

Latin Loans in Old Frisian and the Problem of Relative Chronology

Rolf H. Bremmer Jr

Universiteit Leiden

The adoption of Latin loanwords into the early phases of the Germanic languages offers wonderful opportunities for all kinds of study, whether from a linguistic, cultural or historical point of view and many scholars have seized that opportunity. Notably the adoption of Latin loans into Old English has been well studied, both for individual words and on a more comprehensive scale, most recently Durkin 2014. The situation for Old Frisian, Old English's closest sister, is completely different. Studies on the early Latin loans in this language are few and far between. But there is much profit to be gained from such an investigation. What does it mean, for example, if Old English and Old Frisian do not share Latin loans that can be dated to the pre-migration period? Why is it that Old Frisian borrowed only a few such 'learned' words that can be associated with the Anglo-Saxon conversion of the Frisians to Christianity between ca. 700 and 800 A.D.? A further problem to be addressed is that of relative chronology. Early loans tended to morph with the receiving language and afterwards underwent the same sound-changes as native words. Such sound changes are an important means for dating the reception of loans. But what if ostensibly later loans were adapted to an earlier native phonological system? E.g., the apostle Andreas' name appears in Old Frisian as *Ondreas*, showing Anglo-Frisian rounding of *a* before nasal, a change that took place centuries before the conversion. What does it mean that Old Frisian has *kersna* 'fur coat, fur-lined coat', with i-mutated vowel, and its neighbouring languages don't? [OS *cursina/crusina* (9th–10th c.),¹ OE *crūs(e)ne* (late 10th c.),² OHG *chursina* (11th c.) and early MDu *corsene* (13th c.) – all ultimately from Proto-Slavic **kъrzbno* 'fur'.] In short, there are plenty of exciting questions to be asked and maybe you can help solve some that I have been unable to find an answer for.

Philip Durkin, *Borrowed Words. A History of Loanwords in English* (Oxford: OUP, 2014), Part III: 'Old English and Proto-Old English in Contact with Latin (pp. 97–170).

¹ H. Tiefenbach, *Altsächsisches Handwörterbuch / A Concise Old Saxon Dictionary*, de Gruyter, Berlin 2010, s.v. *kursina*.

² *DOE*, s.v. *crūsene*. First quotation in the Will of Æthelwold (after 987 AD).