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## THE FORMATION OF THE DEFINITE ARTICLE IN THE NORDIC LANGUAGES

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The definite article in Modern Nordic languages is a suffix, etymologically related to a demonstrative. The form is not attested in the oldest linguistic sources, the runic inscriptions, but appears first in Icelandic sagas and Swedish and Danish legal codices from 13th century onwards. In these texts it does not appear with the same regularity as in modern languages.

Despite numerous attempts to reconstruct the formation of the definite article in the Nordic languages, a number of questions remain either controversial or unanswered. The contention issues are the exact etymology of the article and the date of its formation.

The demonstrative from which the article grammaticalizes appears in Old Icelandic in two forms: *inn* or *hinn*, in Old Swedish as *hinn* only. However, only *inn* appears as a clitic. It is argued here that the etymology of *inn* and *hinn* may provide an argument in favour of an early formation of the article.

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### INTRODUCTION

Among Indo-European languages there is considerable variation as to the form and position of the definite article. The majority of the western European languages show a preposed free morph: English *the*, German *der/die/das*, French *la*. In some the article is a bound, postposed morph: Bulgarian *-ta*, Romanian *-ul* and Nordic languages *-in/-it*.

The formation of the definite article in Nordic languages has been an object of many studies (e.g. DELBRÜCK 1916; DE BOOR 1922; HODLER 1954; HEINRICHS 1954; LEISS 2000). There is a substantial disagreement as to the time of its formation, which in lack of extensive written sources remains a reconstruction. It predates the first Nordic texts in the Latin alphabet (13th century), it is uncertain by how much. Some authors assume the formation to have taken place a century or so earlier (NYGAARD 1966; NOREEN 1913), while others (DELBRÜCK 1916; NECKEL 1924) put it further back in time, before 800 AD, when a dialectal split divided the region into eastern and western branch (see 1). In the most recent account, SYRETT 2002, the dates are generously stated as 500–1100 AD.



## Continental Nordic languages:

## Swedish

- (2)a. mannen  
 b. den gamla mannen

## Danish (standard)

- (3)a. manden  
 b. den gamle mand

## Danish (South Jutlandic)

- (3)c. æ mand  
 d. æ gammel mand

Norwegian (*bokmål* and *nynorsk*)

- (4)a. mannen  
 b. den gamle mannen

## Insular Nordic languages:

## Icelandic

- (5)a. maðurinn  
 b. gamli maðurinn / hinn gamli maður

## Faroese

- (6)a. maðurinn  
 b. tann gamli maðurinn

In the insular Scandinavian languages, where the category of case is fully productive, the definite article is inflected for case even when cliticized to the noun, which is also inflected. As a result, there are two case endings within each definite form.

- (7)a. Icel. mann-s-in-s  
 man-GEN-DEF-GEN

Such a system is found in Old Swedish (1225–1541 AD) as well. For some paradigms the two endings are identical (ex. 7a), for some different (ex. 7b):

- b. ON/OS fisk-s-in-s  
 fish-GEN-DEF-GEN  
 from *fisk* 'fish', masculine a-stem
- c. ON/OS bond-a-n-s / bónd-a-n-s  
 peasant-GEN-DEF-GEN  
 from ON *bóndi*, OS *bondi* 'peasant', masculine nd-stem

Since the definite form in modern insular languages as well as in ON and OS is only loosely attached to the noun, which retains its own inflection, it may more accurately be termed a clitic rather than a suffix (see ZWICKY & PULLUM 1983 for a discussion on differences between clitics and affixes). However, in modern continental languages, where the

case system has declined, the definite form is now suffixed directly onto the noun (MS: Modern Swedish):

- (8)a. MS fisk-en-s  
fish-DEF-GEN
- b. MS bonde-n-s  
peasant-DEF-GEN

The oldest Nordic sources are the runic inscriptions (the oldest are dated to the 3rd century). The oldest text written in the Latin alphabet is a fragment of a religious legend, written in Norway ca 1150. The first longer texts, dating from the 13th, are the Icelandic sagas in the western branch and legal codices in the east.

There are no definite forms of nouns in the runic material older than 1000 AD. Single occurrences of definite forms are noted from the period 1000–1200. Even in younger inscriptions, where other texts exhibit a plethora of definite forms, the article occurs only sporadically in runic inscriptions, which might suggest that it never was fully represented in this particular text genre (e.g. NECKEL 1924).

Both in sagas and in legal texts the definite forms are to be found with increasing frequency, though their distribution is much more limited and their occurrences still sporadic in comparison with the modern languages. There is a dramatic difference between different genres: whereas there are hardly any definite forms in the legal texts, they are abundant in somewhat younger religious prose, mainly inspired by Latin texts. Modern legal prose still uses the article diffidently in comparison with other genres (GUNNARSSON 1982). For Icelandic poetry it has been observed that the article is almost absent from the *Edda* with the exception of one part of it, *Hárbarðsljóð*, where its use overlaps to a great extent with the modern one. This difference in the distribution has again been ascribed to genre and style rather than chronology: this is the only part of an otherwise solemn text which records colloquial speech and dialogue (NECKEL 1924). That would point towards the definite article's being well-established in the spoken language even at a time when it is only poorly represented in texts.

Despite its low frequency, the form is attested for all genders, cases and numbers (examples in table 1 from Old Swedish), though all plural forms are far less frequent than the singular ones and some, particularly the genitive plural, are only sporadically found in the material.

Table 1. The definite nouns in Old Swedish

		m <i>day</i>	f <i>journey</i>	n <i>ship</i>
sg	nom	daghr-in	færþ-in	skip-it
	gen	daghs-ins	færþ-inna(r)	skips-ins
	dat	daghi-num	færþ-inne	skipi-nu
	acc	dagh-in	færþ-ena	skip-it
pl	nom	dagha-ni(r)	færþe-na(r)	skip-in
	gen	dagha-nna	færþa-nna	skipa-nna
	dat	daghum-in	færþom-in	skipum-in
	acc	dagha-na	færþe-na(r)	skip-in

## 2. THE CLITICIZATION OF THE DEMONSTRATIVE

As in many other languages, the source of the definite article is a distal demonstrative pronoun. In the Nordic languages its form and position (postposed bound morph) suggest the original constituent order noun + demonstrative.

In morphology, a bound morpheme derives historically from a free lexical or grammatical morpheme and generally inherits the same order relative to its stem that was assigned to the earlier free morphemes by syntax. (HAWKINS 1990: 102–103).

The demonstratives in ON may appear on both sides of the noun, seemingly without a difference in meaning. However, only *sá* and *sjá* (*þenne*) appear with nouns, whereas (*h*)*inn* is only found with weak adjectives: (*h*)*inn* + A, *sá/sjá* + N.

Two reconstructions of the cliticization process have been proposed in the literature. The first, given in GRIMM 1837, is further developed in DELBRÜCK 1916. To account for the demonstrative (*h*)*inn* as the source of the definite suffix, it assumes the postposition of an adjective phrase consisting of a weak adjective and a demonstrative:

- (9)           maðr inn gamli  
              man that old-DEF

The demonstrative, which originally belonged with the weak adjective, cliticizes onto the noun and comes to be reanalyzed as its affix, allowing nouns to appear without the adjective. The theory is identical with the reconstruction proposed for Rumanian ('homo-ille-bonus' e.g. GRAUR 1967: 22), which was possibly inspired by the Nordic one.

Later statistical studies have shown that the frequency of such phrases might be lower than previously assumed, and of the phrases that are found, the crashing majority consist of a proper name rather than a common noun, as in e.g. *Haraldr inn hárfagri* 'Harald the fair-haired' (MUSINOWICZ 1911 gives 98 out of 102 instances), which undermines the reconstruction. Therefore, a postposition of the demonstrative, with possible anaphoric reference, has been proposed by e.g. NYGAARD (1966: 34) and accepted by many others (e.g. LARM 1936). However, throughout the texts, proper names with a cliticized demonstrative are also found, as *Erikinum hælghæ* 'Erik-DEF holy-DEF'. Another argument in favour of the Grimm hypothesis is that it brings together the two exponents of definiteness in ON: the weak adjective and the clitic. A reconstruction whereby a postposition of a demonstrative by itself is assumed leaves out weak adjectives with their definite meaning. It would mean that alongside one exponent of definiteness, another one was being formed. The evidence available today shows that the two exponents are used in identical contexts. Therefore it is reasonable to look for a structure which may bring together the postposed demonstrative and the weak adjective.

In later stages of the development a third exponent arises, the preposed definite determiner *þen*. However, in this case grammaticalization takes place in contexts previously not marked by any definite form, the distribution of *-inn* and *þen* being originally close to complementary. The preposed determiner *þen* was used mainly in anaphoric contexts, when the same referent was mentioned again, necessarily in a neighbouring syntagm. The developing definite article *-inn* on the other hand was used in so-called associative-anaphoric contexts, with the referent familiar due to previous mention of other, related referent. This difference is illustrated by examples below, taken from the oldest Swedish text, *Äldre Västgötalagen*.

- (10) Varþær suþærman dræpin allær ænskær maþær. þa skal böta firi marchum fiurum. þem **sakinæ** sökír. ok tvar. marchar konongi. (ÁVL aM:5)  
 be southerner killed or Englishman then shall pay for marks-DAT four-DAT the-DAT charge-DEF-ACC searches and two marks king-DAT  
 ‘If a German is killed, or an Englishman, the crime is paid with four marks to the one pressing charge and two to the king’
- (11) Læggær maþær manni **fæ** sit in til gætslu. þa ma þæt **fæ** eigh tapas af þem uip takar (ÁVL RB: 13)  
 puts man-NOM man-DAT cattle his in for safekeeping then may the cattle not lost (be) of the-DEF takes  
 ‘If a man gives his cattle another man for safekeeping then the cattle may not be lost by the keeper’

No similar systematic distributional differences between the weak adjective and the definite clitic have been found.

### 3. THE ETYMOLOGY OF THE NORDIC ARTICLE

The demonstrative pronoun (*h*)*inn* is found in the eastern languages (Swedish and Danish) almost exclusively as *hinn* (there are five runic inscriptions where the form *inn* appears, U 226, U 1146, Hs 21, Sö 41, Sö 125, see *Rundatabasen*), whereas in Icelandic two forms are in variation: *hinn* and *inn/enn*. There they seem to be interchangeable in all contexts, though a more detailed study is called for.

- (12)a. **hit** fyrra sumar  
 ‘the.NEUT previous summer’
- b. **et** sama kveld  
 ‘the.NEUT same evening’
- c. Haraldr **hinn** hárfagri  
 ‘Harald the.MASC fair-haired’
- d. Hákon jarl **enn** ríki  
 ‘Hakon earl the.MASC rich’  
 (NYGAARD 1966: 49–50; FAARLUND 2004: 58)

This variation in form has not been given sufficient prominence in the literature, though in most works it is tacitly assumed that *hinn* and *inn* are the same pronoun, *inn* being the weakened one. In the following we will take a closer look at the demonstratives found in ON and OS and their etymologies.

The ON demonstrative system as reconstructed today encompasses following pronouns: *sá*, *sjá* (OS *þænne*), *hinn* and *inn/enn* (not attested in OS). All of the elements contain some reference to the distance between the speaker and the object, though what exactly is a disputable matter. The reason for it is first and foremost the insufficiency of sources which do

not allow for sweeping generalizations. It is also possible that the proximal/distal contrast was not of equal prominence in all contexts and many contexts would allow for any of the demonstratives to be used.

In runic inscriptions, which are the oldest linguistic sources from Scandinavia, both *sjá* and *sá* are found, in seemingly identical contexts, either preceding or following the noun, typically *stein* ‘stone’ on which the inscription is carved.

- (13)a. **þat azina** (By stone, ca 500 AD, Norway)  
‘this stone slab’
- b. **stein saR** (U 10)  
‘stone this’
- c. **þoriR ok hroða letu ræisa stæin þenna** (U 429)  
‘Thore and Hroda had this stone raised’
- d. **astrið let ræisa þenna stæin** (U 238)  
‘Astrid had this stone raised’

However, it must be noted that *sjá* is by far the most frequently used demonstrative, overwhelmingly postposed (PERRIDON 1995: 252), with few instances of *sá* and only sporadic use of *hinn*, as in the 500 AD inscription from Norway, which supplies the first occurrence of adnominal *hinn* without a weak adjective:

- (13)e. **hali hino** (Strøm whetstone, ca 500 AD, Norway)  
‘stone this’  
(NIELSEN 2000: 173)

The common reconstructions would ascribe proximal deixis only to the compound demonstrative *sjá* (in OS *sasi* or later *þenne*), whereas *sá*, *hinn* and *inn* are all translated as ‘that’ without further subdivisions (e.g. NYGAARD 1966; NOREEN 1913). Their inflectional paradigms as found in Runic and Old Swedish are presented below. Apart from the lost diphthongs in e.g. *þem* (ON *þeim*) they are identical with the ON ones. As can be seen, the paradigm of *sá* encompasses two IE demonstrative stems: *\*t-* and *\*s-* (in Polish *ten/ta/to* ‘this’ and *s-* in *do siego roku* ‘for the next year, happy new year’ respectively). The *s-* forms, masculine and feminine nominative, are abundant in runic inscriptions but in classical Old Swedish (1225–1375) they give way to the accusative *þen* and *þa/þe*.

Table 2. The paradigm of the demonstrative *sá*

		m	f	n
sg	nom	sá	sú	þæt
	gen	þæs	þer(r)a	þæs
	dat	þem	þer(r)e	þy
	acc	þæn	þá	þæt
pl	nom	þer	þar	þen
	gen	þera	þera	þera
	dat	þem	þem	þem
	acc	þe	þar	þen

Table 3. The paradigm of the demonstrative *sjá* (*þænne*)

		m	f	n
sg	nom	þænne sā(R)si	þæsse	þætta
	gen	þæsssa	þæsssa	þæsssa
	dat	þæssom, þæmma	þæsse	þæsso
	acc	þænna	þæsssa	þætta
pl	nom	þæss(r)	þæsssa	þæss(n), þænne
	gen	þæsssa	þæsssa	þæsssa
	dat	þæssom	þæssom	þæssom
	acc	þæsssa	þæsssa	þæss(n)

Table 4. The paradigm of the demonstrative *hinn*

		m	f	n
sg	nom	hinn	hin	hitt
	gen	hins	hinna(r)	hins
	dat	hinom	hinne	hino
	acc	hinn	hina	hitt
pl	nom	hinir	hinar	hin
	gen	hinna	hinna	hinna
	dat	hinom	hinom	hinom
	acc	hina	hinar	hin

The retention of the case inflection of the pronoun allows us to narrow the field of possible candidates for the article to *hinn* and *inn* (see also Table 1).

- (14) Havir konæ hor giort ok givær bondæ kono sinni sak. þa væri sik. mæþ siv mannum af **næmdinni**. (ÄVL GB: 5)

has woman-NOM adultery done and gives husband-NOM wife-DAT his-DAT charge than defends herself with seven man-PL-DAT of jury-DEF-DAT

‘If a woman has committed adultery and the husband charges her with it, she should defend her case with the testimony of seven men of the jury’

The disagreement reduces as to whether the two are indeed separate pronouns with separate etymologies or whether they are just two forms of the same pronoun. Among the proponents of the latter view a rift occurs whether *hinn* or *inn* is the original one.

The pronoun *inn* is a descendant of the PIE demonstrative *\*eno*, compare e.g. English *yon*, Gothic *jains* or Ancient Greek *\*(e)ke-eno-s*. For some of the proponents of common etymology of *inn* and *hinn*, *hinn* is a continuation form, ‘strengthened’ by a deictic element *h-*. The *h-* itself may be a descendant of PIE *\*k-*, an item of weak there-deixis, related to *h-* in English *he/him*, Dutch *hij*, Nordic *han/hon*. Such is the view presented in KRAHE (1967: 56, 67). All authors assuming the composition of the demonstrative *hinn* regard *inn* as the original form, see NOREEN (1913: 180, 190), DE BOOR (1920: 173, 178), KRAHE (1967: 67), and lately SYRETT (2002: 721).



The opposite view, as presented in among others JÓNSSON (1921: 315) and NECKEL (1924: 407–412), assumes a phonetically conditioned *h*-drop and thus *hinn* as the original form and *inn* as the shortened one. This etymology is more problematic as no direct PIE descendant of *hinn* can be found. Neckel would see a relative in the Greek demonstrative *kēinos* ‘that’. It is to be noted that this particular demonstrative is a compound of PIE *\*k-* and *\*eno-*, in other words, exactly the form postulated for *hinn* by e.g. Krahe, comp. Ancient Greek form quoted above, *\*(e)ke-eno-s* (see PROKOSCH 1939: 272–273).

To my knowledge the only proposal of a different form as the source of the article is GJERDMAN 1924. Gjerdman’s hypothesis rejects *hinn* as the source of the definite article, and instead seeks its etymology in the personal pronoun *hann* ‘he’, which etymologically also derives from PIE deictic stems *\*k-* and *\*eno*. As far as I know, his theory has only been taken seriously by one author, PERRIDON 1989. Despite the etymological relation between the two, a serious challenge to it is presented by the paradigm of the pronoun, particularly the neuter form, *þet*, which in the dative was *þy*, whereas the clitic is clearly derived from *hitt*, of which the dative form is *hino*.

- (15) OS a cors-e-n-o  
on cross-DAT-DEF-DAT

Typologically, the most usual course of action is the grammaticalization of the distal demonstrative to the definite article. It is usually the distal demonstrative that is the unmarked in a pair proximal – distal. However, if the proximal one should be the unmarked one of the pair, it is more likely to appear in article-like contexts. In Polish, for instance, which lacks a definite article, a demonstrative *ten/ta/to* ‘this near me’ may be used in article-like functions (as well as older *ów/owa/owo* ‘that’) but never *tamten/tamta/tamto* ‘that away from me’, e.g.

- (16)a. Przyjęto pewną teorię. Teoria ta... (possibly Ta teoria...)  
A theory was accepted. The (This) theory...  
b. Przyjęto pewną teorię. \*Teoria tamta... (and neither Tamta teoria...)  
A theory was accepted. That theory...

The reason for it is that the proximal *ten/ta/to* is the unmarked demonstrative and the compounded distal *tamten/tamta/tamto* the marked one.

This leads us to conclude that the most likely candidate for the article is to be sought in a demonstrative with deictic force so weakened that its sole function is to point but not to give much information as to the distance to the object.

#### 4. THE AGE OF THE NORDIC ARTICLE

This lengthy presentation of an etymological strife is relevant for further discussion of the origin and age of the article, as it seems that only *inn* is ever cliticized. No form with cliticized *hinn* has been found.

- (17)a. bondanom  
peasant-DAT-DEF-DAT
- b. \*bondahinom

That there is some relation between *hinn* and *inn* is beyond doubt. First of all, all reconstructions point towards PIE *\*eno* for both forms. Secondly, their inflectional paradigms are identical. As for the initial *h-*, the proposal that it is there for phonological reasons finds little support in other linguistic data. In initial and medial positions *h-* was, if anything, prone to deletion rather than insertion. What remains as the most probable reconstruction is the blending of two elements, *h* and *inn*. In that case the proposed *h-drop* seems quite improbable. If an element is attached to a demonstrative to strengthen it, what reasons would there be for it to be lost and with it the information it contained?

The variation between *inn* and *hinn* has not been considered of any consequence in the literature. Most of the authors seem tacitly to assume an *h-drop* in *inn*, ergo *hinn* as the original form, the one from which the definite article is formed. Nor has it ever been questioned why only *inn* cliticizes and never *hinn*.

In the process of grammaticalization, the clitic and the free morph are initially in free variation. However, with time two scenarios are feasible and attested in other grammaticalization processes: either the free form and the bound form split and develop independently of each other (as in e.g. Nordic *-sk* vs *sik*) or the free form disappears entirely. We know that the first scenario is the ON one, since *inn* survives alongside *-inn*.

Such examples illustrate the fact that the development of *inn* and *-inn* from some point follow separate paths. An additional complication is created by the complex form with *h-*.

Had the composition predated the cliticization, we would have two forms to choose from: the weakened *inn* and the reinforced *hinn*. The latter is the more likely candidate for cliticization. However, we can equally well assume that the composition follows the cliticization, perhaps even result from it. A weakened demonstrative is further undermined by its increasing bondedness with the noun. This becomes an opportune moment for reinforcement.

Since OS emerged devoid of the demonstrative *inn* entirely, while OI retains the two forms, we may conclude that their parallel existence belongs to a period of common history, before the dialectal split had taken place. This leads to a further possibility that since the *inn* that is the source of the *-inn* is not attested in any Swedish material, including runic inscriptions (with the exceptions mentioned above), the cliticization must predate the sources available to us today. Therefore the formation of the definite form belongs to ON period, before 800 AD.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In this article the history of the formation of the definite article in the Nordic languages was sketched with particular emphasis on its etymology. The demonstrative from which the article has developed appears in western Nordic languages as either *inn* or *hinn*, with the latter form most readily explained as a compound, strengthened by a deictic element *h-*, identical with that in personal pronouns *han* 'he' and *hon* 'she'. The composition of the de-

monstrative is here seen as connected with its cliticization onto the noun. Though the exact order of events may not be reconstructed because of the lack of sources, an interdependence of the two processes explains why it is only the *h*-less form that was cliticized and why no instances of *-hinn* have ever been attested. The proposed connection between the two processes makes an early date of the cliticization a more plausible solution.

Such an early date, though already proposed by some scholars (DELBRÜCK 1916; NECKEL 1924), is seriously challenged by the fact that the earliest instances of the definite suffix come from a few debatable examples from the runic material and the twenty odd examples from *Äldre Västgötalagen*. The absence of definite forms may be explained by stylistic reasons, but perhaps even by the gradual acquisition of its functions, which lagged behind the formal development of the article.

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Runic examples are quoted after *Rundatabasen*. Old Swedish examples (10), (11) and (14) are from the oldest Swedish text, *Äldre Västgötalagen*, Older Law of Western Götaland, from 1225.

*Allatum die 30 mensis Decembris anno 2008*