

Summary

Lindworm and ling

By Staffan Fridell

The word *lindorm* ‘lindworm’, referring to an imaginary creature, is attested as early as in Old Swedish and Old Danish (and also secondarily as a man’s name), and later occurs frequently in folk tales, folk songs and other folk genres. It is probably an adaptation of Low German *lintworm*, with the same meaning.

The corresponding West Scandinavian word, OWScand. *linnormr*, could be an entirely native formation, corresponding to Low German *lintworm*. But as OWScand. *linnormr* is only attested once, and in the *Piðrekssaga* (a translation from German) at that, it is likely that this word, too, is modelled on a German prototype. Here, however, *lint-* happens to have been adapted to its West Scandinavian etymological equivalent *linnr* ‘serpent’, which is known only from poetry. *Lintwurm* is in fact an epexegetic compound, as its first element *lint* means ‘serpent’.

Alongside *linnormr*, Old West Scandinavian also has a word *lyngormr*, referring to a fabulous creature of a similar type to the lindworm. According to the author, *lyngormr*, too, is probably a folk-etymological adaptation of the German *lintworm* (-*wurm*).

A man’s name **linkorm** *Lingorm* (acc.) is recorded once in a Gotland runic inscription from the 12th century. The author believes this Gotland name to be formed from yet another Scandinavian adaptation of the Low German *lintworm*, in which the first element *lint* has been replaced with an (otherwise unattested) Old Gutnish **ling* ‘dwarf berry shrub, heather’ etc., formally identical to Swedish *ljung* and Danish and Norwegian *lyng* ‘heather, ling’.