

THE GRAVE OF STARKAD THE OLD

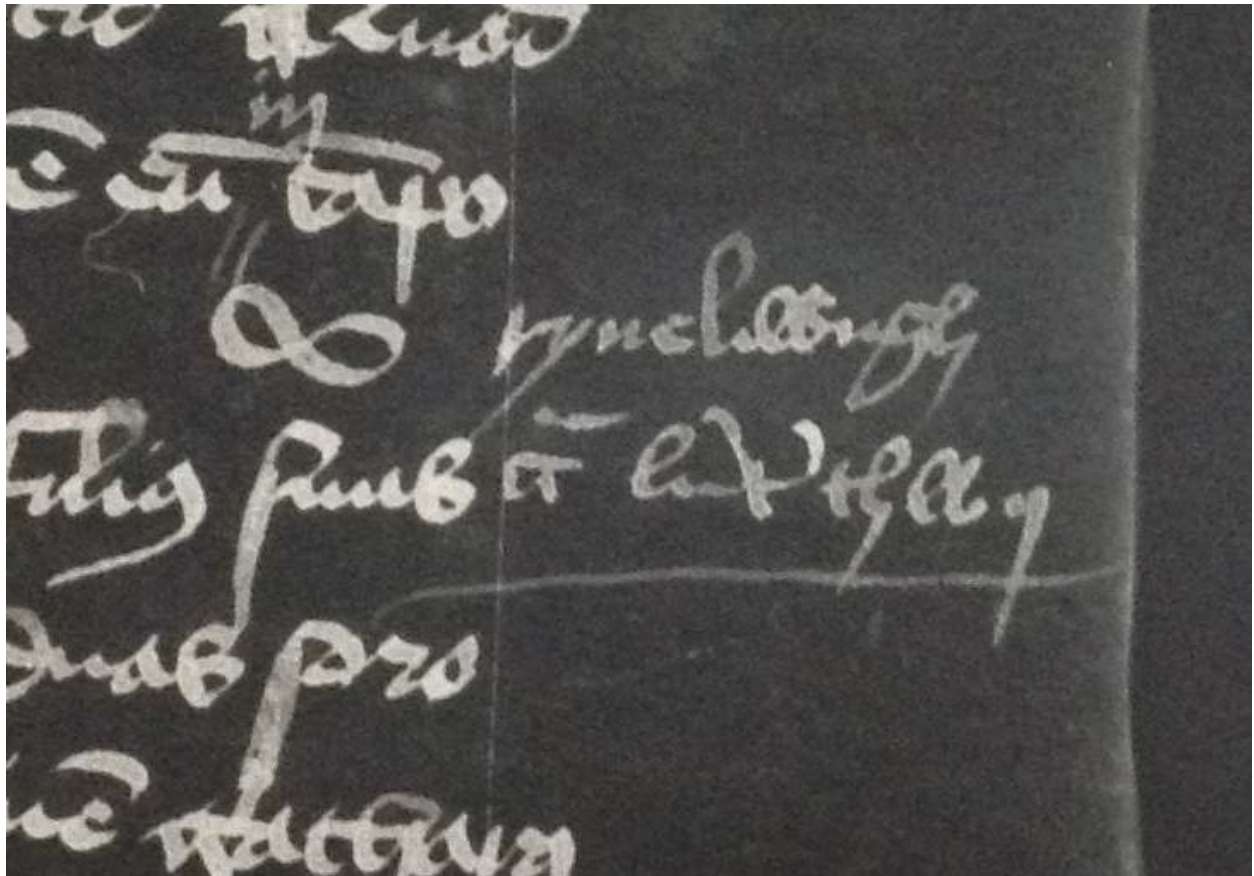
By August Hunt

A fair degree of mystery surrounds the location of the final resting place of the most famous Viking (or “Odinic”) hero of all, Starkad hinn gamli or Starkad ‘the Old’. This is mainly due to the fact that the early 13th century writer Saxo Grammaticus provides us with a place-name that appears to be no longer extant: the Plain of Roliung or Rolung. There is a mountain on this plain next to which Starkad sat in an episode preceding his death, and a beck.

Roliung/Rolung is mentioned in the latter part of the 13th century in the *Annales Ryenses* (59), where it is identified as a heath (liung = Swedish ljun, ‘heath’) not far from a bridge over the river Ronne at or near Angelholm, Skane, Sweden or, perhaps (see Axel Olrik’s *Danmarks Heltedigtning: En oldtidsstudie*, 1903, p. 161), one over the Raan River somewhere just south of Helsingborg in Skane. There is a Raa Ljung near Helsingborg, in fact, and some very large barrow mounds are found at Ronneberga just a little south of the Raan. The –berga (berg = mountain or hill) element of Ronneberga makes us think of the mountain Starkad is supposed to have sat under on Roliung. Alternate spellings for the place-name found in the sources include regriæliung, regnælyngh, ræynælyung.

More specific locations have been sought for his grave in Swedish tradition. A favorite region seems to have been that either between Angelholm and Vegeholm or even just west of the Vegea River and Valinge. There is a story preserved from the 16th century (see again Olrik, pp. 162-163) of a certain Sterkkarl (or Starkkarl), i.e. the ‘Strong Karl’, moving big stones about or even having a grave in the vicinity. It is tempting to view the name Sterkkarl as a folk corruption of Starkad.

When I set out to investigate this matter, I found one bit of potential information that had not yet been properly utilized: another place-name said to be near Roliung, found preserved in a marginal note in the mid-15th century MS. Skokloster E 8945. The place-name in this note puzzled the early 20th century editor, M.C. Gertz. Here is a negative image of the relevant note, courtesy Erik Petersen, Senior Researcher at The Royal Library, Copenhagen:



As it included Medieval Latin abbreviations, I sought the aid of Professor Staffan Fridell of Uppsala University (katalog.uu.se/empinfo/?id=N94-866), a noted expert in the field of both Swedish place-names and MS. Paleography. He had the following to say concerning the problem posed by the marginal note:

"The name should undoubtedly be read:

lunterthwn

Luntertun was a medieval town in Skåne close to the present-day town of Ängelholm."

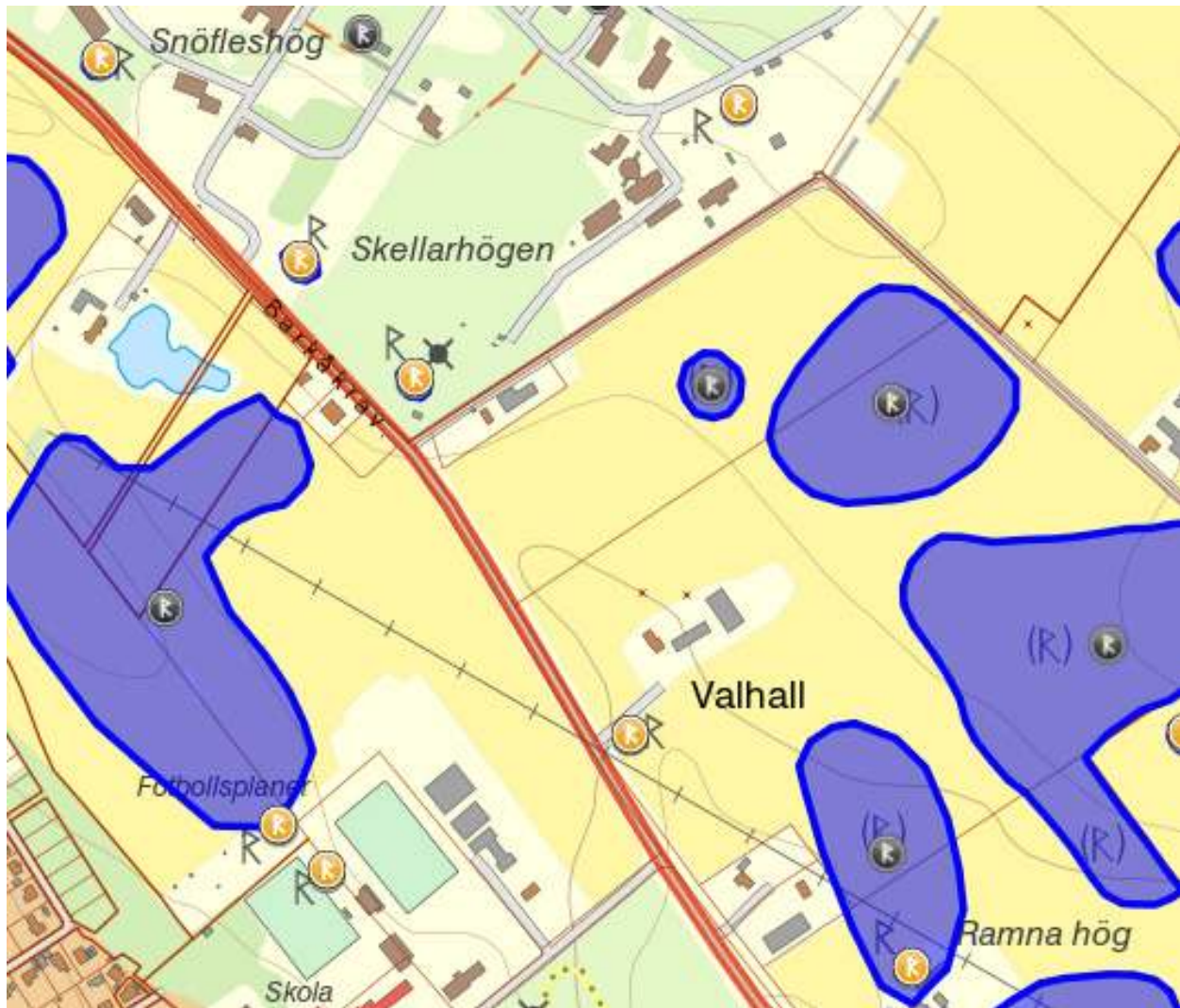
The marginal note then read "ryneliwng h circa lunterthwn" or "Ronneltjung near Luntertun". I would add that Luntertun existed prior to and was largely replaced by Ängelholm. There was a very early bridge over the Rönne at Luntertun, and this may well be the Rynaebro mentioned in the *Annales Ryenses*. Records reveal that Luntertun was also called Rynestad.

This both helps and hurts our search for Starkad's grave. Why? Because, as it happens, there are many large barrows around Luntertun. I'm attaching some maps below taken from the Swedish database on ancient monuments which show the various mounds to be found in the neighborhood of Luntertun. The third and last map, which does not show Luntertun itself, portrays three large mounds just to the NW of

the town. The sites described as hög or högen are significant barrows, while all the orange/R-marked circles are barrows of one size or another.







The mounds are of Bronze Age origin, but they were often re-used for burials in the Iron Age, including the time of Starkad. Heathland is found throughout the area covered by these mounds. It may be that Saxo's Roliung (or Ronneljung) was not a specific place-name, but instead merely indicated a heath on the Ronne near Luntertun. This kind of generalized description for the place could later have been taken for a true place-name. It is also possible the name went out of fashion or was replaced by another name.

The barrows shown on the first map, which stretch from Luntertun to Magnarp in the NW, are referred to as the Barkåkra Group. They have been described as lying "like a string of pearls on the ridges" (www.pcl-eu.de/project/virt_lib/eea_kraut_02.pdf, p. 110).

Barrows have, of course, been destroyed over the centuries, both through building and agriculture. The possibility that Starkad's barrow may have suffered such a fate must be considered.

In my mind, the principle question when it comes to searching for Starkad's grave is whether we decide to trust Saxo's spelling of the place, i.e. Roliung or Rolung, or accept the identification by later authors of

Saxo's rendering with a heath on the Ronne River near Luntertun (or Vegeholm). If we accept Saxo as the authority, then we must dispense with a heath on the Ronne.

According to Professor Staffan Fridell, "the river Råån in Skåne would be a linguistically possible candidate." At the same time, "The Rönne-names, like that of Rönneberga, are unrelated to *Råån*." The professor was kind enough to send me a section of John Kousgård Sørensen's *Danske sø- og ånavne* which discusses the Råån name:

Rå

Helsingborg kbst. (Her?) Pula ca. 1200 (áheiti i Snorra Edda, F. Jónsson, *Den Norsk-Islandske Skjaldedigtning* A 1908 s. 669) ro, (v.l.) rō; 8/12 1398 in amne dicta Raa; 1405 (1557 *ÆDA* IV 30) Raa; Palteb. 1514-18 s. 144 I gamble Raa, som hun gaar udj haffuit; Winslows Dagbok 1676 s. 82 Rå-å; I-s 1947 [*rau*, *rau*]; TK 1962 Rå; og i *Raus*, sidste trediedel af 1300-t. LDL s. 253 de Raoos; Palteb. 1514-18 s. 140, 144 Raws; Lb. ca. 1570 I 518 Rous Sognn, 519 Raus; I-s 1947 [*rō-ws*, *rō-vs*] (ældre), [*raus*, *raus*] (yngre); TK 1959 Raus. – Oprindelig ånavn som i de ældste kilder, derefter navn på fiskerlejet (tidligst 1405), som lå ved åens udmunding i Øresund. Efter samme udmunding har den umiddelbart øst for fiskerlejet beliggende bebyggelse og tidligere sogneby Raus (sidste led us 'munding') navn. Navnet er tidligt overleveret som tilnavn 23/2 1358 Andree Raaoz, 10/7 1366 Andree Raos.

Et gammelt usammensat ånavn Rå(a), afledt af subst. gllda. *rā* 'rå, stang', her i betydningen 'grænsepæl'. Navnet sigter til, at åen på en lang strækning danner skel mellem Luggude og Rönnebergs herreder. Tolkningen findes tidligst hos Hellq.Sjön. s. 496 under behandlingen af et parallelt svensk sønavn *Råen* (Råi). Jfr. især Bertil Ejder i *Kring Kärnan* 13, 1980, s. 34 ff. Ånavnet har bevaret sin usammensatte form ind i nyere tid. Nu hedder den med epeksegetisk efterled Råå(n).

What this means is that Roliung could well be from Ra-ljung. The attempt by later tradition to substitute Ronne-like names leaves us without an extant Ronne-ljung, while the Ra(a) Ljung near the mouth of the Raan still exists today.

O would hasten to add that Helsingborg is the closest point on the Swedish mainland to the island of Sjælland, from which Angantyr and his brothers were said to hail in Saxo's tale.

Local tradition identifies the following monument as that belonging to the purely fictional salvation hero Holger Danske, who was NOT known of by Saxo Grammaticus and only became important in Danish lore AFTER he was made famous in French Chansons de Gest:

RAÄ-nummer Helsingborg 164:1

Objektidentitet	10126201640001
Lämningstyp	<u>Grav markerad av sten/block</u>
Antal	1
Typ	Rest sten
Antikvarisk bedömning	Övrig kulturhistorisk lämning
Kategorier	Gravar
Typisk datering	Bronsålder Järnålder
Län	Skåne
Kommun	Helsingborg
Landskap	Skåne
Socken	Helsingborg
Koordinater (N/E)	6209142 / 357727 (SWEREF 99 TM)
Koordinater (x/y)	6212949 / 1307456 (RT-90 2,5 gon V)
Koordinater (lat/long)	N 56° 0' 23,07", E 12° 43' 5,55" (WGS84)
Visa i Google Earth	Helsingborg 164:1
Visa på karta (hitta.se)	Helsingborg 164:1

OBS. Fritexterna är inte kvalitetssäkrade. Information kan saknas eller vara felaktig.

Beskrivning	<p>Resta stenar, mycket ungefärlig plats för, enligt T. Mårtensson. Några resta stenar, Fem höge stenar, omtalas 1729 vid vakthuset på Råå ljung. Torsten Mårtensson anser att platsen torde vara att söka vid stranden, ungefär i höjd med koparverkshamnens Svågbrytare. En förhöjning med en vårdkase finns där markerad på kartan i krigsarkivet. Vid 1986 års inv påträffades 1 bit övrig slagen flinta, bränd.</p>
Terräng	Flack SV sluttning ner mot mindre rasbrant. Tomt.
Antikvarisk kommentar	Holger Danske sades här ligga begravnen.

Skadestatus	Förstörd
Undersökningsstatus	Ev. i beskrivning
Höjd över havet (min)	5
Höjd över havet (max)	0
Namnlista	Fem höge stenar
Kartblad	3C2b NV (RT90)

Alas, the five high stones have been lost. They gave their name to the community of Hogasten or 'High Stone' in Helsingborg and were likely removed from the plateau-like elevation near the mouth of the Raan to be used in the construction of ramparts. Some have proposed before that this monument was originally associated not with Holger Danske, but instead with Starkad. I quite agree with this idea.

Here is Hogasten on a map, showing streets named not only for Holger Danske, but for both Angantyr and Starkad:



Widar Narvelo, an ecologist for Helsingborg, has confirmed for me that Högasten lay within what had once been the fuller extent of Råå Ljung. To quote Mr. Narvelo:

“Råå ljung was a rather big grazing area covered with heather, a moorland created by man (using fire to create farmland) and grazing animals (originally a primeval forest) perhaps over 1000-years ago until the 1800’s. Nowadays there are only small areas left. You can see Råå ljung on the old map showing the landscape during the 1700’s. It is the big beige area also called “Pålstorps bys utmark” along the coast from Råå to Helsingborg, a length of about 5 km and a width of maximum 1 km.

The following map is courtesy Mr. Narvelo. The red encircled area is Råå Ljung as it once existed.



In Saxo's story, Angantyr falls slain by Starkad in a stream on Roliung. As a result, the waters become red with the fallen berserker's blood. There is precedence for this sort of thing in folk tradition. The Rödabäck (Red Brook) further south in Skåne appears to have gotten its name because of the blood of soldiers that flowed into it during the Battle of Lund in 1676 between the Danish and Swedish armies. The battle actually took place north of Lund around the Kävlingeån river, of which the Rodaback is a tributary. The Swedes eventually won, securing Swedish rule over the former Danish province of Skåne.

For Starkad's red stream, I would propose the Ramlosa-brunn, a spring just a little to the NNE of Hogasten. The spring is iron-rich, and the stream from it has turned all the sandstone through and over which it flows a distinctive reddish color. The spring became a renowned spa in modern times. Here is a photo of the water that issues forth from the spring. Note in the photo below that the water itself is clear; the reddish color is imparted to it only by the iron-stained sandstone.



Widar Narvelo has the following to say about the Ramlosa-brunn:

“It is just rainwater running through the different layers of sedimentary bedrock, mainly sandstone, with iron compounds in it. And then in the ravine the water is just leaking out. We have this phenomenon throughout the whole of landborgen and in the Råån valley as well as in Ramlösa. There is another well in the north of Helsingborg called well of St Georg (Jörgen) and this well might have been used since prehistoric age. Some of the out-leaking ground water empties in the Lussebäcken stream.”

