Article:


Permanent URL:  
https://ludos.leeds.ac.uk:443/R/-?func=dbin-jump-full&object_id=134419&siro_library=GEN01
ME. ISKED 'LONGED.'

The verb isk(en) is recorded once, in the past tense, in the Cotton manuscript of Cursor Mundi (ed. R. Morris, E.E.T.S.) line 11848, and has not been recognized by dictionaries or grammars. The word is clearly written in the manuscript; from the context its meaning is 'long' or some similar sense. The passage in which it occurs is part of the description of the last days of Herod and runs (11843-8):

His aun geing all flegg him fra,
Bath seruands and sun alssua,
His freindes all þai him fra flegg,
Moght nan for stinck negh til his bedd,
All þai fled fra him a-wai,
And isked efter his enddai.

The last line appears as And preyed aftir his endyng day in the Trinity MS., and (with differences in spelling) in MSS. Göttingen and Fairfax.

The form isked might be regarded as a variant of asked (error or even dialectal form). As to its being a genuine variant, no isk- forms for 'ask' are recorded in the New English Dictionary or the English Dialect Dictionary, and the verb occurs frequently in the form aske in the Cotton manuscript of Cursor Mundi. Another explanation of the form was suggested by Morris in his Notes (Cursor Mundi I, p. xxxi ff.), ad loc., who compared ME. jiscen. But the meaning of OE. gītian, ME. jiscen, jissen etc. is confined to the sense 'covet' (see N.E.D. s.v. Yisse v.) which would not be satisfactory here; and, although the loss of ʒ before i would not be abnormal, the representation of OE. ts by sk would be difficult to explain.

1 I made a brief comment on it in Saga-Book of the Viking Society XI, 156.
2 So apparently Kaluza in his Glossary (Cursor Mundi III).
3 From the many references given in the Glossary it appears that aske in the sense 'request, demand' is followed by a direct object without a preposition, e.g. 7319 þai ask now ofer king þan me.
The vocabulary of the Cotton manuscript of *Cursor Mundi* has a very strong Norse element,\(^4\) and neither form nor meaning of *isked* presents any difficulty if we take it as a Norse loanword from *ýskja* 'to wish' (= OE. *wýscan*). In Old West Norse the form *ýskja* is rare,\(^5\) the usual form being *ærskja*,\(^6\) a later formation from the noun *ósk* (= OE. *wúsce*),\(^7\) but Old Danish has *ýskia* (beside *ærskia*)\(^8\) and Old Swedish has *ýskia* (beside *óskia*).\(^9\)

The use of the preposition in *isked eftir* is paralleled by the Modern Icelandic construction *ærskja eftir e-u* 'to desire something.'\(^10\)

E. S. OLSZEWSKA.

---

\(^4\) Many Norse loanwords occur in the Cotton MS. and not in the other MSS., e.g. clint sb., lasce sb., stáir v.

\(^5\) J. Fritzner's *Ordbog* (2nd ed.) s.v. *ýskja* has only one example: *Nú er sá dagr kominn, er vér hófum ýskt a foma skýldi*, taken from *Alexanderssaga*.


\(^7\) Professor Dickens kindly informs me that OE. *wúsce-* is found only in the compound *wúsce-bearn* and the personal name *Wúscfrea*, borne by two members of the Northumbrian royal house, the great-grandfather and the son of Edwin (who was killed in 633).

\(^8\) See J. Brøndum-Nielsen, *Gammeldansk Grammatik* §102.


\(^10\) S. Blöndal, *Islandsk-dansk Ordbog* s.v. *áskja*. Note also that where the Cotton MS. has the verb *wísse* 'wish' (according to the references given in the *Glossary*) it is used with the preposition *eftir*; the verb *wísse* is apparently only used in rhyme.