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Carole M. Cusack and Peter Oldmeadow eds.

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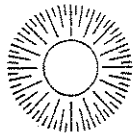
THIS IMMENSE PANORAMA

Studies in Honour of Eric J. Sharpe

Edited by Carole M. Cusack and Peter Oldmeadow



School of Studies in Religion
The University of Sydney

Medieval Europe

Runestones and the Conversion of Sweden[1]

Henrik Williams

I would like to begin by expressing my gratitude to the Centre for Medieval Studies for inviting me to give this inaugural lecture. It was with great pleasure that I received the news that Sydney University has joined the growing number of institutions which have founded a Medieval institute. Just to amuse myself I took a look at the number of sites on Internet which turn up if you search for 'Medieval institute': about three hundred! Another two hundred answered to 'Medieval studies', although we should be conscious that there is a considerable overlap within, and between, these two search categories.

Why are medieval institutes and centers so much in vogue these days? Is it only the general interest in things past, especially in times when shining knights and fair maidens were more common (at least in our fancy) than economic trouble, urban crime and environmental pollution? Well, I guess this is indeed part of the answer, at least for people in general, but it cannot even begin to explain the academic interest in medieval matters.

In the most recent edition of Merriam Websters Collegiate Dictionary 'medieval' is defined as having to to with 'Middle Ages', which in its turn is defined as 'the period of European history from about A.D. 500 to 1500'. This Eurocentrist attitude could be a weakness, but I don't believe that it has to be. The very expression 'Middle Ages' indicates transition, change; and the study of a changing world does in fact touch the core of historical study itself, the most important legacy this subject can leave society in general.

Medieval studies can therefore contribute to the general discussion of societal change, not least concerning changes in religion. Medieval studies also provide a model for all historical study, since it by tradition has been oriented towards the interdisciplinary approach. Only by studying a process from as many angles as possible can one gain true understanding of the changes involved. Medieval studies are thus as important to the scholars as they are entertaining to everyone.

For many years it was popular to talk of medieval times as 'The Dark Middle Ages'. That misconception has long since been

[1] This article is a slightly revised version of the inaugural lecture for the Sydney University Centre for Medieval Studies, given March 27, 1997, at which Professor Eric Sharpe was present.

rectified - as a matter of fact, a 1984 volume in honor of the Swedish art historian Aron Anderson was called *Den ljusa medeltiden* ('The Bright Middle Ages').[2]

If any part of the Middle Ages could still be regarded, if not dark, than at least in the twilight zone, it would be the period in each European area before the advent of Christianity. Although medieval times are said to have started around the year 500 AD this is only valid for parts of Europe. Even in the High Middle Ages, around the year 1000, scholars studying the northern parts of Europe hesitate to use the term medieval. For Scandinavian scholars these are pre-historic times and when I once studied history we were forbidden to dabble in this era, since it was considered to 'belong', as it were, to the field of archaeology, and hence off-limits. This is why for example a Swedish scholar will call the period 800-1100 'the Viking Age', and the High Middle Ages to her or him would fall as late as in the 14th century.

The so-called Dark Age of Scandinavia thus ends with the viking period, inaugurated by the Norsemen's raid on the Lindisfarne monastery in 793 and ending with the battle of Hastings. In fact, the presence of Scandinavians in England must predate the Lindisfarne raid by at least a century, and we must also be aware of the fact that the battle of Hastings in no way marks the real end of viking warfare in England, which ceased only in the twelfth century.

During the more than three hundred year long viking period, Scandinavia goes through a number of all-important changes, the most significant of which is the introduction of Christianity. Denmark is traditionally considered to have been Christianized by Haraldr Blue-tooth Gormsson in the 960's and Norway somewhat later. Iceland's conversion occurs around the year 1000, but Sweden lags behind. Although parts of southern Sweden were Christianized in the tenth century, the central parts of the most important province, Uppland, are believed to have stayed predominantly pagan until the end of the 11th century.

The problem with writing the conversion history of any country is almost always the lack of proper sources. Documents from the medieval Catholic church relating to the missionary efforts in north-western Europe are generally scarce. In the case of Sweden we have a couple of papal letters from around 1080 as our first official evidence. Apart from this there are really only three historical sources to the viking period of Sweden.

[2] Statens historiska museum, Stockholm.

Firstly there is a saint's life, the *vita* of Ansgar, the earliest known missionary to Sweden. Ansgar visited the trade town of Birka in Lake Mälaren in 829. He was successful in establishing a local church which survived a few decades, but left no known traces and had no influence on early Viking Age Sweden in general.

Secondly, the Arch-bishop of Northern Germany, Adam of Bremen, wrote a history in the 1070's of the missionary efforts of the Hamburg diocese in Scandinavia. He tells us that there was a pagan temple, covered with gold, at the central cult site of the Swedes, which was located at Uppsala, ten kilometres upriver from today's city Uppsala. According to Adam the Swedes conducted a major sacrifice, including humans, in a nine-year cycle.

The third major documentary source consists of information in the Old Norse literature, but this is sparse and often more of a fantastical than historical nature. The Norwegians and Icelanders obviously considered the Swedes to be uncultured ruffians, still wallowing in Heathen passions.

From the historical point of view it seems reasonably clear that missionary efforts from Germany and England, probably also Norway and Denmark, gradually Christianized the Swedes from the South towards the North. The decisive factor seems to have been when the king of the Swedes decided that the church could help him get a better grip of the country. The Southern parts of the country were probably, as I have said, Christianized in the 10th century. At the very end of this period, around 980, the trade town Sigtuna is established in southern Uppland, probably by the first Christian king Olof. All the lots of property in the town were distributed by the king to chieftains loyal to him. In Sigtuna we have early churches, the grave of a bishop, and even coin production, a fact of immense symbolic significance. In the central pagan province, as it were, we find a king with national ambitions issuing coinage around the year 1000 with a royal picture on one side and a cross on the other!

The king's strategy was successful. Towards the end of the eleventh century all of Uppland seems to have been Christianized and the establishment of an archbishop in Uppsala in 1164 marks the end of the missionary period in Sweden.

But, as I have said, the sources only allow us to sketch the most general outline of what happened, when and why. Given the scarcity of material, it is strange indeed that the only original existing documents from Sweden itself, contemporary with the missionary period, have been largely ignored. I am talking about the runic texts

on rocks, boulders or cliffs that were commissoned as memorial markers for deceased persons.

We know of almost three thousand of these runestones from present-day Sweden. More than ninety percent date from the very key century of the conversion, and about two thirds come from the central part of Sweden, around Lake Mälaren, where the most intriguing Christianization process took place. In fact, the longer it seems to have taken for a province to be Christianized, the more runestones it has.

In 1990 a five-year project called 'The Christianization of Sweden' was started under the auspices and financing of the Swedish Council for research in the Humanities and Social Studies. The Council specifically ordered the project to consider the runic evidence, and I was consequently drafted as a specialist in this field. Our interdisciplinary project has produced five major volumes during these years, two of them with a topical profile and two with a regional. A five hundred page volume followed in 1997 as a summation of the results of our project.[3] Very briefly they can be said to be that the Christianization was a slow process, first affecting organisation and only gradually mentality. We have also found that conflicts with the older system and the Old Norse religion as a rule seem to have been rare and not of a violent nature.

In our concluding book, I have written two chapters on the runic inscriptions as sources of the conversion process. This lecture is meant to present some of my results, as well as some of the findings of the other contributions to the volume. I will mainly discuss Christian features on runestones, but also seemingly pagan elements on these monuments.

I must first clear up one common misconception, even among people living in the runestone-rich countries of Scandinavia: the runes themselves are just ordinary letters, used before the roman alphabet was introduced, and have no intrinsically magic properties. Runestones are in general memorials, more than ninty-five percent of them are introduced by the statement: 'so-and-so erected the stone in memory of so-and-so, her/his relative'. Many runestone inscriptions stop here. Others may briefly tell of where the death occurred, who carved the stone, and, quite frequently, include a

[3] Lunne Böcker, *Kristnandet i Sverige. Gamla källor och nya perspektiv*. (Projektet Sveriges kristnande. Publikationer 5) Uppsala, 1996. Every chapter has an English summary and there is a concluding chapter in English.
Another book well worth perusing for the best synthetic treatment of the conversion is Maja Hagerman, *Spåren av kungens män. Om när Sverige blev ett kristet rike i skiftet mellan vikingatid och medeltid*, Stockholm, 1996.

prayer for the soul of the deceased person. There are hundreds of such prayers, always Christian, and even more common is the presence of a cross, often handsomely elaborated and a part of the overall runestone design with its slithering snakes and other runic animals.

Apart from ornamentation with crosses, which I have already mentioned, and the inclusion of prayers for the dead, to which I will return, there are several other ways in which the runestones reveal themselves as predominantly Christian. There is Christian figurative art, statements regarding churches and related matters, the fact that runestones are sometimes placed in or close to church buildings, the occurrence of Christian terms and expressions, and lastly the existence of Christian personal names. I will briefly exemplify all of these categories in the order mentioned.

1. Christian figurative art

Most runestones do not contain figurative art, but some do, and if so most often of a clearly Christian nature. I should like to start by showing the great Danish runestone from Jellinge (Fig. 1) that King Haraldr Bluetooth erected to proclaim that he had Christianized all of the Danes.

On the left side you can see Christ and on the right an animal, probably a lion, perhaps the lion of Judah occuring on many Swedish runestones, but may also (or instead) show a connection to royal power. Only one Swedish stone has a message resembling King Haraldr's. The northernmost of all runestones, on Frösön in Jämtland, proclaims that the commissioner of the stone caused the province to be Christianized.

But let us return to the question of runestone pictures. The exact interpretation of the runestone from Harg (Fig. 2) is a bit uncertain, but at any rate it is quite clear that we are dealing with the tolling of a church bell. There are other examples of this kind: clearly Christian pictures, but with a less than definite message. A man carrying a cross occurs several times, but again we have no clue to who such a man might be.

Another small fragment of a runestone from a northern province has a man who seems to be sitting in some kind of vehicle, perhaps a cart of some kind. Is he an early missionary or is this a cult parade? Here, as in all other cases where pictures occur on a runestone, the runic inscription does nothing to enlighten us, we are lost wondering.

2. Statements regarding churches and related matters

In just a couple of cases is there information about churches on runestones: one man has been buried in a church and another in a graveyard. There is a scarcity of information about churches and absolute silence about things like missionaries, priests, or any type of church organization. This is so conspicuous that we must draw the conclusion that these things were rare at the time, or if they did indeed exist, were perhaps still only in the fledgling state of churches connected to rich people and priests in their exclusive employment. One corrobating fact might be that burials seem to have continued to occur in the traditional grave fields by the old farms, where a certain portion was marked off and perhaps consecrated in some way. This we can tell because certain sections of some grave fields consist exclusively of graves with uncremated bodies oriented in a more or less east-west direction, two certain indications of Christian interment.

If runestones are silent on the matter of churches, they are more informative about good deeds performed by pious Swedes. The building of bridges and causeways and even roads are the most popular pious activities to mention in a runic inscription. The building of a bridge has been given religious interpretations; *pontifex*, 'bridge builder' is a Christian term heavy in meaning. Another charitable work is to build hostels for the sick or for travellers. This is mentioned on a few runestones. It seems as if the Swedes took quickly to these common Christian practices, yet it is somewhat of a shock to learn from two runestones that at least one man and one woman tried to make the pilgimage to Jerusalem, a journey not commonly associated with travelling Viking Age Swedes.

This is where we should bring up the matter of prayers again. Even though the runic texts may make no mention of lesser persons within the church, the higher echelons are not left out. The most common prayer is simply 'God help her/his soul', which occurs on hundreds of runestones. Other, more elaborated versions, are 'May Christ let Tumme's spirit come into light and paradise and into the world best for Christians' or 'God and God's Mother help his spirit and soul, grant him light and paradise' or finally my own favorite: 'God save his soul better than he deserved'.

We can see from the prayers that 'God' primarily means Christ. In fact, there is reason to believe that the theology taught in the missionary period was a less than true rendering of the dogma of the Trinity. The Father and the Holy Ghost are completely absent

from the prayers. From somewhat later Scandinavian sources it is evident that the theology can be summarized: 'We believe in one God, and his name is Christ'. The link between Christ his mother is already of the strongest kind. 'Mother of God' is an expression recorded almost fifty times. One late inscription varies the usual 'God and God's Mother' by the prayer 'God, the son of Mary'. The only other name occuring on par with Christ and his mother is the archangel Michael, and this helps us to understand why the prayers on runestones mention so few persons, and also grasp what purpose they served.

The runestones only represent a limited portion of Christian teachings, which explains the stereotyped contents. From the expressions and religious *personae* occurring therein it is clear that the runestone prayers are derived from the liturgy of death, including the *commendatio animæ*, the requiem mass and the interment. This is what is important to those who have commissioned the runestones. This also explains why Christ dominates in the concept of God, and why the mother of Christ, Mary, and the archangel Michael are the only other persons mentioned in the intercessionary prayers. These two have a most important task to accomplish on Judgement Day. Other saints were known in this earliest Christian period. But most important to mention in the runestone prayers are Michael who weighs the soul, Mary who intercedes for it, and Christ who judges it.

3. The placement of runestones in or close to church buildings.

This is a point I will not elaborate much. Suffice it to say that a great many runestones have been found close to medieval churches or even as part of the church buildings themselves. The best known example is the Cathedral in Uppsala, still the biggest church in Scandinavia, its construction started at the end of the 13th century. Under many of the pillars in the oldest part of the church there have been found altogether more than a dozen runestones, lying with their cross-marked faces upwards as foundation to these pillars.

The general question concerning the connection between runestones and churches is: were the stones erected at the church or at what became the church site or were they brought to church at some later date, and if so: for any special purpose or just to serve as building material? This question cannot be fully answered yet. We do have evidence that some runestones were indeed brought to churches to be used as construction material. But it also seems that many runestones were originally placed close to a church. In my

own research I have suggested that runestones may have been placed close to the first, usually wooden church, erected in a district. This is, however, but a theory.

4. The occurrence of Christian terms and expressions.

In modern times we tend to think of the medieval church as exclusively steeped in the use of Latin. This is not entirely true. The sermon was as a rule delivered in the language of the listeners to it, and we should surmise that the initial Christian teaching in the missionary period must have followed the same principle. It is also quite evident from the Christian terms and expressions recorded on runestones that the language was almost one hundred percent Swedish in origin; very few words were borrowed from or through foreign languages. *Christian, church, cross, paradise, saint,* and *soul* are almost the only words that are clearly of foreign origin.

To express Christian beliefs and ideas other strategies than borrowing were used. An indigenous word was given a wider meaning. Thus a word like *light* was used to represent *paradise*. The interesting fact here is that one can see from these words that they were not simple translations from Latin, but rather modelled upon the religious terms in German or Old English, the languages of the missionaries to Sweden. In the countries to the south of Scandinavia Christianity had dominated for many centuries and a homegrown religious language had developed. It is this pattern that is followed in the runic texts.

5. The existence of Christian personal names.

If there are extremely few borrowed words in runic Swedish, the same is certainly true for the number of non-Swedish personal names. This is an important fact that has not been taken into proper consideration because of two misunderstandings. Firstly the number of names have been overestimated because not enough attention has been paid to the difference between Viking Age memorials and later ones. In fact we only have five Christian names out of much more than one thousand different personal names. The five Christian names are all male, *John* dominates by far in number of records, and all the names have probably been taken from Christian saints.

The second misunderstanding is due to the preconceived notion that the Runic Swedish names had anything to do with the Old

Norse religion. In the standard handbook on Old Norse personal names we can find the following drastic statement:

> The Old Norse names were intimately tied to the old religion. They were, so to say, impregnated with paganism. That is why the champions of Christianity had to combat and exterminate them with all their power, as well as all other pagan witchcraft.[4]

The fact that there are no signs of any such war of extermination has not worried the proponents of the heathen nature of Old Norse personal names. There is, however, no reason to believe that the Old Norse names were considered pagan.

Firstly, most people simply kept them when Christianity arrived. As in Germany and England it took half a millenium before Christian names outweighed the old names. This eventually happened because both traditions share the same custom of naming people after dead relatives. Once Christian names had been introduced, they slowly spread throughout the population. There was one advantage to choosing a Christian name. Since these were almost exclusively names of saints, one could also have the protection of this holy person as a fringe benefit. That this did fact did not succeed in doing away with the old names quicker shows just how strong the custom of naming a child after an ancestor really is.

Secondly, if the Old Norse names really had been considered pagan we would surely not have expected well known Christians to wear them. The pious Danish Bishop Odinkar did not change his name, even though this name was (erroneously) thought to mean 'dear to the pagan god Odin'. The diocese of Odense has its name after the placename *Odins-vi* 'the holy place of Odin' and there are many examples of names in Sweden like *Torsåker* 'the field of Thor' and *Fröslunda* 'the grove of Freyr' that still in the modern language clearly signify cultic sites of pagan gods. Some of these placenames also became names of the church situated there, and later the name of the parish or entire county.

A study of the runestones of Sweden shows a remarkable lack of conflict between the old and the new religion. This is no new discovery, but I have managed to confirm it in several ways in my own research, and it has implications on other conversion processes, in medieval Europe and elsewhere.

4 Assar Janzén 'De fornsvenska personnamnen', *Personnamn*. A. Janzén (ed.), (Nordisk kultur 7.), Stockholm-Oslo-København, s. 239. The translation is my own.

As the second part of my lecture I would like to leave already published results and launch some front-line research on pagan elements in runestone pictoral art.[5] I have already claimed that all runestone pictures of a figurative kind must be considered Christian, but my talk of pagan pictoral elements would seem to contradict such a presumption. I therefore need to address the question of why runestones have been linked to the Old Norse religion in the first place.

My guess is that things went wrong from the very start. When runic research started in Sweden in the 17th century, it was intimately connected to contemporary ideas about the greatness of my home country. This was the time of Sweden's political climax. For a short period Sweden had the largest army in the world, built the biggest warships for the biggest fleet, had colonies in Africa and America and even aspired to compete with England and Holland, France and Spain, for the rule of the seas. Swedish was considered the oldest of all languages, the origin of Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. The Garden of Eden had been located in our country, and from it the illustrous Gothic tribe had sprung forth to conquer Europe.

The only problem was that Sweden had so little to show to prove this. No ancient ruins, no proper historiography, only the Old Norse sagas and, above all, the runestones. These were shown off as the evidence of a Nordic golden age. The antiquarians of the 17th century also lacked archaeological excavations on which to build their research. But they did find information in the writings of archbishop Adam of Bremen and in Icelandic books that told of the magnificent temple in Uppsala, which I mentioned earlier.

Filled with the megalomaniac spirit of the period, the first runologists set out to interpret the runic inscriptions and ornamentation. One of the best known was Johan Peringskiöld. When he for example stood in front of a runestone at Danmark church close to Uppsala he got the fantastic idea that its circular inscriptional band was supposed to represent the fence around the Pagan temple, and he also saw its plain cross as a representation of the famous hammer, *Mjollnir*, owned by Thor, god of Thunder and lightening. Why did he not realize that this is a cross? Well, since the runestones at this time were considered to be from the time of Noah

[5] I leave aside the problem of two putatively pagan elements of runestone ormamentation, the so-called Thor's hammer and Odin's masks. Suffice it to say that they often seem to best interpreted as the exact 'opposite' of what has been claimed, i.e., as representations of the cross and the face of Christ. For a fuller treatment see *Kristnandet i Sverige* (*vide supra*).

and the flood, Christian symbols could not very well appear in the monuments, could they?

There are, however, a number of runestone pictures of clearly un-Christian origin. I would like to start with the famous runic rock-carving from Ramsundet (Fig. 3) showing the well-known tale about Sigurd the dragon-slayer. In an almost cartoon-like technique the carver shows us in this five meter wide storyboard how Sigurd kills the dragon. After the deed he is persuaded by the smith Regin, the brother of the dragon, to roast its heart for him, but when he checks if it is cooked enough he burns his finger and sticks it in his mouth. Then he tastes the dragon's blood and can understand the song of the birds sitting in a nearby tree. They tell him that Regin plans to eat the heart, turn himself into a dragon and slay Sigurd. They advise him to kill the evil smith first, and we can already see the decapitated Regin lying among his smith's equipment. At the tree we also see Grani, Sigurd's faithful horse, loaded with the dragon's hoard.

This motif is found on other runestones as well. Is it evidence of pagan beliefs? Well at least the Ramsundet inscription gives a clear answer: it contains a runic text proclaiming that the memorial was commissioned by a woman who also made a bridge for the soul of the deceased, a clearly Christian act I have already described.

Then, what is the meaning of the Old Norse motifs? We must look at other pictures. Sometimes we find another scene connected to the legend about Sigurd, that is the death of the hero Gunnar in the snake pit, into which he was thrown with his hands tied. He managed to prolong his life for a little while by playing the harp with his toes to charm the snakes. The link between Sigurd and Gunnar is that they are both heroes of Germanic legend that have fought against evil in form of a dragon or snakes. In the Christian tradition these animals were representatives of the devil, and Sigurd and Gunnar thus derive a Christ-like character by fighting the symbols of the evil one.

This observation is borne out by a rather striking picture on a Upplandic runestone (Fig. 4). In the bottom panel we can see a man in a boat with a raised hammer in one hand, a fishing-line in the other and one foot sticking out through the bottom of the boat. The line is baited with an animal head with horns and this bait is about to be swallowed by a creature with huge jaws. Now, we happen to have a story in *Edda*, Snorri Sturluson's book about old myths, where we are told that the god Thor and a giant once went fishing for the huge serpent lying in the sea all around middle-earth. When the Serpent took the bull's head used for a bait Thor put his feet against

the bottom of the boat so hard that they went through. He was just about to kill the serpent with his hammer when the giant cut the fishing-line.

This motif is also known from a stone cross in England (as are other Old Norse motifs on other English monuments), and could thus obviously be used on Christian memorials. The picture could thus easily be adopted to a Christian purpose. We have somewhat later documentary evidence that the serpent of middle-earth was seen as the direct counterpart of Leviathan, a biblical symbol of the Devil. There are also sermons that show Christ himself as a fisherman fishing for the middle-earth serpent, symbolically defeating Satan. This is why the early Christians in Sweden dared use a pagan deity to impress on their fellows how God saves the world from evil. It is probably not by chance that only Thor occurs in a context like this. He was the hero among the gods, probably widely admired in the farmer communities of Sweden.

There is further evidence that the Old Norse myths were suitable vehicles for carrying the Christian message to the vikings. On a runestone at Ledberg church (Fig. 5) we find pictures on two of its sides that most likely depict scenes from the *Ragnarok*, the destruction of the world. We may interpret the ship on one side to be *Skiðblaðnir*, which sets sail at the last judgement. One the other side we see a warrior with a foot in the mouth of a canine beast, possibly Odin, being bitten by the wolf *Fenrir*, but more probably Odin's son who thence killed the wolf by stepping on its lower jaw and ripping the upper.

Why must we study these scenes in a Christian context? If we look at the third side of the runestone we find a rather striking cross, which puts this monument in a Christian environment. What could be the reason for an allusion to the destruction of the world according to Old Norse myths on a Christian memorial? I can offer two explanations. First of all the pupose might be to remind the beholder that the end of the Old Norse pantheon was at hand, and hence it was time to embrace a new faith. Secondly it is conceivable that the destruction of the world was a 'current event' in missionary times, given the closeness of the 'year 1000' when the Return of Christ was due. This was certainly a Christian theme worth reminding the Swedes about. The missionaries may have taken the opportunity of preaching on the Last Judgment, even though recent research gives less importance to the 'year 1000'.

A similar thought seems to have struck the man who commissioned the runestone at Skarpåker in the province of Södermanland in memory of his son. The inscription ends with the

phrase 'Earth shall be riven and High Heaven', strongly reminiscent of the destruction of the world as told to us in the mythological Old Norse poem 'Voluspá'. This constitutes a verbal parallel to the pictures on the Ledberg runestone. Surely the laconic words are also an expression of the father's grief for the death of his son. It may not, however, be interpreted as a pagan creed; the back of the Skarpåker runestone is ornamented with an magnificently elaborated cross which leaves us in no doubt about the Christian setting of the monument.

My final example is found among a group of related runestones from Hunnestad in the Scanian province. One of the monuments carries only a picture, that of a canine beast with a person on its back, in whose hands there are snakes (Fig. 6). Once again the *Edda* offers a means of interpretation. It tells us of the death of the mild god *Baldr*, who after dying innocently and betrayed is burned on a funeral pyre on a ship. No one present has the strength to push the ship off the shore, so a giantess called *Hyrrokkin* is summoned. She comes riding on a wolf with adders as reins! To see a representation of this scene on the Hunnestad stone seems natural.

Again the Christian context is assured, because one of the stones in the Hunnestad group is marked with a cross. It only remains to fit the presence of *Hyrrokkin* into a Christian interpretation. I suggest that once again we are dealing with a scene that reminds us of the Last Judgement. *Baldr*, the most Christ-like of the Old Norse deities, is departing to the realm of death. Whether *Hyrrokkin* was used for something more than an easily recognized reminder of *Baldr*'s death and, in extension, *Ragnarok*, is difficult to say. Like the dire words on the Skarpåker stone it may only serve the purpose of an allusion, like the cross a symbol of things to come.

The conversion of Sweden went, most likely, slowly. The runestones show us something of what preoccupied the minds of the first generation of Christians. They were firmly rooted in old traditions as shown by the adherence to the Old Norse names, and they were perhaps more easily reached through interpretation of their old myths than through an exclusive exposure to the new. Yet they by no means lack sophistication in expression their new faith with a clearly Scandinavian touch. The religious terminology was quickly expanded to encompass the new notions and some of the Viking Age Swedes show the fervor of their prayers and the ambitions of their pilgimages as proudly as the rest of the Christianized Europeans.

Fig. 1. The larger runestone from Jellinge. (Number 42 in L. Jacobsen & al. København (eds), *Danmarks runeindskrifter*, 1941—2.)

Fig. 2. The runestone from Harg's forest. (Number 595 in E. Wessén &, S. B. F. Jansson (eds.), *Upplands runinskrifter* 2, Stockholm 1943.)

Fig. 3. The cliff at Ramsundet (Number 101 in E. Brate & E. Wessén (eds), *Södermanlands runinskrifter,* Stockholm, 1924—36.) [A better picture in: Henrik Schück, *Svensk litteraturhistoria* Stockholm 1890, p. 57.]

Fig. 4. The runestone at Altuna church (Number 1161 in E. Wessén & S. B. F. Jansson (eds) *Upplands runinskrifter* 4, Stockholm, 1958.)

Fig. 5. A runstone at Ledberg's church (Number 181 in E. Brate (ed.) *Östergötlands runinskrifter*, Stockholm, 1911.) [Also found in Erik Moltke, *Runes and Their Origin*, Copenhagen 1985, p. 171.]

Fig. 6. One of the stones that once stood at Hunnestad (Number 284 in L. Jacobsen & al. København (eds), *Danmarks runeindskrifter*, 1941—2.)

Figure 1

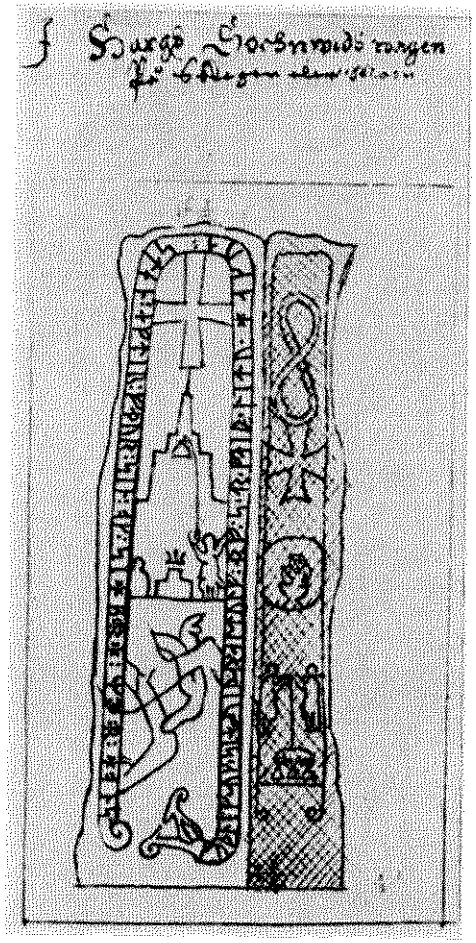


Figure 2

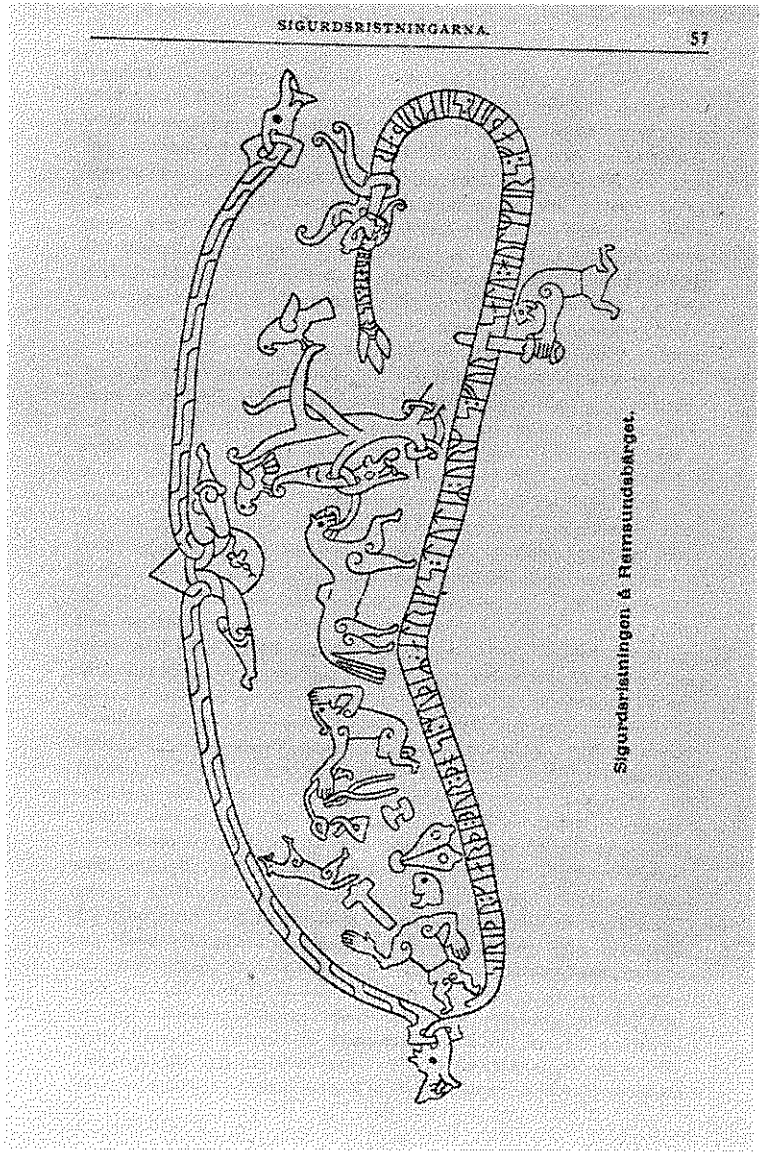


Figure 3

Figure 4

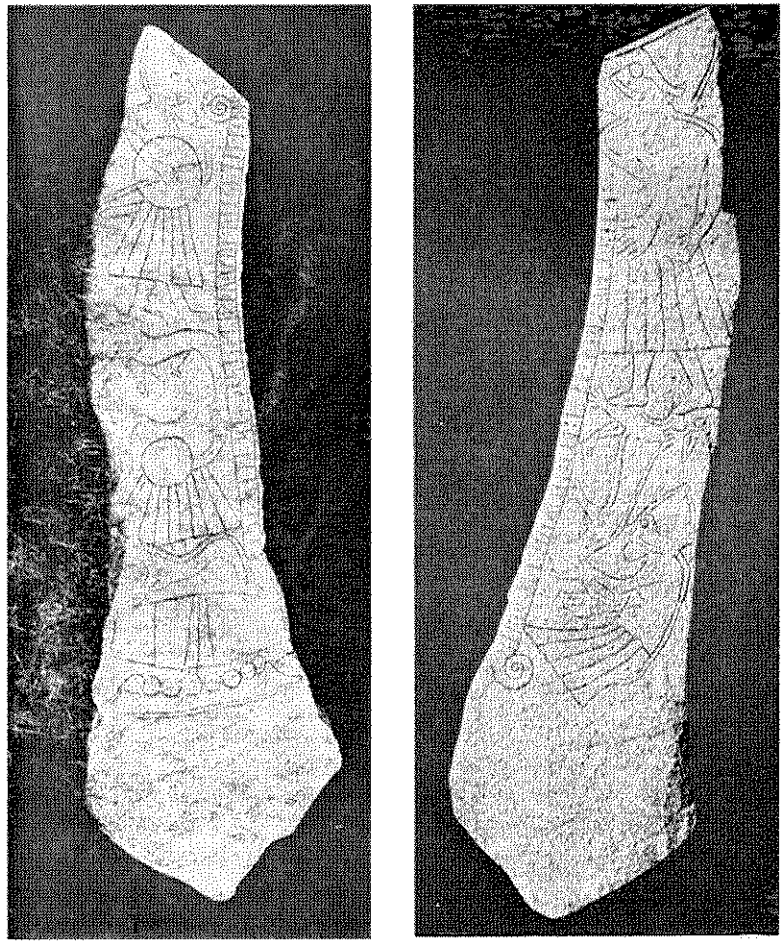


Figure 5

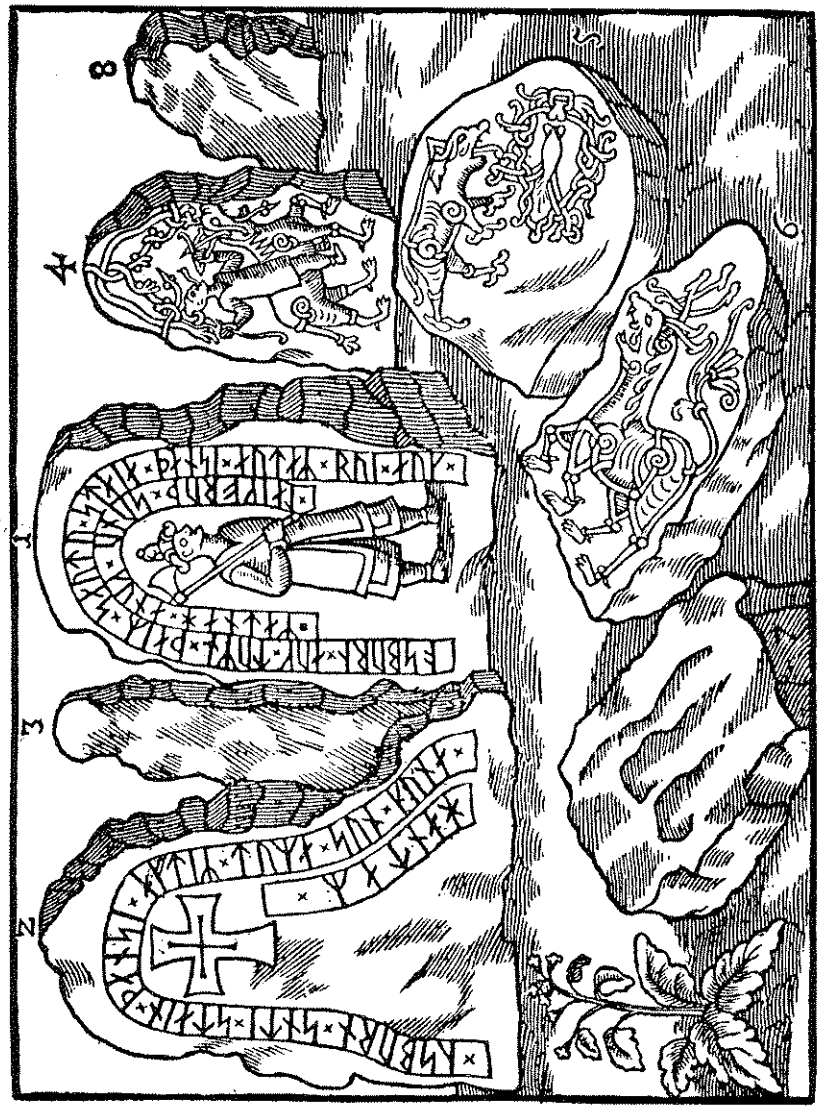


Figure 6