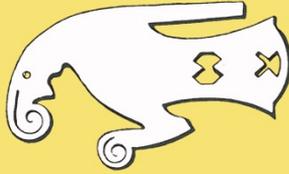


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A Note on Late Iron Age Kingship Mythology

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The paper establishes a link between three poems by the sixth century Latin occasional poet Venantius Fortunatus and the kingship and *hieros gamos* myth in Norse literature as it has been analysed by Gro Steinsland. The Latin poems are dated c. AD 566 and in essence they depict the marriage of the Austrasian king Sigibert and the Visigoth princess Brunhild as the ideal royal wedlock between two persons who are in a positive way complementary. Venantius' way of alluding to the connection between kings and Gods and the myth known to us from *Skírnismál* is considered a positive reflection of a *hieros gamos* myth. A negative version of the same mythic material is found in the Norse literature. This inversion is tentatively explained as the result of a crisis of Northwest European and Scandinavian kingship somewhere between AD 600 and 900.

Keywords: *Gender complementarity, kingship mythology, hieros gamos, Venantius Fortunatus.*

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Gro Steinsland's analysis of the *hieros gamos* myth in Norse literature (1991) presents strong evidence that the myth played a special and central role in the kingship mythology of the late Iron Age. Her conclusions invite a rereading of other texts with the aim of identifying the myth and trying to date the period in which it reflected contemporary views on the subject of kingship.

Venantius Fortunatus' poems to the Merovingian royalty and aristocracy contain at least three texts that should be read again on the basis of Steinsland's interpretation. First, however, it must be discussed how a late classical poet came to write poems devoted to barbarians. When we try to uncover Venantius' reasons for doing this or that, we can refer only to Fortunatus, e.g., the information he supplies when he mentions

himself in his poems or writes about himself in the introductions to the collections in which he published his works. His writing is occasional and his purpose in mentioning himself is always another than presenting the reader with a neutral comment or description.

The three poems of which parts are to be discussed here belong to the earliest among his known production and they were written on his arrival at the Merovingian court in Metz AD 566. They were included in the sixth of the seven books of poems published *c.* AD 576 (Meyer 1901; Tardi 1921; Reydellet 1994 with refs.).

In AD 566 Venantius was a well educated young man, a poet from northern Italy with good connections in Episcopal circles (Brennan 1985, p. 57). Ten years later he depicted himself as a wandering bard (Venantius, *Prefatio*, p. 4) who happened to arrive just at the right time for the wedding between the Merovingian king Sigibert and his Visigoth queen Brunhild. Reydellet (1994, p. x) has, however, shown that Venantius had arrived in good time and waited at the court in order to add lustre to the occasion with a Latin epithalamium and a panegyric to Sigibert and Brunhild. These poems are among the first in Latin to praise a Germanic king and queen as representing the ideals of classical perfection. They were an ideological victory for Sigibert.

When Venantius arrived he was looked after by Count Sigoald and made friends with a number of influential Franks during his time at the court. It seems that the poet was a most amiable person and a sufficiently gifted occasional writer and panegyric to convincingly flatter the Merovingian royalty and nobility within a classical scheme. Before and after the wedding Venantius toured the country either with the courtier Sigoald or with the court.

Later in the winter AD 566 he was in Paris where he wrote panegyrics to King Charibert and visited his bishop Germanus before he went to Poitiers to meet Queen Radegund, who had formed a community there and appointed Agnes, her adoptive daughter, to be her abbess.

In Poitiers Venantius' life changed and he no longer devoted his efforts to the cultivation of different promising noble patrons. On the contrary, he started to work for the Queen and Agnes, becoming part of a troika that managed the community. Venantius, however, did not live in the convent (Brennan 1985, pp. 61 ff.). He led a relatively quiet life, but his patroness being a Merovingian queen, who was not much restricted by the walls of her convent, he was still in contact with the royal family

and he made himself useful with poems, visits and business management in connection with the Queen's involvement in international and national politics. His employment by Radegund in Poitiers was probably the real reason why he originally left for Gaul (Reydellet 1994, p. x & XIII). His first year in France resembles an educational tour and his poems to royalty, nobility and bishops were intended to establish him in Merovingian society. Some time after AD 573 Gregory of Tours became Venantius' principal patron. Gregory commissioned poems from Venantius, gave him a small villa, situated between Tours and Poitiers, and around AD 575 he encouraged Venantius to collect his poems and to publish.

While the modern reader will find unmistakable signs of an empty conventionality in Venantius' verse, it is likely that the Merovingian aristocracy found it both pleasing and convincing whether it occurred in official performances or in private letters. It should, however, be remembered that Sigibert's court, and for that matter any Merovingian court, seems to have been prepared to use whatever means available to promote itself.

Although Venantius' early poetry contains attractive elements, most modern readers will eventually find him no more than an occasional poet of some technical skill—well versed in many arts. His original skill may nonetheless have been another, namely that of cunningly mixing classical epithalamium, panegyric and eulogy with a genuine understanding of Germanic ideology. Venantius' talent in this respect may easily be overlooked even though we are aware of this general fact.

From the classical point of view Venantius should be criticised for his extrovert, animated passion and his use of the concept of love may also rouse one or two critics (Dill 1926, pp. 333 f.). His style poses a problem since we may mistake it for empty manners and inconsistency. His attitudes, e.g., to the concept of love are characterised by indecision, and they could in the end reflect a way of coping with nakedness and shame in Duerr's sense, or the reverse, a primitive relationship with sexuality in a fashion that would fit Norbert Elias' thesis. In the epithalamium to be discussed below, he is most reluctant to comment on the erotic reality of marriage and that may remind us of Germanic prudery (cf. Duerr 1994, pp. 161 ff.). However, in the panegyrics, e.g., to Duke Lupus he expresses his love for the Duke in exaggerated words that offended Dill as 'tasteless love' (1926, pp. 237 f.) and remind us of a

'childish' and immature or uncivilised relationship (cf. Elias, 1989, pp. 75 f.):

1. 31 *Sic ego, curarum valido defessus ab æstu,
Noscens te salvum fonte refectus agor.
O nomen mihi dulce Lupi replicabile semper,
Quodque mei scriptum pagina cordis habet
Quem semel inclusum tabulis dulcedinis intus
Non abolenda virum pectoris arca tenet;*

*

1. 45 *Post tenebras noctis stellarum lumina subdens
Lucifer ut radiis, sic mihi mente nitis
Ut recreat mundum veniens lux solis ab ortu
Inlustrant animum sic tua verba meum.*

*

1. 71 *Hi celebrem memorent, illi te lege sagacem:
Ast ego te dulcem semper habebo, Lupe. (END)*
(Venantius, Book 7, Poem 8.)

(So I, exhausted by the mighty summer heat troubles, feel restored, hearing that you were safe. Oh, Lupus' sweet name to me always worth repeating and which has been written on the page of my heart and whom once included in the tablets of sweetness, the undestroyable coffer of my chest shall keep. (Book 7, Poem 8, ll. 31–36).

As the morning star with its rays after the darkness of the night dominates the light of the stars, and as the light of the sun recreates the world when it rises, so do your words enlighten my heart (Book 7, Poem 8, ll. 45–48).

Here they talk of your celebrity, there of your sagacity in law, *but I* shall always love you, Lupus. (Book 7, Poem 8, ll. 71–END.)

Our difficulties in understanding the poems are accentuated by the fact that modern scholars who take an interest in Venantius Fortunatus, tend to be very familiar with the literary eloquence of the quotations and the classical tradition, handed down to us in a vast number of sources, but less aware of the growing archaeological material constantly changing or adding to our view of the Germanic ideal. These difficulties are still intriguing and we may therefore benefit from the relief provided even by relatively extreme interpretations of the poems.

The Poems to Sigibert and Brunhild

The cultural complexity in Venantius is exemplified by the very first two of his poems to Merovingians, namely those with which he introduced himself officially at Sigibert's court in connection with the royal wedding. In recent decades the poems have been discussed by Rogers (1969) and by George (1992). The first poem is an epithalamium to Sigibert and his Visigoth bride Brunhild, a bedside poem as it were, to be recited officially at the wedding. The rationale of such a poem is to point out the raptures of love, not least its erotic joys and of course the happy and highly valuable result that may come of these pleasures in the nuptial bed. Venantius makes use of the genre in a surprisingly heathen way which must to the official wedding of a Christian king and queen, be seen as a relatively light-hearted flirtation with Pagan cult and rites in connection with the reproduction of the foremost in society. Rogers comments upon this poem with a clear eye for its impersonal attitude and seeming lack of deeper insight into matters which for most people are too serious to be treated so superficially and schematically.

From a modern point of view her criticism has much to support it and she ends up by showing that the structure of the poem is meant to lead us upwards to a culmination that celebrates the marriage between a man and a woman representing the State and Nature respectively, and that is not a particularly inspiring bedroom scene. Rogers' analysis of the poem is in my opinion so correct that it should provoke additional discussion. It is obvious that the poem fits the tradition of the epithalamium in such a commonplace way that it probably fits more than its own tradition and the State-Nature match.

Turning to George, we find a much better historical or contextual analysis, which explicitly takes the additional aspect of Venantius' poems into consideration, namely the cunning ways in which they are designed to match classical and Germanic ideals alike. One of the examples is the short panegyric following directly upon the epithalamium (George 1992, pp. 40 ff.). Much of what was said in the first would have befitted the second, but the latter is, as George shows, more strictly to the point in summing up the mixture of the classical and Germanic virtues of a monarch and his queen as the primary nuclear family of the kingdom, a constitutional phenomenon in alliance with God.

George's analysis adds a lot to that of Rogers and perhaps we should

try to combine the two aspects and consider the poems as wedding requisites as well as works of art. Their universe is the wedding days, and there is a point in their order, i.e., an epithalamium followed by a panegyric. We should imagine that they were recited, e.g., on the first and the last days of the wedding festivities respectively or, at least, the former at a light-hearted opening stage and the latter at a more solemn concluding stage of the ceremony. With reference to Gregory of Tours, some scholars, e.g., George (1992, p. 40), believe the panegyric to have been written shortly *after* the wedding, but Gregory's text (4. 27) does not prove this.

The epithalamium is a straightforward construction mixing ingredients from authors like Sappho, Statius, Sidonius or Ennodius in a poem that centres around the familiar Cupid–Venus' dialogue (Morelli 1910, pp. 398 ff.). Cupid, however, plays the most active role.

The poem starts with a spring scene (ll. 1–14), an echo of a traditional opening, and continues (ll. 15–24) by showing us the procession of noble dukes and warriors, who have come to the wedding. In the poem Venantius tells us that they represent joy, but they do so in a more than usually heavy-footed way. We could have hoped for dancing and singing and playing young men and women to remind us of Catullus or some sportive Loves from the otherwise conventional Sidonius (Catullus *Carmen* 61, Sidonius *Epithalamium Rurico et Hiberiae*; Tufte 1970, pp. 23, 69). All we get are phalanxes of noble dukes and warriors surrounding their king on his up-hill way to the wedding. The following eleven and a half lines (25–36) tell us that Sigibert has reached a stage in life when love, marriage and the wish for heirs converge. Then, as we could have foreseen, Cupid happens by (ll. 36–47) and makes Sigibert burn to marry the maid. The rest of the poem (ll. 47–143) is dominated by Cupid and Venus, who talk to each other and sing the praises of Sigibert (Cupid) and Brunhild (Venus) alternately. Eventually the couple is blessed by Venus, as Cupid had asked her to do at the beginning of the section. Contrary to her usual behaviour in epithalamia, Venus confines herself to talking rather than posing or acting, and we get the impression that Cupid and Venus are heralds pointing out what is appropriate at a royal wedding (Morelli 1910, pp. 400 f.), i.e., when a king, a perfect and civilised prince, takes a queen from far away.

Undoubtedly the poem is a late-classical epithalamium, although rather dull, and probably Rogers is correct in saying that it is marked by

a late-classical tendency for Pagan Gods to reflect forces that work on man from within. This may account for Cupid's attack (ll. 36–47) but not for the following scenes between Cupid and Venus each praising the worth of their client. This has nothing to do with the inner forces of anybody. On the contrary the deities work as deities enlightening the listeners, i.e., the wedding guests who we met in lines 15 to 24 approaching the court and the hall where this new poem is recited and where they are sitting listening to it. Venus and Cupid, mother and son, are Gods interfering with the human affairs of royalty and lineage and Venantius' God, although formerly mentioned twice, has not been invited to the party.

There is a gently jesting tone in the Cupid/Venus scenes and the two are part and parcel of the late-classical epithalamium, but here they demonstrate the linkage between the Germanic king and queen and the Pagan Gods. In Venantius' poems mythological figures and Pagan Gods are rare and unimportant, and generally speaking Cupid and Venus, as introducers of prince and princess, are used by a Christian poet only to signal a good-humoured approach to the sweetness of the wedding theme. In Venantius' epithalamium the last two-thirds of the text are dominated by the Gods and their part in the affair is of paramount importance. When they have spoken the poem comes to an end and Venantius has succeeded in avoiding every possible nuptial joke. From the composition of the poem and the strong involvement of Germanic Gods in the creation of Germanic royalty we must conclude that the way Sigibert and Brunhild are presented fit the mythology of the Germanic king and his wedding.

Steinsland's (1991) analysis of the *hieros gamos* myth in Skírnismál and its relation with genealogical poems like Ynglingatal, Háleygjatal and Hyndluljóð as well as Ynglinga saga takes us still further into the interpretation of the epithalamium. The best parallels are the royal weddings in Ynglingatal and Ynglinga saga, since they show the marriage between a king and a woman from Útgarðr, as well as the death of the king—in Steinsland's opinion a sign that these weddings are modelled on a Norse *hieros gamos* myth (Steinsland 1991, pp. 237 ff.). It is naturally impossible for Venantius to link death and wedding in an anti-epithalamium (cf. Tufte 1970, pp. 37 ff.), as is done in Norse poems and sagas. Probably it did not occur to him at all, but it is worth pointing out the similarities between the character of the weddings. The similarity is

especially obvious in the notion of the queen as an Útgardr woman, i. e., a worldly variety of the giantess in the original myth. In the epithalamium, and in the panegyric that follows, Brunhild is described in passages which strongly remind us of the foreignness of the giantess.

- Per hiemes validasque nives, Alpenque, Pyrenen,
perque truces populos vecta est, duce rege sereno,*
(115) *Terrenis regina toris. Super ardua montis
Planum carpis iter: nil obstat amantibus umquam,
Quos jungi divina volunt. Quis crederet autem
Hispanam tibimet dominam, Germania, nasci,
Quae duo regna jugo pretiosa conexuit uno?*
(120) *Non labor humanus potuit tam mira parare:
Nam res difficilis divinis utitur armis.
Longa retro series regi hoc vix contulit ulli:*
(Venantius Book 6, Poem 1, ll. 113–121.)

(Through winter and heavy snow, and the Alps, the Pyrenees, and raw people, she travelled with the Duke as the serene King (v. 115) a queen for an earthly (Blomgren 1971, pp. 119 f.) marriage bed. You crossed the steep mountains as if it were a plain, since never did anything stand in the way of lovers whom the Gods wanted to bring together. But who would have believed that there was born in Spain, with you a mistress for Germania, (you) who shall connect, like a yoke, two rich kingdoms into one (v. 120). No human skill did prepare such wonder. For difficult matters divine vigour is needed. Hardly any, way back in the series of kings, have conferred this on any king (Venantius Book 6, Poem 1, ll. 113–121).)

Interestingly enough these words are spoken by Venus, who ought in fact not to be so surprised by the facts of the story, which she continues to relate through another fifteen lines before wishing the couple well in the last eight lines of the poem. It is no doubt Venantius who is speaking on behalf of the wedding guests in Venus' concluding monologue.

Venantius expresses surprise that a queen for Germany could be born in Spain, probably in view of what it takes to bring her out of the place, but to the modern reader it is even stranger that Spain should be connected with such cold, snowy, distant and troublesome regions, partly populated by raging tribes from where it takes one of the king's dukes to get a woman out. Why did Venantius not just tell us that a splendid

flower from sunny Spain had come to comfort everyone in Metz? And why is the description of Brunhild as Venus' child (Book 6, Poem 1,1.103) so literal that her marriage bed must be pointed out as earthly?

Only with Steinsland's interpretation of *Skírnismál*, *Ynglingatal* and *Ynglinga saga* in mind does it become clear why this *Útgarðr* picture or *ǫtunn* background is needed. It is a reference to a myth like that in *Skírnismál*, where Freyr sends *Skírnir* to *ǫtunheimr* in order to fetch him the giantess *Gerðr*. Incidentally the adjective used to describe the king (*Sigibert*) and in effect also his duke (*Gogo*), *sereno*, corresponds to the cognomen of Freyr and the etymology of *Skírnir*, i.e., *skírr*, an adjective meaning 'clear, pure or shining' (cf. Steinsland 1991, pp. 48 f.).

Gogo's *Skírnir*-like character is also apparent from the way *Venantius* describes his mission in Spain in a panegyric to the duke himself:

1. 40 *Et domini mores, serve benigne, refers.
Nuper ab Hispanis per multa pericula terris
Egregio regi gaudia summa vehis.
Diligis hunc tantum quantum meliora parasti:
Nemo armis potuit quod tua lingus dedit
(Venantius Book 7, Poem 1.)*

(And you restore, friendly servant, your lord's character. Just now from Spain through many dangers, you convey over lands the greatest joy to the excellent king. You value him so much more inasmuch as you have given (him) the best. Nobody could have done with arms what you obtained with your speech (*Venantius* Book 7, Poem 1, ll. 40–44).)

This *restoration* of *Sigibert*, a word pointing out the seriousness of the matter, namely that his character was temporarily lost, is a parallel to *Freyr* who is strongly affected by his love for *Gerðr*, but eventually restored by *Skírnir*. Initially in the poem *Skírnismál*, i.e., in the introductory prose lines and the first two verses, *Freyr* is described as having got *hugsóttir*, i.e., 'illnesses of the mind' and seeming to be in *ofriðr afi*, i.e., in 'feud hate' with someone (*Jónsson* 1888, p. 38). Likewise the friendly character of the servant *Skírnir* matches the fact that he is more than a servant (*Steinsland* 1991, p. 48). It is also worth noting that *Venantius* stresses Duke *Gogo's* logocentric qualities, thereby implying that a lesser man than *Gogo* might have used force to obtain his goal. It becomes easier to understand *Venantius's* observation if we bear in mind the trouble *Skírnir* had in persuading *Gerðr*.

A check on the use of the adjective *serenus* in PHI, CD ROM #5.3 makes it clear that the word is not used to describe a duke nor used in connection with the word *dux*. With respect to human beings it describes their countenance or forehead. Cicero used it once to define the character of a person, and Statius spoke of *maiestate serena*. It is known as a cognomen, but night and day, sky and weather, are the most common nouns described by the adjective. *Serenus* is a relatively poetic word and to use it about a king or a duke is odd, although possible, not least in a poem which starts out with a heavy-footed procession of armed dukes and nobles (Venantius Book 6, Poem 1, ll. 15–25).

Having observed this, we can go back to line 36, where just before Sigibert falls in love with Brunhild down in Spain he is in the hall like Freyr, who is sitting in Óðin's hall Hliðskjálf, when he sees Gerðr far away in Jötunheimr. Venantius writes of Sigibert:

1. 36 *Instaurat de prole lares, ubi luserit heres*
(Venantius Book 6, Poem 1.)

(He erects for the dynasty a house, where heirs will play.)

In effect he builds himself his hall in Metz with a view to settling down and falling in love with someone who is remarkably far away—and does so.

The parallelism between Freyr and Sigibert is also implied by the relationship between, on the one hand Freyr and Skírnir, and on the other Sigibert and Gogo. In Norse mythology Skírnir is usually considered to be an emanation of Freyr (Holtsmark, 1970, p. 570) and the existence of a similar relationship between Sigibert and Gogo is indicated by the line in the poem quoted above, in which we are told that Brunhild travelled from Spain, “with the Duke as the serene King” (Book 7, Poem 1, l. 114). We know for a fact that she travelled with Duke Gogo, but we are given to understand that he was also the King in the King's serene nature. We may in other words conclude that the somewhat obscure expression matches the obscurity of the concept of emanation.

In the second poem, the panegyric, Venantius dwells on the fact that Brunhild was won twice, first by Sigibert and a second time, when she gave up her Arian faith to become a Catholic, by Christ. This hint at her

deviant background is in keeping with the summary character of this poem. Together with the quotation above we must conclude that she is indeed a foreign woman who must be considerably changed in order to become Sigibert's wife. We can agree with Venantius that we have not for a long-time seen this kind of match or love affair. It is also typical of the short and programmatic poem that it sets out by showing Sigibert's power over people and countries, a result of the wars that have led to peace, and ends by calling Sigibert a holy king:

1. 35 *Rex pie, reginae tanto de lumine gaude:*
(Venantius Book 6, Poem 1a.)

(Holy King, rejoice in the queen's abundance of light.)

Although the light may fit in better with Christian than with Pagan, the Godly roots of the Pagan king and his marriage to the giantess from Útgarðr are obvious in the three poems. The king's holiness is matched by his divine vigour in lines 121–2 of the poem quoted above (Book 6, Poem 1), since it was Sigibert himself who took the initiative to marry Brunhild. It is also characteristic that when Venantius flatters Duke Gogo he refers to the Skírnir-motive and hints at the parallel between Freyr the troubled love-sick king.

There is even a farfetched but amusing linguistic point to be made as to where Brunhild is brought. Incidentally, the etymology of the place-name Metz goes back to the name *Mediomatica*, i.e., the name of the Gallic people who lived in the Metz area. The etymology of *Medio-matico* ('middle' plus 'mother' or 'maternal') suggests that the name referred to those who lived in the middle of the motherland. Whether or not this is the case, the reference to 'middle' is still obvious in the word *Mediomatica* as well as in *Mettis*. These elements are linked to the Gallic *Mid-*, which means 'middle' (Nègre 1990, Nos. 2486 and 2487). Since 'Miðgarðr', *midjungards*, is known even in Gothic (Lehmann 1986, the word *midjungards*) to mean 'the habitable earth', i.e., 'the human world', it is not totally out of the question that Franks, Saxons and Frisii at the wedding could have made the connection and seen the Spain—Metz link as a parallel to Útgarðr—Miðgarðr. If so, we may have found a surprisingly poetical explanation why Sigibert established his court in Metz.

In the Norse myth and genealogies the bride is more or less forced to marry, and Gerðr, who refuses to marry Freyr, reluctantly agrees to make love to him. There is an obvious threat and revenge theme to be found in the poems that we cannot expect to be present in Venantius. We may, however, be relatively sure that in some circles the marriage was looked upon as a misalliance or unnatural. This is the point of a contemporary anecdote, related by Gregory of Tours, in which Brunhild throws herself between Duke Lupus and his antagonists. Lupus had sided with Brunhild after Sigibert's death and in this particular situation Lupus and his enemies are about to start a fight, which will probably kill Lupus, but Brunhild rather courageously, and with no use of force, prevents it. In the altercation Lupus' antagonist, Ursio, tells Brunhild:

Recede a nobis, o mulier. Suficiat tibi sub viro tenuisse regnum;
(Gregory of Tours 6. 4).

(Go back from us, Oh woman. It is enough that you held the reign under your husband.)

This seems an echo of the fact that the giantess is reluctant, to put it mildly, to conform and behave like a good earthly wife—she is irritatingly emancipated. Given the fact that Brunhild's career turned out to be that of a strong-minded queen and model valkyrie, Ursio may well have been expressing male Germanic sentiments about the royal marriage by telling Brunhild that her role as giantess should come to an end. Ursio is changing the myth about the marriage of the king. Even the fact that Gogo's ability not to use force is pointed out to us as something remarkable rather than normal, may indicate that royal match-making and thus also royal wedlock are starting to become problematic.

The Kingship Myth

From a Scandinavian point of view there are two main aspects to discuss if we can agree about the definite link between the mythic Norse genealogies with their tales of royal marriages and Venantius' sixth century depiction of such a marriage in Austrasia, the most germanised part of the Merovingian kingdoms.

The first aspect concerns the origin of the genealogical myth and the *hieros gamos* myth. As mentioned above, Venantius was born in the Aquileia area probably in the 540s and educated in Byzantine Ravenna. His childhood and youth were in other words a period influenced by the last three phases of the Gothic underdog war conducted by Totila against the Byzantine Empire and the scattered resistance following his defeat (Wolfram 1987, pp. 354 ff.). In view of his later career it is only fair to suspect that from his childhood onwards he was acquainted with Gothic ways, and the way in which they formed the cultural background for a dedicated or at least cunning resistance (Wolfram 1987, p. 353). For that reason it may well have been easy for him to communicate with Germans and to know how, generally speaking, he should write to please a member of the Austrasian nobility, but when it comes to the poems to Sigibert and Brunhild, he has obviously made use of more specific and current information, e.g., about Brunhild's journey from Spain.

The jesting genre of the epithalamium is little more than a cover for describing a traditional Pagan marriage and Venantius does not allude to the political implications of the marriage, nor does he use the analytical perspective of the modern historian to reveal the purely political character of the wedding. On the contrary his interpretations are part of the scene itself and he is himself contemporary with the scenes he describes. He is genuinely occasional. With his background in mind we may say that his poem is an example of the anthropologist's participant observation (Winch 1963), and since he recited it in public to an audience, who in all probability liked the poem, his observations were no doubt received as correct in the Metz of AD 566.

This leaves us with two alternatives as to the origin of the myth:

- 1) the wedding marked the beginning of the Norse genealogical myth with its affinities to a *hieros gamos*; or
- 2) the genealogical myth and reality were symbiotic already in the sixth century.

No matter which alternative we adopt, Steinsland's general chronological discussion (1991, pp. 177 ff. and 239) about the possibility for the Norse literature to reflect Late Iron Age modes of thought seems to have been settled as it is clear that the genealogical myth existed in some form or other in the sixth century. The difference between Austrasia and

Scandinavia is of little importance in front of the precisely dated Austrasian evidence.

In my opinion the second alternative ought to be favoured, mostly because the main point in writing the epithalamium must have been to bring Germanic wedding tradition in line with late classical and, to a lesser degree, Christian ideology. Venantius lived the myths of both cultures and it goes without saying that both the Germanic as well as the classical wedding ceremonies were filled with the stuff of ritual and myth. It is not reasonable to see Venantius' poem in itself as a major reshaping of an existing myth, since in relation to concepts like 'conformity' and 'change', the poem—as we would expect from an occasional poet at the beginning of his career—is mostly about conformity. This allows us to conclude that in the late sixth century a Germanic king, whether Christian or not, would recognise his divine origin or overwhelming dependency of the Gods, together with his duty to marry the perfect complement to his own civilised male perfection. In connection with the myth it may well be reasonable to stress the complementarity rather than the antagonisms of king and queen. The Germanic *hieros gamos* myth itself disappears down in the pre-Christian Frankish era.

In a review of Steinsland's book Anders Hultgård (1994, pp. 78 ff.) has pointed out that threat, curse and revenge are themes that do not easily fit the *hieros gamos* myth of the Greek–Oriental kind on which the Norse myth is probably modelled. He also shows that there are motives in the *Skírnismál* which are not coherently linked to each other although they ought to have been connected. Hultgård's comments suggest that we should look for a positive Germanic version of the myth in order to establish a link between the Greek–Oriental myth and the Norse one. Since the relation between the royal couple in Miðgarðr and the Gods in Ásgarðr seems to be firmly established by Venantius' poem we may conclude that his poem represents this missing link. It seem also to be true that a distinctly terrestrial crisis for royalty and kingship could have influenced the religious myth.

This brings us to the character of the historical facts and their affinities with the myth. Nobody doubts that Brunhild actually followed the route hinted at by Venantius (Book 6, Poem 1; Book 7, Poem 1) and known to Gregory of Tours (4. 27). Undoubtedly this journey was difficult to undertake and if a safe journey from Spain to Metz had been the

primary consideration, it would have been natural to take ship, or at least follow the coast, to Marseilles, which was part of Sigibert's kingdom. The route over the Pyrenees in the winter is such an odd choice that we can only infer that the chief objective was not a safe journey, but the fetching of a bride out of the winter in order to present her at a spring wedding.

For the ambitious Sigibert and for Brunhild's father, Athanagild, it is the character of the journey, the guided caravan train, that counts. Sigibert stages his infatuation, the fetching and the wedding to fit a myth. Venantius' role is to link the myth with classical ideas about wedlock. Sigibert, we may suspect, sought universal acceptance of his divine lineage, but it seems no more than right to accept that he felt *obliged* to marry the way he did—he lived a rather demanding myth and modelled reality from it.

The second aspect of Scandinavian interest is the difference between the Norse myth with its revenge and death motive, and the happy days of Sigibert and Brunhild. Since Elisabeth Vestergaard (1986) introduced Lévi-Strauss' concepts of *inversion* and *transformation* (Lévi-Strauss 1955, pp. 225 ff.) and the structural perspective into the interpretation of the poems about Sigurd and Sigfried, this perspective (cf. Lönnroth 1978) has become an analytical level that ought more often to be reflected in the analysis of the texts. In connection with the poems, and the additional analysis of their transformation in the oral poetry of the Faeroes, Vestergaard argued that the transformation of the myth reflected a change in the kind of loyalty that ought to characterise the married woman—a matter of making use of the same tale in two different societies (Vestergaard 1986, pp. 123 ff.; 1989, pp. 221 ff.; 1992, pp. 5 ff.). Gudrun's disloyalty towards Atle (Vestergaard 1984, pp. 67 ff. with refs.) is no doubt on a par with the disloyalty of the woman from Útgardr (Steinsland 1991, p. 200), but less fatalistic and inexplicable.

A structuralist analysis can be applied here too. In Venantius the complementary pair Sigibert and Brunhild are positively united in marriage in order to secure the development of the kingdom and thus also the civilised world. The match is a happy one, sanctioned and actively supported by the Gods. The marriage is not depicted as a contract, and there is love behind this apotheosis and unification of the two complementary beings. The king and the queen are not polarised or exponents of an antagonism. In the Norse myth polarisation and antagonism are at

hand (Steinsland 1991, p. 200), and the match is a misfit. Venantius uses the myth to demonstrate a fruitful synthesis. The ideal marriage is reciprocal and the considerable changes in Brunhild's life are matched by those which Sigibert underwent when he fell in love. Rather than speaking of the polarisation of the characters, there is reason to stress their reciprocity and the complementarity. This seems in several cases to be a positive conflict-solving notion in Norse and Nordic societies (cf. e.g., Hastrup 1993, p. 34; Herschend 1994, pp. 185 ff.).

Turning from Venantius to the Norse genealogical myth, we find the role of the female part considerably changed. Here the violence-and-death motif blocks most of the social point in the marriages. Only childbearing survives. Drawing on Lévi-Strauss' concepts we may say that the two myths are inverted. The King/Queen relation is dominated by the king in Venantius and is to his mind a positive relation, while it is inverted, i.e., dominated by the queen in Ynglingatal, and a negative relation according to the Norse poets. Expressed as a formula the following happens:

$$\begin{array}{ccc} \text{K} & & \text{Q} \\ \text{---} & \rightarrow & \text{---} \\ \text{Q} & & \text{K} \end{array}$$

A structural analysis does not negate Steinsland's interpretation of the role played by fate in Germanic kingship, on the contrary, Venantius' poem makes it clear that the fatalistic re-orientation of the myth happens some time after AD 566, and the quotation from Gregory of Tours (above) is a hint that the change may well have started around AD 600. On the other hand, Venantius continued to see Brunhild as a woman towering high about her sex rather than as a monstrous alien, but then, it should be remembered that his ideological backbone was not Monarchical, but Episcopal.

We can actually see how the myth is changed in the Beowulf poem, which is much concerned with the crisis of the hall, of the kingship and eventually of the people. It is thus not surprising that in a typical Beowulfian digression (vv. 1932–1962) the poem comments upon the character of the royal marriage. Having touched upon the problem in passing, while telling us the main story, the author seeks to demonstrate his sagacity in a moralising didactic passage. In this case he wants to express some critical points concerning the behaviour of queens. The criti-

cism does not apply to the queen in question and therefore it is slightly bewildering. The edition of *Beowulf* that I use is the same as Sune Lindqvist read when he prepared his *Beowulf dissectus* (1958). Just where the digression rather abruptly begins (vv. 1928–42) his comment in the margin runs: *Vad f-n är det?*—“What the hell is this?”. Even Chambers (1932, p. 36) is puzzled and in print he finds the digression “the most obscure in the whole poem”.

When *Beowulf* returns from Denmark to his king, Hygelac is presented and it is pointed out that Hygelac’s young queen Hygd is wise and splendid despite the fact that “she had experienced life under the lock of the burg a few winters only”. However, the whole description introducing Hygelac radiates the family happiness that also Sigibert longed for:

	næs him feor þanon
	tō gesēcanne since bryttan
	Hygelāc Hrēþling, þær æt hām wunað
	selfa mid gesīðum sǣwealle nēah
1925	Bold wæs betlic, bregorōf cynning,
	hēah on healle, Hygd swīðe geong
	wīs wēlpungen, þēah ðe wintra lýt
	under burhlocan gebiden hǣbbe
	Hæreþes dohtor; næs hīo hnāh swā þēah,
1930	nē tō gnēað gifa Gēata lēodum,
	māþmgestrēona.

(It was not far for him (i.e. *Beowulf*) from there to go to the treasure-giver, Hygelac the Hrethling, there where he lived himself with the retinue, close to the sea-wall. The house was splendid, the king very famous, high in the hall. Hygd very young, wise well-thriven, although she had experienced life (lit. been bound) under the lock of the burg a few winters only, Haereth’s daughter, she was not too mean nor too niggardly to give treasures to the geatish people.)

The comment about Hygd, rather uncalled for as it is, could be a gender-bound tendency in the author to belittle women, but the continuation, the digression on *Pryð* and *Offa*, takes the matter further. It shows us an example of the happy unification in a fruitful marriage of a most haughty uncivilised woman, *Pryð*, and the perfect prince, *Offa*. *Pryð* was given away by her father and transported over the grey green waters

to be developed through marriage. The author is most critical of her monstrous behaviour before her marriage, but happy to report her transformation through marriage.

In later texts the character of Pryð spills over to that of Drida, the wife of Offa II, the Mercian king who reigned AD 757–796 (cf. Chambers 1959, pp. 31 ff.). Legend, known to us from a Latin text partly based on Anglo-Saxon texts and written *c.* AD 1200, has it that in his marriage Offa II did not succeed in controlling his foreign, avaricious and haughty wife (cf. Klaeber 1950, pp. 196 ff.).

Klaeber sees to the transformation of Hygd and Pryð as examples of the ‘Taming of the Shrew’ motif, but with reference to Venantius and Ynglingatal this interpretation, however justified, seems too general to fit the period and the royalty in question. We may therefore conclude that in *Beowulf* the charming little story about Hygd and the not quite so charming, but nonetheless positive, story about Pryð and Offa I show us the positive myth and the myth changing, while in the legend about Offa II we detect a parallel to the inverted myth in *Ynglingatal*. From the point of view of political history, Offa’s reign, a continuous power struggle, more or less suggests itself as a symbol of the kingship crisis (Fisher 1972, pp. 163 ff.).

In the general perspective it is easy to see that within the period AD 600–800 an economic and demographic backlash could have affected several areas in South Scandinavia and the countries around the North Sea, with different strengths and at different times, thereby undermining the institution of royalty. We may also venture to say that if the author of *Beowulf*, who is so concerned with the crisis and deterioration of the Migration Period kingdom and moreover heavily prone to his moralising and didactic propensities, had been aware of the inversion of the

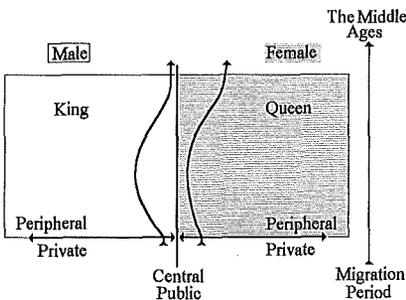


Fig. 1. A model showing the balance between King and Queen during the Late Iron Age kingship crisis.

myth about the royal marriage, he would not have limited his criticism to Pryð's premarital behaviour.

Thus the epithalamium, the genealogies and the poems about Sigurd and Sigfried, partly supported by the Beowulf poem, can be seen to form a small sequence in the development of the royal family as an institution.

To begin with (in the epithalamium) we meet the ideal match, i.e., the reciprocity between the complementary beings probably a reflection of a *hieros gamos*. Although this ideal may live on in remote areas symbolised, e.g., by the use of *guldgubbar*, i.e. small gold foils, showing the married couple kissing each other, the ideal collapses in a crisis for the kingship (Olsen 1909; Steinsland 1990). The qualities of womanhood (Sigurðkvíða and Ynglingatal) are not immediately affected by the crisis, at least not in Scandinavia, but female loyalties to others than husband and children become more prominent. Eventually the role of the queen, or the woman given in marriage, is transformed by making her loyal to her husband only (Siegfriedlied). In principle the structural development behind the literary shape, which projects a male understanding of the kingship mythology, can be summarised as in Fig. 1. The terrible queens of the Late Iron Age should be seen as a sign of a successful emancipation, the murders ascribed to these women are merely symptomatic of the royal crisis. Although the queens may have taken this crisis seriously we find that even for the wickedest of them it was difficult to surpass the quota that devolved upon the average king.

English revised by John Kendal

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Rune Edberg och Sten Tesch

Nyfunna skeppsbilder från 1100-talet i Sigtuna

Edberg, R. & Tesch, S., 1996. Nyfunna skeppsbilder från 1100-talet i Sigtuna. (Recent finds in Sigtuna of 12th-century ship-pictures.) *Tor* 28. Uppsala.

Two rib-bones with carvings depicting ships have recently been found in the central part of Sigtuna, one in 1990 on the Urmakaren site and the other on the Professorn site in 1995. The Urmakaren bone had on its reverse side a carving of a lion and the Professorn bone a complete, late-runic alphabet. The latter also had various triangular figures on both sides. Both finds can be dated to the 12th century. The authors suggest an interpretation of the bones both within a Christian framework of symbols and following a Nordic tradition in which a king may create loyalties by distributing wealth, such as ships.

Keywords: *bone-carvings, 12th Century, ships.*

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Vid utgrävningar i Sigtuna sommaren 1995 påträffades ett revben av nöt med en inristad bild av ett skepp (fig. 1–2). På revbenets andra sida fanns en komplett vikingatida runrad inristad (fig. 3–4).

Revbenets största längd är 168 mm och största höjd 36 mm. Vågskvalp har gett det en matt yta. Skeppet på inristningen är 98 mm långt. Största höjd mellan köl och mast-”topp” är 25 mm. Skrovets höjd varierar mellan 4 mm och 7 mm.

Genom stilen på runorna, som är en blandning av normalrunor och kortkvistrunor, kan benet dateras till tidigast omkring år 1100 (Marit Åhlén, runverket, muntlig uppgift). Fyndet, som gjordes vid en provundersökning inför ett villabygge i kvarteret Professorn i centrala Sigtuna, kan stratigrafiskt hänföras till 1100-talet. Det påträffades bland en stor mängd andra djurben i ett tunt kulturlager närmast den sterila botten. Fyndplatsen låg 2,75 meter över havet, vilket under 1100-talet måste ha inneburit att benet legat och skvalpat i strandkanten. De övriga fynden i

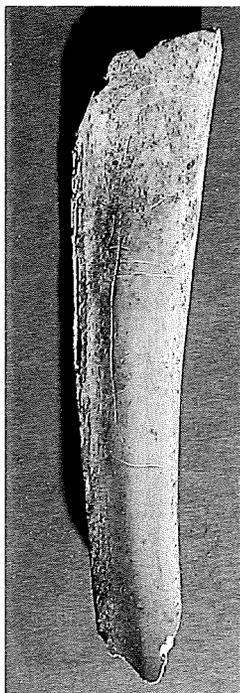
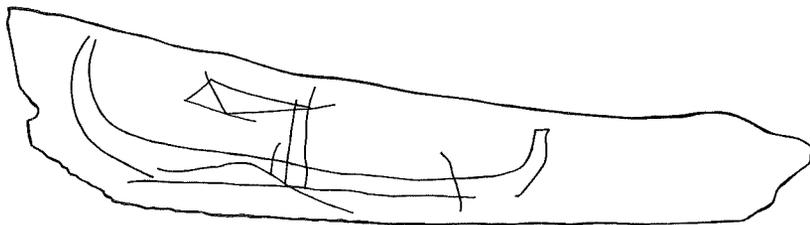


Fig. 1. Benet med skeppsristningen från kvarteret Professorn i Sigtuna, påträffat 1995. Foto: Riksantikvarieämbetet, Stockholm. – The bone with the carving of a ship found in 1995 in the Professorn block in Sigtuna. Photo: Central Office of National Antiquities, Stockholm.

Fig. 2 (nedan). Skeppsristningen på benet i fig 1. Renrit. av Elisabet Claesson, Sigtuna museer. – The carving of the ship on the bone in Fig. 1. Drawing by Elisabet Claesson, Sigtuna Museums.



lagret pekar entydigt på att benets datering till 1100-talet är riktig. Det rör sig om sågade älghornsbitar (spill från kamtillverkning) och skärvor av Östersjökeramik (A-gods, delvis svallade bitar). Inte någon av dessa föremålskategorier förekommer efter omkring år 1200.

Skeppet är försett med kraftigt uppdragna uppåt oavslutade stävar och uppåt oavslutad mast. Det är framställt enbart med hjälp av konturlinjer. Mastens nedre del syns genom skeppssidan vilken i sin tur syns rakt genom en inristad, kraftig våg. Vidare syns vid mastfotens vänstra sida en svärförklarad "bulle".

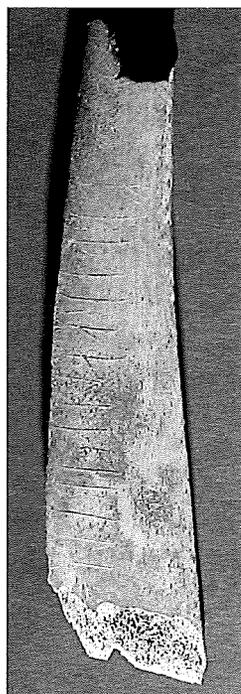
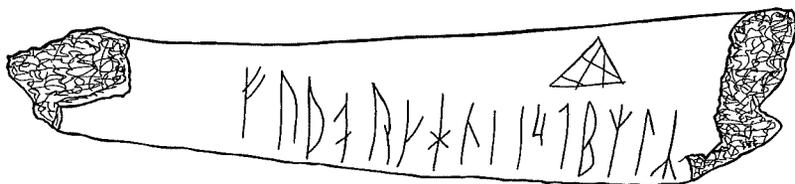


Fig. 3. På "skeppsbenets" andra sida är en komplett 16-runors runrad inristad, tillsammans med en triangelfigur. Foto: Riksantikvarieämbetet, Stockholm. – On the other side of the "ship bone", a complete row of 16 runes has been carved, together with a triangular figure. Photo: Central Office of National Antiquities, Stockholm.

Fig. 4 (nedan). Ristningen på benet i fig 3. Renrit. av Elisabet Claesson, Sigtuna museer. – The carving on the bone of Fig. 3. Drawing by Elisabet Claesson, Sigtuna Museums.



Vad som kan tolkas som en styråra framträder i form av ett enda streck på skeppets låring. Detta streck, som kan härröra från slakten eller tillredningen av djuret – skrovets ristningslinjer överlagrar strecket – har avsiktligt eller oavsiktligt kommit att ingå i kompositionen.

Skeppsristningen motsvarar i stort sett en traditionell bild av hur vikingaskepp, lite förenklat, såg ut. Framställningen av "seglet" bryter emellertid mot den naivt-naturalistiska stilen och förefaller tillhöra en annan dimension.

Den yttersta vänstra delen av "seglet" utgörs av en distinkt skuren, liksidig triangel och utifrån denna är två avsmalnande linjer dragna, del-

vis in över masten. Två nya, svagare ristade linjer som går ihop i yttersta änden ansluter på högra sidan om masten och skapar på så sätt ett perspektiv.

Vågrörelserna mot skeppssidan måste rimligen tolkas som att skeppet gör fart genom vattnet. Ändå seglar skeppet inte. Är vädret så hårt att seglet har måst tas ner helt eller har det blåst sönder?

Runraden på benet förefaller drivet och målmedvetet ristad. Triangelfiguren intill denna är också gjord med kraftfull knivföring. Båtristningen är däremot gjord med varierande intensitet. Lika målmedvetet utförd som triangeln i "seglet", lika tveksamt åstadkommen förefaller "seglets" förlängning vara. Inget hindrar i och för sig att två olika ristare varit i farten, men i så fall får de två ristningarna rimligen förutsättas ha gjorts i ett kronologiskt sammanhang (samma middagsfest!?).

En viss motsvarighet till triangeln återfinns på en gotländsk bildsten (fig. 5). I detta fall återges, trots att vågsvallet på bildstensbilden är nog så kraftigt, uppenbarligen en underbeslagning. Båten svävar oberörd över ett våldsamt stormigt hav.

Vi har svårt att ge det egendomliga "seglet" med sin triangel en till-

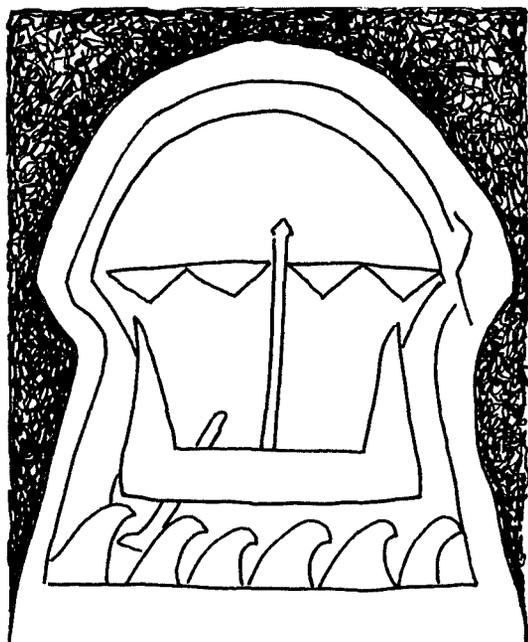


Fig. 5. Bildstensskepp med underbeslaget segel från okänd gotländsk fyndort. Från Varenius 1992, s. 66. Renrit. av Elisabet Claesson, Sigtuna museer. – Ship with a furled sail on a picture stone from an unknown find-spot on Gotland. From Varenius 1992, p. 66. Drawing by Elisabet Claesson, Sigtuna Museums.

fredsställande funktionell förklaring och en tolkning från symbolsynpunkt kan prövas. Ytterligare en anledning till en sådan är att det finns en triangelfigur inristad också på runrads-sidan av revbenet. Denna triangel är oliksidig och i sin tur, till synes planlöst, indelad i olikstora trianglar. Den harmoniska placeringen av figuren i förhållande till runinskriften tyder på att den är inskuren efter denna.

Triangeln finns som symbol i många kulturer och har många betydelser. Förkristna trianglar med dunkel symbolisk innebörd förekommer i skeppssammanhang till exempel på den berömda gotländska stenen från Hammars i Lärbro (fig. 6). Liknande triangelformationer som på denna finns i Osebergsfyndet (fig. 7).

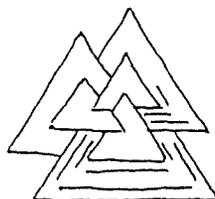


Fig. 6 (ovan t.v.). Bildsten från Hammars i Lärbro med triangelmotiv (detalj). Ur Nylén 1987, s. 62. – Picture stone with triangular motif (detail) from Hammars in Lärbro (Gotland). From Nylén 1987, p. 62.

Fig. 7 (ovan t.h.). Hopsatta trianglar från Osebergsfyndet. Ur Varenius 1992, s. 119. – Joined-together triangles from the Oseberg ship-burial. From Varenius 1992, p. 119.

Att Sigtunaristningens upphovsman varit kristen får genom fyndets datering anses ganska säkert. I den kristna symbolvärlden handlar triangelsymboliken nästan undantagslöst om den heliga treenigheten Gud–Sonen–Den helige ande. (Dahlby 1963, s. 11–14; Cooper 1993, s. 204 f.). Kanske vill ristaren med sin triangelfigur i riggen helt enkelt bara säga att i stormigt väder ligger ett skepps öde i Guds händer?

Skeppsbenet från kvarteret Professorn är inte det första av detta slag i Sigtuna. Vid utgrävningar 1990 i kvarteret Urmakaren påträffades ett ben med en skissartad framställning av en klinkbyggd båt med kraftigt uppdragna stävar (fig. 8–9). Denna ristning är 63 mm lång med en största höjd köl–stävspetsar av 32 mm. På andra sidan av detta ben återges ett tillbakablickande lejon. Också detta fynd kan stratigrafiskt föras till 1100-talet. Lejonbilden har dessutom en klar parallell på en av de dopfuntar som på 1100-talet utgick från verkstäder i Sigtuna (Karlsson 1989, s. 58 f.).

Vid grävningar 1989 i kvarteret Trädgårdsmästaren i Sigtuna påträffades ett runben med inskriften ”Kungen är frikostigast med mat. Han gav mest. Hans ynnest är stor”. Denna inskription kan tolkas i linje med uppfattningen om att den tidiga staden existerat som en produkt av ett lojalitetsförhållande mellan kungamakt och stormän, i ett socialt samspel där givandet och tagandet av gåvor spelade en central roll (Tesch 1990, s. 36 f.; Roslund 1990, s. 151–153). Också de nyfunna skeppsbilderna kan förslagsvis tolkas som en indikation på samma anda i staden. En skeppsgåva skapade lojaliteter mellan maktens män, något som behandlas på flera håll i sagalitteratur och skaldediktning (Varenius 1992, s. 27–34.) Här ett illustrativt avsnitt av Egil Skallagrimssons saga (översättn. Alving 1938, s. 79 f.):

”Du synar vårt skepp, konungsson”, sade Torolv. ”Vad tycker du om det?”

”Bra”, svarade Eirik. ”Ett präktigt skepp är det”.

”Då ger jag dig det, om du vill ha det”, sade Torolv.

”Det vill jag visst”, säger Eirik, men lönen för gåvan tycks dig kanske ringa, om jag lovar dig min vänskap. Dock är det hopp om att den kan bli större, om jag får leva”.

Torolv svarade, att den gengåvan tycktes honom vida mer värd än själva skeppet. Därmed skildes de, och från den stunden var konungssonen Torolv mycket gunstig.

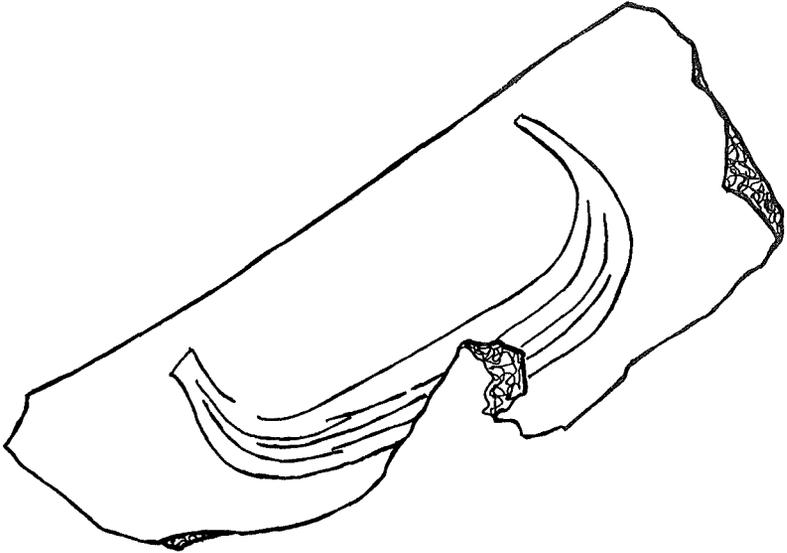


Fig. 8. Båtristning på revben från kvarteret Urmakaren, Sigtuna, funnet 1990. Renrit. av Elisabet Claesson, Sigtuna museer. – Carving of a boat on a rib-bone found in 1990 in the Urmakaren block in Sigtuna. Drawing by Elisabet Claesson, Sigtuna Museums.

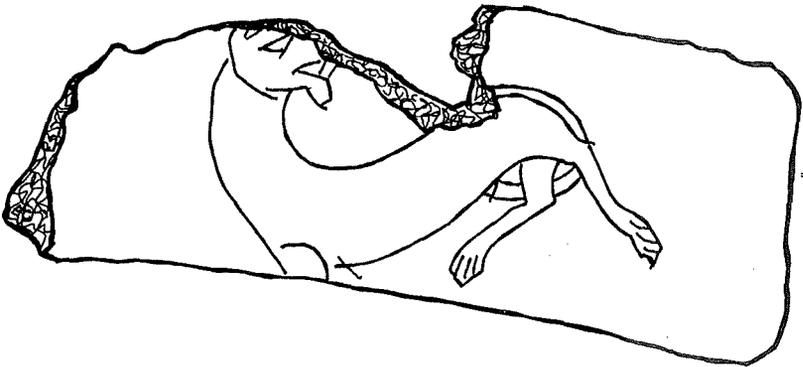


Fig. 9. Lejon på motsatt sida av revbenet i fig. 8. Renrit. av Elisabet Claesson, Sigtuna museer. – Lion on the opposite side of the rib-bone in Fig. 8. Drawing by Elisabet Claesson, Sigtuna Museums.

Summary

Two separate finds of ship-picture carvings on cow's rib-bones are reported from excavations in the central part of Sigtuna.

In 1995, a bone was found on the Professorn site. It carried a simple picture of a ship of the Viking Age type, apparently in rough seas. The rigging of the ship is enigmatic, with a yard and sail appearing as a triangular figure. On the reverse side of this bone, the late-runic alphabet was carved, together with a composition of triangular figures. The bone can be dated to the 12th century, both by stratigraphy and by analysis of the runes. The authors suggest a possible interpretation of this ship-carving within a Christian framework of symbols, i.e. the Trinity.

Another bone, found in 1990 on the Urmakaren site, also outlines a ship of the Viking Age type. The reverse side of this bone carried a carving of a lion with its head turned, a picture strikingly similar to motifs on baptismal fonts produced in 12th-century Sigtuna.

The authors also suggest that the carvings may be interpreted following a Nordic tradition in which a king or prince created loyalties by distributing wealth, such as ships. This tradition is regarded as having been strong in early Sigtuna, as indicated, among other finds, by a runebone praising the king's generosity.

English revised by Neil Tomkinson

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