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**К.В. Поспелова**

## **ДРЕВНЕФРИЗСКАЯ БРАННАЯ ЛЕКСИКА В ИСТОРИКО-КУЛЬТУРНОЙ ПЕРСПЕКТИВЕ**

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© *Поспелова Ксения Вадимовна* – аспирант, кафедра германской и кельтской филологии, филологический факультет, Московский государственный университет им. М.В. Ломоносова, 119991, Российская Федерация, г. Москва, ГСП-1 Ленинские горы, 1.  
**E-mail:** [pospelova1990@gmail.com](mailto:pospelova1990@gmail.com). **ORCID:** <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0679-154X>

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### **АННОТАЦИЯ**

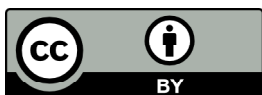
В статье рассматривается древнефризская бранная лексика, а именно 8 симплексов и сложносоставных слов, засвидетельствованных в древнефризских источниках. Древнефризский корпус является малым и с точки зрения жанрового своеобразия включает в себя исключительно правовые тексты. Поскольку в древнефризском обществе широко практиковалась кровная месть и ее компенсации, а понятие чести было одним из центральных для достоинства свободного фриза, ее оскорбление должно было быть компенсировано в суде. При этом оскорблением чести являлось не только нанесение телесных увечий или порча имущества, но и оскорбление достоинства с помощью оскорбительных слов.

В статье исследуются четыре семантические группы: оскорбления, связанные с женщинами; принижение социального статуса; принижение интеллектуальных способностей; сравнение с животными. Для каждого из восьми рассматриваемых ругательств выявляется историко-культурный контекст. Во-первых, засвидетельствованы два оскорбления, применявшиеся по отношению к женщинам или с их упоминанием. Одно из них имеет отношение к общегерманским представлениям о ночных призраках женского пола, душащих спящего, либо указывают на внебрачное рождение адресата ругательства, что непосредственно предопределяло низкий статус этого человека в средневековом обществе. Во-вторых, принижение социального статуса осуществлялось не только с указанием статуса по рождению, но и с помощью отсылки к размерам имущественного владения. В-третьих, оскорбление могло быть построено на принижении интеллектуальных способностей адресата. Наконец, последняя группа ругательств включает в себя обозначения животных, ассоциируемых с агрессией и нечистым существованием.

Рассмотрение древнефризских ругательств в широком контексте позволяет отразить важные лингво-исторические особенности древнегерманского материала на весьма ограниченной лексической выборке.

**Ключевые слова:** германские языки, древнефризский язык, словообразование, словосложение, семантические поля, бранная лексика.

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K.V. Pospelova

## OLD FRISIAN INSULTS IN CULTURAL-HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

© Pospelova Ksenia Vadimovna – postgraduate student of the Department of German and Celtic Philology, Philological Faculty, Lomonosov Moscow State University, 1, Leninskie Gory, GSP-1, Moscow, 119991, Russian Federation.  
E-mail: [pospelova1990@gmail.com](mailto:pospelova1990@gmail.com). ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0679-154X>

## ABSTRACT

This paper discusses Old Frisian swear words used in the Medieval society to insult another member. These include 8 simplex and compound words attested in the Old Frisian sources. The Old Frisian corpus can be characterized as a minor one, limited not only in terms of its volume, but also in terms of the genre spectrum. To be more precise, all Old Frisian texts, be that codices, charters or private letters, are related to the legal domain. As blood vengeance was widely practiced in the Middle Age Frisia, the continuous sequence of vendetta was limited through a compensation system covering a vast variety of illegal cases. The concept of honour was of great importance for the Frisians, and any offence was to be compensated in the court. At this, a person's honour could be offended not only through causing bodily harm or property damage, but through verbal insults as well.

The paper analyses four semantic groups of insults: insults related to or addressed to females; social status understatement; intellectual abilities understatement; comparison with animals. Each of the eight cases considered in the paper are discussed within a wider cultural-historical context. First of all, the female-related swear words are connected with, on the one hand, the pan-Germanic idea of female night spirits choking the sleeping person, or, on the other hand, emphasize the bastardly status of the addressee, which would negatively predetermine their position in the Frisian society. Secondly, the addressee could have been insulted by a direct statement of their limited or completely absent property, which would assert their low social status as well. Thirdly, and this case is still relevant for the contemporary world, an insult could have been based on a statement of the addressee's limited intellectual capabilities. Finally, the fourth group includes designations of animals associated with aggression or indecency.

An analysis of Old Frisian swear words and their functions as insults in a wider context allows to touch upon and reflect basic linguo-historical features of the Old Germanic data despite the minimal volume of the lexical selection.

**Key words:** Germanic languages, Old Frisian, word-formation, compounding, semantic fields, insults.

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## FRISIAN AS A LANGUAGE

West, East and North Frisian are **West Germanic** languages [Munske 2001] or dialects of one language that used to be spoken along the entire southern coast of the North Sea. Nowadays Frisian spoken in the Netherlands and in Germany. In the Netherlands, West Frisian is spoken in the north of the country, in the province of Fryslân, where about 74 % of the population of ca. 620,000 (1999) are able to speak Frisian. Thus, the total number of Frisian speakers in the Netherlands amounts to roughly 400,000 (based on representative sample surveys in 1967, 1980 and 1994) [quoted after Gorter 2001, p. 74]. In Germany, Frisian is spoken in two areas. In the municipality of Saterland in Low Saxony, the number of Frisian speakers has been decreasing since 1945. Nowadays less than 20 % of the total

population of 12,000 inhabitants speak Frisian [Fort 2001, p. 410], which amounts to ca. 2,400. The other Frisian-speaking area in Germany is the west coast of Schleswig-Holstein, as well as islands Sylt, Föhr, Amrum and Heligoland, and several small islets [Walker 2001, p. 263], with some 60,000 people of the population (37 %) considering themselves Frisian, 8–10,000 of which (5 % of the population) speak Frisian [Walker 2001, p. 263]. Investigations into Frisian, a minority language [Versloot 2008, p. 4], are scarce, as most attention has traditionally been paid to the larger Germanic languages by which Frisian is surrounded [Munske 1979].

Historically speaking, Old Frisian is an **Ingvaeonic** language, or, in other words, it belongs to the North Sea Germanic group including Anglo-Saxon, Old Saxon, Middle Low German and, partly, Dutch [Markey 1981, p. 16]. Being the closest relative of Old

English, Frisian has preserved some of the early features of the Anglo-Frisian language cluster, for instance, such phonetic features as the nasal spirant law and palatalization [Fulk 1998, p. 140–154], and some compound cognates attested exclusively in Old English and Old Frisian [Carr 1939, p. 115, 124, 143]. On top of that, Old Frisian is the only language to share some lexical features with English, e.g., lexical equivalents New English *brain*/Frisian *brein*, New English *key*/Frisian *kāi*. By now, Frisian and English have driven apart to a great extent, because they have for centuries been under a major influence of, among other languages, Dutch and French, respectively.

### OLD FRISIAN AND ITS FEATURES

The written tradition begins about 1200 with the old Frisian Psalter Fragments. Before the tradition of manuscript production starts, there are some twenty runic inscriptions dated back to the time between 500 and 800 AD. Stray words in Old Frisian are attested in the *Lex Frisionum* and the *Traditiones Fuldenses* (both ca. 800); another set of Old Frisian words are place-names in ecclesiastical possessions. Ingvaemonic develops into proto-Frisian and other variants of Germanic in the 6th–8th centuries. There are two main branches of the language, divided by the river Lauwers, proto-Old West Frisian and proto-Old East Frisian. The main corpus of Old Frisian is dated from between ca. 1200 and 1550. Despite all the differences of dialect, diachronically and spatially, the Old Frisian texts are considered the corpus of one language. They consist of: (1) legal codices, (2) charters, (3) letters. The rest of the corpus consists of smaller categories that are less numerous: chronicles, sermons, and poetry/rhyming texts.

**The Old Frisian corpus can be characterized the following way:**

1. The earliest manuscripts in (Old) Frisian date back to the 13–16 cc., i.e. they can be aligned with Middle English, Middle German and Middle Dutch periods. Due to this chronological ‘asymmetry’, it has been widely discussed whether Old Frisian should actually be classified as Middle Frisian [de Haan 2010, p. 25; Gukhman et al. 1963, p. 8]. In this paper, the oldest stage of Frisian is referred to as Old Frisian, in line with the tradition of tripartite classifications followed in Old Germanic studies.

2. The reason for the above-mentioned ‘asymmetry’ has to do with the initial orality of Frisian laws. Initially they existed only as part of an oral tradition and were written down at a later stage. Thus, the Old Frisian codices provisionally reflect an earlier stage of the language development as opposed to, e.g., Old Frisian charters that reflect the language as it was at the moment of fixation [Bremmer 2014].

3. Old Frisian manuscripts originate from various parts of *Frisia Magna*.

4. In terms of genres, the Old Frisian corpus includes legal codices from 1200–1550 [Bremmer

2014, p. 602–603], which amount to roughly half of the available sources, and charters and letters, mostly from later times.

The Old Frisian corpus is quite limited both in terms of its volume and the spectrum of genres. Swear words and mentions of insults, on the one hand, could have been expected in other types of texts, e.g., those documenting Medieval vulgar songs or popular tales. On the other hand, the legal domain is likely to list cases of insult as well: they are given as examples of appellative constructions deployed in order to insult another member of the Frisian society. Insults, as one of the honour offence categories, were conceptually similar to wounding, or property damage.

### INSULT AS HONOUR OFFENCE

The Medieval Frisian society was, first of all, autonomous and, secondly, saw continuous disputes between its members. As a result, blood vengeance was wide-spread in Frisia at that time [Nijdam 2008, p. 332–333]. In order to prevent an endless sequence of revenge killings it was necessary to stipulate compensation tariffs for any damage. The main concepts included body, honour, vengeance and compensation; yet – as one might consider due to the ‘body’ element being introduced – the spectrum of what could be damaged was not limited to the material world only: “<...> Medieval Frisia is an excellent case study, because it was an autonomous feuding society, where violence and revenge were an integral part of daily life. Medieval Frisia also produced the abundant genre of the compensation tariffs. In these texts, all kinds of injuries, assaults and *insults* are enumerated” [Nijdam 2008, p. 332–333].

The compensation volume was conditioned by a significant number of factors, therefore documentation of the smallest detail of the violation was of high importance. Most of the compensations comprised by the Old Frisian codices have to do with the injuries that could be detected through a visual examination, as the victim was to demonstrate their injuries before the judges. At the same time, proof of offence was possible as well.

### ANALYSIS

This paper treats several groups of insults: insults related to or addressed to females; social status understatement; intellectual abilities understatement; comparison with animals. Some of the lemmata are grouped together as they occur in a single quotation. Each lemma is followed by the source token in the brackets. The tokens are presented in line with the tradition of the Hofmann & Popkema’s Dictionary<sup>1</sup> [Hofmann & Popkema 2008].

#### 1. NIGHTMARE (ABOUT A FEMALE)

*nachtmerie* (SnR), *merie* (LwS) ‘nightmare; night ghost’

<sup>1</sup> The tokens are listed in the back annex of the Dictionary.

The compound word has cognates in Germanic and occurs in these languages texts roughly from the 13<sup>th</sup> century on. The exact meaning of the word in Germanic is ‘an evil female spirit afflicting sleepers with a feeling of suffocation’ (Middle Dutch *nachtmare*, German *Nachtmahr*) [etymonline].

The variety of Old Frisian designations of female persons, obviously, is not limited to offensive references [Pospelova 2018]. One of the most significant features of a woman’s position on the Medieval society is her unfree, dependent position [Algra 2001, p. 564–565]. Texts written in Western Europe in the Medieval times mention females mostly in relation to sexual abuse, compensations for abuse of pregnant women and various types of offence of women, which was considered to be an insult for the entire family [Nelson & Rio 2013, p. 105–115]. A female was believed to lack the intellectual capacities necessary for representing herself in the court, taking part in administrative affairs or taking the legal responsibility for herself [Shahar 2003, p. 11–21]. At the age of 12, which was the maturity age [Algra 2001, p. 565], a girl had the right to select a partner and from that time on was in his custody. Designations of female administrators appear only in later Frisian texts, mostly in charters [Hofmann & Popkema 2008]. Before that time, a female’s role outside her family could only have been played in a monastery or through being engaged in manual labour activities like wool brushing.

Calling a female person a ‘nightmare’ suggests parallels with the concept of a woman as a witch, which can be tracked in Old Germanic through analysis of legal terms, namely designations for ordeals [Hofmann & Popkema 2008].

## 2. SLAVE, WOLF, LANDLOPER

*dae Jniurie virden als landloper, schalck ende wolff* (SnR 5253, 1516)

‘Such offensive words as landloper, slave and wolf’

*londlōper* (SnR) ‘landloper, waderer’

*skalk* (Exc-A, GFr-A, JF-Ro, L<sub>24</sub>-DE<sub>1</sub>FHJR<sub>1</sub>U, LwS, SnR, We<sub>16</sub>-E<sub>1</sub>) ‘slave; evil person’

*wulf, wolf* (GFr-A, JF-Ro, SnR) ‘wolf’

The structure of the Frisian society in the High Middle Age included three strata: (1) *ethela*, the nobles, allodial land owners, who received income from their lands, as well as duties from peasants possessing their own hereditary lands (*ein* ‘own’ or *einervad* ‘own hereditary’); (2) free Frisian members not in possession of any land; (3) the half-free (*letar*) and unfree (*unein*) Frisians. The first two groups considered themselves *Free Frisians*, i.e. direct subordinates to the king, thus being exempt from feudal obligations [Bremmer 2009, p. 3–5]. Their independence, both within the society and at a national scale, was of great importance for the Frisians. Presumably, this is the reason for ‘slave’ and ‘landloper’ to be extremely offensive when applied to a free person.

The concept of ‘wolf’ is associated with the dark sides of the personality, e. g. Old English *wulf* had

both meaning attested ‘wolf; wolfish person, devil’ (from Proto-Germanic \**wulfaz*; Old Saxon *wulf*, Old Norse *ulfr*, Dutch, Old High German, German *wolf*, Gothic *wulfs*) [etymonline]. Taking into account aspects of the meaning of *skalk* ‘slave; evil person’ in the previous section, where calling someone an ‘evil person’ allows to be interpreted as an accusation of an illegal action, the ‘evilness’ of a *wolf* might well be analysed by analogy.

## 3. SON OF A WHORE, FOOL, DOG

*hōrbred* (LwS) ‘son of a whore’

*gek* (SnR) ‘fool’

*hund, hond* (BBr-D, BDg-U, BEm-E<sub>1</sub>E<sub>2</sub>E<sub>3</sub>, BFDg-J, BFW-U, BHm-J, BLw-JU, BrB-B, BW<sub>5</sub>D-J, BWb-JU, Cra, Dom-DFJU, Exc-A, HrFr, JF-Ro, L<sub>24</sub>-DE<sub>1</sub>FHJR<sub>1</sub>U, O, RgJ-J, SkRa-DRo, SnR) ‘dog’

The child’s birth status conditioned their entire life. One can see a number of cases reflected through lexis: from *hφr-bern*, *hφr-kind*, *hφrning* ‘whore child’ with no hereditary rights and *spil-kind* ‘premarital child’ and *jung-hēra* ‘young lord’.

‘Dog’, semantically, seems similar to ‘wolf’ in terms of its semantics. Yet it looks more plausible that it is not the aspect of ‘evilness’ emphasized in the offensive usage; the concept of a dog as a hunting animal lacking proper living conditions rather suggests that by calling someone a dog a Frisian would put the interlocutor into a socially inferior position.

Finally, there is one lemma with unclear meaning: *rikker* (SnR; or *wikker*? [Hofmann & Popkema 2008]), yet definitely offensive. Existence of words like *rike* ‘rich’ or *woka* ‘to soften’ do not provide any firm grounds for deducing the semantic pattern.

## CONCLUSION

The paper analyses eight Old Frisian swear words. Formally grouped into four categories, these words actually be connected with 2 insulting strategies: degrading the social status of the interlocutor, or their intellectual abilities. The only exception is (*nacht*)*merie* ‘nightmare’ used in relation to a woman and resonating with the concept of a woman as a witch. Overall, it seems that the social status played one of the most significant roles in the Medieval Frisian society, which makes perfect sense when considering the hereditary patterns.

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