



A New Interpretation of the Depictions on the Sparlösa Rune Stone in Sweden

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The article deals with a much debated and controversial Swedish rune stone, the Sparlösa Stone, which is generally dated to the 9th century depending on the presumed age of the runic letters. It is regarded by most researchers as a pre-Christian stone but some people, however, see Christian influences. The author instead suggests it is originally a Christian picture stone from as latest the 7th century and that the runes are added later. It is suggested the depictions on the stone were intended to be a memorial of Theoderic the Great and that the initiator was an Arian Christian. The depicted building on the stone might be connected with Ravenna, and this hypothesis is supported also by other symbols on the stone. There is no connection between the depictions and the runic text. This stone indicates Christianity might have settled in Scandinavia far earlier than normally presumed.

KEY WORDS

RUNES, PICTURESTONE, GOTHs, THEODERIC, RAVENNA, ARIANISM, SHIP OF THE CHURCH, MARY, LION

Cet article traite d'une pierre runique suédoise qui a fait l'objet de nombreux débats et controverses, la pierre de Sparlösa; on la date généralement du ix^e siècle d'après l'âge présumé des caractères runiques. La plupart des analystes la considèrent comme une pierre préchrétienne mais certains y voient cependant l'influence du christianisme. L'auteur suggère au contraire qu'il s'agit à l'origine d'une image chrétienne du vii^e siècle tardif et que les runes auraient été ajoutées postérieurement. On suggère que les images gravées sur la pierre devaient rappeler la mémoire de Théodoric le Grand et que l'initiateur était un chrétien Arien. Le bâtiment représenté sur la pierre peut être rapproché d'un certain bâtiment de Ravenne, et cette hypothèse est renforcée par d'autres symboles présents sur la pierre. Il n'y a aucune connexion entre les représentations graphiques et le texte runique. Cette pierre montre que la chrétienté pourrait s'être établie en Scandinavie beaucoup plus tôt que ce que l'on pense habituellement.

MOTS CLÉ

RUNES, PIERRE GRAVÉE, GOTHs, THEODORIC, RAVENNE, ARIANISME, NEF DE L'ÉGLISE, VIERGE MARIE, LION

Data de recepció: 29-04-2009. Data d'acceptació: 21-09-2009



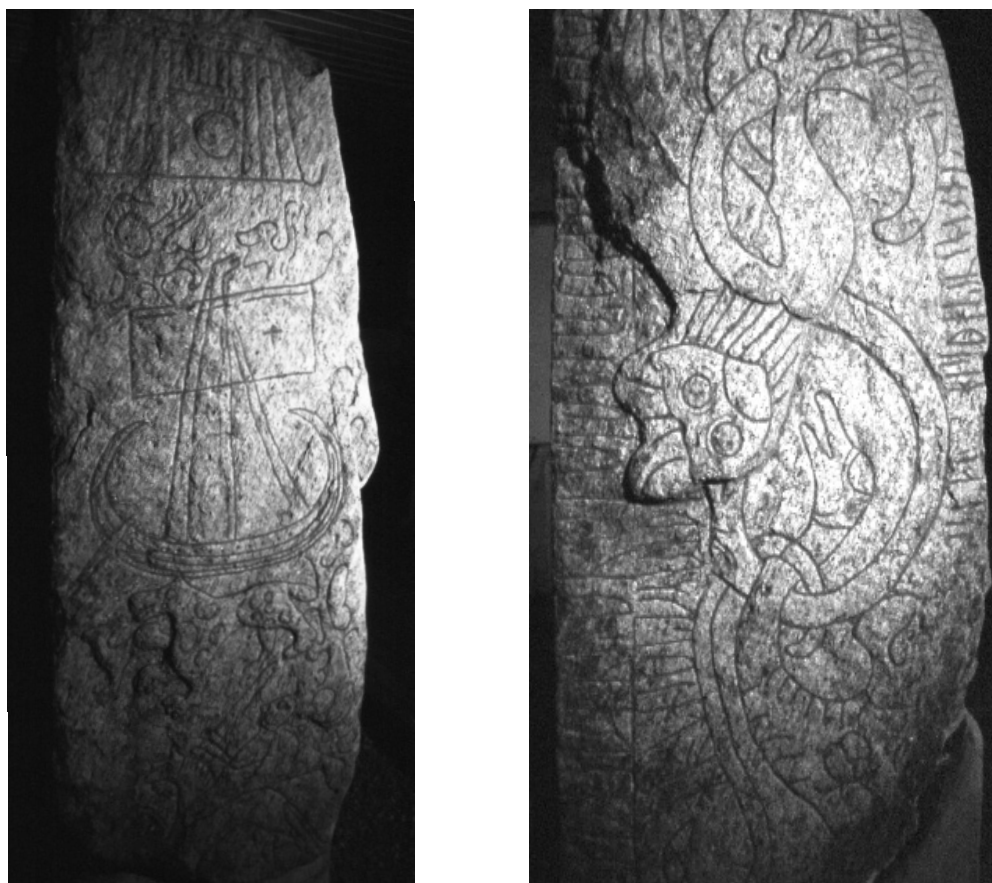


Fig. 1. The two dominant depiction sides of the Sparlösa Stone showing the relief cutting (photo, Carl Anders Borg).

The Sparlösa Stone is a long-discussed stone featuring depictions which bear no relation to the accompanying text (Fig. 1 & 2). It is usually dated to the 9th Century CE because of the runic characters. I have, however, long held the impression that the depictions refer to a more archaic time with connections to the Mediterranean world and to the Arian Goths. The text, however, suggests instead the pre-Christian Nordic religion, and seems to be a mixture of myths and possibly real persons. Accordingly, in my earlier attempt to interpret it I suggested that it may have been carved during the 7th Century CE at the latest and that the runes were added later (Nordgren, 2007). The stone is a four-sided monolith reminiscent of the form of the Visigothic stone sculptures in Spain. Also recently, archaeologist Bengt Nordqvist made an attempt to interpret the motif and he arrived at a conclusion similar to my own. He places it in the Migration Period, i.e., the 5th and 6th Centuries CE, possibly as late as the 7th Century CE (Nordqvist, 2007).

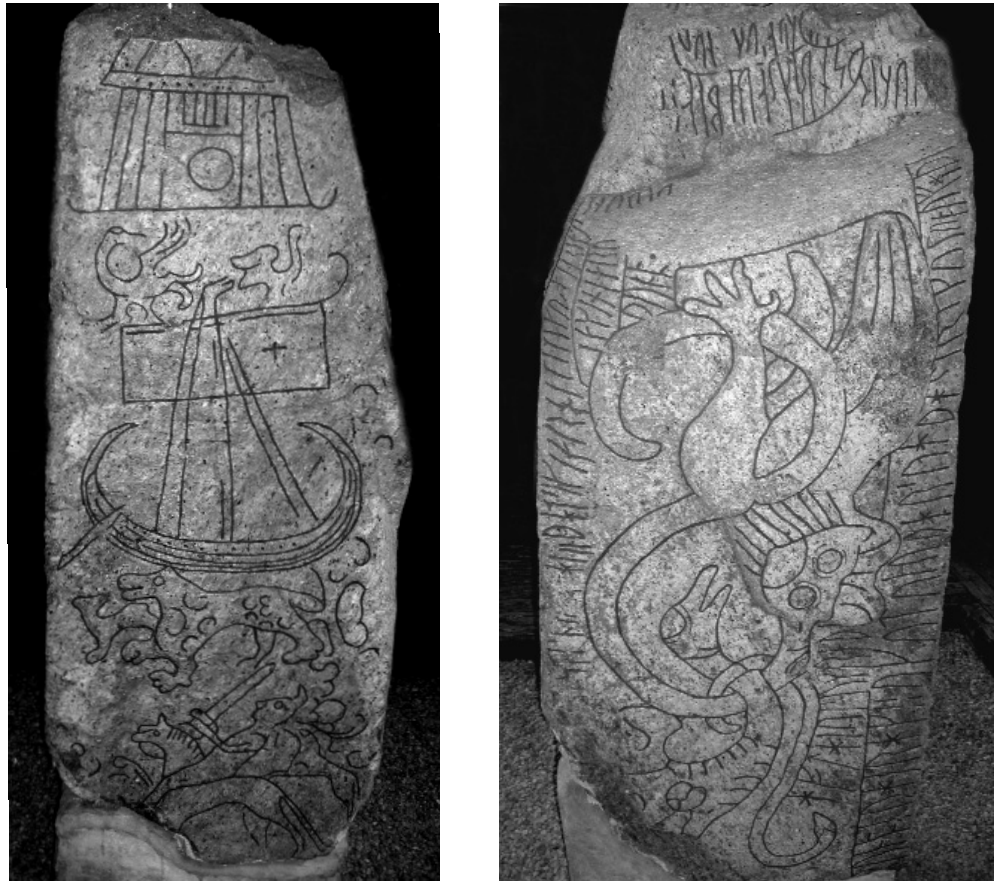


Fig. 2. The dominant depiction sides in daylight with the carvings filled in with colour (photo, author).

This new attempt to solve the riddle makes use of both earlier suggestions by, primarily, Otto von Friesen (Friesen, 1940), Hugo Jungner (Jungner, 1947), Åke Hyenstrand (Hyenstrand, 1996, 2005 and 2007) and Bengt Nordqvist. My conclusions remain largely unchanged with several small, but important, amendments.

I initially regarded the depicted building as a drastically simplified cathedral. In that respect, however, I have now changed my opinion. Below the building is a ship in the shape of a crescent moon and with a squaresail emblazoned with a cross. Two birds are sitting on the yardarm. Below the ship is a rider together with some animals, and one of them appears to be a hunting leopard. The horseman wears close-fitting trousers and a Phrygian cap. He is holding a sword pointed upward. He does not use stirrups: Hence, the drawing is very old. On another side of the stone a goose and an owl, with a head similar to a lion's head, are fighting with a snake. The owl evidently refers to Minerva, the wise



and alert owl-goddess. The figure is difficult to interpret but analysis still gives it a distinct meaning. On the third side there is a face and a line of crosses; and even the fourth remaining side bears several figures. I will return to these.

This suggested to me early on that the narrator, or possibly the stone carver, must have visited the Ostrogothic realm in Italy or else heard a very careful and accurate description by someone who had been there and seen it with his own eyes.

The Ship

Below the house there is a ship (Fig. 3). I see that ship as the heavenly ship steered by Mary, with Christ in her care. This is evidenced by the Greek cross on the sail standing for Christ; the sail is the Holy Ghost; the mast with yardarm is, in this instance, the Tree of Life. In Byzantium, a known symbol for Mary was the Tree of Life flanked by the two imperial Sassanid peacocks. Those peacocks are sitting on the yardarm. Some interpreters see them as ravens or even doves, but they are very much like Visigothic stone carvings of precisely the imperial peacocks (Fig. 4). Some observers conclude they are swans. It is not unlikely that the carver, having only a rude description of a peacock with long neck and large tail, used what knowledge of birds he had. Still, I could never believe that a swan should be pictured on a yardarm; hence it is in any case symbolically a peacock. We note also that the ship has the shape of a crescent moon. The icon of the Madonna on the crescent moon first appeared precisely in the former Visigothic areas of Southern France and

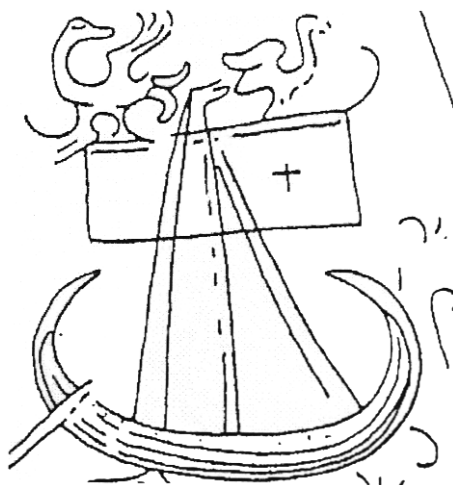


Fig. 3. The Ship.

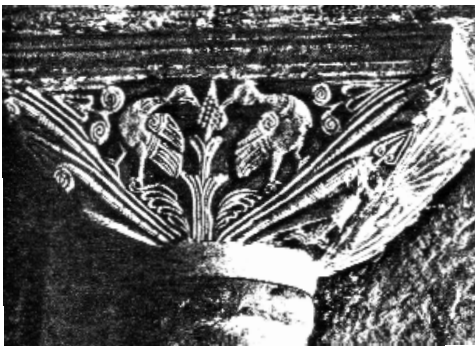


Fig. 4. Visigothic peacocks and trees of life in Leon, San Pedro de la Nave, Zamora, Quintanilla de la Viñas, Burgos and Oviedo (photo Leon, author; Burgos and Zamora, P. de Palol and G. Ripoll; Oviedo, A. Bonet Correa).





Fig. 5. Medieval baptismal font in Väring church, Sweden, with the rose of St. Mary in the centre of the cross (photo, author).

the Iberian Peninsula. The old moon goddess of the Goths was Ingun/Freja and the image of Mary herself comes from the moon goddess Isis in the Late Antique cult of Serapion. These symbolisms and depictions are closely interrelated. In the church of Väring in Västergötland there is an early medieval baptismal font decorated with a ship of great similarity with a close to similar placement of the cross. The hull reminds of the moon crescent of the oldest Gotlandic picturestones. In the center of the cross it is engraved a rose, that looks like the early rose of Virgin Mary and which evidently substitutes the peacocks at the Sparlösa ship. The name Väring is connected with the Varangians. The old medieval stone church is long since destructed and the ancient font may as well have been used already in the original wooden church (Fig. 5).

It has been suggested that the ship could have been copied after a Dorestad coin from the 9th Century CE, and that the cross on the sail should symbolize the empire of Charlemagne (Fig. 6). The building would in that case be a Viking Age hall (Westerdahl, 1996: 16-21).

Concerning the ship, however, all the literature agrees in connecting the Virgin Mary with the ship symbol. She and Christ travel in the ship of the church. In Hugo Rahner's



Fig. 6. A Dorestad coin that could possibly be a Mary icon.

Symbole der Kirche, among other sources, there are numerous examples of this. A ship of similar shape is found on a picture stone from Endre, SHM no. 1687, with a stag below and with a stylized snake. It is dated to 6th-7th Century CE. A depiction of a boat with a distinctly Mediterranean, lunar crescent shape is on a carved stone at SHM 6664 Hemse and 7570 Väskinde Björkome, Gotland, Sweden, and dated to the Migration Period. SHM 484:77 shows a ship with a mast and a small square sail above two rudimentary bird depictions that possible could represent peahens.

The suggested link to the Dorestad coin ship still could have a certain bearing, since on one of the coins; one can see a lone peacock sitting atop the mast. This is a very naturalistic and skilled depiction. Regarding Mary's function as the patroness of sailors —Stella Maris/Sirius— it is possible that some early coins were intended to function as icons with a protective power not unlike that of the bracteates. Thus, a common origin for the symbolisms is possible, but with regard to the shape of the birds, the Sparlösa picture seems definitely older.

Hence we have in Västergötland a Christian picture stone with distinctive traits of the Eastern Church and with a possible connection to the Goths.

Neither the older, nor the younger text of the stone seems to have any connection to the motif. This, of course, raises the question whether the picture carvings are contemporary with the oldest text or if the text was added later.

Åke Hyenstrand and Eva Hyenstrand-Bergström have seen (cf. Bergström Hyenstrand, 2005: 137 f.) the Sparlösa Stone as evidence of Christian contacts with the European Continent around the year 800 CE. They hypothesize that the stone marks a divide between pre-Catholic Christianity (Arianism) and Catholicism. Both epochs, they contend, are represented on the Continent by two leader figures: Theoderic, ruler of the Ostrogoths (6th Cent. CE) and Charlemagne (8th-9th Cents. CE). Both are connected with knight symbol-

isms. The rider/knight with helmet and sword is represented on the Sparlösa Stone. Is this stone an important key to the process leading to the Swedish realm? Åke Hyenstrand asks. (Hyenstrand, 2007).

At the aforementioned Symposium entitled “Cult, Gold and Power”, Bengt Nordqvist presented yet another interpretation of the Sparlösa Stone, in which he places the motif as early as the Migration Period, and in any case not later than the 7th Cent. CE. He concludes his article as follows:

“The Christian influence of the Sparlösa Stone is partly very evident owing to the carved cross symbols in the crossband frieze and on the ship. There are, however, other symbols that are more difficult to interpret. Examples of these are Lindquist’s opinion about the Gotland picture stones from the 6th and 7th Cents. CE. On these is often found a domesticated duck-like bird. This he interprets as the ‘mild dove of Christianity in Gotland tradition during the Vendel period’ (Stenberger, 1979: 623) (Vendel period = late Merovingian period; author). The birds sitting on the sail of the ship could be interpreted in the same symbolic language. To this we can add the interpretation of the hunting scene with the stag and the connection to Theoderic of Verona (author: Didrik av Bern, Dietrich von Bern) as defender of Christianity. How, then, should we regard this? Important in this context is the situation extant during the 5th, 6th, and 7th Centuries CE. The Roman Empire fell asunder and the Roman culture became mixed with Greek, Gothic, Germanic, Byzantine and Slavic traditions (cf. Hyenstrand, 1996). Exactly as Hyenstrand expresses it, this situation is mirrored in the Nordic source materials from that same time. Behind the source material is also the spread of myths and legends, and as he also emphasizes, a Christian component which probably leaned toward Arianism at the time. With utmost certainty there have been individuals here in Scandinavia who during the 5th and 6th Centuries was Arians.” (Cf. Nordgren 2001: 146) (Bengt Nordqvist in *Kult, Guld och Makt* 2007).

Further, Charlotte Fabech and Ulf Näsman argued in 2008 that there were traces of Christianity this far north as early as the 4th Century CE, and that with certainty there were Christians living here during the 6th Century with contacts to Ravenna, Theoderic’s capital city <<http://www.vr.se/huvudmeny/forskningvistodjer/humanioraochsamhallsvetenskap/manadensprojekt.4.aad30e310abcb9735780002571.html>>.

The Hunt

Here, both Hyenstrand and Nordqvist have developed opinions similar to my own. Hyenstrand has connected this scene to Theoderic the Great and a stag hunt (Fig. 7). Nordqvist has, like me, seen a connection to Byzantium and the Goths. Nordqvist has also interpreted the cat-like animal as being a leopard. Recently, Nordqvist succeeded in finding two nearly identical Byzantine imperial hunting scenes in Constantinople/Istanbul in which the emperor wears a Phrygian cap and hunts a stag. Also a leopard is included <www.finnestorp.se>.



Fig. 7. The Hunt.

On a mosaic in Ravenna there is an image of the three wise men, the Magi, the Holy Kings (Fig. 8), dressed in short capes, close fitting trousers and Phrygian caps in exactly the style that is claimed to have been the fashion among Gothic nobility in the time of Theoderic the Great. The hunting leopard was definitely not used in Sweden. The lion and snake images are well-known Christian symbols for the fight between Christ and the devil.

Could there possibly have been a symbolic transformation from “Holy Three Kings” in the mosaic to Theoderic as a holy king in an originally imperial hunting scene? The connection to Southeastern Europe and the Mediterranean, accordingly, seems to be quite clear. It should be noted that the smaller animal, often believed to be a dog, shows some



Fig. 8. “Holy Three Kings”, San Apollinare il Nuovo (Ravenna).



indication of a hump on its back and a shape of the head that suggests a dromedary, or camel: Yet another animal with a direct connection to the ancient world.

Hyenstrand, instead, sees the animal as a lion —my leopard— with a cub (Hyenstrand, 1996: 157). There are, accordingly, a number of options to choose from and the safest option is to draw no absolute or final conclusions.

The Building

A more concrete and decisive grounds for my interpretation may indeed be the building depicted on the Sparlösa Stone (Fig. 9). Let us have a closer look.

The Stone was repaired several times at the Riksantikvarieämbetet (Royal Office for Antiquities) in Stockholm, and was then temporarily moved from its resting place. At an old picture I saw something that looked like an ambiguous roof decoration, inclusive a



Fig. 9. The building on the Sparlösa Stone. Note the damage above to the left. In an old and not printable picture it looked like a roof decoration inclusive a hole. This was, however, an illusion but it still clearly indicated the likeness with the mausoleum (photo, author).

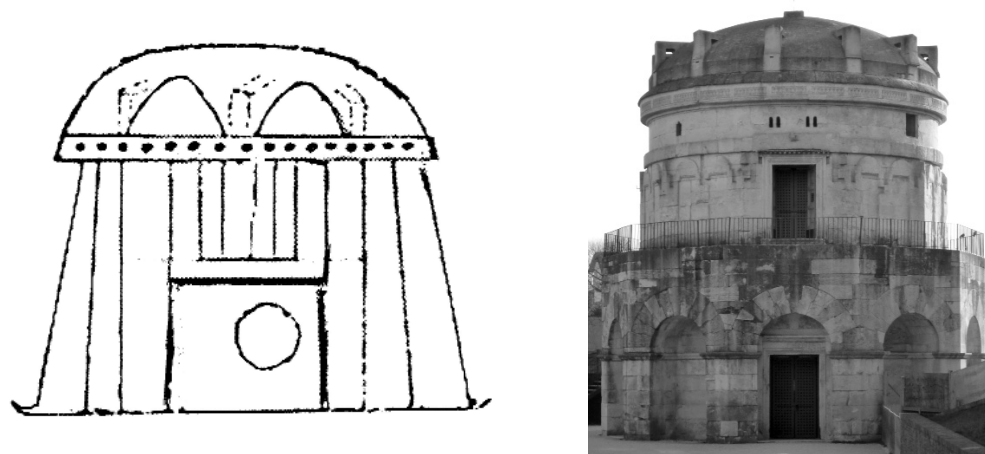


Fig. 10. The Sparlösa Building and the Mausoleum of Theoderic the Great (photo, Halstein Sjølie).

hole, at the upper left damaged part. It was clearly an optical illusion. Nevertheless, it was a very intriguing picture because it gave me several useful associations, and it points toward a final solution of the identity of the building. That is why I am referring to this old and not printable picture. Besides the place of the suggested decoration we see one of the details, often interpreted as a vault. I do not believe that interpretation to be correct. What, then, can it be? Is there a model for this building somewhere?

I have previously touched on theories about the realm of Theoderic the Great and Byzantium. Hyenstrand and Nordqvist have also researched in this direction. I am, however, now thoroughly convinced that my earlier conclusions were correct, and I think I can fix the geographical location of the building to Italy and, more specifically, to Ravenna. Indeed, I suggest that the building is in reality an image of Theoderic's mausoleum in Ravenna. It is reproduced with such minute detail that it indicates that the person who informed the carver must have seen the monument *in situ*. Also, the other pictures tell us that the informant was quite familiar with the cultures and religious symbolisms of the antique world.

Above is a drawn enlargement of the "the building" in exact proportions. Beside it is a picture of Theoderic's mausoleum (Fig. 10 & 11). From these illustrations, I will put forward an argument for the credibility of my hypothesis.

The war booty sacrifice moor Finnestorp in Västergötland, Sweden, is an extremely interesting site in connection with Southeastern Europe and the Goths. Originally discovered in 1904 but later forgotten. Later another sporadic excavation revealed more finds and from 2000 there are regular excavations two weeks yearly yielding a great number of real high status finds like personal equipment, weapons and horse harnesses in bronze, goldplated silver and gold and bones from primarily horses. It is in the same category as



Fig. 11. Enlargement of the roof frieze of the mausoleum. This one is as well suggested on the Sparlösa house (photo, Troels Brandt).

e.g. Illerup and Nydam but contains till now only high status objects. The distribution of these finds spans the period ca. 350-550 CE and the style suggests a close connection with the Gothic-Hunnic area and with the Ostrogothic realm in Italy. Finnestorp is situated close to Sparlösa and lies in the same community. During the excavation in July and August 2009 we found some harness details having almost identical patterns with the frieze of Theoderic's mausoleum indicating contemporary contacts with Ravenna (Fig. 12).

If one closely observes the roof decorations on the mausoleum and compare them with the drawn suggestion of the Runestone's reconstruction, one notices that the roof surface between two of these could be drawn in a carving of this character as being one of "vaults", especially if one takes account of the effect of shadows. The former mentioned illusionary "decoration" on the entrance also coincidentally reproduced the "hole" that is extant in every single decoration. The shape of the roof is also similar if one observes the undamaged portions of the carving. Please note as well, fig. 10, that the frieze decorations on the rim of the roof of the Sparlösa house are matched with that of Theoderic's mau-

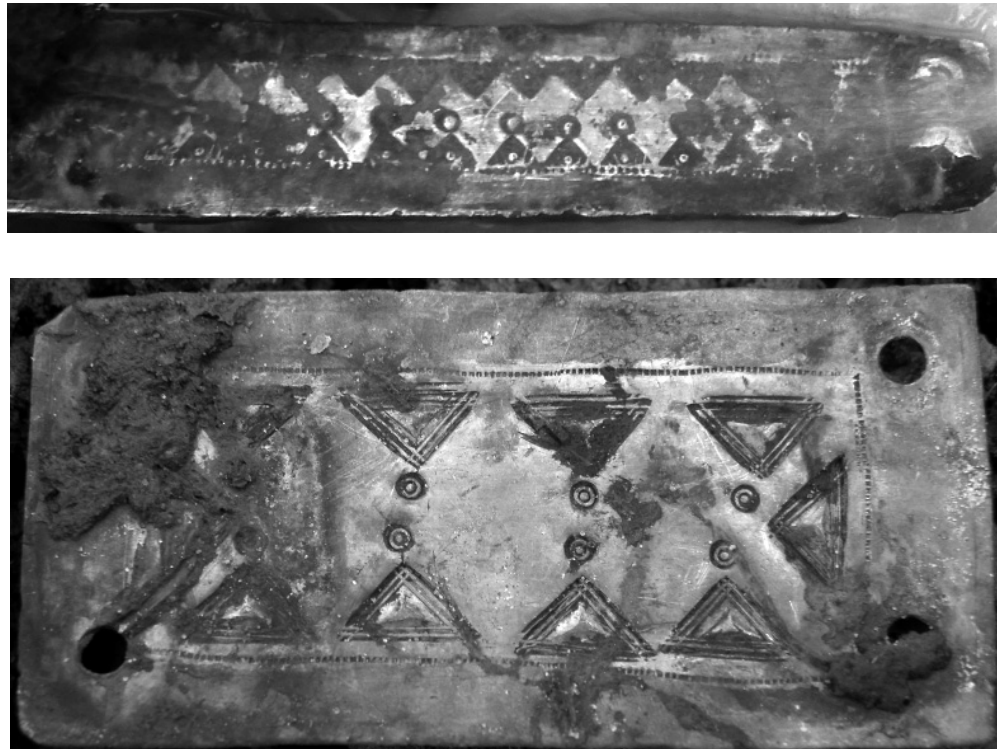


Fig. 12. Harness decorations belonging to a horse from the Migration Period. These objects we excavated at the Finnestorp weapon sacrifice moor in Västergötland, Sweden 2009. The site lies close to Sparlösa. The patterns match almost exactly the frieze on the mausoleum of Theoderic. The objects are photographed directly after excavation and accordingly still not prepared and conserved. The excavation leader, Dr. Bengt Nordqvist, RAA, has permitted me to publish these pictures that are part of the coming documentation for 2009 (photo, Caj Carlstein).

soleum. As shown in fig. 12 some of our finds during this year's excavation of Finnestorp weapon sacrifice moor exhibit the same pattern and the site as well happens to lie close to the Sparlösa Stone.

Why, then, is the building interpreted as being built of planks or logs when it depicted a stone monument? A further confusing factor is that the portion of the wall, i.e., the vaults beneath the mausoleum, has been excluded. This was a serious problem for me until I happened to see a close-up picture of the Ravenna monument.

To begin with, the wall and vaults should perhaps be considered as only the foundation of the real mausoleum, which is placed on the terrace. If the sculptor's intent was to depict only the mausoleum, it would not have been necessary to include the entire foundation.

Theoderic himself rested for only 15 years in the mausoleum. After Justinian's victory over the Ostrogoths and their commander Totila at Busta Gallorum, Umbria, Northern





Fig. 13. Arian bishop's tomb with peacocks and Trees of Life (photo, Halstein Sjølie).

Italy in 554 CE, a Benedictine monastery and church was installed in the monument. The monastery occupied all of the lower level, which made it also less important to reproduce that part if the viewer wanted to depict the mausoleum alone.

An interesting detail in this connection is that, according to Agnello's *Pontificalis*, the monastery and the church were dedicated to the Virgin Mary and the name of the church was Santa Maria (Agnellus, 1924: 112-113).

Agnellus, an author from the first half of the 9th Century CE, wrote a biography of the archbishop Johannis Ageloptes in which we find the following sequence: (*Theodericus*)...*sepultusque est in mausoleum quod ipse aedificare jussit extra Portas Artemetoris, quod usque hodie vocamus ad Farum, ubi est monasterium Sanctae Mariae, quod dicitur ad memoriam regis Theoderici*. In translation: "Theoderic ... is buried in the mausoleum, which he himself caused to be built just outside the gate of Artemetoris, which we now call 'at the lighthouse', where the monastery of Holy Mary is situated, which is so called in memory of King Theoderic" (Bovini, 1977: 6 f).

This possibly could suggest that Mary, on the ship of the Church, with the symbols of resurrection and of eternal life, may symbolize his (Theoderic's) removal from the grave both *in corpore* and spiritually, but as is indicated by the *triskel* on the other side of the stone (see below), his soul lives on and continues to fight evil. This strengthens the interpretation of the ship as depicting Mary and the church ship. It might be added that the above-mentioned peacocks in connections with the Tree of Life are found in Ravenna at a number of bishops' tombs and in the Arian baptisteries (Fig. 13).

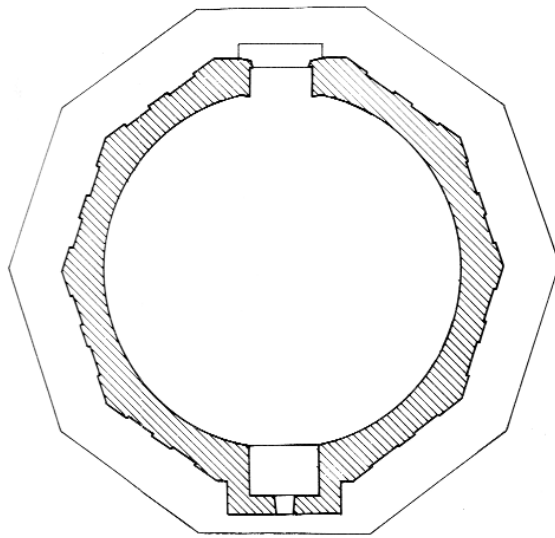


Fig. 14. Theoderic's mausoleum (plane drawing by Deichmann).

When one looks closely at the picture of the mausoleum, it is clear that the wall is covered by standing decorative bas-relief columns. Seen from the front side there are two such columns to the left and two to the right. In between is a clean front framing the door. The monument was restored in the 19th Century CE, but these decorations are of a much older origin, as was indicated by ancient pictures. Hence, one or another type of bas-relief was probably original. If one wanted to depict these columns in a simple stone carving, it is fairly natural that the result would appear as mere “planks”. On the Sparlösa building, there are two “planks” on each side framing a distinct door facing, which is accurately and correctly placed in comparison with the actual mausoleum, even if the proportions differ slightly.

Friedrich Wilhelm Deichmann conveniently included in his book a detailed plane drawing of the view from above the monument (Fig. 14). It shows convincingly that the original character of the upper part of the monument had a structure resembling the shape of cladding or planking. The entrance is depicted here at compass north, but in reality it faces westward.

Directly over the gate of the Sparlösa house is a depiction of a sort of window—a frame with two standing lines on each side of a broken line (Fig. 15). If one compares this view to the mausoleum, one can see below the ceiling two narrow windows on each side of a lower-placed decoration. The similarity is striking, and the position is absolutely accurate. Those windows admit sunlight onto the sarcophagus of Theoderic the Great.

As mentioned above, the gate is of the wrong dimensions, but is situated in the right position. Whether the circle on the Sparlösa Stone represents a lock, a solar symbol or an oath ring, which have all been suggested, is inconclusive because we cannot know with certainty how the door originally appeared. It might, however, be concluded that the gate

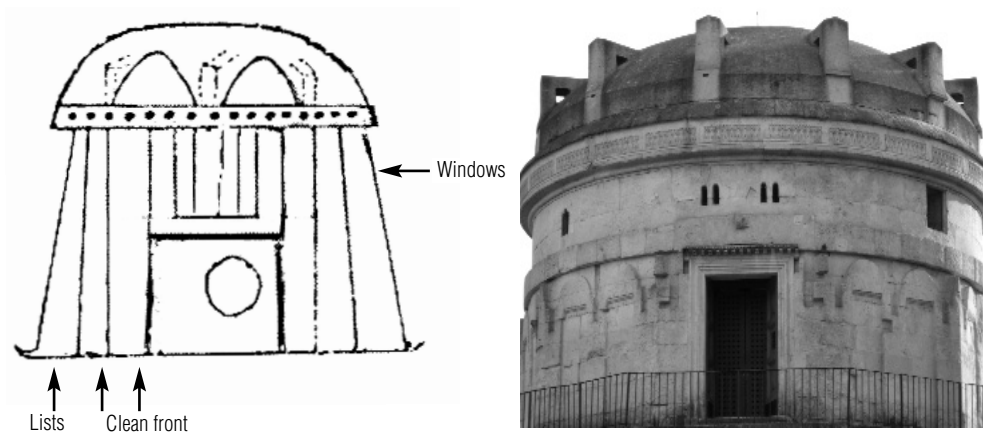


Fig. 15. Windows and decorative columns (photo, Halstein Sjølie).



Fig. 16. The roof decorations may appear large from certain perspectives. This face is significant in interpreting the Sparlösa Stone, because some observers have understood it to be a vault (photo, Troels Brandt).

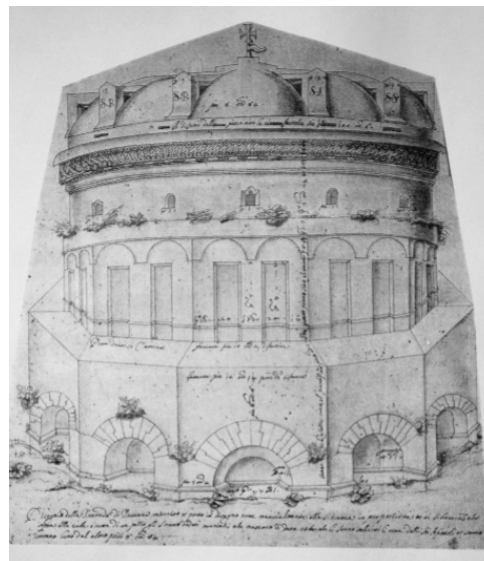


Fig. 17. This 16th Century picture from a collection in Vienna shows the monument before the earlier restoration. Note the strong impression of vaults on the roof, similar to the Sparlösa building. Also, the pattern of “planks”, i.e., bas-relief columns, is in place. It is evident that the turret is not quite circular but is, in fact, decagonal. This view, however, does not show the entrance.

faces west—not in the direction of sunrise, but rather toward sunset. Whether that symbolism can be correctly interpreted is, I believe, in the realm of bold speculation. As an interesting general remark, however, Bovini suggested in 1977 that the monument was constructed after the model of a Gothic cottage. The carving, if that is correct, would therefore have a doubly Gothic significance. Some researchers have indeed seen a hunnic hut—a jurta—and this fits well with Bovini’s opinion about the model of the mausoleum. A jurta, however, would not be combined with the ship of the Church.

The Triskel

The triskel construction on the opposite side of the stone is difficult to interpret and many attempts have been made to solve the riddle (Fig. 18). I presume in this case that the front side deals with Theoderic. This indeed makes it easier to interpret this combination of animals in a meaningful way.

One sees here a goose and an owl—whose head also bears a likeness to a lion’s head—fighting with a snake. Since ancient times, the goose has been regarded in Egyptian and Indian tradition as a symbol of wisdom and of watchfulness. This meaning was subsequently transferred to Rome, where the goose was also used as a watch bird. The owl held a similar position in Greek mythology, where Minerva represented wisdom.



Fig. 18. The Triskel.

The lion is a well-known symbol for Christ and for strength. In this context it also represents, I believe, Theoderic himself, because for the Goths, the lion was a very special symbol. The realm of Asturias, ruled by the Visigoths up until the Reconquista, was called León—and so was its capital. Concerning Theoderic, I believe it is enough to observe the single decoration on his sarcophagus (Fig. 19): A lion's head! The nearby snake, in a Christian context, is a symbol for the devil.

The symbolic meaning of the triskel should be that Theoderic, as a representative of Christ, and with the assistance of all good and wise powers, fights evil. Such a symbol is not a domestic Germanic construction, but it does point toward an ancestry from a literate Mediterranean world, as does the symbolism at the front side.

Nordqvist compares the triskel construction with the stone at Smiss on the island of Gotland, and with a find in Uppåkra outside Lund in Scania (Southern Sweden). He tends toward concluding that they were from the Migration Period.

The remains of Theoderic the Great were, after his violent removal from the grave chamber, stored in the monastery Sancta Maria Rotonda. It is in the bottom floor of the monument itself. In 1564 it was decided to move the sarcophagus and plaster it

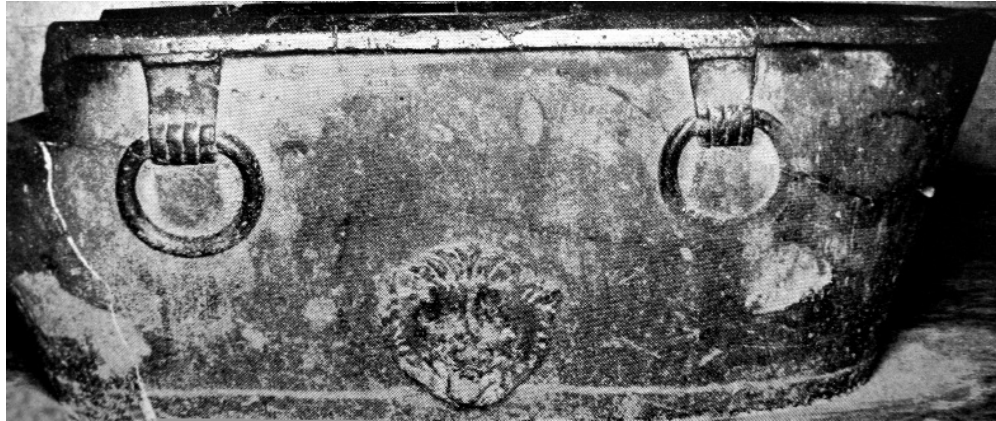


Fig. 19. Theoderic's Sarcophagus is decorated only with a Lion'shead (Deichmann, Abb. 209).

into a church. Later, the sarcophagus was placed in a museum and, finally, it was returned to the mausoleum in 1913 (Bovini, 1977: 32 f). This means that Theoderic was called to Mary and was made immortal by her. The ship depiction on the Sparlösa Stone, accordingly, appears to give a very accurate picture of reality as perceived by its sculptor.



The Worshiper or the Priest

On another side of the stone one sees, near the bottom, a male figure with upreached arm/hands (Fig. 20). He is possibly holding an object. The crosses on the crossband are Greek crosses with similarly long crossarms.

Bengt Nordqvist comments on this figure:

“On the Älleberg neck collar, for example, the worshipers appear as a regularly repeating picture motif (Holmqvist, 1972: fig. 12, and 1981; Haseloff, 1981: 136 a). They hold their hands upward with the arms at a right angle. The figures hold their palms forward with the thumb directed toward the face. The forehead is characterized by hair parted in the middle, and the figures lack beards. These worshipers with their typical traits show a very great similarity to the male figure on the Sparlösa Stone, as does a figure on a gold bracteate from Southern Sweden (Holmqvist, 1972: 242). In the latter example only the upper torso is shown. Holmqvist presents a number of other international examples that are consistently dated to the Migration Period. He raises the question whether these adorants/worshipers might be a Nordic variant of Daniel in the lion's den, and if these figures should perhaps be regarded as a Nordic variant





Fig. 20. Male figure with crossband.

of Christian art (Holmqvist, 1972: 242). The face with parted hair we also recognize from the luxury buckle of Finnestorp. The worshiper is also found as a motif on textile bands from the grave of high social status in Högom (Arrhenius, 1994: 202). Altogether, the human image from Sparlösa has counterparts in a multitude of objects from the 5th and 6th Centuries CE" (Nordqvist, 2007).

With respect to the horizontal bands as well, he finds similarities to the Migration Period material, but at the same time this type of cross also appears well into the Merovingian (Vendel) period. He states that the weakness in earlier comparisons is that they excluded the Migration Period. In Finnestorp too, this motif is found on a press plate from a sword scabbard. At the top of this side of the stone there are also a number of semi-circles, a common decoration from the Roman Iron Age and up to the 5th and 6th Centuries CE (Nordqvist, 2007).

As I am not an archaeologist, I must assume that Nordqvist knows his profession. Hence, I can conclude that all these decorative elements very well might be, but not necessarily must be, from the Migration Period.

Earlier interpreters failed to compare these objects with the Migration Period. On this basis, they dated the carvings to the 9th or possibly very late 8th Century CE. Because of this, the dating must be regarded as uncertain. However, I shall not dispute those elements on an archaeological basis alone. I have, however, an impression that the worshiper, whom I view as bearded, may picture a priest holding up the cross-beam on which the stone and motive symbolically rest —i.e., on a Christian foundation. A similar motif may have existed on the opposite side of the stone, but there are no means to confirm that fact due to damage to the stone.

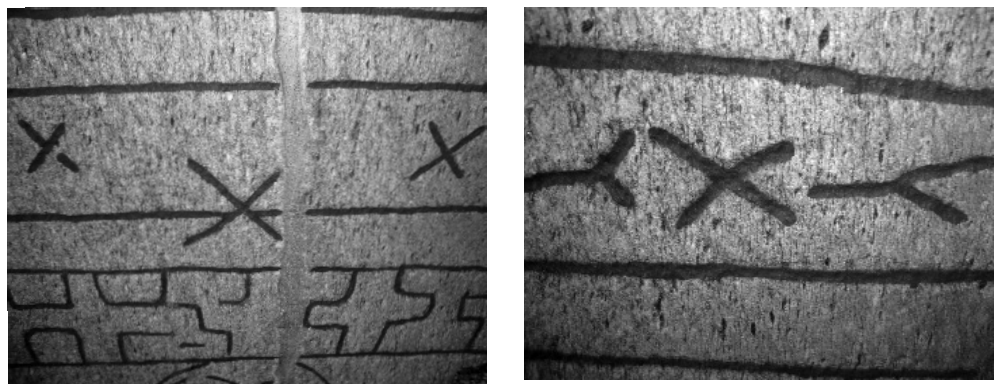


Fig. 21. Possible Christograms in Greek letters (photo, author).

Byzantine icons – Christogram?

A curious detail on the stone is a possible inscription in Greece suggesting in the left picture IX (iota-chi) meaning Iesous Christos, the field sign of Constantine the great (Fig. 21). To the right we have two ypsilon surrounding a chi. Chi is Christos and ypsilon can be read as Yios, the son. The combination with three letters is said to mean the holy trinity and is regarded as an icon. The ypsilon can as well be interpreted as a fork cross, also called a robber cross since the robbers crucified with Jesus sometimes are shown on such crosses. In any case it is interesting that Jesus literally is mentioned as Christos, the son, suggesting an Eastern, Arian origin. The carver, whoever he was, evidently did not prefer the ordered text but made his own cryptical signs to counterwork the pre-Christian content of the text. The explanations of the Greek symbols above are taken from Roland Johansson's stencilled work *“Äldsta dopfunten för Kållands Råda kyrka”*.

Medusa's Head or Another Icon?

On the side of the stone opposite to the “priest” is part of a figure that possibly could be a Medusa Head (Fig. 22), as has been proposed by Otto von Friesen. Other observers proposed an owl. There is also a figure that Bertil Almgren interpreted as a spiral ornament.

Bengt Nordqvist writes:

“If one observes the head and the underlying spiral as belonging to a figure, the Medusa interpretation might again become meaningful. There are several face masks on which ‘bands





Fig. 22. Medusa Head?

radiate from the mouth'. These Medusa Heads are found, *inter alia*, on fibulae and a belt buckle (Haseloff, 1981: fig. 3 a and 53: 1; Arrhenius 1983: fig. 11 f.). The recurring theme is a head; and out of the mouth two lines extrude. These figures originate in Roman art. The aforementioned examples, however, of fibulae with Medusa faces, date from the 5th and 6th Centuries" CE (Nordqvist, 2007).

Nordqvist's interpretation is, of course, not entirely reliable due to the poor condition of the image, and must be regarded rather as a product of guesswork. Nor do I dare venture a conclusive opinion in this matter. Nordqvist, however, sees a connection to the Migration Period which fits well with the contemporary gold bracteates (Fig. 23). These



Fig. 23. Detail of bracteate (Kolstrup, 1991).

are not Medusa Heads, but are Germanized gods, influenced originally by Roman emperor images, with shamanistic properties, and they typically have a “talk bubble” stretching from the mouth. It is interpreted as the shaman exhaling his healing spirit.

There are also certain similarities between the shape of the beard on the bracteates and the beard of the supposed Medusa Head which possibly point toward the Migration Period.

Almgren uses the spiral motif to establish a later dating of the carving. It is suitable to remark that the spiral motif was not unusual in the Migration Period in Gotland, and was common among the Mediterranean Goths.

The Text and its Origin?

In this connection I have no intention to argue about the introduction of various runic alphabets because I am neither a linguist nor a runologist, and hence cannot proceed with expert knowledge one way or another. Instead, I will attempt to set forth a visual impression of the runes, as contrasted with the picture carvings as a part of the total motif composition (Fig. 24).

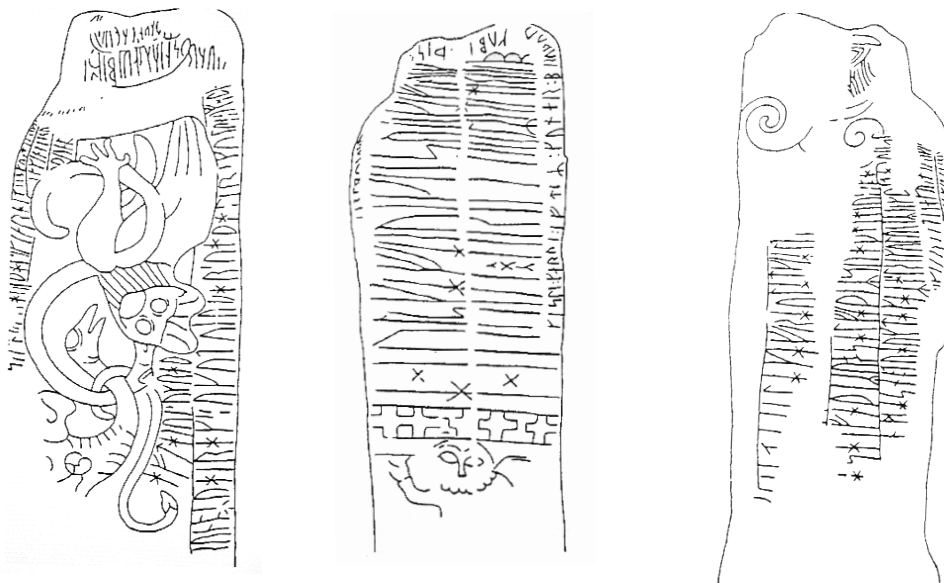


Fig. 24. The text sides of the Sparlösa Stone.

If one observes the text around the triskel, it is quite evident that the text, on both sides of the picture and at the top, has been fitted into the remaining spaces and not according to a pre-planned composition.

The text above the “priest” shows better composition, but it could possibly have been placed at a later date onto a then-unused surface. The outer text was carved even later and is totally unconnected with the earlier text.

On the “icon” side there is a significant difference in size of the runes, and the lines are uneven. Some of them have been destroyed, but perhaps also an earlier drawing, since destroyed, would explain the asymmetry. The stone was originally cut into two halves and plastered into a church wall.

From a purely visual perspective, I have the impression that all the texts were added after the figure carvings were completed, and that, accordingly, there was never a plan or intention to create a stone with both pictures and text. This fits well with Gotland tradition wherein picture stones appear during the Migration Period while runestones are more rarely encountered. It might simply result from the fact that, originally, only a very few people could understand runes, hence there was more need of a *biblia pauperum* that everybody could understand. When, later, the knowledge of runes spread, it was in the simplified, “Younger Futhark” (runic alphabet) with only 16 characters.

Von Friesen, incidentally, argues that the Swedish-Norwegian futhark was most likely introduced originally right in Sparlösa (Friesen 1940: 22)! He suggests that there is no real confirmation of when this alphabet was introduced since earlier comparisons are missing. The Sparlösa Stone should therefore be dated according to typology and not philologically.

Only a few names are mentioned on the Stone: Eivisl/Öjuls, Alrik/Alli, Erik and the honorary attribute Sigmar. It is said that there are only two mentions on runestones of the name Öjuls/Eivisl, namely on the Sparlösa Stone and on the Kälve Stone in Östergötland. Nordén suspects it may indeed have been the same person who merely moved eastward (Nordén, 1961: 257). This could suggest a nexus with the eastern style or influence. On the other hand, this is only one of many contradictory readings. Jungner, however, has an interpretation that is very intelligible, interesting and reasonable. He writes:

“Öjuls/Eivisl gave, the son of Erik, Alrik gave.

The kin/family gave loudly victorious cries in return.

To them saw the kinfather, about them saw the Allfather (Allfather cared for them: Author's remark), so that they always owned their bread.

Death raises lament. Dag, the high priest of Alrik died; also Öjuls died. His name (Öjuls') is now spoken at the sacred grove of the brave...and Sigmar is called the son of Erik” (after Jungner).

To identify any known historical king or chieftain from the inscription on this stone would be a completely hopeless endeavour. It seems, however, that there are components here from Northern Germanic myths and legends. For example, one can detect a certain



likeness with parts of the Vikarr-Saga, wherein Óðinn slyly seduces Geirhild, who unknowingly promises her unborn child to him, if he can arrange a marriage between her and King Alrek of Horðaland. Alrek was intended to take his betrothed, Sigyn, as his bride instead, but found Geirhild more beautiful. Accordingly, there is a definite connection between Alrek and Óðinn. When one considers the probable meaning of the personal name Alrek/Alrik, the name takes on a life of its own. According to Hellquist's Etymological Dictionary (cf. Hellquist "Ale"), it can be traced back to the Gothic *ahls*, meaning cult place, holy grove. The ending *rik* (cf. Gothic *-reiks*; Gaulish *-rix*; Latin *rex*) means "ruler". Thus the meaning should be "the ruler of the holy/cult grove or place, the *vi*". In this case, hence, the god Óðinn (Alrik, Allfather). Therefore, Alrik and Óðinn may very well have been two names for the same entity.

When the son of the (Geirhild and Óðinn/Alrik) union is born, he becomes a great victor. In the end, however, he is called home to his real father in Valhall. In the case of *Vikarr*, the saga tells of his death through hanging: But in this story, he exits falling in honorable battle. *Sigmar*, which means "famous for victories", is a fitting name indeed together with *Sigfather* ("father of victory", or Óðinn). In this hypothetical version, if the Vikarr legend is applicable, then Erik would have been the father of Öjuls, who in reality would have been the son, not only of Erik, but also of Óðinn, the "All-king" and the "All-father" himself. Alternatively Erik and Öjuls were a real father and son. In that case Öjuls was initiated into fealty and loyalty to Óðinn (Alrik), as is often suggested in old stories.

Later, Dag (high priest of Alrik), dies, as does Öjuls —"he gave his life". He then becomes the legendary Sigmar. The family and its kinfolks wins success and glory in battle, and their welfare is looked after by Allfather (Óðinn) while Erik, the family's head, the kin father, assures that they remain prosperous and independent: "they always owned their bread". This resulted mainly from Öjuls' victories and successes in battle. All of this, however, had its price: Öjuls was, after all, consecrated to Alrik, who took return payment for his gifts in his own way. Sigyn, in the Vikarr saga, also found a parallel in the Völsungasagas and in the Nibelungenlied, which latter epic provides a strong Continental connection as well. Usually, an earthly king was himself a "*höggode*" —*pontifex maximus*—, "high priest". The text of the stone, however, indicates that this person, as high priest of Alrik, was more of a divine entity than a human one. Dag, whom I have already mentioned, also figures in a saga, the Helgikviðae, with a spear that was given to him by none other than Óðinn. He also figures as a dualistic half of Balðr (probably called Úllr in earlier centuries), although that role was played in later eras by a god of a different name, Hððr. In all of those periodic dramas, however, he kills himself/his dualistic counterpart. This is clearly demonstrated in the Baldur Myth, the Helgikviðae, the Fjölsvinsmál and, finally, in the Skírnismál, as I demonstrated in my dissertation (Nordgren, 2000-2008 and 2004). The fact that Dag dies is in that context a natural part of the yearly cycle: The death of the sun. In Skírnismál, Balðr/Úllr is buried in the guise of Draupnir, but he —the ring— always returns to Óðinn. However, these scenarios are only possible or relevant if we accept Jungner's interpretation as the correct one.





It is also possible that *Erik* could actually be Theoderic; but the Sparlösa monument stone script refers, according to most experts, to Öjuls/Eivisl. In theory Öjuls could have fought in the Ostrogothic army against Justinian, and indeed could have fallen in that famed and final battle in Northern Italy in 554 CE. In that case, however, it should have been possible to trace at least some stone text to an Ostrogothic link, which it is not.

Åke Hyenstrand has also adopted Jungner's interpretation. He has suggested that Alrik might be "the ruler of the temple". Accordingly, he too applies the mythical thematic and speculates that, Erik might have doubled as the "Allruler", perhaps even as King of Uppsala (Sweden), and Alrik could have been a director or priest in the temple which Rimbart believes was built for Erik (Hyenstrand, 1996: 158). All of these possibilities of course deserve some thought, but I visualize Alrik as a god, rather than as a human priest/chieftain. My own conclusions, however, are basically still in accord with those of Hyenstrand.

As a general reflection, those who perceive the word *ubsal* in the runic text and place *Alrik* as a king there, are in effect confirming that it is really a myth we are dealing with—not with a real person. The time period we are observing and investigating here was the Age of Migration (*Völkerwanderung*), which is the era in which Óðinn, the new god, was introduced. That epoch gave us something called *Aun's Law*, which is still known in Uppsala. Both Aun and Alrik may actually have been pseudonyms for Óðinn (cf. Nordgren, 2000-2008, 2004 and 2007). Erik, however, could have been a historically existing king. But in the presumed time of the carved text, the 9th Century CE, few people, far less a king, would have lived in Old Uppsala. Instead, it was a necropolis. The howes (grave mounds) of Uppsala are dated to the 6th Century. There is a tendency to associate the name *upsal* with Gamla (Old) Uppsala, but in reality there are about 200 such place names in Scandinavia and the British Isles. Several possible candidates are much closer to the centre of presumed sculpting, and I prefer to connect them with cultic sites where the local king generally performed the ritual or religious sacrifices. If that more general application is true, then we know even less about the identity of a local king.

One should also consider that the Old Norse word *Upsalir* was also used to denote the "home of the gods". That definition would fit quite closely with the concept of Alrik and Dag as being gods rather than as a local, human chieftain and his priest. In this connection it could be suitable to mention that some researchers have understood from the text that Alrik made the runes, and hence that he was the carver. It is, however, generally known that Óðinn taught how to make the runes to humankind. Also the reading that Alrik's father sat in Upsal fits well with the home of the gods.

Inasmuch as the motifs on the Sparlösa Stone are convincingly Christian on at least three sides—Not to speak of the presumed Medusa Head—whereas the texts all seem to address local kings and myths, or only local kings altogether, entirely with a definite pre-Christian and cultic content, it becomes ever more evident that the motif was sculpted or carved first, and the text was added later. The person who informed the sculptor/stone carver certainly had definite, first-hand knowledge of Ravenna, Theoderic's capital, and was fully aware of the carving's meanings and symbols, at least from a religious (Arian





Christian) viewpoint. If the inscriptions should be contemporaneous with the depictions, then there would have at the very least been a suggestion of Dietrich von Bern (or Theoderic the Great, Theoderic of Verona) who features in the myths and legends and epic poems of Continental Teutonic realms: But such is not the case.

Laila Kitzler Åhfeldt (Åhfeldt, 2000: 99-121) however, claims they are indeed contemporary. She has used a newly developed method of scanner analysis on a limited number of samples of cutting marks. She claims that the text on, the “priest” side and part of the “icon” side were made by the carver of the depictions, and with help on the “icon” side by an inexperienced helper. On the *triskel* side both carvers are said to have been working with the text. The cross ribbon and the spiral ornament she assumes is made, or repaired, by a third person who wrote the younger text. She bases all this on the fact that “the experienced carver” cuts closer and deeper. This method however can not date the carvings. Also it is dubious that she can identify single individuals. Hence it is still possible that the inscription was done later with another experienced carver with help of the inexperienced one. If, however, she should be right in her assumption we must explain why the text is totally unrelated with the motif. The only explanation I can see in such a case is that the carver was explicitly ordered to carve the text, and that the chieftain who gave this command had himself no idea of the real meaning of the depictions, but just thought they were nice and impressive. Maybe he was told it was connected with Dietrich, which he saw as status when raising a memorial after Öjuls, but why is it not mentioned in the text? The informant, however, fully knew what it meant and so might have had to be content with having planted a seed of belief for the future. There is even the possibility that the chieftain who initiated the work was defeated or killed by a competitor, and that the informant also was killed or driven away. We can only speculate. In any case Kitzler herself expresses insecurity with the dating to the 9th Century CE with regard to the present interpretation that builds on the character of the runes, and suggests the stone maybe should be dated typologically. It still makes more sense with a relatively early try to spread Arian Christianity. Later on this kind of depictions would not have been initiated by Catholic Christians. Hence I still suggest the text might be later and, if really contemporary with the depictions, it still should be not later than the late 7th Century CE.

There are many myths, sagas and legends from Continental European Germania during the Migration Period—including the Völsungasagas, the Nibelungenlied of modern Wagnerian fame, and Tacitus’ telling of the Semnonenhain—which lead us directly back to the Helgikviðae. As such, none of this is inconsistent with dating the depictions to the 7th Century CE at the latest. Yet this is, as remarked, supposedly incompatible with the runes which, as observed *supra*, are dated to around the 9th Century CE down to possibly around 750 CE by some researchers. This is, however, as remarked above, by no means finally proved.

If, by chance, the inscription and the pictures really should be contemporary it is evidently also credible that the carver could have been a Christian, and well aware of the



meaning of the motif, since he added christograms in the text to reduce the power of the runes in the pre-Christian text.

I must in any case still conclude, in the end, that the person who ordered the text seems to have had no idea whatsoever as to the meaning of the pictorial motif on the stone.

The purpose of this article is primarily, as indicated by the title, to examine the meaning of the pictures on the stone. The remarks herein concerning the text are therefore to be understood as random commentaries, merely one suggestion among many. I do not claim that my interpretation of the text is the correct one, but I gladly leave this matter to competent experts on runology.

Conclusions on the Meaning of the Pictorial Motif

Theoderic, the great hero king, is dead. He was placed into his mausoleum. The Heavenly Ship, the ship of church, with Mary at its helm, is flanked by the symbols of resurrection and of eternal life (Fig. 25). Also, the ship carrying Christ bears the soul of Theoderic to

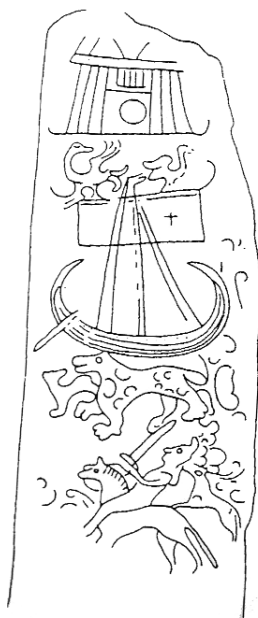


Fig. 25 The Sparlösa Stone –the most important picture side.



Fig. 26. A drawing of the ruins of the monastery in the 18th Century by Vincenzo Coronelli. Since the monastery seems to have been quite large, the Sparlösa Stone carving would have depicted an early view of the mausoleum —close in time to the construction of the mausoleum.

heavenly paradise, the heavenly meadows and plains, where he can spend eternity in joy and, in the manner of the great emperors of ancient times, have the prerogative to engage in magnificent hunts. As suggested in the foregoing, Mary might well symbolize his corporeal removal from the grave, although that may be merely an interesting reflection. In any event, the monument is dedicated to Mary as a monastery and a church only 15 years after Theoderic's funeral, and the nomenclature itself was intended, according to Agnellus, to preserve the memory of Theoderic, whose remains were later returned to that same monastery and mausoleum until the year 1564 CE.

Theoderic had been the great defender of the Arian Christian faith, the bright sun in the Christian heavens, the Gothic lion. Now, he continues even in death to fight evil, as a representative of Christ, with watchfulness, wisdom and strength, as depicted by the triskel on the opposite side.

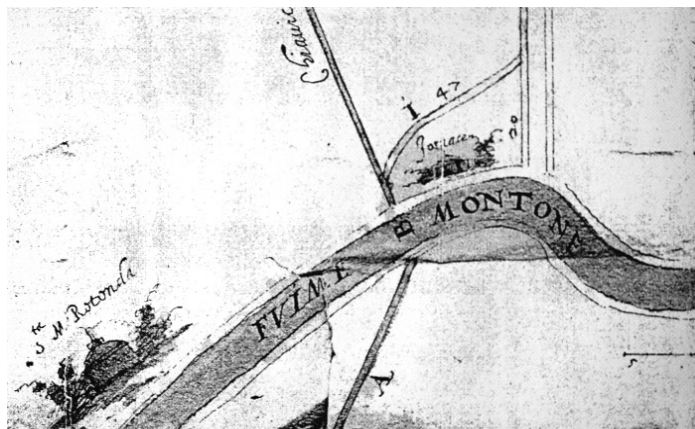
I do not believe that an official representative for the victorious Catholic Church would have presented his memorial in this fashion, but an Arian missionary, a fellow Arian, or a pro forma convert to Catholicism would easily have done so. Catholics were, on the contrary, eager to be rid of his reputation and fame; determined that he, the Goths, and Arian Christianity in general should be forgotten, and that Catholics should be left to reign in peace. That he was preserved in the monastery instead must be seen as an act of mercy. The Greek crosses with their long cross-beams supporting the stone also suggest a Greek religious background rather than a Roman one.

Considering all the circumstances, I find it probable that the stone was raised, at the latest, during the 7th Century CE or earlier, and that the initiator of the depicted motif was an Arian Christian.

After the fall of the Ostrogothic realm in 554 CE, power over vast areas of Italy was seized, after a short time, by the Arian Langobards, although Rome and Ravenna were not included. During the first half of the 7th Century CE, the Langobardic areas remained Arian, although several rulers temporarily had better contacts with the pope and some-



Fig. 27. The mausoleum and the monastery as a combined edifice were situated at a canal close to the old or medieval harbour (1680). During the early middle Ages, a lighthouse was built on the property, and was simply attached or joined onto the mausoleum. This is why Agnellus refers to it as “at the lighthouse” —*ad farum*.



times personally accepted Catholicism, e.g., Queen Theodolinda, who cooperated with Pope Gregorius the Great. In Ravenna, the Eastern Catholic variant was in control. According to Dick Harrison, however, many Langobards were doubtful Christians. They officially took Catholicism in the second half of the 7th Century, and remained in power until 774 CE, when they became a dependency of the Franks.

During the 8th Century CE, when the entire property was Catholic, the monastery in all likelihood continued to grow still larger. In any event, it most certainly partially obscured the mausoleum; and in the first half of the 9th Century CE, Theodoric's mausoleum was hidden even further behind the addition of a lighthouse built upon the foundations of the mausoleum and the monastery (Fig. 26 & 27).

Even the other depictions on the Sparlösa Stone provide indices of an original date placed in the 7th Century CE at the latest, but quite possibly also earlier.

Acknowledgments

My warmest thanks go to research assistant Simon Malmberg at the Swedish Research Institute in Rome for his sage advice; and to Dr. Enrico Cirelli, of Bologna University's Research Centre in Ravenna, for his most valuable support with local research.



Texte abrégé

Une nouvelle interprétation des figures gravées sur la pierre runique de Sparlösa en Suède

Avec ses représentations imagées sans relation avec le texte, la pierre de Sparlösa a fait l'objet de grandes discussions. Elle est habituellement datée du IX^e siècle. J'ai depuis longtemps l'impression que les images se réfèrent à des temps plus anciens, et qu'on peut y voir des connexions avec le monde méditerranéen et éventuellement avec les Goths Ariens.

Cependant, le texte suggère plutôt la religion nordique préchrétienne et semble mêler mythes et personnages réels. Selon cette hypothèse, j'ai suggéré dans ma précédente tentative d'interprétation, que les images auraient pu être gravées au plus tard vers le VII^e siècle et que les runes auraient été ajoutées plus tard (Nordgren, 2007).

La pierre est un monolithe à quatre côtés rappelant la forme des pierres à sculptures wisigothiques d'Espagne. Récemment, l'archéologue Bengt Nordqvist a tenté d'interpréter le motif et a abouti à une conclusion identique à la mienne. Il fait remonter la pierre à la période des Grandes Migrations, c'est-à-dire vers le V^e ou le VI^e siècle, éventuellement le VII^e (Nordqvist, 2007).

Cette nouvelle tentative pour résoudre l'énigme se fonde sur des hypothèses formulées antérieurement: celles d'Otto von Friesen (Friesen, 1940), Hugo Jungner (Jungner, 1947), Åke Hyenstrand (Hyenstrand, 1996, 2005 et 2007) ainsi que sur l'article de Bengt Nordqvist. Mes premières conclusions demeurent les mêmes et depuis que Nordqvist a confirmé que la scène de chasse est à mettre en parallèle avec certaines images du Byzance impériale <www.finnes-torp.se>, je me sens sur un terrain plus solide. Cependant, la maison dessinée sur la pierre est un élément décisif et je vois là une raison pour réviser mon idée première selon laquelle il s'agirait d'une église grossièrement dessinée. Au

lieu de cela, il semble qu'il s'agisse d'une excellente figuration du mausolée de Théodoric à Ravenne. J'ai tenté de démontrer cette ressemblance en commençant par agrandir un détail du toit de la maison (fig. 9). Ce détail créait une illusion photographique sur une image de trop mauvaise qualité pour être reproduite. Cela ressemblait à une décoration du toit mais c'était dû à ce qu'une partie de la pierre était endommagée. Cependant, cela m'a permis de faire quelques associations pour proposer une solution. A la figure 10, il y a un dessin à l'échelle de la maison située à côté du mausolée. A la figure 16, on voit que les décorations du toit du mausolée peuvent parfaitement être interprétées comme des voûtes à cause de l'angle sous lequel on les voit et à cause des effets d'ombre. La figure 17 montre un effet identique dans un dessin du XVI^e siècle. Une question se pose car la maison paraît être construite avec des ais (planches de bois) et n'est supportée par aucune voûte. J'en conclus qu'il n'est pas nécessaire de dessiner les fondations, mais seulement de montrer le mausolée réel. La présence des planches de bois peut s'expliquer par les dessins sur le mur du mausolée. Si on le considère de face, il y a deux planches de part et d'autre d'une entrée de forme régulière —exactement comme sur la gravure de la pierre. La construction originale est indiquée dans le dessin de Deichmann (fig. 14), et cela confirme mes hypothèses. Au-dessus de la porte se trouvent deux lignes de part et d'autre d'une ligne brisée, le tout entouré d'un cadre qui suggère une fenêtre. Juste sous le plafond du monument se placent deux petites fenêtres de chaque côté d'une décoration encadrée plus bas, parfaitement ajustée à la pierre (fig. 15). De même, le plafond du monument est adapté à la forme de la pierre (fig. 10-11). Ainsi, la nef céleste porte Théodoric dans





sa tombe et le conduit au Paradis et à la vie éternelle (pour le symbolisme marial, cf. Rahner, 1964). Il faut savoir que quinze ans après ses funérailles, le corps de Théodoric fut déplacé et le mausolée devint une église et un monastère bénédictin sous l'invocation de la Vierge Marie. Ceci indique-t-il que le symbole peut aussi être rapproché du transfert physique corporel? C'est probablement une idée folle, mais enfin... Après le déménagement de la chambre funéraire, le monastère au pied du monument prit soin des restes du roi et les conserva jusqu'en 1564. Ainsi, Théodoric fut pris en charge par la Vierge Marie, tant sous son aspect spirituel que corporel. Le monastère prit aussi le nom de Sainte Marie, selon Agnellus, en mémoire du roi. Certains verront là une allusion à la nef d'un médaillon de Dorestad où la croix peut représenter Charles le Grand, et les oiseaux comme des corbeaux. Je conviens qu'il y a au sommet d'un médaillon, un paon unique mais il est très réaliste et ceux de la pierre sont typiquement gothiques (fig. 4). Je vois cependant la possibilité d'une source commune et de là on peut considérer le médaillon (fig. 6) comme une icône significative destinée aux marins.

Au-dessous, la scène de chasse (fig. 7) montre une chasse impériale où l'empereur porte un bonnet phrygien et chasse avec un guépard. Le petit animal derrière est interprété à la fois comme un chien, un lionceau (Hyenstrand suggère que le guépard est un lion), et un dromadaire. Je ne vois là qu'un dromadaire. Cette scène peut aussi bien représenter le Paradis où Théodoric, dans la vie éternelle où il vient d'entrer, jouit de la prérogative impériale des plaisirs de la chasse.

Sur le côté opposé de la pierre se trouve un grand *triskel* (fig. 18). Il a fait également l'objet de nombreux débats. J'y distingue une oie et un oiseau rappelant le hibou mais dont la tête présente une ressemblance avec celle d'un lion. Ils combattent un serpent, peut-être deux. En Égypte et en Inde, l'oie symbolise la sagesse et la vigi-

lance, le hibou a la même signification dans la mythologie grecque (Minerve). Transportée dans le monde romain, l'oie fait office de gardien. Les Goths utilisaient souvent le symbole du lion et le lion symbolise le Christ. Le serpent signifie le mal dans un contexte chrétien. De là mon interprétation : le personnage à tête de lion est Théodoric, le lion des Goths, qui représente aussi le Christ. Ainsi, Théodoric continue à combattre le mal avec l'aide des puissances du bien et de la sagesse. Je ne pourrais sans doute jamais prouver ceci mais je trouve que c'est une hypothèse raisonnable. Incidemment, la seule décoration sur le sarcophage de Théodoric est une tête de lion! (fig. 19).

L'orant, ou le prêtre (fig. 20), et les croix grecques sont classées par Nordqvist comme des ajouts datant de la période des Grandes Migrations et ce, durant la période Mérovingienne. Je n'oserais pas faire trop de commentaires sur ce point mais j'y verrais peut-être un prêtre élevant la réalisation de la pierre sur une fondation chrétienne.

Le côté opposé présente une supposée tête de Méduse, ce qui est typique de l'Age de Fer romain et de la période des Grandes Migrations. Je n'en dirai rien. Nordqvist voit là une possible « bulle de respiration » comme dans les scènes où le chaman expulse son esprit de ses poumons (fig. 22 et 23). Ceci convient bien, cependant, à cette période des migrations.

N'étant pas spécialiste des runes, j'ai seulement tenté une approche visuelle des runes à côté des dessins; pour moi, la place des caractères écrits ne semble pas prévue à l'avance mais remplit plutôt les espaces restés vides. La dernière datation dépend aussi de l'usage des runes scandinaves (norvégiennes/suédoises) qui doivent dater du IX^e siècle. Par ailleurs, von Friesen note que ce site est le premier où furent trouvées de telles runes aussi n'y a-t-il aucun moyen de comparer avec du matériel plus ancien. Si bien que, à mon avis, la datation doit être faite selon la typologie et non par les runes. Plusieurs interprétations du texte sont données par les runolo-





gues sans qu'aucune d'elles ne fasse l'unanimité. J'ai choisi une strophe parmi celles que je considère pouvoir être interprétées d'une manière compréhensible :

«Öjuls/Eivisl a donné, le fils d'Erik, Alrik a donné.

La famille a donné à grands cris victoire demande appelle en réponse.

À eux scie le père de famille, au sujet de eux scie le tout- père (Óðinn) (Il a entendu leur demande) ainsi ils firent toujours leur propre pain.

La mort soulève les plaintes; mort aussi Dag, le *Pontifex Maximus* d'Alrik, et quant à Öjuls... on dit maintenant dans le séjour sacré des braves que Sigmar est appelé le fils d'Erik» (Jungner). Il me semble qu'Alrik doit être Óðinn (des Goth. Ahls avec la finale *-rix*, *-rik* = Maître ou grand-prêtre du temple/du lieu de culte). Un souverain universel était lui-même *Pontifex Maximus* et donc, comme grand-prêtre d'Alrik, devait être d'essence divine. Ceci conduit à Dag/Sviþdagr que j'ai, dans ma dissertation, montré comme le double du primitif Úllr et du tardif Balðr; il figure dans le *Helgikviðae*, *Fjölsvinsmál*, Le Mythe de Balðr et *Skírnismál*. Il tue constamment son *alter ego* et Óðinn ramène toujours du monde souterrain Draupnir (Balðr) qui y est enterré. La mort de Dag représente la disparition du soleil et le début d'un nouveau cycle des saisons. Erik et Öjuls pourraient même être réunis avec Alrik/Alrek et avec le mythe de Vikarr, mais sous des noms différents, ou bien ils pourraient être des personnages réels. Dans ce cas Öjuls est promis/initié à Óðinn et en retour Óðinn donne richesse et vic-

toire à sa famille; finalement, Öjuls tombe et est accueilli dans le Valhalla. Ceci n'est qu'une suggestion parmi bien d'autres, et je laisse le soin aux runologistes compétents de résoudre le problème.

Le principal résultat de cet article a été d'examiner les dessins; après cet examen, je décide de maintenir mon hypothèse que ces dessins, du moins ceux des faces avant et arrière de la pierre, furent réalisés au plus tard au cours du vi^e siècle et même, selon toute probabilité, dès la période des Grandes Migrations. Ceci suggère donc l'initiative d'un chrétien arien de l'érection de la pierre.

A propos de l'interprétation due à Kitzler-Åhfeldt (Kitzler-Åhfeldt, 2000) qui soutient que les images et le texte sont contemporains; je insiste que les dessins sont probablement faits au plus tard au vii^e siècle grâce à l'initiative d'un chrétien bien que le texte n'implique pas ceci. Il est possible que le successeur employât la pierre pour inscrire le texte. Il n'a pas dans ce cas rendu compte au sujet de la signification de la raison.

Mes chaleureux remerciements vont à l'assistant de recherche Simon Malmberg de l'Institut suédois à Rome, pour ses excellents conseils, et au Dr. Enrico Cirelli de l'Université de Bologne à Ravenne, pour son aide efficace dans les recherches sur le terrain. Merci aussi à Monsieur Leif Olson Götene, pour la traduction, et Monsieur le Prof. Patrick Ettighoffer pour ses conseils linguistiques.

Trad. Leif Olson



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