Maria Domeij Lundborg (Lund University)

Between Tradition and Change. Scandinavian Animal Ornamentation in the Process of Christianization

Animal ornamentation was produced from c. 400-1150 AD. Even though stylistic variation is obvious during this period of time, there are also striking continuities in both image and structure. This applies not the least to the central zoomorphic creatures, whose bodies are often drawn out and bound in various forms of web-like patterns.

From the early 1990s there has been a growing interest in the “symbolic” meanings of these artistic expressions. When trying to decode the ornaments, scholars tend to make use of analogies from written sources in a more or less methodologically conscious way. Ornamented objects from supposed pre-Christian times, and with functions that are not clear-cut Christian, are most often paralleled to one or the other aspect of the Norse mythology. Moreover, ornament and mythology are commonly understood as belonging to a pre-Christian, religious discourse. Animal ornamented objects with Christian functions, or objects dated to Christian times, are more often discussed as having Christian symbolic meanings. In my paper I discuss the symbolic meanings of animal ornamentation in a long term perspective. Special focus is put upon the relation between animal ornamentation as a tradition and the ongoing shift in religions.

Jörn Staecker (University of Tübingen)

Byzantine Crosses and Encolpia in Early Christian Scandinavia (c. 900-1100)

Objects of byzantine origin are a kind of exotic items among the Viking Age crosses and encolpia in Scandinavia. They are extremely difficult to date (there are no stratified finds) and there are more question marks than answers. The dating is a key to the general understanding of this special group. Until the 1980s the traditional chronological method of art-history and history was not dismantled. But the old method is still accepted and circulating on the web. The reasons will be
demonstrated here and it will be shown how this material is to be placed on the right spot in history. Besides this the origin and meaning of some of the crosses will be discussed. Even here there are still open questions concerning the production place (Russian or Byzantine) and the meaning of the iconography.

**Anne Pedersen** (National Museum of Denmark)

*Early Medieval Ornaments – a Question of Faith*

Harald Bluetooth’s rune stone in Jelling commemorates the king’s acceptance of Christianity on behalf of his people around AD 965. It marks a stage in a long process in which old values and beliefs were replaced by new ways of thinking, and new structures of power and social groupings emerged. According to Adam of Bremen many churches had been built by the end of the 11th century, the first most likely by local magnates or the king. Likewise, coins with Christian motifs attest to the status of the Danish kings as Christian rulers. As a result of extensive metal detecting in recent decades, a new source of evidence providing insight into the reception of Christianity by the common people has emerged – personal ornaments of copper alloy for everyday use. In the 9th and 10th centuries a variety of brooches were introduced from the Continent and the cross motif was adapted in Scandinavian-type brooches and pendants. However, from the 11th century a multitude of new, locally made forms appeared, the types drawing upon inspiration from both northwestern Europe and Byzantium. The virtual explosion of creativity and innovation suggests that these ornaments played an important role in the process of establishing new values, ideas and identities and thus the integration of Christianity at different levels of society.

**Gareth Williams** (British Museum)

*Christian Symbolism on Viking Coins from England and Scandinavia: a Comparison*

Coins were increasingly used as monetary or quasi-monetary means of exchange across much of Scandinavia from the late ninth century onwards. Although there were pockets of controlled coin-based economy, they were used primarily alongside other forms of silver, and the imagery and inscriptions on the coins were largely irrelevant to their monetary function, as was their origin, with imported coinage coming from Western Europe, Byzantium and the Islamic world.

By contrast, there seems to be a clear correlation between the issuing of coins and the conversion of individual rulers to Christianity, and to a concept of Christian kingship in which coinage played a symbolic part, even when the coins were issued on too small a scale to have a major monetary function. It is therefore unsurprising that the majority of Viking coins carry explicit Christian messages, either in their inscriptions
or in their iconography. This applies both in the Viking settlements in England in the late ninth and early tenth centuries, and in the Scandinavian homelands in the late tenth and eleventh centuries. Both groups of coins show an influence from more established Christian coinages, but also an element of innovation. This paper considers the range of imagery found in both groups, and concludes that the Scandinavian coinage shows a wider range of Christian iconography than the earlier Anglo-Scandinavian coins. This in part reflects wider trends in northern European coin design, but not all of the designs have obvious numismatic parallels, suggesting a wider engagement both with Christian belief and perhaps with other forms of Christian art.

Ildar Garipzanov (University of Bergen)
*Coins as Symbolic Expressions of Christian Identities in Viking Age Scandinavia*

This presentation will overview the early use of both local and foreign coins as Christian symbols in Viking Age Scandinavia prior to the first regal issues c. 995-1000. First, it will question the Christian interpretation of the early Scandinavian (Hedeby) coinage struck in Scandinavia in the first half of the ninth century. Second, it will discuss the symbolic usage of Carolingian and Byzantine coins in ninth- and tenth-century Scandinavian contexts and stress their function as symbols of social status. Finally, it will explore the symbolic functions of the Cross coins of Harald Bluetooth.

David M. Wilson (Centre for Manx Studies, University of Liverpool)
*Christian Symbolism in The Viking Age in the Isle of Man – Origins and Content*

The Isle of Man has in effect had two conversions, an early conversion in the fifth or sixth century, and a later conversion of an incoming people – Vikings, ultimately of Norwegian origin – in the early tenth century. Both conversions will be examined in this paper.

There are few historical or literary sources for the history of the Island in the centuries encompassing this period. Evidence must be drawn from archaeology, stylistic history and epigraphy, particularly in relation to the conversion process. The paper discusses the symbolism of the large number (some 200) fragments of stone sculpture – memorial stones – which have been studied by scholars for almost 200 years.
The paper will consider the strictly Christian symbolism found on these monuments in the pre-Norse and Viking periods. It attempts to identify the different Christian influences felt in the Island before the arrival of the Norse settlers – some of whom are shown archaeologically to have been pagan when they arrived – through the motifs and inscriptions (ogham, runic and Latin) on the stones. It points to the purely Christian elements in the Viking-age sculpture and, while ignoring to a large extent the well-trodden paths of iconography based on Norse mythology, will examine clues to the conversion process apparent in the sculpture itself and in the Norse runic inscriptions. As a footnote it opens up a discussion as to why the physical symbolism and exegetical scenes ceased to be produced in the period after 1000.

Iris Crouwers (University of Bergen)

Eschatological Themes and Motifs on the Viking-Age Crosses of the Isle of Man

A tradition of erecting stone cross monuments had been established on the Isle of Man long before Norse colonists arrived on the island in the second half of the ninth century. The custom was adopted by the settlers, who probably converted to Christianity during the first half of the tenth century, and approximatively between the years 930 and 1020 cross monuments with Scandinavian characteristics were produced. This paper focuses on nine Viking Age cross monuments that show figurative motifs and scenes that could refer to Norse conceptions related to death, the afterlife and the end of the entire world. Three of these monuments also display images which are indisputably Christian, while certain motifs may have had eschatological meanings both in a Christian and pagan Norse context. Furthermore, seven of the discussed monuments contain a runic inscription from which it can be gathered that they were raised to commemorate a deceased relative. The paper explores the relationship between the iconography and the commemorative function of the monuments, as well as what these monuments might tell us about the eschatological conceptions that existed on the Isle of Man in a time when two religions met and blended.

Michelle P. Brown (School of Advanced Study, University of London)

Written in Stone: the Larger Jellinge Rune Stone as Book

The larger of the rune stones at the royal site of Jellinge forms a powerful visual statement of a pivotal moment in the conversion of Denmark. Its runic inscription proclaims the adoption of Christianity as state religion by King Harald Bluetooth, following his conquest of Denmark and Norway, and commemorates his parents, King Gorm and Queen Thyra, thereby effectively transforming their pagan burial site to a christianised royal shrine.
Gorm’s runic tribute to his wife, who predeceased him, was joined by Harald’s tribute which combines word and image in a manner that, I would suggest, was intended to consciously recall the incipit pages of the great biblical manuscripts of Britain and Ireland. In this paper I will relate the monument’s display script and iconography – themselves once illuminated with pigments – to their Insular models and consider their implications for the conversion process.

Magnus Källström (Swedish National Heritage Board)
_Symbols and Imagery on the Christian Rune Stones of Rune Carver Åsmund Kåresson in Sweden_

Åsmund Kåresson is probably the most renowned rune carver active in central Sweden towards the end of the Viking Age. He has signed about twenty inscriptions, some of them in co-operation with other rune carvers, but his characteristic style makes it possible to attribute another forty or fifty inscriptions to him. This puts Åsmund among the most productive rune carvers of the time.

Åsmund is sometimes identified with Osmundus, a missionary bishop of English origin, which according to Adam of Bremen was present at the court of the Swedish king Emund the Old. In current research this identification is rejected by most scholars, but it is undeniable that Åsmund’s carvings exhibit several signs of Christianity. The Christian cross is seldom missing and many of the inscriptions also contain prayers such as “God and God’s mother help his soul”. On a couple of the stones there are also images of various types. Some researchers have claimed that Åsmund cut these pictures primarily for decorative purposes (or even for his own amusement), while others have tried to connect some of them to Christian iconography.

In my paper I will present an investigation of the imagery on Åsmund’s rune stones and discuss its possible meaning(s).

Kristel Zilmer (University of Bergen)
_Runic Graffiti and Christian Symbols in Norwegian Stave Churches_

Different types of runic inscriptions are known from medieval Norwegian stave churches, some possibly originating from the time around or shortly after the building of the church (in some cases going back to the twelfth century or the early thirteenth century). Stave church pillars, wall planks, portals etc. reveal shorter and longer runic texts and sequences of letters, as well as single runes and rune-like signs, alongside other graffiti and visual images. Using the inscriptions from Lom stave church in Oppland (dating back to the mid-twelfth century) as a point of departure, I will discuss some textual, visual and spatial contexts for certain types of runic graffiti.
that occur in Norwegian stave churches. Certain emphasis will be given to inscriptions containing prayers and supplications, personal names, as well as presumed religious monograms, acronyms and abbreviations, critically assessing some earlier interpretations that may still affect approaches to the runic material. A point of discussion also concerns the dating of runic graffiti in stave churches and the possibilities of finding out what inscriptions may originate from the time around the building of the church.

Lisbeth Imer (National Museum of Denmark)
Rune Stones in Denmark: the Christian Influence

Just after the time of the conversion and the erecting of Harald’s runic monument in Jelling, there was a boom in the erecting of rune stones in Denmark. With the adoption of Christianity, the magnates’ possibility of manifesting and maintaining old boundaries by lavish and costly funerals at the existing grave fields vanished, and therefore the custom of erecting rune stones became popular. Erecting rune stones was an old and distinguished custom, yet flexible; rune stones could be placed wherever necessary, and the textual content could be adapted to the new Christian ideology.

In my lecture, I would like to discuss the rune stones as forming a part of the collective memory in Late Viking Age society at the time of conversion, especially in connection with the Jelling stones, and the rune stones that can be directly or indirectly linked to the Jelling dynasty.

Anne-Sofie Gräslund (Uppsala University)
Christian Influences in Late Viking Age Old Uppsala and Its Surroundings

Adam’s spectacular description of the pagan cult in (Old) Uppsala, written in the 1070s, must be the most quoted literary source for Late Viking Age Svealand, and it has been an immensely important contribution to the general view of a very late date of conversion for this region. But what do the contemporary rune stones and grave finds in the area tell us about the religion of the inhabitants? In my paper I will give a survey of relevant runic monuments and recently excavated burials in Old Uppsala and adjacent parishes. It is apparent from runic inscriptions that many persons were Christians in the 11th century and that many burials show strong Christian influences.
The dedication of altar and building had to be performed by certified men; the rite making a simple, symbolic, logistical frame around a communal spiritual encounter. Liturgical and social orders seem reciprocal: to determine the intersection between profane and sacred in this event is difficult, and people may have chosen to believe in the simultaneous presence of both dimensions. So the rite makes visibly an eternal order, which may legitimize the social order of the time, with political consequences. Boundaries may have been defined together with ownership of property and the economy of the church. Further, contribution to and the support of the fabrica, maintenance duties, the asylum institute and ecclesiastical laws for the permanent liturgical use of the building may have been proclaimed. The pragmatic rubrics tell the professionals how to carry out the rite, and also when to abandon churches no longer useful, even when the dedication given was supposed to endure for eternity.