

Leeds Studies in English

Article:

A. H. Smith, 'Old Scandinavian "Lundr"', *Leeds Studies in English*, 2 (1933), 72-75

Permanent URL:

https://ludos.leeds.ac.uk:443/R/-?func=dbin-jump-full&object_id=134475&silos_library=GEN01



Leeds Studies in English
School of English
University of Leeds
<http://www.leeds.ac.uk/lse>

OLD SCANDINAVIAN 'LUNDR.'

In 1929 an early tenth-century runic inscription was discovered by Dr. Arthur Nordén on the farmstead of Oklunda near Lundby in Vikbolandet in the eastern part of Östergötland in Sweden and this inscription was discussed in a paper by Professor O. von Friesen read to the Viking Society three years ago (to be published in the Saga Book of the Viking Society). The inscription states that "Gunnar wrote these runes; he fled after making himself guilty of manslaughter; he sought this holy place and since then he has occupied this new settlement. He has here a place of security." It is the earliest Scandinavian allusion to the right of sanctuary.

The fact that the farmstead where the stone lies is called Oklunda and the neighbouring village Lundby is significant. It is possible that here we have a clue to the exact meaning of the Old Scandinavian word *lundr* 'a grove, a small wood,' which is fairly common in English place-names. From references in the sagas it is evident that *lundr* was used in heathen times of a small wood or grove devoted to some religious practice or other; in "Landnámabók", for example, we are told that *Þórir bjó í Lundi, hann blótaði lundinn*.

But what the exact significance of *lundr* was we cannot determine from its ordinary use in literature. The circumstances surrounding the rune stone suggest that the Gunnar of the inscription found sanctuary in a *lundr*, and one is tempted to think that the practical religious associations of such a wood were that it offered right of asylum or sanctuary. The common meaning 'small wood' is in all probability a later development belonging to the period after christianisation in Scandinavia.

Further it seems likely that this signification of *lundr*, i.e. 'wood offering sanctuary,' was known in Scandinavian Eng-

land. O.Scand. *lundr* is found frequently in Danelaw place-names, most often in the simplex form Lund (see *Place-Names of the North Riding*, E.P.N.S., vol. V, *passim*), but sometimes also in combination with other elements. In the West Riding of Yorkshire we have various Lunds (especially to the south and west of York) and Lumby (recorded as *Lundby* in O.E. charters, such as 963 *Magnum Registrum Album* of York i, 56d; c. 1030 *Early Yorkshire Charters*, ed. Farrer, no. 7), which means 'farmstead in or near the grove' and is exactly paralleled by the Swedish *Lundby* near Oklunda where the runic stone referred to above was found. In the East Riding, besides various Lunds (one, Lund on the Wolds, being recorded in Domesday Book as *Lont*), we have Swanland near Hull (*Swanneslund*, 1296 Index to British Museum Charters) from a personal name O.E. *Swān* or O. Scand. *Sveinn* or the common word *swān* 'herd, swineherd', and in the North Riding besides the simplex Lund, we have Stockland, Autherlands, Sutherland, etc., as well as the curious name Upsland from an earlier **Uppsala-lundr*. In Huntingdon there are two interesting examples, one Toseland being from a personal name *Tóli* or *Tauglauss* (see *Place-Names of Bedf. and Huntingdon*, E.P.N.S., vol. III, p. 272), the other being Holland (earlier *Hauelund*), which is a compound of O. Scand. *hagi* 'enclosure' and *lundr*, and means 'a sacred grove hedged off' (*op. cit.* 220). In Northampton there is a unidentified field-name *Thurferdislund* (*Place-Names of Northampton*, E.P.N.S., vol. X, p. 292) and an alternative name for part of Huxloe Hundred was *Nauereslund* (*op.cit.* pp. 176, 216). It is noteworthy that as in Toseland (Hunts.) and Framland (Leic.) *lundr* is here used in a hundred-name.

In many of the simplex Lunds and perhaps in some of the compound names the word *lundr* does mean 'a small wood' and nothing else, but in the rest it was probably 'a sacred grove'. In this connexion we should bear in mind these two points: the first is that O. Scand. *lundr*, whilst being fairly common in place-names, as we have seen, is not to my knowledge found in the usual literary sources in Middle English. The common

word for a wood was O.E. *wudu* or sometimes O.E. *hyrst* and in Scandinavian England O. Scand. *skógr* (Birskew, Aiskew, Litherskew, etc.), and for *lundr* to have fallen into disuse and *skógr* to have been kept up, even in modern dialects as *scaw* (see *English Dialect Dictionary*, s.v.), there must have been a fundamental and original difference which, we might say, disappeared with heathenism, when *lundr* came to mean simply 'a small wood.'

The second point is more interesting. Professor Bruce Dickins in *The Place-Names of Bedf. and Hunts.* 220 (*op.cit.*) has called attention to the significant rendering of *lund* by Reginald of Durham as *nemus paci donatum*, "which shows that this word in Scandinavian England must have been used with the same heathen religious associations that it had in Scandinavia itself." Reginald of Durham (Surtees Society, p. 275) is writing (c. 1290) of a church in *Plumbelund* so called from a surrounding grove and he finally adds that *secundum ydioma Anglicum, lund, nemus paci donatum, cognominetur*, that is, a *lund* was 'a sacred grove given up to peace.' Dickins' suggestions of heathen religious associations in England is very apt and now I think we may go further and say that *lundr* was in some cases a grove where right of sanctuary could be had. As a matter of fact Dickins' remarks refer to Holland in Huntingdon, which has been derived from O. Scand. *hagi* and *lundr* 'a sacred grove which has been hedged off'; if this is correct it presents an interesting parallel to Professor von Friesen's conjecture that when Gunnar was compelled for his own safety to settle down for a long time in his sanctuary he marked out a boundary within which he would be safe. And further, if this etymology of Holland is the right one the place-name must have had exactly the same significance as O. Scand. *fjerbaugsgarðr* (see *Viga-Glúms saga* cap. 24, *Flóamannasaga* cap. 10) 'an enclosure where a convicted person was safe' and would be paralleled to some extent by O. Scand. *þingi-helgi* (see *Hænsa-Póris Saga* cap. 14 and Fritzner s.v. *þinghelgr*) 'the sacred boundary of a meeting regarded (by the heathen Scandinavians) as sanctuary.'

The fact that a thing-place was regarded as holy (on which see also *Eyrbyggjasaga* cap. 4) gives additional significance to the hundred names Toseland, Framland and *Nauereslund*, mentioned above.

We should, therefore, bear in mind in interpreting these English place-names the intimate connexion between the words of the runic inscription and the two Swedish place-names Oklunda and Lundby, a connexion that in itself (apart from Reginald of Durham's words) shews that O.N. *lundr* might well have referred to 'a wood offering sanctuary' as well as to 'a sacred grove' or 'a small wood.' The need for places of refuge and asylum would be as great in Scandinavian England amongst the Scandinavians themselves as it was in Scandinavia.

A. H. SMITH.

University College, London.