

Report on examination by Henrik Williams of the so-called Larsson papers

The Larsson papers (see http://www.khm.uio.no/forskning/publikasjoner/runenews/nor_2004/krs-exsw.htm) are undeniably of great interest, not least in connection with the Kensington Runestone (KRS). Their background and especially their full contents will be discussed in another, fuller report. In this context, it will be sufficient to comment on some salient features that have been the object for recent discussions. This is a report on the observations and findings made by me on May 26, 2011. The conclusion in brief is that there is every reason to believe that the documents were indeed written and dated in concordance with their own statements to that effect, and that there are no indications of tampering, manipulation or additions to their contents after their first writing.

The Larsson papers consist of two handwritten sheets kept at the Institute for Dialectology, Onomastics and Folklore Research, in Umeå (DAUM, inventory number 10669). These, and several other documents, were brought to Uppsala for examination by the DAUM courier. The examination was carried out to establish certain facts and answer a number of questions. The various points of investigation and its result follow below. The documents were scrutinized by visual inspection in natural light, with the help of a diode flashlight and by ultra violet light (15 W black light). The flashlight was used to shine through the paper in order to look for watermarks or other features of significance. There were none except the horizontal lines of the 1883 document, left by the production process. The UV light was used in the hope of making a distinction of different layers of ink. There was no indication of such a phenomenon, but it should be pointed out that this part of the examination has little scientific value. However, the UV examination did at least prove that there are no traces of weak writing, previously overlooked.

The study took place in the *Boksalen* (book room) of *Carolina Rediviva*, the Uppsala University Library. Present were myself, Mr. Staffan Lundmark (DAUM), Prof. Andreas Rosenberg (board member of the American Association of Runic Studies, AARS), Dr. Mats G. Larsson (independent archaeologist), and a film crew from Norwegian television (NRK) consisting of Mr. Lars O. Skjønberg and his cameraman.

1. Of the two sheets the first has a bluish color and is ca. 249 mm high by ca. 218 mm wide. According to Mr. Lundmark, there is no other document of this paper quality in the Edward Larsson collection. The first page is almost filled, and signed in a German style of handwriting by “C. E. [= Carl Emil] Larsson”. It is dated December 𐀀𐀁𐀂 (1883) with so-called pentadic numerals. This document will henceforth be referred to as “Larsson 1883”.

2. The other sheet is yellowish, ca. 348 mm high and ca. 213 mm wide. The first page is also rather full, it is signed “Edward Larsson” in the German style and dated 𐀀𐀁 (16) April 𐀀𐀁𐀂 (1885). This document will henceforth be referred to as “Larsson 1885”. It contains largely the same information as does Larsson 1883, and the two documents must be intimately connected.

3. Carl Emil and Edward Larsson were brothers. By comparing the handwriting on both documents, especially the signatures, with other papers from the Larsson collection, I was able to confirm firstly that they are indeed the writers of the respective documents, secondly that they were interested in handwriting and calligraphy, thirdly that they were in the habit of signing and dating documents, even those of a kind where this would not be expected, and fourthly that they did copy texts by other writers. Especially interesting is a document written by their father, Lars Larsson, and dated to April 12, 1860. This bears the information “Afskrifven 14 Oktober 1881 af *Sonen* C. Emil Larsson” (‘copied October 14, 1881 by the

son C. Emil Larsson') and "Afskrifven 25 Aprill [sic] 1884 af Sonen Edward Larsson" ('copied April 25, 1884 by the son C. Emil Larsson'). This makes it possible that the Larsson papers were also copied from a common source, possibly even a text by Lars Larsson. However, certain indications point in another direction.

4. The Larsson papers both contain two rune-rows, the first of the familiar medieval version, but the second of a very rare type, which in part is very similar to that of the runes used on the KRS. These runic rows will henceforth be called Larsson 1883:1 & 2, and Larsson 1885:1 & 2, respectively. A close examination of the texts indicates that Larsson 1885 is derived from 1883 and not an independent copy. The introduction to 1883:1 mentions "20 Bokst." ['20 letters'], and there is indeed a dot after the first 20 runes, separating them from two extra runic ligatures. Larsson 1885 has no dot here, probably because of a failure to realize its significance. Further, the A-rune of Larsson 1883 was obviously intended as an A , but the twig is quite long (as is that of the N-rune, N), and the whole rune leans to the left so that it gives the impression of being a slanted X. This rune is misunderstood in Larsson 1885, where it has been given the shape of an upright X. I interpret these phenomena as an indication that Larsson 1885 is a copy of the 1883 document.

5. That Larsson 1885 is secondary to 1883 is further strengthened by a few words written on the back of the latter document. On the top we find "Tyska stilen" ['The German style'], without any doubt written by Edward. Besides other papers belonging to his father and older brother, we thus know that he did possess the 1883 document and began making a copy of it on the back. Probably realizing that it would be more convenient to have a separate copy, Edward interrupted his writing and produced the 1885 paper instead. My conclusion is that only the 1883 document is of value as an independent source.

6. The photographic reproductions of Larsson 1883 may be taken at face value. Only on two points did the examination of the original reveal more information. The first observation is of considerable interest, as it relates to the possibility mentioned by Dr. Richard Nielsen that there may have been changes made to the Larsson papers after the publication of the KRS in Swedish newspapers. One candidate for such modification would be the X-rune of Larsson 1883:2, where the hook could have been appended later. It turns out, however, that there is an ink stain where the hook is joined to the staff (and one lower down), indicating that the ink of the staff was most likely wet when the hook was added, i.e. they were both written at the same time. None of the features typical of the KRS runes has thus been added at a later stage to any of the Larsson 1883 runes. This constituted the main point of my examination.

7. The second observation deals with the second, B-rune of Larsson 1883:2. In the pictures, it looks as if this rune has an extra, slightly larger loop, added above the other two. An examination of the original document shows that the line of this top loop is much thinner than those of the two loops below. This is due to an erasure visible in the middle of the top loop, an erasure caused by scraping the paper surface with a sharp implement to obliterate the writing. The intention may have been to remove the top loop altogether, but if so it was not entirely successful. At any rate, I can find no other motivation for the erasure. My interpretation is that Carl Emil by mistake started making his B-rune "from the top" as he had in his earlier rune-row. He then corrected this by adding the loops in the middle of the staff and tried to erase the top loop. In the 1885:2 rune-row, this rune is drawn correctly.



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