and non-use of these marks based almost exclusively on linguistic grounds, while other aspects are hardly to be found. In the present article I have tried to give the subject a different slant, emphasizing what might be called the “material” side of the question.

3. Eight categories

In order to find out whether there is a relation between the use and non-use of punctuation marks and the runes being (widely) spaced or crowded, I distinguished 8 categories:

1. punctuation marks between all the words, coupled with good spacing;
2. punctuation marks between all the words, coupled with the runes being crowded;
3. punctuation marks between all the words, the runes being partly