

Early Christian grave monuments and the 11th-century context of the monument marker *hvalf*

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This paper discusses the use of the noun *hvalf* as monument marker in Swedish runic inscriptions with focus on its connotations, time of introduction and historical context. In centre of attention is the specific word and its relation to the 11th-century early Christian grave monuments, the so called Eskilstuna cists. In the end of the paper parallels in design and ornamentation linking the grave monuments citing a *hvalf* to a small group of Anglo-Saxon stone sculpture, as well as possible connections between south-east England and Sweden, are examined.

Hvalf in Swedish runic inscriptions

Hvalf is mainly found as a monument marker in runic inscriptions on medieval grave covers from the province of Västergötland and the island of Gotland. There are five examples from Västergötland, all on coffin-shaped grave slabs with bevelled edges (Vg 81, Vg 88, Vg 95, Vg 146 and Vg 165), dated to the late 12th century and the early 13th century (Svärdström 1958-70: 1v; Palm 1992: 235). *Hvalf* occurs eight times in runic inscriptions from Gotland (G 7, G 34, G 65, G 101, G 123, G137, G199 and G 201), all except one comprising of flat grave covers. These Gotlandic slabs belong to the end of the 12th century or later (Palm 1992: 235). There is also one example of *hvalf* from Denmark on a 12th-century cist (DR 111), and more important in this context: two grave covers from Hov in Östergötland (Ög 240 = Ög 241 and Ög Hov12;21) which I will return to later. Additionally a *hvalf* is mentioned in the inscription on the now lost rune stone from Bogesund in Uppland (U 170). A last possible example of the citing of a *hvalf* is the head- or foot-stone from Berezanj in Ukraine (X UaFv1914;47).

The Old Swedish word *hvalf* means vaulted, a vaulted roof, an arch in a church or a burial vault (Fritzner; Svärdström 1950-78: 139; Hellquist 1999: 1306) but the examples in the runic inscriptions show that *hvalf* in medieval times referred to coffin-shaped grave covers and flat grave slabs, indicating a later shift of meaning. However, *hvalf* did most likely not only allude to the recumbent grave cover but to the funerary monument as a whole (Wessén and Jansson 1940-58, 1: 262; Svärdström 1950-78: 139; for another opinion see Gardell 1937: 106). In the early Christian period *hvalf* was probably used to denote a stone cist and the term can possibly be explained by the shape of the construction, referring to some kind of hollowed space, a cist or a *tumba* (Wessén and Jansson 1940-58, 1: 262; Jansson et. al. 1962-78, 2: 164). *Hvalf* was a novelty as monument marker and was presumably introduced in Scandinavia in connection with the emergence of new types of Christian grave monuments in the early Middle Ages (Palm 1992: 235 f.).

Hvalf and 11th-century funerary stone sculpture

The earliest examples of churchyard monuments known in Sweden are the early Christian grave monuments, often called Eskilstuna cists, which in their most elaborate form consist of a lid slab, two side slabs and two gable slabs forming a stone cist standing visibly on the ground. Simpler constructions such as single recumbent slabs with or without head- and foot-stones seem however to have been more common (Ljung 2009a: 155; cf. Neill and Lundberg 1994: 148, fig. 2). The ornamentation of the early Christian grave monuments is carried out in Ringerike or in Urnes style. Runic inscriptions are most frequently found on the lid slabs. They follow the same memorial formula as the texts on the late Viking Age rune stones, where the sponsor/s of the monument is/are named first, followed by the name/s of the deceased and formulations where the relationship between the people involved is defined.

Let us return to the two recumbent slabs from Hov church in Östergötland (Ög 240 = Ög 241 and Ög Hov12;21) mentioned in the beginning of the paper. The church at Hov houses the largest corpus of early Christian grave monuments preserved, around a hundred slabs and fragments are placed inside the church. Additionally, approximately a hundred fragments are still thought to be incorporated into the church walls (Jansson 1962: 11).

Ög 240 = Ög 241 consists of two larger fragments of an almost complete slab. The inscription cites that:

× keitil : l(a)gþi : hualf : þ... .. si- : kuþ : hia(l)...- : [t]juna : salu ×
 “Kättil laid this vault ... his ... May God help Tunne's soul.”

The fragmentary preserved inscription of Ög Hov12;21 tells that someone laid the vault (... : **lagþi : hual...** ...). Ög Hov12;21 may have belonged to the same grave slab as Ög Hov32;27. The carving technique, the ornamentation as well as the types of runes makes it most likely that the two fragments at least have been carried out by the same craftsman (Jansson 1962: 21, 27). In contrast to the medieval evidence of the usage of *hvalf* from Västergötland and Gotland, where the monument marker is combined with the verb to make (*gera*), both grave slabs from Hov cite that someone laid the vault. The verb to lay (*leggja*) is commonly used on early Christian grave monuments together with *steinn*, the most frequent monument marker (cf. Palm 1992: 233 ff.).

The grave slabs citing a *hvalf* have been thought to belong to the late 11th century (Jansson 1962: 12). I argue instead that they on stylistic grounds should be dated to the first half of the 11th century. The ornamentation displays several characteristics of the Ringerike style, current in Scandinavia from the late 10th century to the middle or third quarter of the 11th century (Fuglesang 1980: 26 f.; 2001: 173; Wilson 1995: 183). The ornamentation of the lid slab Ög 240 = Ög 241 is carried out in relief and depicts a symmetric pattern consisting of two intertwined stems with offshoots and tendrils developing into a cross-resembling ornament. The ornamentation shows similarities with the memorial stone from Vang in Norway which according to Signe Horn Fuglesang dates to the classic Ringerike phase (cf. Fuglesang 1980: 176, pl. 36B). Also there are interesting parallels in the design of the Hov slabs with a small group of Ringerike-style stone sculpture in the south-east of England (Rochester 2 and 3, London St Pauls 1, London City 1a-b, London All Hallows 3, Great Canfield 1, see also Otley 12A in Yorkshire). The shape of the cross on Ög Hov12;21 strongly resembles a fragment from All Hallows by the Tower, London, which on one face is decorated with an equal-armed cross with interlace (cf. Fuglesang 1980: 188 f., pl 52B). The Ringerike style in England has been interpreted as a court style related to the period of Danish supremacy under King Knut and his immediate successors (1016-1042; Tweddle 1995a: 88). This further implies a similar dating of the grave slabs from Hov.

The use of *hvalf* as monument marker already in the beginning or the middle of the 11th century is also supported by the now lost rune stone from Bogesund (U 170). The rune stone seems to have been placed near to a grave-field in the parish of Östra Ryd. The inscription tells about two memorials made reminiscence of Önd, or Agne as Henrik Williams has interpreted the name (Williams 1996: 60):

[: kuni * auk * as(a) * litu * raisa * st-- þina * auk * hualf * iftiR * akn- -un sin anaupr * i akru * a- -R * krafin * i * kirikiu*karþi * fastulfr * risti * runaR * kuin * raisti * stinhal þisa *]
 “Gunne and Åsa had this stone and the vault raised in memory of Önd(?), their son. He died in Ekerö(?). He is buried in the churchyard. Fastulv carved the runes. Gunne raised this stone rock-slab.”

The rune stone is consequently raised in memory of Önd who was buried in the churchyard. Elias Wessén and Sven B. F. Jansson argue that this most likely was at Ekerö in Lake Mälaren where he died (Wessén and Jansson 1940-58, 1: 261 f.). Members of Önd's family erected several rune stones in the parish of Östra Ryd (U 166, U 167, U 170 and probably also U 171) indicating that it was the place where their family manor was situated. Two of the rune stones have been recovered at the church (U 166 and U 167) and it is not inconceivable that Önd actually was buried in his home parish and not where he passed away. The area was actively involved already in the initial phase of the late Viking Age rune stone tradition in Uppland. This is demonstrated by the unornamented stone, U 169 in Björkeby, Östra Ryd parish (cf. Gräslund 1992: 196; Zachrisson 1998: 123), indicating an early introduction of Christian belief and customs (cf. Herschend 1994: 54 ff.; Zachrisson 1998: 126).

In addition to the rune stone Gunne and Åsa also made a *hvalf*, most likely the funerary monument in the churchyard beneath which Önd was put to his final rest (Palm 1992: 243; Ljung 2010: 122). An older depiction of the Bogesund rune stone implies that the ornamentation belongs to the middle of the 11th century (Pr 3 according to Gräslund's chronology, 1991; 1992: 183 f.). Hence the inscription on the rune stone demonstrates a contemporary existence of the rune stone tradition and churchyard burials in Uppland. The two practices did not exclude each other, rather they were intertwined phenomena as suggested by the inscription (Ljung 2010).

The last possible 11th-century example of *hvalf*, the head or foot stone from Berezanj (X UaFv1914;47), is somewhat problematic. The inscription cites that:

krani : kerpi : (h)alf : pisi : iftir : kal : fi:laka : si(n)

“Grane made this vault in memory of Karl, his partner.”

The details of the thirteenth to sixteenth signs are indistinct and the sequence has been interpreted as *(h)alf*. T. J. Arne is of the opinion that *(h)alf* is a wrongly written *hvalf* (Arne 1914: 47). According to Henrik Williams this would have been an improbable mistake of the carver to do and he stresses that the runic sequence is uncertain (pers. comm.). Irrespective of the reading of the runic inscription a connection between the Berezanj stone and the early Christian grave monuments in Sweden can be made. Both the shape and design of the Berezanj stone strongly resembles a group of arched head- and foot-stones with runic inscriptions from Häggesled in Västergötland (Vg 21, Vg 22, Vg 23; Vg 24, Vg 25, Vg 26, Vg27 and possibly also Vg 28 and Vg 29; Lindqvist 1915: 80 f.; Jansson et. al. 1962-78, 2: 164; Svärdström 1958-70: 39). Like the find from Berezanj the Häggesled group consists of stones without ornamentation (except for two incised crosses on Vg 26 and Vg 27) and the runic inscriptions follow the curved edges of the stones in the same way. Compared to the total corpus of early Christian grave monuments in Sweden there are to my knowledge no parallels in the design of the Häggesled head- and foot-stones on other sites, something that makes the connection to the Berezanj find even more interesting.

The curved stones in Häggesled probably formed part of composite monuments, possibly consisting of a recumbent slab between head- and foot-stones. This assumption is supported by the runic inscriptions citing that someone laid the stone (*lagði stein*; Vg 21, Vg 24 and Vg 25) and the mentioning of stones in plural (*satti steina*; Vg 23 and Vg 27). Furthermore the inscription of Vg 21 and Vg 22 shows that they most likely once belonged to the same monument (Svärdström 1958-70: 38).

The design and the workmanship of the Häggesled stones bear rune-stone-like features and it was pointed out already by Harald Wideen that these monuments belonged to the “proper” rune stone period of Västergötland (1955: 178; for a different opinion see Lindqvist 1915: 61; Gardell 1937: 86 f.). It is questionable whether the rune stone tradition can be separated from that of the early Christian grave monuments. As we have seen, the Bogesund rune stone (U 170) demonstrate a contemporaneous use of churchyards with sepulchral monuments and the erection of rune stones in the surrounding countryside. A period of coexistence between rune stones and early Christian grave monuments has also been established in Östergötland (Ljung 2009a). I have discussed elsewhere that both rune stones and early Christian grave monuments should be regarded as different expressions within the same memorial tradition, which transforms during the course of the 11th century due to the influence of Christian beliefs and mentality (Ljung 2009a; 2009b; 2010). Thus the closeness in workmanship and design between the Häggesled slabs and the rune stones of Västergötland points towards an early dating of the Häggesled group (and the find from Berezanj) since the rune stone tradition of the province already seems to have come to an end in the first half of the 11th century (Wideen 1955:251; Lager 2002: 91).

The correlation between the monument marker *hvalf* and the early Christian grave monuments indicate that they were introduced simultaneously already in the early 11th century. All the same, *hvalf* does only occur in few a runic inscriptions and all of them refer to funerary monuments, whether recumbent grave slabs, a head- or foot-stone or a monument of unknown shape as in the case of the Bogesund rune stone. One may ask what feature or shape *hvalf* referred to. It may have denoted a cist or an arched space as suggested by Wessén and Jansson (1940-58, 1: 262), perhaps the hollowed room formed by a box-shaped tomb above

the ground as in the case with the most elaborate form of early Christian grave monuments. Though it is not possible to determine whether the slabs citing a *hvalf* formed parts of cists or not. Another conceivable explanation is that *hvalf* referred to the arched shape of the head and foot stones, forming two vaults at each short side of the recumbent grave slab. Even if the monument marker *hvalf* may have originated is a special shape or feature it almost certainly came to denote the memorial monument as a whole.

An English connection?

The ornamentation of the two grave covers from Hov citing a *hvalf* (Ög 240 = Ög 241 and Ög Hov12;21) have, as mentioned earlier, features belonging to the Ringerike style linking them to a group of stone sculpture in England. The likeness in design may be taken as an indication of various kinds of return influence between England and Scandinavia. Most famous of the Ringerike style stone carvings in England is the grave marker from St Pauls in London depicting a four-legged animal, facing backwards, that is intertwined with tendrils. On the narrow face of the stone is a runic inscription telling that “Ginna and Toke had this stone laid”. The stone originally had a roughly dressed lower portion for insertion into the ground. It has therefore been interpreted as a head- or foot-stone in a composite monument consisting of a second gable and a recumbent grave slab that may have carried the continuation of the inscription (Tweddle et. al. 1995: 227). The rune types and orthography, as well as the language and the wording suggest an early 11th century dating of the inscription. Moreover the carver must according to Michael P. Barnes and R. I. Page (2006: 288) have been a Dane or a Swede. Altogether this makes it probable that the commemorated person also was of Scandinavian birth (Tweddle et. al. 1995: 237). The St Paul stone and the two other Ringerike carvings from London (London City 1a-b, London All Hallows 3) have stylistic characteristics very close to Scandinavian ornamentation, linking them further to a Scandinavian milieu (Fuglesang 1980: 63 f.). The similarities in carving technique and ornamental design of the restricted group of Ringerike sculpture in southern England (Rochester 2 and 3, London St Pauls 1, London City 1a-b, London All Hallows 3, Great Canfield 1) suggest even that they were produced by the same workshop (Tweddle 1995a: 87 f.).

Even though the ornamentation and in some cases the runic inscriptions of this group of Ringerike style stone sculpture point to a Scandinavian background, the shape of these slabs is also found on other sepulchral sculpture in south-east England. There are several examples of semicircular-headed grave markers from the 10th, and more particularly from the 11th century, including the Ringerike carving from Rochester (3), in the area. In addition there are parallel-sided, square-headed grave markers, among them the above mentioned St Paul stone, from the same period (Tweddle 1995b: 22; Tweddle et al. 1995: 166 f.). This indicates that Ringerike style stone carvings in England not simply can be viewed as Scandinavian but rather as a mix, or a hybrid, of Scandinavian ornamentation and Anglo-Saxon grave forms. The group also mark interfaces between Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon burial and memorial traditions, places where interchange of ideas and practices apparently took place in the early 11th century. In connection with this, the often cited rune stone from Nävelsjö in Småland (Sm 101) should also be taken into consideration. It is raised in memory of Gunnar who was laid in a stone coffin (*steinpro*) in Bath in England by his brother Helge. Like the Ringerike style stone sculpture it clearly illustrates intertwined Anglo-Saxon connection as well as Scandinavian knowledge of English grave monuments.

Returning to the early Christian grave monuments in Sweden, one can conclude that Ringerike style ornamentation is rather uncommon and only found on a few sites. Urnes style ornamentation with Ringerike style elements or designs in pure Urnes style are on the contrary by far more common. The grave covers from Hov in Östergötland citing a *hvalf* belong to the small Swedish collection of Ringerike style grave monuments. They have, as previously discussed, parallels with the English Ringerike group of stone sculpture. There are also some other features in Hov, and some other sites, reminding of the English sculpture. The shape of a few rectangular slabs with ornaments or incised crosses (Ög Hov5;18, Ög Hov7;19 and Ög Hov18;24), probably head- and foot-stones, resemble the parallel-sided, square-headed grave markers in south-east England. This square/rectangular shape of head- and foot-stones is not at all common, taken the whole corpus of Swedish early Christian grave monuments into consideration. The most frequent type of gable slabs is cross ornamented

stones, decorated on two faces, often with shaped edges following the outline of the cross-arms. The rectangular shape is however also found at the nearby Vävesunda church (see for example Ög 54 and Ög N291) situated around 13 km from Hov, on the other side of Lake Tåkern. Semicircular-headed grave markers are not found at Hov, but the shape is represented at St Martin's in Skänninge (Ög N278) ca 10 km north-east of Hov. One face of the head- or foot-stone is decorated with a cross with tendrils, offshoots and pear-shaped lobes and the ornamentation can be attributed to the Ringerike style (cf. Fuglesang 1980: 98 ff., pl. 54; Bergengren 2005: 17 ff.). The rounded shape of grave markers is as previously discussed also present on the head- and foot-stones from Häggesled in Västergötland and the Berezanj-stone possibly citing a *hvalf*.

Concluding remarks

The ornamentation of the Ringerike style stone sculpture in England has been interpreted as Scandinavian influence and the monuments have consequently been thought to have belonged to a Scandinavian milieu. Looking at the corpus of early Christian grave monuments with Ringerike style ornamentation in Sweden there are similarities not only in the design with the Anglo-Saxon group, which one may have expected, but also in the shape of head- and foot-stones. Furthermore the square or rounded shape of grave markers is otherwise uncommon among the Swedish material. Altogether this points to a possible connection between the groups of Ringerike style sculpture in south-east England and in Sweden.

The collection of Ringerike style stone sculpture in southern England has, as already described, been related to the period of Danish supremacy under King Knut and was probably made as memorials over people of Scandinavian descent (Tweddle 1995a: 88). One may speculate about the identity of the people being buried beneath the Ringerike style grave monuments in Sweden, for example the recumbent slabs referred to as *hvalf* in Hov. Ög 240 = Ög 241 was made in memory of a man called Tunne by Kätill, the part of the inscription defining the relationship between the two men is now missing. No names are preserved on the fragment of Ög Hov12;21. The shape and ornamentation of this group of Ringerike style sculpture may well say something about the people erecting and/or being commemorated with these early Christian grave monuments. It is not unlikely that they had extensive contacts with the Anglo-Saxon area during the period of Scandinavian rule in the first part of the 11th century. They possibly belonged to the circle around King Knut, served in the Þingalið, or were relatives of people with English connections. Rune stones in the area also bear witness to contacts with England during this period. Two stones are raised in memory of men being killed in England (Ög 104 and Ög Fv1950;341) and a third one tells about Þjalfi who was with Knut (Ög 111).

The context of the two grave slabs from Hov citing a *hvalf* is also highly interesting. The extensive collection of stone sculpture from the site indicates the presence of an 11th century cemetery with elite burials in stone coffins or beneath recumbent grave slabs, a place of both religious and political importance. The place name Hov may indicate the presence of a pre-Christian cult site, though the signification of the name is disputed (Brink 1990: 45; Vikstrand 2001: 253 ff.). In the Götaland-area it does however often coincide with central places, magnate farms and church sites (Vikstrand 2001: 269 f.). In later medieval times, around 1400, Hov functioned as the royal administrative manor in charge of the western part of Östergötland. Furthermore, at the end of the middle ages Hov was the largest fiscal unit in the whole province consisting entirely of crown-lands (Tollin 2002: 224). The church in Hov is prominently positioned on an elevation in the landscape and it has a long and complicated history. It was probably built as a private church, and Christian Lovén argues for a royal connection to the Sverker dynasty in the 12th century (Lovén 1990). Claes Tollin also considers it likely that Hov was a centre of power of the Sverker dynasty (Tollin 2002: 225). The large collection of early Christian grave monuments shows that Hov was a place of special importance within the highest social level already during the 11th century. The numerous fragments of stone sculpture display great variation indicating that they represent quite a large number of grave monuments probably more than could have been erected by one family alone (Ljung 2009a: 189 f.). Moreover Hov, as well as Vävesunda and St Martin's in Skänninge with its rectangular and semi-circular head- and foot-stones, belong to this earliest phase of Christian cemeteries with stone sculpture in Östergötland emerging in the beginning

of the 11th century. The majority of the cemeteries with early Christian grave monuments in the province seem not to have been established until the mid-11th century (Ljung 2009a). These conditions further support the contemporaneity between the English and Swedish groups of stone sculpture here discussed.

Returning finally to the monument marker *hvalf* and its possible connotations, it is interesting to notice that coped grave covers were produced in the south-east of England in the 11th century, among other types. A parallel-sided monument with convex upper surface from Winchester, St Maurice even bears a runic inscription. The use of Old Norse runes indicates that it dates to the period of Scandinavian supremacy in Southern England, c. 1016-42 (Tweddle 1995a: 86; Tweddle et. al. 1995: 327 f.). The vaulted form suggested by the monument marker *hvalf* may therefore also be seen in the light of the connection between grave monuments in England and Sweden.

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