

Revised preliminary report

Runic inscription from Hogganvik, Mandal, Vest-Agder (2009)

A runestone was found on 26 Sept. 2009 by Henrik Henriksen (using an excavating machine) and his father Arnfinn Henriksen on Arnfinn and Bjørg Henriksen's property, a villa on a hilltop in the midst of grave-mounds from the early Iron Age period at the Hogganvik farm. They were clearing away stumps and decided to move a large stone between two stumps in the lawn some 20 meters down from and in front of the house. The runestone was found most likely right on a grave-mound. The county curator, archaeologist Frans-Arne Stylegar, administers the find and is planning conservation and excavation work. The inscription was examined by Prof. James E. Knirk, Jonas Nordby and Terje Spurkland on 1 Oct. and found to be genuine, and again by James E. Knirk 14–15 Oct. The geologist Ole Fridtjof Frigstad examined the stone 16 Oct. Prof. Harald Bjarvand has been consulted on Germanic etymologies.

The stone block measures 152 (across) × 145 × 20–25 cm, and is a reddish augen gneiss (a metamorphosed granite). It occurs locally and could have come from rock formations on the property quite near the find site. It must weigh close to 800 kg. The stone has a rounded “top” whereas the “bottom” slopes to a point. It was probably a rounded shell protruding from vertical bedrock which developed a crack at the top; weathering continued in the crack and the shell probably finally simply broke away as there are no signs that wedges were used to split it off. The relatively thin block may be the lid of a grave with slab sides (this will have to be determined by an archaeological excavation), or it may have stood raised for a period of time and then fallen over. The runes were on the bottom side and appeared only after the stone was picked up and turned on its edge by the excavating machine. Only slight damage occurred at the edge from the teeth of the excavating bucket and on the runic surface from the runestone being shoved over a stone lying underneath it. The damage appears as white marks.

The runic surface has four lines of older runes all reading from right to left. One line curves along the top edge, starting at roughly the same place vertically on the stone as the other three lines; the other three lines are horizontal, with the top two closer together and the bottom one at more of a distance. The curved line along the edge stops right beside where the bottom line ends. The order of lines making most sense is: curved line along top, bottom line, top line and then middle line (or perhaps middle line and then top line). The runes were well protected, and the three horizontal lines are clear and have a white color at the bottom of the grooves. The white color is due mainly to crushed feldspar and micro cracks in the stone produced by hewing. The runes along the edge are also fairly clear, but they have deteriorated somewhat more, and the white color is missing in the grooves near the beginning of the line where the stone was already much more weathered prior to hewing. This was clearly the top edge where the crack developed that led to the slab breaking off; weathering here is most severe. Almost all readings are certain (parentheses indicate uncertain readings; ^ indicates a bind-rune).

- a. [?]kelbapewas:s(t)^ainaR:aaasrpkf (140 cm. long, runes c. 7-10 cm high)
- b. aarpaa:inanana(l/b/w)oR (85 cm long, runes c. 7-10 cm high)
- c. eknaudigastiR (57 cm long, runes c. 7-8 cm. high)
- d. ekerafaR (42 cm long, runes c. 6-7 cm high)

Comments to uncertain readings:

a1 [?] – Slight remains of a typical **s** for this stone (reading right to left ↶) might be visible on the stone, but weathering is severe. A reading **kelba-** cannot be interpreted in the Germanic languages. There is not enough room between the top of the *k*-rune and the edge of the stone to allow the interpretation of this rune as the bottom two lines of a three-branched *s*-rune. Thus **selba-** (“self”) does not seem to be a possible reading.

a12 (t)^a – The remains of the probable right branch of a *t*-rune, on the level of the lower branch of the *a*-rune with which it is juxtaposed, is visible on the stone. The only problem with the reading is that there is a somewhat higher ridge closer to the stave such that this branch does not appear to be connected definitely to the stave. But the spelling **sainaR** makes no sense and must represent a misspelling; therefore a correction, using a strange bind-rune or ligature has most likely been effected (similar to the bind-rune correction of the misspelling **haaiwido**, for **hlaiwido**, to **h^laaiwido** – with a bind-rune – on the Kjøllevik stone). The placement of the *t*-branch on the level of the lower branch of the *a*-rune is dictated by the proximity of the upper angle of the preceding *s*-rune; a *t*-branch in normal placement at the top of the stave would have come into conflict with the *s*-rune.

b14 (l/b/w) – This rune is located on a hump where an irregular break running over the surface occurred long before the runes were hewn, probably already when the slab broke out of the bedrock. The break took away a large piece of the surface such that this area (where among other things **aaasrpkf** in the a line and also **-oR** at the end of the b line now stand) is now lower. An *l*-rune can be read here, but the branch seems to be bent or rounded downward somewhat, much like the upper pocket in a *b*-rune; traces of the rest of a pocket may be visible, and there may also be traces of a lower pocket, such that **b** is perhaps the preferred reading. A reading as a *w*-rune, with only one pocket, at the top, is less probably, since the *w*-rune in the a line has a pointed, not a rounded pocket. An *r*-rune might also be a possibility, but it has open form, not closed; this will have to be looked at closer.

Divided into “words”:

- a. [s]kelbaþewas s^tainaR aasrpkf
- b. aarpaa inana naloR/naboR/(nawoR)
- c. ek naudigastiR
- d. ek erafaR

The inscription appears to fall into four parts:

1. A grave inscription for someone called **[S]kelba-þewaR**: “Skelba-þewaR’s stone”. Some of the oldest runic inscriptions use this type of formulation to indicate a memorial (grave) inscription, e.g. Stenstad: “Inga’s stone [ON *hallr*]”. The word **þewaR** “servant” is recorded once in older runes in the Valsfjord inscription: “I, HagustaldaR, servant of GodagaR”. As a name element, **-þewaR** is recorded on the Thorsberg scabbard-chape *WulþuþewaR* (as well as a weak form (?) **-þewa** on one of the Illerup shield mounts: *Laguþewa*). **[S]kelba-** can etymologically be the word “shake, tremble” (ON *skjalfa*, adj. *skjalfr/skelfr* “shaking, trembling; afraid”). But one also has the place-name element ON *-skjalfr/-skjölf* (i.a. as part of the name of a hall or a leader’s seat; etymologically “shelf”, thus at an elevated position) and the made-up woman’s name ON *Skjalfr/Skjölf*, also known as a name for the goddess Freyja. Note that although *Wulþu-* (cf. Gothic *wulþus* “glory, splendor”) is often interpreted as the god’s name *WulþuR*/ON *Ullr*, this is most likely incorrect. Thus we do not have support for an interpretation as “Freyja’s-servant” parallel to an “Ullr’s-servant”.

2. Non-linguistic material (this is a provisional or temporary designation). At the end of the a line and beginning of the b line there are repetitions of the vowel **a** (**aaa ... aa ... aa**), and in between consonant clusters. Both clusters including the consonant **p**, which in older (Scandinavian) runic inscriptions otherwise occurs only in alphabet inscriptions containing the entire row of older runes. The sequence makes no sense linguistically and might represent a coded message. A coding by one-to-one replacement of runes by other runes (e.g. the one immediately preceding or following) is not a possible explanation since such replacement would still yield meaningless repeated letters. As a coded message, one might take sets of two runes as a representation of a single rune, thus dividing: **aa as rp kf** and **aa rp aa**, for a total of seven coded runes where the first, fifth and seventh are the same (**aa**, whatever that signifies), and the third and sixth are the same (**rp**, whatever that signifies). Or one might try to distribute the vowel runes among the consonant runes, e.g.: **asarpkaf araapa**. But this still makes no sense. Therefore this non-linguistic material may represent “alphabet magic”, i.e. using what for us appears to be random letters, often repeated, as a magical/protective formula. Such a procedure might be more understandable if the runes were immediately placed in the ground after the probable burial on the underside of the stone, and thus were not meant to be read. A good example of “alphabet magic” is the b-side on the Lindholmen amulet from Skåne (DK, now SE): **aaaaaaaaRRRnnn|bmuttt:alu;**; note the repetition of **a**'s and the repetition and clustering of consonants.

3. Probable linguistic material. The end of the b line, in spite of the repetition **nanana**, appears to have linguistic structure, with the probable nominal ending **-oR**. Thus **inana** may be the preposition “within/from within” (which takes a genitive object) whereas **na(l/b/w)oR** may be the genitive singular of a noun. The noun “needle” might fit the reading **naloR**, if the Scandinavian development of dropping the *b* in **nablo-* could have occurred as early as this inscription; but how should “within the needle” or “from within the needle” be interpreted? Likewise **naboR** could be interpreted as representing ON *nöf* “nave of a wheel; log-cabin outside corner”; but again, how is the phrase “(from) within the nave” or “(from) within the cabin-corner” to be interpreted? The reading **naw-** one might try to connect with ON *nár* “corpse, ghost”, but the ending here does not fit the *i*-stem declension of this word. The hypothetical reading **naroR** leads likewise to no acceptable etymological solution.

4. Two statements about an I-person, which here should be understood as the rune carver. The statement “I, NaudigastiR” appears to contain a personal name (literally “Need-guest”; note, however, that personal names should not be read and interpreted literally). There are already six known occurrences of the personal name element **-gastiR** recorded in inscriptions with older runes: Gallehus (DK) golden horn *HlewagastiR*, Einang stone [???] *dagastiR*, Myklebostad stone *AsugastiR*, Berga stone (SE) *SaligastiR*, Sunde stone *WidugastiR* and Nydam axe handle (DK) *WagagastiR*. A question which must be addressed, is whether these names are to be considered as real personal names, or whether they perhaps represent cultic names, i.e. names given to people to identify them as someone with a cultic function. But the name “Need-guest” does not make much sense as a compound, as it should if it is a cultic name, and “need” is indeed known as a Germanic personal name element (and also as the name of the *n*-rune, cf. **Asu-gastiR** where the first element, ON *ás* “(pagan) god”, is also the name of the *a*-rune). Note the spelling of **Naudi-** “need” with *-d-* as expected, and thus not corresponding to the aberrant Gothic form of this word with *-þ-*. Several I-statements in older runes continue after the name with further information about the I-person. This further information, as a rule in a verbal statement, usually consists of a

description, an indication of a social position, or perhaps a nickname. The second I-statement here, in the d line, is a second I-statement without a verb and might represent a nickname: “I, erafaR”. The sequence **erafaR** probably contains an epenthetic vowel (a help in pronunciation), namely the first *a*-rune, such that we can read **er^afaR** and construe this as **erfaR**. In Germanic, this makes sense as the word for the animal “wolverine” (ON *jerfr*, Norw. *jerv*). This word is as a rule reconstructed with a Germanic/Proto-Norse **b*, not **f*; the etymology of the word is, however, unknown, and this reconstruction is far from certain. The new inscription seems rather to indicate that the correct form of the Germanic word for “wolverine” instead contains **f*, i.e. **erfaz*. The runic writer’s signature then appears to imply: “I (am called) NaudigastiR [=Need-guest]; I, the Wolverine”.

A probable translation of the entire Hogganvik inscription might then be:

Skelba-þewaR’s [“Shaking-servant’s”] stone [= (grave) monument].

[Alphabet magic:] **aaasrpkf | aarpaa**

?Within/From within the ?wheel-nave/?cabin-corner [or: ?needle].

I [=the rune carver] [am called] NaudigastiR [=“Need-guest”];

I, [nicknamed] the Wolverine.

Note the following rune forms (here turned around as right-facing runes):

⊐ = **e** (the connecting branch is slightly inclined one way or the other in most cases)

< = **k** (large, but not full-size)

⋈ = **s**

Υ = **R**

ƿ = **f**

ᚢ = **b**

⋮ = word division

Usually double consonants are not indicated in early runic inscriptions, not even when one word ends with a consonant and the next one begins with the same consonant. Note, therefore, the interesting double *s* spelling with an indication of word division between them in the a line: **-s:s-**.

The graphic forms and the linguistic material indicate a dating to the classical Proto-Norse period, in general, the time of the Germanic tribal migrations, maybe 350–500 AD. Examination of the area under and around the stone by a metal-detector gave a positive indication of metal, but not iron, directly beneath where the stone had lain. The archaeological excavation in the spring of 2010 might produce grave-goods that could help date the probable grave and thus the runestone.

James E. Knirk (sign.)

27 Oct. 2009

Attached pictures:

1. Entire stone, inscription side.

2. Entire inscription.

3. Inscription with runes colored in red. (This picture is a revised version of the one already sent out and represents the results of the second examination. There are also some minor corrections of inaccuracies)