

JAAH 2023 No 32 Herschend

Log book

Frands Herschend, Homeland :: hostland – An 11th century micro geography southeast of Arlanda Airport.

Received:	2021-12-05
Length:	c. 9000 words.
1 st Editorial comments:	Reviewers are approached 2022-01-18
Language edit:	Some
Copy rights and credits:	Must be fixed
Author's and reviewers' comments:	Reviewers' comments received 2022-02-28 and 2022-03-17. Author's comments received with revised article 2023-01-14
Editorial comment:	Layout finalised 2023-02-06. Published in Journal of Archaeology and Ancient History 2023-02-14

Reviewer 1

Homeland hostland – an 11th century micro geography east of Arlanda Airport

Let me first point out that I find this a rather intelligent discussion of an interesting “small landscape” (Swedish *bygd*, for which there is no equivalent in English). It has a multi-disciplinary approach, harnessing archaeological and historical sources as well as runic inscriptions and place-names. However, the text has weaknesses in disposition and lucidity, and there are also earlier research, which the author would have benefited from utilising.

I know the area of Helgö-Torsholma quite well, as I wrote about it rather extensively in my PhD-thesis from 2001 (Vikstrand 2001:244–247). The author seems unaware of this, which is a pity, as I believe it might have had impinge on his or her own discussion. Let’s start with the relation between the names *Torsholma* and *Helgö*. It’s quite clear that *Torsholma*, compounded with *holm* ‘island’, is actually an older name on Helgö. The name *Helgö* is from the beginning probably a non-onomastic compound, designating a judicial-religious concept, referring to an island set aside for certain purposes and protected by certain judicial-religious constraints. An island could be a *helgö*, and in several cases this appellative designation has developed into a name, much in the same vein as place-names like *Prästgården*, *Kungsgården*, *Husaby* etc. In certain cases, an older name has been preserved, such as *Torsholma*. Another instance is *Enhälja* (*onahelghu* 1318) in the parish of Villberga in Uppland. This is a “backward” *Helgö*, an Old Swedish **On helgha* ‘the holy island’. An older name is most probably preserved in the name of the neighbouring village of *Gåde* (*in gudo* 1347) ‘island of the gods’ (or perhaps ‘island of the higher powers’). Both these cases – *Torsholma* and *Gåde* – is pointed out already by Karin Callissendorf in her important work on the *Helgö*-names from 1964. It is in the author’s list of literature, but I can find no direct reference to it in the text.

The above described relation between *Torsholma* and *Helgö* rather throws a spanner into the author’s argumentation about the theoporic names in the area representing a younger layer of sacral names and *Helgö* an older. With a reference to “Vikstrand 2009” (not in the reference list and without page-number), I am said to corroborate this opinion, but I really don’t know what publication the author is referring to. In this case, *Helgö* is most certain a younger name than *Torsholma*. This said, I will concede that the author in this reasoning is not totally barking up the wrong tree. Impersonal sacral place-names, such as *Gudhem* or *Vi*, referring to collective, impersonal powers or holy places, certainly belong to a very old stratum.

Finally, in fig. 8 *Fröslunda* is wrong for *Frösunda*, and this name is probably not sacral (Vikstrand 2001:84). Fig. 8 also refer to a *Torslunda*. This name, present on modern maps, depends on a 19th century windmill known as *Torslund*. This is most probably a young name, coined on the basis of *Torsholma*. It should not be adduced in this context. *Torslunda* also occur in fig. 9, perhaps wrong for *Torsholma* (“Landing with a view to Torslunda”).

Beside the names, there are also more to say about the place Helgö. The author discusses the road leading from Livstens bridge, arguing that it might lead to a 11th century landing place. This can actually be sustained by the topography. The road leads to a field that during the Viking Age was a wide inlet with sandy shores, a perfect landing place for Viking Age boats. A small archaeological investigation on the southwest shore of this inlet disclosed hearths, fire-cracked stones and bones, dated to the Late Iron Age (raä 133, Brunsted 1996:5 ff.). Gunilla Larsson, Martin Rundkvist and myself undertook a metal-detector investigation of this area in 2013. Beside what probably was an old smithy, indicated by iron rivets and iron scrap, nothing was found to elucidate the nature of the place. Still, it is fully plausibly that this was the landing place which constituted the core of the Helgö-site, and that the island’s main function had to do with maritime activities. In this I believe me and the author agree.

The author does not mention the very interesting timber construction at Helgö, consisting of a footbridge leading south from the island to a disarrayed wooden construction. This might be excused as it is not very well known, and neither investigated nor dated. It is, however, mentioned by Gunilla Larsson (2011:89–91) in a publication the author ought to be familiar with. As the construction resembles cultic constructions known from other places, it could prove crucial for the understanding of Helgö.

A premise for the whole essay is the relocation of the battle at Helgeå 1026 from Scania to Uppland, as suggested by Bo Gräslund in his important paper from 1986. Although Gräslund’s argumentation is convincing in many ways, the question cannot, due to the ambiguity of the sources, be regarded as settled. A main objection is of course that there is no name **Helgeå* testified from this area or in Uppland at all. The only indication is the village-name *Helgäby* (*helgaby* 1420, *helga aby* 1454), located some 10 kilometres to the north at a watercourse leading down to the Helgö-Torsholma area. This is a main arguing-point for Gräslund. He refers to Karin Calissendorff (1964:136) who writes that *Helgäby* indicates that this watercourse has been called **Helgä*. So she does, but she also understand the name as an original **Helgöä* ‘the Helgö river’, thus secondary to the name *Helgö*, and not a genuine **Helga ä* ‘the holy river’ (1964:136, see also Vikstrand 2001:246–247). Such a **Helgöä*, Old Swedish **Hælgþœa*, is difficult to reconcile with the *ä* in *helga* of the literary sources. A strong argument for an original **Heögöä* is that while

there are several *Helgö*-names in the Lake Mälaren area, **Helgá* is otherwise unknown. This indicates that while the ‘holy island’ was a well-known concept in this part of Scandinavia, the ‘holy river’ was not. *Helge å* in Scania, on the other hand, is well attested already from ca. 1200, consistent with the fact that several sacral names on rivers are known from the south Scandinavian area.

Although his/her rather extensive argumentation for the relocation of the battle to Uppland indicates some uncertainty, the author nevertheless regards it as “convincing and hardly controversial”. Later on, it seems to become an undisputable fact, obvious from statements such as “when Knut arrived at Helgö” (p. 23) – not *if* he did so. I believe the author’s purpose would be better served with some degree of humility, recognising the difficulties to decide the location of the battle.

According to the author, a main objective for Knut campaign to Sweden was to conquer Sigtuna, where he is supposed to have taken hold of the coinage. This raises questions as to why Knut should have ventured up Långhundraleden to Helgö? This is clearly not on the road to Sigtuna. The author tries to address this problem by constructing a land road from Helgö to Sigtuna, marked out in the landscape with rune stones. This is not successful. Rune stones are many times placed by old roads but they are not road signs, and the supposed road to Sigtuna is not believable. As I see it, the attempt to reconstruct such a road is something you might try in the process of research. But as it fails, it ought to be left out of the paper.

The author also describes the Helgö-Torsholma area as “a small marginal society”, apt to embrace Knuts campaign as a manifestation of their autonomy. This is a strange opinion. First, this is not a marginal area. Helgö-Torsholma is situated in the heartland of Attundaland, one of three smaller “lands” at the core of Svethiud, which later came to make up the province of Uppland. Attundaland is during the 11th century a densely populated area, a seafaring community with contacts all over the Baltic and also, as the author emphasises, with England. They did, as the runic inscriptions testifies, take part in Knut’s yields, but I cannot concur with the author’s opinion that these runic inscriptions are made “in loving memory ... of England, the land of payments, and of Knut” (p. 10). They commemorate with proudness the participation in these epic events, but the proudness and emotions are directed towards their own families. By the 11th century Attundaland was already a part of the Svea kingdom, endowed with the privilege of participate in the election of the king. But as we know, this was not a coherent country in a modern sense, and men like Ulf and Alle were free to follow a leader like Knut. As a matter of fact, it was common for young aristocratic men to take service with a foreign chieftain or king as a part of their “careers”.

The homeland–hostland dichotomy hinted at in the title is not properly introduced until the last part of the paper, a little ad hoc to the main investigation. It is mentioned briefly on p. 3, but the paper would benefit if it was presented more thoroughly already in the beginning. Not at least as it is included in the title. On p. 23, in the homeland-hostland part, there is a paragraph on *Encomium Emmae Reginae*. I fail to see what relevance this has on the investigation or even what it's all about. If it shall remain it must be elaborated and its purpose clarified. Perhaps it is better to delete it.

Per Vikstrand

Literature

- Brunstedt, Solveig, 1996: Smärre undersökningar i Uppland 1982–1989. Stockholm. (UV Stockholm, rapport 1996:120.)
- Calissendorff, Karin. 1964. Helgö. In: Namn och bygd 52, p. 105–152.
- Gräslund, Bo, 1986: Knut den store och Sveariket. Slaget vid Helgeå i ny belysning. In: Scandia 52, p. 211–238.
- Larsson, Gunilla, 2011: Båtar och sjöfart på Långhundraleden. In: Nytt ljus över Långhundraleden. Bygder, båtar, natur. Vallentuna, p. 85–109.
- Vikstrand, Per, 2001: Gudarnas platser. Förkristna sakrala ortnamn i Mälardalskapen. Uppsala. (Acta Academiae regiae Gustavi Adolphi 77. Studier till en svensk ortnamnsatlas 17.)

Reviewer 2

This is an extensive paper, both as to content and in words, treating a delimited geographical area in south-eastern Uppland. A section of Frösunda parish forms the basis of this “micro geography” study. I will return to the issue later on, but I would first point out that it is neither relevant nor elegant to relate a Viking Age landscape study to Arlanda airport. The paper and the landscape analysis theory on which it is based use the starting point of a reinterpretation of the battle at Helgeå (Gräslund 1986). The political-historical context is fights between on the one side the Danish/English king Knut the Great and on the other Anund Jacob (Sweden) and Olav Haraldsson (Norway). The issue is whether the battle took place in Scania (Helgeå at Åhus) or, as proposed by Gräslund, in south-eastern Uppland. I can state that I have no problems with Gräslund’s re-localisation of the battle; instead, I think that his extensive analysis has much substance (despite some source-critical difficulties). Nevertheless, the present author builds his entire interpretation of the landscape’s historical context, settlement character and social and functional status on an (albeit firmly underpinned) hypothesis.

Divided into five headings and two sub-headings, the author develops an argument of the importance of the chosen landscape segment in the meeting of a foreign invasive power in the shape of Knut the great and his army. This leads towards a final argument based on the concept of “homeland-hostland”, which may be seen as the paper’s focus. However, the journey towards this end is (far too) long and contains both confusing and sometimes wrong premises. A number of sub-headings would simplify the reading immensely.

I will not enter into the discussion on source-critical aspects in interpreting the written sources and their localisation of the battle. This has been studied by several scholars, both historians and archaeologists. It could however be added that the author must assist the reader better regarding this discourse, as well as the political-historical background to the paper. I had to re-read both Gräslund (1986) and Moberg (1987) to gain a clear enough picture to understand the author’s starting point. This is a general problem in the paper – several arguments demand more help to the reader in order to avoid being confusing and incomprehensible.

Instead, I will focus on the landscape study and the contextualisation of the meeting between a foreign power and a local society in south-eastern Uppland in the 11th century.

The introductory paragraphs aim at introducing the reader to a geographic and social landscape. The concept “micro geography” is the keyword in the theoretical/methodological basis for the analysis. Here is one of the major problems with the analysis. A “close-up analysis” of a landscape is done at every archaeological investigation. Thus, there are hundreds of examples of similar studies in Uppland. I am all for doing as detailed analysis as is possible from the source material at every study of an archaeological-historical complex, series of events, find context etc of whatever segment of society is under study. The paper is lacking in several instances of explaining the “setting” (here termed homeland) in which the battle takes place. The analysis of the ancient remains in the area only touches the surface and is generalised in a way that does not allow a fuller understanding of the time depth in the landscape’s settlement units. A number of already known basic points are also presented here.

The micro-geographical starting point means that we can identify characteristics that separate this particular landscape segment from other parts of Uppland (the author claims that the landscape stands out). This is probably true, but will also be true in all other landscape segments of similar size. It almost seems a contradiction here to delimit the geographical area under study, since the location tangents one of the most important routes from the Baltic sea towards the central areas of Uppland in prehistoric times (Ambrosiani 1961; Calissendorff 1966; Alm *et al.* (ed.) 2011). In order to contextualise the area, you must also include that which is specific in the remains, and thus possibly underpin the argumentation for the uniqueness in the relation between homeland :: hostland in this particular place. In several cases, it is inferred that the area is seen as peripheral and sparsely populated – but compared to where? Certainly not to the eastern Mälardalen area. This provides de facto a wrong basis for understanding historical events in this region in the Viking Age /Early Middle Ages. The area is definitely not peripheral nor sparsely populated.

Here I will also briefly mention the shoreline maps generated from SGU (fig. 3). Although this is a simple and, in many cases, helpful tool to generate a general picture of water distribution at different times in a landscape, it also includes source-critical aspects. The SGU map generator is based on a model (modulated data from a large geographical area), which means that the resolution precision for a particular area can vary greatly. The discussion on shorelines is old and complex, but demands a higher level of precision to move further. It would demand a landscape reconstruction of a smaller area, e.g. the micro-geographical landscape under study in the present article to consider the topographical elements in the particular landscape segment.

Such a perspective will also influence the analysis of the runestone records and the geopolitical discussion in this part of the paper. This is otherwise the strongest part of the study. The approach of relating an archaeological/historical material to the landscape is naturally relevant, and here, even more interesting in the meeting between object and text. The section (*homeland : : hostland interaction*) that actually binds together the theoretical part with the practical part of the paper clearly works the best. Here, the author works across the different disciplines in a very clear way comparing Cohen's checklist and the runestone texts, providing adequate help to the reader to follow the argumentation. This is not the case in other sections, where theory and practise are intertwined. This said, we can return to the critique of the landscape analysis. I suggest that it would have been useful and interesting to integrate other parts of the Långhundraleden, such as Vada with the three mounds Sjökillarna (located downstream from Helgö), the fortress at Biskops Tuna, Folklandstingsstad and the seat of the king election Mora Sten close to Uppsala to understand the geopolitical landscape that Knut found himself in. The fact that the sacred island of Helgö is at the intersection of three shires, Långhundra, Seminghundra and Vallentuna is an interesting factor in contextualising the place. Naturally, not all these examples are contemporary with Knut's presence in the region, but they provide a picture of the area's importance over time, and helps to contextualise south-eastern Uppland during the Late Iron Age to the Early Middle Ages.

Although the runestone analysis is interesting both as monument and text, it also lays bare other deficiencies in the use of the available source material. I sympathise with the intention to use the runestone texts in the analysis of the relationship between England and eastern Scandinavia. One is always exposed to the risk of being criticised for crossing borders between disciplines, that here includes text interpretation, source material and runestones as monuments. Nevertheless, together they form an unusually dynamic source material and open up for a discourse at a level of detail that is rarely present in a prehistoric context. It is even possible to isolate runestones that explicitly mention Knut the Great. However, new problems appear in our understanding of the time and the geopolitical conditions for Knut's operation in Uppland, unless the archaeological material is not integrated in the analysis. As stated above, I would have liked a thorough description of the ancient remains settings in the analysis. This would provide a better basis for a discussion of possible central places in the area (again, important for Knut's intentions and the choice of place for the invasion). The result is that the argumentation on the micro landscape at Helgö is given the importance of a central place/trading place which is

compared to Gotland! This reveals consequences that can be related to the defective analysis of the ancient remains setting in the region. The concept of a central place must be related to the general discourse of what defines a central place, or our understanding will be fallacious.

To return to the runestone records of the relationship between England and eastern Scandinavia, the absence of archaeological sources must be recognised. Uppland is one of the best-investigated landscapes in Sweden, and a great number of grave fields and settlements have been excavated, not least during the past forty years. If the results from these excavations had been considered, a more nuanced picture of the relation between England and eastern Scandinavia would have appeared. Apart from the runestones that mention expeditions to the west, and sets of coins mainly found in hoards, no English (insular) finds of artefacts from the Viking Age are found in eastern Scandinavia. For example, only one vessel from England is known (Birka). The only place where there is some artefact support for this relationship is in Sigtuna (Roslund 2010). But even these are sparse. A discussion regarding the insular artefact finds and the depth of relationships between England and eastern Scandinavia could have provided further material to the discussion of Knut's activities in Uppland and the micro landscape in which he found himself. One archaeological excavation is mentioned in passing. This is a smaller investigation and phosphate mapping at Helgö farm, performed by Lars Sjösvärd (Sjöstedt sic!). Mainly, the investigation generated remains from early modern period, but seven hearths were located. Two of these were dated to the Vendel period – Viking Age (Brunstedt 1996). The author only mentions this single excavation performed in the area in passing. In themselves, the seven hearths do not indicate that we could interpret the place as central from a political or trade-related perspective. The article mentions the find of a knife, but that is tied contextually to the Early Modern contexts and thus irrelevant here. The “Torsholma-Rolsta-Helgö estate” is depicted as a hub for reloading and trade. Apart from the fact that it was not possible to reach higher than the threshold northeast of Rolsta, no evidence is provided from the archaeological source material, such as larger foundation remains, “black earth area”, indicative stray finds or archaeologically recovered finds that in any way supports this interpretation. This can be seen as exemplifying a general problem (i.e. a lacking a basis in the archaeological source material) in the paper, making the storyline quite hypothetical.

In addition to the examples mentioned above, there are some general issues that makes for a difficult reading of the paper, such as several maps (e.g. 4b and 10b). Map 4b deserves a better

explanation, since it is problematic to understand what the black and red lines indicate, as they illustrate the author's interpretation.

A further issue that makes for a difficult reading and understanding the author's point is the very long sentences. The paper needs a large addition of commas and full stops. In all, this is a very long paper.

The theory's relation to practise do not really fit. It is difficult to find the reason in several sections on local society where suddenly Christianity (Benedictines, e.g.) are mentioned in passing. These sections can be deleted, as they are not related to general practise. How is Christianity shown in this local society, we ask ourselves, when do the farm's religious preferences change? What do they consist of? What can we see in the ancient remains of this religious transition? The structure of the paper is messy, which also makes for difficult reading. In conclusion, I sympathise with the author's intention, as I see it, based in Bo Gräslund's brilliant and brave re-interpretation of where the battle of Helgeå took place in 1026. As stated above, I see grave deficiencies, mainly in relation to the choice of source material. In order to perform a landscape analysis that claim to discuss geopolitical events in the first half of the 11th century that contribute to continued research into the issue, the archaeological sources, finds and ancient remains must be more closely considered. The ancient remains form our central source material for understanding a landscape that has few or no written sources, but which in this case have unusually many. This may have contributed to a bias in the trust in the written records in relation to an archaeological landscape analysis. Such an analysis includes a pre-understanding of how people travel/move in such a landscape in the 11th century. Simply by reading 17th century stories from foreign travellers it is easy to understand that finding your way on foreign territory is not unproblematic, much less seizing power over it. Here, I would have liked a realistic discussion of Knut's possibilities to carry out his project (which again must be based on a thorough geopolitical landscape analysis). If history is based on written sources to such a high degree, the result becomes unnecessarily speculative and hypothetical.

References

- Alm, G. m. fl. (red.) 2011. *Nytt ljus över Långhundraleden. Bygder, båtar, natur*. Redigerad av en kommitté inom Arbetsgruppen Långhundraleden.
- Ambrosiani, B. 1961. Långhundraleden. *Årsboken Uppland* 1961. 7–33.

- Brunstedt, S. 1996. *Smärre undersökningar I Uppland, 1982–1989*. Uppland, Frösunda m. fl. socknar. RAÄ 133 m. fl. Riksantikvarieämbetet, UV Stockholm, rapport 1996:120.
- Calissendorff, K. 1966. Folklandstingstad och en gammal färdled. *Fornvännen*. 61, 244–249.
- Gräslund, Bo. 1986. Knut den store och Sveariket. Slaget vid Helgeå i ny belysning. *Scandia*. Vol. 52:2:211–238.
- Moberg, O. 1987. Slaget vid Helgeå och dess följder. *Scandia*. Vol. 53:1:175–85.
- Roslund, M. 2010. Västanfläkt eller stadig vind? Kontinentala och insulära inslag i Sigtunas tidiga medeltid. I R. Edberg, & A. Wikström (Red.), *Situne Dei*. Årsskrift för Sigtunaforskning utgiven av Sigtuna Museum. 43–52.

Authors Comments

When I read the comments by the two reviewers I thoroughly rewrote the article. The prime reason was Per Vikstrand's comment which saved me from a gross blunder. And I rewrote the discussion of place names according to his review.

The second reviewer's comments made it obvious that several important points in the discussion had not been sufficiently well presented. They created a number of confusions that the ought to be written out of the manuscript. First, the reason why one may benefit from a discursive discussion. Second, that the micro-geographical perspective was not something one could read about in any excavation report. Third, that the Torsholma Rolsta Näs Helgö area is a deviant and peripheral yet significant end of the road area. Fourth, that I was not interested in the Battle at Helgeå. only in the question whether it would have been reasonable for Knut to land at present day Helgö. We cannot be sure that he did, but there are reasons to believe so. Fifth, this needed a discussion about the relations between homeland and hostland in the 11th century. Sixth, this discussion needs an English and a Norman input. Seven, this demands the highlighting of the fictional historiography that was popular in the 11th century not least while it can be traced in the Knut inscriptions in the greater Torsholma area.