

»Where is *Leangasi*?«

Onomastic clearing up of an exotic place-name instance

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This is an English translation of an article originally written in Danish ‘Fra Leangasi til Kalvehave via Skåningehavn - Onomastisk opklaring af et eksotisk stednavnebelæg’, published in *Namn och Bygd - Tidskrift för nordisk ortnamnsforskning* 2014 (Uppsala: Kungl. Gustav Adolfs akademien för svensk folkkultur, 2015), pp. 223-225. The translation has subsequently been published online in 2017 at: www.jggj.dk/Leangasi.pdf.

»Where is Leangasi?« This was a question recently received by the Name Research Section at the University of Copenhagen, where we are supposed to know about Danish place-names and how they have been spelled since the earliest extant written sources from the late eleventh century. But none of us had ever heard of ‘Leangasi’. According to one written source, though, this was the place where Erik, King of Danes, confirmed some privileges for his vassals in Estonia (which at this time was a Danish duchy) on 2 October 1252:

Erich vann Gades genaden ein köning tho der dehnen unnd schlawen allen de diesse iegenwerdig schriffte sehen, ewige selicheit, iuwer gemenheit do wÿ kundt, dat wÿ allen unsern luden in Reuell unnd Wesenberg besittlich mit erflichem recht, (weleker in gemener spracke genömet werdt LANDT recht) ere guder in freÿheit tho besitten, verlaten hebben, wante ere rechte in allem mehr tho befästigen, als tho krencken sin wÿ gewilliget: unnd up de mede keine twÿfelheit adder twistinge in thakomenden thÿden van iemande, auer umb disse gunninge erhefen mogen, hebben wÿ diesse gegenwerdige schriffte edder breff den benomden unnsen luden mit unnsere in segell in eine getuchnisse unndt bewehrung befestiget unnd gegeuen. **Datum Leangasi** anno domini dusendt twehundert unndt twee unndt fefftig des anders dages octobris des mantes.¹

Thus, a colleague at the history department naturally wanted to know where this event took place – was it in Denmark, Estonia or perhaps somewhere else? To our knowledge, however, there has never been any place called *Leangasi*, or even something remotely similar, anywhere around the Baltic Sea. Furthermore, there was no King Erik in Denmark in 1252; King Erik IV Plovpenning was killed on 10 August 1250 and King Erik V Glipping was crowned on 25 December 1259. So who was this King Erik in 1252?

¹ Transcript from the 16th century in cartulary of the Teutonic Order. Zentralarchiv des Deutschen Ordens (Abteilung Livlands vol. I fol. 72), Vienna. Published in the online addition to *Diplomatarium Danicum* at <http://diplomatarium.dk/dokument/12521002001>; visited 5 April 2017).

The source for these problematic claims is a sixteenth century transcript of the alleged diploma to be found in a cartulary of the Teutonic Order, now preserved at the Zentralarchiv des Deutschen Ordens in Vienna. When the editors of *Diplomatarium Danicum* in 2014 came across this alleged source transcript they of course noted the problems, and therefore suggested that it might be a fake, i.e. a later fabrication meant to add royal credibility to the claimed rights; in terms of ‘Leangasi’, the editors suggested an unknown location in Estonia.

As it turns out, however, place-name scholars do not need to search for a Leangasi in neither Denmark nor Estonia; historians do not need to add an extra Erik to the Danish list of kings; and neither should the administrative office of the Teutonic Order be accused of deliberate fraud – at least not in this case. The whole wretched business is all due to one anonymous German translator and scribe, who may have been rather tired when he read the original Latin version of the diploma. This we know because it so happens that the original document still exists at the Estonian National Archives in Tartu. It is even published in the printed version of *Diplomatarium Danicum* (2. ser. vol. I no. 80), but nevertheless managed to escape the identifying attention of the editors by being dated two days earlier than the transcript, and by not being issued by any King Erik, but by King Christopher I of Denmark.

C. dei gracia Danorum Sclauorumque rex omnibus presens scriptum cernentibus salutem in perpetuum. Uniuersitati uestre notum facimus, quod nos omnibus hominibus nostris in Reualia et Wesenbiergh constitutis omnia bona sua iure hereditario quod uulgariter dicitur lænrect dimisimus libere possidenda, quia ipsorum iura confirmare in omnibus pocius uolumus quam infirmare. Ne igitur in posterum super hac donacione nostra ab aliquo possit oriri dubietas uel calumpnia presentes litteras dictis hominibus nostris contulimus sigillo nostro roboratas in testimonium et cautelam. Datum Scaninghafn, anno domini MCCLII pridie kalendas octobris.²

The translating scribe of the Teutonic Order in fact made three crucial mistakes in his transcript: he misread the initial ‘C.’ in the original (for Christopher) as an ‘E.’ (which he then guessed must had been for Erik); he somehow managed to mistranslate the Latin date “*pridie kalendas octobris*” (30 September) to “*des anders dages octobris des mantes*” (2 October); and he finally misread the issuing location ‘*Scaninghafn*’ in the original document as the non-existing place-name ‘*Leangasi*’.

² National Archives of Estonia, Tartu. Published in *Liv-, Est- und Kurländisches Urkundenbuch* vol. I no. 239; *Diplomatarium Danicum* 2. ser. vol. I no. 80.



The mysterious 'King Erik of Denmark anno 1252' on a closer look turns out to be the better-known regent, King Christopher I, who ruled Denmark from 1252 to 1259.³ Since his name had been abbreviated in the original diploma to the initial 'C', a sixteenth-century scribe apparently misread it for an 'E' and from this guessed that it was one of the numerous King Eriks of medieval Denmark. Copperplate by unknown artist, 16-18th century. © Royal Library, Copenhagen.

In regard to the misreading of the place-name, one could partly excuse the German clerk in the sense that 'Leangasi' is not as far-fetched a mistake for a 'Scaninghafn' written in medieval Gothic letters as it would appear to be in present-day font types. In addition, our Teutonic clerk can also partly be excused by the fact that in the sixteenth century, when he was making the transcript, he would have had almost as little idea about the location of 'Scaninghafn' as we today would have of the whereabouts of 'Leangasi'. The name in the original diploma actually refers to *Skåningehavn* (literally meaning "harbour of the Scanians"), a coastal location on the south-east corner of Sjælland, the largest of the Danish isles. The name is only referred to in four extant instances from the period 1231-1376, after which the small rural landing place appears to have been closed, probably due to sanding; henceforth, the parish changed name from *Skåningehavn* to *Kalvehave*, named from an inland village situated nearby.⁴ This is indeed one of the few known cases of a rural Danish parish changing name during the Middle Ages. Still, the place was never called 'Leangasi' - perhaps apart from in the eyes of one tired German scribe.

³ Christopher was not officially crowned until 25 December 1252, but *de facto* took up regency soon after his brother, King Abel, was killed in battle on 29 June 1252.

⁴ The change of parish name is even explicitly stated in a document from around 1376: »*Skaningæhafn quod modo dicitur Kaluehawæ*« ('*Skåningehavn*, which now is called *Kalvehave*'). *Roskildebispens Jordebog* fol. 140r.



The true alter ego of 'Leangasi', Skåningehavn, was a medieval harbour or landing place situated on the south-easternmost tip of the Danish island Sjælland. Its exact location is unknown, but most likely it would have been on the inner side of the small coastal point Orehoved, sticking its head out into the narrow strait Ulvsund between Sjælland and Møn. From here, ferrying traffic is known to have connected Sjælland with Møn, but as suggested by the name Skåningehavn ('harbour of the Scanians') it may also have been used for maritime traffic to and from Scania. Until around the 1370s, the harbour settlement also gave name to the local parish, with the church (dated to 1225-1250) situated a few hundred metres inland. The harbour disappears from the sources after 1376 and was probably closed due to sanding, after which the parish took its new name from the nearby inland village Kalvehave. Map by author.