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Images from Old Norse Mythology and Legend on Anglo-Scandinavian and Scandinavian Stone Sculpture and some Wood Objects

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of
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Abstract

In a general sense, the objective of this thesis was to survey and assess the various stone and some wood monuments (that include images from Old Norse mythology and legend) in the north of England and Scandinavia during the so-called Viking Age. Chapter One examines the English material, with a particular focus on the myths involving Völundr the smith, Sigurðr, Ragnarök, Þórr and the Miðgarðsormr and some other more obscure figures. Chapter Two explores the relationship between the form of pre-Christian religion of the Vikings and Christianity. In this instance, the stone sculpture from northern England became the grounds for examination, although I have also invoked many of the relevant texts from the Old Norse-Icelandic literary record. Chapter Three is an examination of the material from Scandinavia (Sweden, Norway and Denmark) and the Isle of Man. This chapter has been divided into three sections – one for each country with further subdivisions on the basis of myth. Chapter Three is similar to the first in presentation, although more independent analysis has been undertaken as language barriers have prevented me from reading the Scandinavian written records with complete accuracy. My arguments include the following: (a) that the relationship between Old Norse paganism and Christianity has been largely underestimated and has yet to be properly researched; (b) that this relationship has deep roots on many levels as evidenced by the Viking Age sculpture and Old Norse literature; (c) many of the Scandinavian myths and legends were thought continuous within the broad Christian framework and were embraced, hence their appearance on the monuments; (d) there is an old tradition of image making in Scandinavia and the British Isles that connects the two areas together, despite the vastness of the sea; (e) many of the monuments in both areas share aspects of composition, style and content and should be viewed as belonging to the same overarching tradition but, in some cases, as having arisen independently.

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GLOSSARY

1) A note on Old Norse spelling conventions

In this thesis I have retained the usual Old Norse spelling and naming conventions as I aim to present the Old Norse sources in the most original and authentic way possible. I therefore use the following letters: upper and lower case versions of ‘thorn’ (Þ/þ) and ‘eth’ (Ð/ð), á, ó, ø, ý, í, ú, æ and œ – however, instead of the hooked ‘o’ I have used the modified character ‘ö’ as computer font systems often do not include it.

2) Technical art historical/sculptural terms

Agnus Dei – A figure of a lamb bearing a cross or flag, as an emblem of Christ.

Alabastron – A type of pottery used in the ancient world for holding oil, especially perfume or massage oils.

‘Bound Devil’ – An ancient Christian symbol, usually an image of Satan/the devil tied up or bound.

Christ in Majesty or Christ in Glory (Latin: *Majestas Domini*) - A Western Christian image of Christ seated on a throne as ruler of the world, always seen frontally in the centre of the composition, and often flanked by other sacred figures, whose membership changes over time and according to the context.

Daniel in the Lions’ Den motif – An event from the Hebrew Bible: Daniel, an official in the Persian empire under Darius, was forbidden to worship any god or man except Darius for a period of thirty days. When he continued to do so he was thrown in a den of lions, but miraculously survived. When he was released the following morning, the people who had convinced the king into making the decree were thrown in the lions’ den themselves. It has famously been depicted by artists such as Jan Brueghel the Younger and Peter Paul Rubens.

Epiphany – The manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles as represented by the Magi (*Matthew 2:1-12*).

‘Hook and eye’ motif – An Anglo-Saxon style of decoration where the eyes and nose form a continuous line.

Interlace – A decorative element in medieval art, the most common form of ornament encountered on Anglo-Saxon sculpture. Its variety and experimental character make it difficult to categorise, but essentially bands or portions of other motifs are looped, braided, and knotted in complex geometric patterns, often to fill a space.

Orans (Latin for ‘praying’) – A figure common in early Christian art with extended arms or bodily attitude of prayer, usually standing, with the elbows close to the sides of the body and with the hands outstretched sideways, palms up.

Quadruped – Creatures with all four legs shown, including those that are winged or centaur-like.

Saltire fret - A fret is a charge consisting of two narrow bendlets placed in a saltire (a motif similar to a St Andrew’s cross) and interlaced with a mascle (a lozenge voided, i.e., with a central lozenge-shaped aperture).

Scroll – A plant-like decorative element that seems to have been introduced into Anglo-Saxon England together with sculpture rather than derived from other media.

Spandrel - The almost triangular space between one side of the outer curve of an arch, a wall, and the ceiling or framework.

Triquetra - This is an interlace pattern which cannot be constructed on a square grid and so is only found on spandrels and circular and square panels.

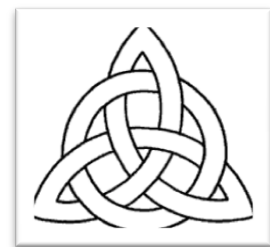


FIG. 1: TRIQUETRA

2b *tegula* (pl. *tegulae*, Latin for ‘tile(s)’) - One of the various forms of Anglo-Saxon ornamental criss-cross design. Cf. Lythe hogback.

Vesica piscis (Latin for ‘Fish’s bladder’) - a shape that is the intersection of two circles with the same radius, intersecting in such a way that the centre of each circle lies on the perimeter of the other.

3) The Styles of Viking Art

Broa/Oseberg style (c. 780-850AD) – The main characteristic is the so-called ‘gripping beast’ motif which is what clearly distinguished the early Viking styles of art from the zoomorphic styles that preceded them. Some of the earliest examples of this type of decoration can be found on the bronze bridal-mounts at Broa from the island of Gotland and on objects from the Oseberg ship burial.

Borre style (c. 840-970AD) – This continues the use of the ‘gripping beast’ motif developed in the earlier style of Viking art but introduces a new feature, the ribbon-shaped body beneath a rather triangular head with protruding ears.

Jellinge style (c. 880-1000AD) – This incorporated S-shaped animals with their heads in profile and ribbon-shaped bodies, spiral hips, pigtailed and curling upper lips.

Mammen style (c. 950-1030AD) – Rather similar to the Jellinge style and often difficult to distinguish. Characterised by birds with thicker ribbon-like bodies than the earlier style, with dots and large spiral hips.

Ringerike style (c. 980-1070AD) – The Ringerike and Urnes styles are the most common on Viking age runestones from Scandinavia and the British Isles. Developed from the Mammen style, though significant differences include thinner more curvaceous animals with undecorated bodies inside, almond-shaped (instead of round) eyes. Also, the tendrils get longer and thinner.

Urnes style (c. 1040-1150AD) – Similar to the Ringerike style and the animals are still quite curvaceous with extensive use of large almond-shaped eyes. Animals

frequently bite each other and the spiral hip is still used, although it is not as large as in the Mammen and Ringerike styles.

LIST OF MONUMENTS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Note: This list is arranged as follows: siglum, place of origin (and name of church where applicable), current location, county/region, country. All photographs for the Anglo-Scandinavian material have been borrowed from the various volumes of the *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture*.

- 'Leeds 1,' Leeds (St Peter) 1, located in the parish church, West Yorkshire, United Kingdom.
- 'Sherburn 2,' Sherburn (St Hilda) 2, located inside the church tower, East Yorkshire, United Kingdom.
- 'Sherburn 3,' Sherburn (St Hilda), located inside the church tower, East Yorkshire, United Kingdom.
- 'York Minster 9' (St Peter) 9, located in Yorkshire Museum, York, North Yorkshire, United Kingdom.
- 'Egglescliffe 1,' Egglescliffe (St Mary) 1, located on the south porch, under ledge at right of entrance, County Durham, United Kingdom.
- 'Bedale hogback,' Bedale (St Gregory) 6, located at west end of nave on south side, North Yorkshire, United Kingdom.
- 'York Minster 34' (St Peter), located in Yorkshire Museum, York, North Yorkshire, United Kingdom.
- 'Kirby Hill 2,' Kirby Hill (All Saints, Kirkby-on-the-Moor) 2, located on the interior face of of the south wall of the nave, high up, on its side, North Yorkshire, United Kingdom.
- 'Kirby Hill 9,' Kirby Hill, (All Saints, Kirkby-on-the-Moor) 9, lost; missing by 1974, North Yorkshire, United Kingdom. Unpublished manuscript reference to no. 9: BL Add. MS 37552 no. XIV, item 631 (Romilly Allen collection).
- 'Ripon 4,' (St Peter and St Wilfrid), located in Ripon Cathedral Treasury, West Yorkshire, United Kingdom.
- 'Nunburnholme 1,' Nunburnholme (St James), located inside the church tower, East Yorkshire, United Kingdom.
- 'York Minster hogback' (St Peter) 46, located in Yorkshire Museum, York, North Yorkshire, United Kingdom hogback.

- ‘Gosforth 1,’ Gosforth (St Mary) 1, located in churchyard, south of church, Cumbria, United Kingdom.
- ‘Sockburn hogback,’ Sockburn (All Saints) 21, located in Conyers Chapel, County Durham, United Kingdom.
- ‘Lythe hogback,’ Lythe (St Oswald) 21, located beneath the tower, on the floor by north shelving, North Yorkshire, United Kingdom.
- ‘Forcett 4,’ Forcett (St Cuthbert) 4, located on the interior west wall of the porch, North Yorkshire, United Kingdom.
- ‘Ovingham 1,’ Ovingham (St Mary the Virgin) 1, located inside church, Northumberland, United Kingdom.
- ‘Gainford 4,’ Gainford (St Mary) 4, located in Monks’ Dormitory, Durham Cathedral, catalogue no. XLI, County Durham, United Kingdom.
- ‘Gosforth 6,’ Gosforth (St Mary) 6, located in church, set in wall at east end of aisle, Cumbria, United Kingdom.
- ‘Sockburn 3,’ Sockburn (All Saints) 3, located in Conyers Chapel, County Durham, United Kingdom.
- ‘Sockburn 6,’ Sockburn (All Saints) 6, located in Conyers Chapel, County Durham, United Kingdom.
- ‘Kirklevington 2,’ Kirklevington (St Martin) 2, located loose in north-west corner of nave, interior, against west wall, North Yorkshire, United Kingdom.
- ‘Baldersby 1,’ Baldersby 1, North Yorkshire, located in the Museum, Charterhouse, Goldalming, Surrey, United Kingdom.
- ‘Sockburn 15,’ Sockburn (All Saints) 15, located in Conyers Chapel, County Durham, United Kingdom.
- ‘Forcett 1,’ Forcett (St Cuthbert) 1, located on the east wall of the porch, visible on both interior and exterior, North Yorkshire, United Kingdom.
- ‘Lowther hogback,’ Lowther (St Michael) 4, located on the church porch, Westmorland, United Kingdom.
- ‘Melsonby 3,’ Melsonby (St James the Great) 3, located on window sill at west end beneath the tower, in the vestry, North Yorkshire, United Kingdom.
- ‘Stanwick 9,’ Stanwick (St John the Baptist) 9, located on the interior west wall of the south aisle; set horizontally, North Yorkshire, United Kingdom.

- ‘Kirklevintgon 11,’ Kirklevington (St Martin) 11, located on interior north wall of vestry, behind a chest of drawers, North Yorkshire, United Kingdom.
- ‘Wath 4,’ Wath (St Mary) 4, located behind the jamb of the screen door, North Yorkshire, United Kingdom.
- ‘Kirkby Stephen 1,’ Kirkby Stephen (St John) 1, located in the church, Westmorland, United Kingdom.

- ‘Jurby 119 (93),’ Michael Sheading, Isle of Man, United Kingdom. Photograph provided by St Bees parish council, <http://stbees.org.uk/history/essays/dragon/plate2.htm> and figure provided by P. M. C. Kermodé, *Catalogue of the Manx Crosses with the Runic Inscriptions and Various Readings and Renderings Compared*, 2nd ed. (Ramsey, Isle of Man: C. B. Heyes, 1892), 15.
- ‘Malew 120 (94),’ Rushen, Isle of Man, United Kingdom. Photograph provided by David J. Radcliffe.
- ‘Kirk Andreas 121 (95),’ Ayre, Isle of Man, United Kingdom. Photograph provided by <http://www.iomguide.com/crosses/andreas/no121.php>

- ‘Sö 101’ ‘Ramsund stone,’ Ramsund, Södermanland, Sweden. Photograph taken by Arild Hauge.
- ‘Sö 327’ ‘Gök stone,’ Strängnäs, Södermanland, Sweden. Photograph taken by Arild Hauge.
- ‘Sö 40,’ Västerlång, Södermanland, Sweden. Photograph provided by Riksantikvaritet: <http://kulturavsdata.se/raa/fml/html/1003870230009>
- ‘Klinte Hunninge I,’ Fornsalen Museum, Visby, Gotland, Sweden. Photograph provided by Sune Lindqvist, *Gotlands Bildsteine 2 vols.* (Stockholm: Wahlström and Widstrand, 1941-2).
- ‘U 1163,’ Drävle, Uppland, Sweden. Photograph taken by Arild Hauge.
- ‘U 1175,’ Stora Ramsjö, Uppland, Sweden. Photograph provided by Riksantikvaritet: <http://kulturavsdata.se/raa/fml/html/10272900170002>
- ‘Gs 2,’ Österfärnebo, Gästrikland, Sweden. Photograph provided by Riksantikvaritet: <http://kulturavsdata.se/raa/fml/html/1024470000200003>

- ‘Gs 9,’ Årsunda, Gästrikland, Sweden. Photograph provided by Riksantikvaritet: <http://kulturavsdata.se/raa/fml/html/10244600120001>
- ‘Gs 19,’ Ockelbo, Gästrikland, Sweden. Photograph provided by Riksantikvaritet: <http://kulturavsdata.se/raa/fml/html/10242901050001>
- ‘Bo NYIR; 3,’ Norums kyrka, Bohuslän västra, Götaland, Sweden. Photograph taken by “Berig.”
- ‘Ardre VIII,’ SHM 11118 (catalogue number), National Historical Museum, Stockholm, Sweden. Photograph taken by Mats Halldin.
- ‘Stora Hammars III,’ Stora Hammars, Gotland, Sweden. Photograph provided by *Gotlands Bildsteine*.
- ‘G 108,’ Alskog, Gotland, Sweden. Photograph provided by *Gotlands Bildsteine*.
- ‘G 113,’ Ardre, Gotland, Sweden. Photograph provided by *Gotlands Bildsteine*.
- ‘U 1161,’ Altuna, Uppland, Sweden. Photograph taken by Pål-Nils Nilsson.

- ‘Tandberg stone,’ Tandberg, Buskerud, Norway. Photograph taken by Arild Hauge.
- ‘Hylestad church portals,’ Museum of Cultural History, Oslo, Norway. Photograph taken by Pieter Collier.
- ‘Oseberg wagon,’ Museum of Cultural History, Oslo, Norway. Photograph taken by Annie Dalbéra.

- ‘Hørdum stone,’ Hørdum kyrka, Thisted, Denmark. Photograph taken by J. C. Schon.

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General Introduction

The practice of making and erecting stone crosses began in Anglo-Saxon England, at the latest, in the seventh century AD. Many of these early crosses were carved with images from Judeo-Christian biblical history and were ornamented with beautiful floral designs and patterns. It is not until the early tenth century in Northumbria (the northernmost of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms) that the first crosses with images from Norse mythological and heroic legends began to emerge. It is clearly no coincidence that the appearance of stone crosses bearing images with their roots in Old Norse mythology coincided with the invasion and subsequent settlement of large groups of mainly Danish Vikings (but also some Norwegians as well) from the early ninth century onwards. As I shall explain in the introduction to the first chapter, the crosses in Northumbria (hereafter referred to as ‘Anglo-Scandinavian’ for lack of a better term) are rare – there are only a handful of surviving examples in the whole of Northern England, in comparison to the hundreds of pre-Viking stone crosses that depict, in general, scenes from Christian doctrine and scripture. This makes them a valuable resource for studying the relationship between the native Anglo-Saxon population and the newly-arrived Viking warriors-turned-settlers.

The material from Scandinavia is perhaps a little harder to characterise. In the whole of Scandinavia there are well over two thousand examples of what we can call ‘stone monuments,’ ‘picture stones’ or ‘runestones’ (not all of which actually carry runic inscriptions) – of these there are around twenty or so that have been carved with images from Old Norse mythology. It is these monuments that I shall investigate in this thesis. Most of the Scandinavian monuments are in Sweden, around 80% in fact, while there seem to be very few in both Norway and Denmark combined, an issue I address in Chapter Three. A common characteristic of all three territories is that the monuments were made at a time when the inhabitants practised some form of pre-Christian religion, much like the Anglo-Saxons several centuries earlier, and we are able to say that many picture stones are completely heathen in design, although there are a number of notable exceptions and it is also evident that following the adoption of Christianity in the Scandinavian countries (which took place at different times), the invocations and images on stone monuments became increasingly Christianised.

Dating is difficult but it is possible to give a general estimate that the bulk of the Scandinavian material was created between the late tenth and early twelfth centuries. In general, the Scandinavian material is more aesthetically pleasing, some would say ‘developed,’ than the images on the Northumbrian crosses but it has been argued by many scholars that the monuments from both areas share aspects of (chiefly) content, composition and style.¹

There are a number of mythological stories and figures that I cover in this thesis, some of which play only minor parts, while others may be known even to beginners to Old Norse literature. The two most prominent figures that play major roles in this thesis are Völundr the smith and Sigurðr the dragon slayer. Völundr is the chief character in *Völundarkviða*, to which he lends his name, and appears in some other Old Norse and Old English poetry (discussed in Chapter One) as well as on the eighth-century Franks Casket. There are also frequent mentions of the ‘work of Völundr’ in both Old Norse and Old English texts, usually describing masterfully made swords. Sigurðr is the central character in the Old Icelandic *Völsunga saga*, but also appears in well over a dozen Old Norse poems (all of which I have listed in Chapter One). Völundr and Sigurðr are arguably the two most popular choices of subject on image stones from both Scandinavia and the British Isles. Having said that, the most famous of all Anglo-Scandinavian stone monuments, the slender Gosforth cross, has been decorated with scenes from the apocalyptic Old Norse *Völuspá*, specifically the events known as Ragnarök that begin at stanza 39, according to John Lindow.² There are also a number of other monuments, both Anglo-Scandinavian and from mainland Scandinavia, that deal with Ragnarök, though many are fragmented and none match the beauty of Gosforth. There are also various stone crosses with images concerned with the god Óðinn, Þórr’s fight with the Miðgarðsormr (mention of which is made in *Völuspá*), slain warriors entering Valhalla, the ‘Hart and hound’ legend and some sacred animal imagery.

¹ Richard Bailey presents a very convincing argument for this in *Viking Age Sculpture in Northern England* (London: Collins, 1980), 101-142.

² John Lindow, *Norse Mythology: A Guide to the Gods, Heroes, Rituals, and Beliefs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 254.

In essence, this thesis is in two parts. The first part is an objective analysis of all known examples of monuments from the British Isles and Scandinavia, made during the (approximate) Viking Age, with images from Old Norse mythology or heroic legend on them. I have chosen to present the material in this way because it is my view that there are not enough (only one, I believe) systematic studies on Anglo-Scandinavian and Scandinavian stone sculpture and the studies that do investigate this topic are often very short or look at a very specific aspect or single example. I also think that little scholarship has focussed on the Anglo-Scandinavian crosses in recent years and I hope to address this. In this sense, I aim to give the material a facelift by resuscitating a largely dormant topic and including the known (limited) range of stone and wood monuments with images from Old Norse mythology. The second part of this thesis addresses the issue of the relationship between Christianity and Scandinavian paganism as it is presented on the sculpture and how this reflected the belief systems of the two religions. It is my contention that many of the Anglo-Scandinavian crosses and even some of the purely Scandinavian stones with images from Old Norse mythology are evidence of the syncretism of Christian and pagan ideas or pre-figuring of Christian concepts in pagan myths. I am not alone in this view and many scholars have presented similar arguments at various times – however, as far as I know, there has been no concerted study on the topic, despite some very strong positive evidence. This is principally the subject of the second chapter, where I argue that elements of Christian and pagan ideas are present on certain Anglo-Scandinavian crosses and, furthermore, various parallels can be drawn between certain Old Norse myths and legends and their Christian counterparts from the biblical stories.

I have already briefly described two of my three chapters. I shall now provide a summary of each. The first chapter, ‘Mythologically- and Heroically-themed iconography on Anglo-Scandinavian stone sculpture,’ is essentially an overview of the twenty-eight stone monuments from Northumbria that have been inscribed with images from Old Norse mythology. I begin with the topic of Völundr, then I discuss Sigurðr, then Ragnarök, then Þórr and the Miðgarðsormr, Óðinn, the ‘Hart and hound’ legend, warriors and Valhalla and various animal imagery. ‘The Relationship between Norse paganism and Christianity’ is the title of the second chapter and, as the name implies, it is an investigation on the parallels between the heathen religion of

the Vikings and the Judeo-Christian religion of the Anglo-Saxons. Like Chapter One, I begin with Völundr and Sigurðr, then I discuss Ragnarök and, finally, there is a section devoted entirely to the struggle between Þórr and the Miðgarðsormr. In each section I discuss the relevant Old Norse literature and reference the pertinent Anglo-Scandinavian stone sculpture where possible. The third chapter is called ‘The Monuments and Picture stones (*bildstenene*) of Scandinavia and the Isle of Man’ and is similar to the first chapter in that it is a review of all relevant picture stones, image stones and monuments from the Scandinavian kingdoms and the Isle of Man, one of the Viking colonies. I begin by discussing Sweden, where most examples are located, then I discuss Norway and Denmark together for cultural reasons and, lastly, I look at the stone crosses on the Isle of Man. Following this is my conclusion where I shall present the ultimate arguments for my thesis and a survey of each chapter.

The most important published work that concerns my thesis is probably the ten-volume *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture* commissioned by the British Academy and edited by, in the main, Rosemary Cramp, James Lang, Richard Bailey and Elizabeth Coatsworth, although only five volumes are strictly relevant. Each entry usually has a detailed investigation, photograph(s) and, where possible, provides a list of further reading. In this project I have referred to the following volumes: *County Durham and Northumberland* (vol. I), edited by Rosemary Cramp, *Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire North-of-the-Sands* (vol. II), edited by Rosemary Cramp, *York and Eastern Yorkshire* (vol. III), edited by James Lang, *Northern Yorkshire* (vol. VI), edited by James Lang, and *Western Yorkshire* (vol. VIII), edited by Elizabeth Coatsworth. I am indebted to these scholars as without their efforts my project would have been unfeasible. The most comprehensive work on the Scandinavian monuments from the island of Gotland is without doubt *Gotlands Bildsteine* (2 vols.) by Sune Lindqvist. Although written in German (in which I am much less than proficient) the descriptions and photographs of the Gotlandic material compiled by Lindqvist have been of great value to this thesis. Photographs and descriptions of the Scandinavian monuments have been acquired from the Swedish

National Heritage Board or *Riksantikvarieämbetet*, which I accessed through the University of Aberdeen skaldic project and runic dictionary website.³

For a comprehensive account of stone sculpture and artefacts in Northern England, Richard Bailey's *Viking Age Sculpture in Northern England* (1980) is the obvious choice. What makes it such a remarkable work is that it really was the first of its kind to deal with the sculpture in a systematic way since perhaps W. G. Collingwood's *Northumbrian Crosses of the pre-Norman Age* (1927). Each chapter has its own separate agenda and sub-arguments - a few of these must be stressed. Firstly, Bailey goes to some length to show that we are not dealing exclusively with sculpture made by Vikings, but 'Viking age' sculpture and that there is generally a clear difference between the sculpture of Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon origin.⁴ I would also point out that Bailey is perhaps justifiably sceptical of placing too much credence on the identification of certain iconographical figures.⁵ The later chapters deal with the ways in which the sculptures were made and provide the reader with a generous list of further material. Overall, *Viking Age Sculpture* is a very useful monograph and it serves as one of the platforms for this thesis.

Lilla Kopár's new monograph, entitled *Gods and Settlers: The Iconography of Norse Mythology in Anglo-Scandinavian Sculpture* (2013), is probably the most recent survey of non-Christian iconography on Anglo-Scandinavian stone sculpture. *Gods and Settlers* may not revolutionise the field, but it has certainly added a fresh perspective to a subject that has not received much attention of late. The author claimed her primary intention was to read the sculpture as 'cultural documents of an intellectual process' rather than to regard them as purely art historical or archaeological sources.⁶ The result is a monograph that covers perhaps all (known) images from Old Norse mythology and legend on Anglo-Scandinavian stone crosses, and offers insight and synthesis of the scholarly record through clear prose.

³ http://abdn.ac.uk/skaldic/db.php?if=runic&table=nrd_headword&val=A (date accessed: 20/02/2013)

⁴ Bailey, *Viking Age Sculpture*, 76.

⁵ Bailey, *Viking Age Sculpture*, 103.

⁶ Lilla Kopár, *Gods and Settlers: The Iconography of Norse Mythology in Anglo-Scandinavian Sculpture* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 11.

Signe Horn Fuglesang's article "Ekphrasis and Surviving Imagery," published in the 2007 issue of *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia*, has many interesting things to say about the notion of ekphrasis and the ways in which pictorial expressions of skaldic poetry serve as valuable evidence. One of its most important issues concerns the ways in which an iconographic tradition of image making can be transferred from one place to another and from one medium to another.⁷ Fuglesang argued that certain pan-Germanic lays existed during and prior to the Viking Age, evidenced by the Franks Casket and the artistry on the Oseberg wagon.⁸ She also suggested that both 'image poetry' and skaldic poetry could have stemmed from the same source.⁹

Margaret Clunies Ross's article "Stylistic and Generic Definers of the Old Norse Skaldic Ekphrasis," is an informative introduction to the subject of skaldic ekphrasis and, combined with Signe Horn Fuglesang's from the same publication, are crucial to the understanding of my project. From the article I want to highlight a couple of its arguments. Clunies Ross maintained that despite a shortage of visual evidence, it is clear that we are dealing with the most popular tales from Scandinavian mythology (i.e. Þórr's fishing expedition for the Miðgarðsormr and Sigurðr's defeat of the dragon Fáfnir). According to Clunies Ross, these subjects were imbued with typological meaning in Christian times as parallels to Christ's victory over Satan, thereby prolonging their iconographical life. Thus, they appear in obviously Christian contexts, such as on the Cumbrian Gosforth cross and the Altuna stone (U 1161) from Uppland in Sweden.¹⁰ Clunies Ross also observed that many subjects of skaldic ekphrasis are set on the borders or margins that can be characterized as 'no man's land,' an argument also set out by Preben Meulengracht Sørensen in 1986.¹¹

Sue Margeson's 1983 article "On the Iconography of Manx Crosses" has become an essential resource for the student of Manx stone sculpture. According to Margeson, Viking Age crosses were a short-lived phenomenon. One of the most

⁷ Signe Horn Fuglesang, "Ekphrasis and Surviving Imagery in Viking Scandinavia," *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 3 (2007), 207.

⁸ Fuglesang, "Ekphrasis and Surviving Imagery," 212.

⁹ Fuglesang, "Ekphrasis and Surviving Imagery," 216.

¹⁰ Margaret Clunies Ross, "Stylistic and Generic Definers of the Old Norse Skaldic Ekphrasis," *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 3 (2007), 170.

¹¹ Clunies Ross, "Stylistic and Generic Definers," 172.

prominent carvers on the Isle of Man was a Scandinavian by the name of Gautr, whose work was produced circa 930-50. David Wilson saw the general tradition as dying out by about 1020.¹² Margeson argued that the blend of pagan, Christian, Viking and Celtic artistry shows a response to a mingling of peoples and traditions – however, she issued a caution against foisting on the pictures an allegorical interpretation of conflict between old and new gods. Margeson was certain that pagan and Christian motifs were thought continuous within a Christian framework and were given equal prominence. She also stressed that they were seen as equivalent rather than as the superiority of the new over the old.¹³

John McKinnell’s detailed and persuasive 2001 article entitled “Eddic Poetry in Anglo-Scandinavian Northern England” presents a number of interesting theories. McKinnell’s chief intention was to critically assess Sophus Bugge’s hypothesis that the major part of Eddic poetry was composed by Norwegians working in the British Isles. In the course of the article, McKinnell applied Bugge’s criteria to the Eddic corpus in order to judge whether certain poems might have been composed there. Interestingly, McKinnell found that some did correspond with the criteria, but too few to make the sweeping argument that the entire corpus was composed in the British Isles.¹⁴ McKinnell also discussed a number of the Anglo-Scandinavian and Scandinavian stone carvings that depict scenes from Old Norse mythology and found it ‘overwhelmingly probable’ that the carvers/patrons who saw and commissioned their work knew the stories chiefly in the form of poetry. Furthermore, while some Eddic poems may have been inspired by graphic images, McKinnell was convinced that it is from the texts that sculptors must have derived most of their knowledge of the stories.¹⁵

¹² Sue Margeson, “On the Iconography of Manx Crosses,” in *The Viking Age in the Isle of Man*, ed. Christine Fell *et al.* (London: University College London, 1981), 104.

¹³ Margeson, “On the Iconography of Manx Crosses,” 104.

¹⁴ John McKinnell, “Eddic Poetry in Anglo-Scandinavian Northern England,” in *Vikings and the Danelaw: Selected Papers from the Proceedings of the Thirteenth Viking Congress*, ed. James Graham-Campbell *et al.* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2001), 338.

¹⁵ McKinnell, “Eddic Poetry,” 330.

Stone images of legendary mythological heroes and their relationship to skaldic poetry is the subject of Preben Meulengracht Sørensen's brief but thought-provoking book-chapter, "Thor's Fishing Expedition." According to Sørensen, the addition and/or absence of certain figures or objects from the stone carvings can tell modern audiences a great deal about what the carver and patron considered relevant and important.¹⁶ For example, Sørensen firmly believed that the Gosforth cross does not depict the Miðgarðsormr, while it seems that the giant Hymir is entirely absent from the Altuna stone (U 1161) in Sweden. The only explanation, Sørensen argued, was that the carver thought they were not required. What fundamentally interested the carver was the interlocking combat of good and evil, not the extra details found in the mythological texts.¹⁷

Elizabeth Ashman Rowe's 2006 study entitled "Quid Sigvardus cum Christo? Moral Interpretations of Sigurðr Fáfnisbáni in Old Norse Literature" presented a novel theory about the subject of the portrayal of Sigurðr on Scandinavian carvings. Rowe argued that when the figure of Sigurðr appears on a stone sculpture, we should probably view it as a kind of 'secular' image. More precisely, Sigurðr acts as a moral heroic figure.¹⁸ Thus, she found it difficult to accept that the Sigurðr figure on the carvings should be seen as presenting an antecedent to Christ. Consequently, for her the Sigurðr image is shorn of its pagan associations. Rowe also argued that the texts sometimes present Sigurðr in negative terms, something the artefacts never seem to do.¹⁹ On the other hand, she was certain that when Óðinn appears flanking a crucifixion scene, a religious relationship is intended.²⁰

Knut Berg's little known 1958 article, "The Gosforth Cross," while not groundbreaking, put forward some interesting arguments. Berg's central argument seems to be that the carvers of Gosforth planned the panelling on the shaft

¹⁶ Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, "Thor's Fishing Expedition," in *Words and Objects. Towards a Dialogue between Archaeology and History of Religion*, ed. Gro Steinsland (Oslo, New York and Oxford: Norwegian University Press, 1986), 257.

¹⁷ Sørensen, "Thor's Fishing Expedition," 265.

¹⁸ Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, "Quid Sigvardus cum Christo? Moral Interpretations of Sigurðr Fáfnisbáni in Old Norse Literature," *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 2 (2006): 189.

¹⁹ Rowe, "Quid Sigvardus cum Christo?," 189.

²⁰ Rowe, "Quid Sigvardus cum Christo?," 191.

meticulously according to a set of theological principles.²¹ In Berg's view, such a cross would have been a powerful message to the incoming Vikings, who were familiar with scenes from Scandinavian mythology and heroic tales. Ultimately, Berg concluded that Gosforth was designed to show the demise of the pagan gods and (but not *by*) the supremacy of the Judeo-Christian God.²² Also of significance (and now widely accepted), Berg argued that a single uniform version of the poems of the *Poetic Edda* could never have existed, which must partly account for the diverging iconographical interpretations of the legends.²³

Sue Margeson's paper, "The Völsung Legend in Medieval Art," at the 1979 Symposium on Medieval Iconography and Narrative (published in *Medieval Iconography and Narrative*), investigated the corpus of Sigurðr-themed iconography in order to weed out dubious material to formulate criteria for reasonable identification of Völsungar imagery. She followed some Norwegian scholars (chiefly Magnus Olsen) in suggesting that *Völsunga saga* was probably composed in Norway and that the Sigurðr tradition was acceptable to Christianity and even embraced by it to an extent.²⁴ Furthermore, Sigurðr was not seen as belonging to some kind of moral framework, but was celebrated as a hero fighting for the virtues of good against evil (monsters).

James Lang's 1978 article, "Sigurd and Weland in Pre-Conquest Carving from Northern England," concentrated exclusively on Sigurðr- and Völundr-themed carvings from the British Isles and Scandinavia. In this very brief but detailed text, Lang linked many of the carvings together, tentatively identifying localised workshops and identical stylistic motifs. He even suggested that Sigurðr and Völundr have had much in common and were probably conflated by their contemporary audiences.²⁵ In Lang's view, the occurrence of Sigurðr is too widespread for him to agree with Emil Ploss's assertion that Sigurðr- and Völundr-themed carvings

²¹ Knut Berg, "The Gosforth Cross," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 21 (1958), 43.

²² Berg, "The Gosforth Cross," 33.

²³ Berg, "The Gosforth Cross," 34.

²⁴ Although, that *Völsunga saga* was written in Norway is not a widely accepted idea.

²⁵ James Lang, "Sigurd and Weland in Pre-Conquest Carving from Northern England," *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal* 48 (1976), 90.

represented a way of redeeming pagan ancestors; however, he did see certain overlaps between the Sigurðr cycle and the Biblical *Book of Genesis*, for example.²⁶

Signe Horn Fuglesang's *Some Aspects of the Ringerike Style* (1980) is (as the name implies) an examination of the Ringerike style of Viking art, but actually touches on the preceding Mammen and succeeding Urnes styles as well. I want to highlight three of her arguments that involved the use of Sigurðr-themed imagery on stone sculpture. Firstly, she argued that the scenes chosen to illustrate the myths and heroic legends were for the most part the same on all monuments, English and Scandinavian, Viking and Romanesque. Secondly, scenes generally concentrate on the killing of the Miðgarðsormr, the events leading up to it and its immediate consequences. Finally, Fuglesang argued that in the representations of Sigurðr that we can be certain of, there is no example of his death or of events immediately prior or posterior to it and consequently no indication that the event was ever incorporated into pictorial representations of the myth.

Birgit Sawyer's study entitled *The Viking-Age Rune Stones* (2003) was not explicitly concerned with mythologically- or heroically-themed iconography and focussed exclusively on the Swedish evidence, but the depth of her research and the extraordinary use of primary sources is significant and should be considered. Of the 2,307 runestones analysed, all were raised between the middle of the tenth and beginning of the twelfth centuries. Sawyer found that more runestones appear in areas affected by political and religious change.²⁷ Some, though not all, were designed to publicly announce one's conversion to Christianity, particularly in Uppland in eastern Sweden.²⁸ However, there survive some inscriptions believed to be explicitly pagan, though many are ambiguous or damaged and we cannot be entirely certain of their meaning (I discuss this topic further in Chapter Three).²⁹ On the other hand, it seems clear that most runic inscriptions commemorated the dead, displayed the wealth of the

²⁶ Lang, "Sigurd and Weland," 94.

²⁷ Birgit Sawyer, *The Viking-Age Rune Stones: Custom and Commemoration in Early Medieval Scandinavia* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 147.

²⁸ Sawyer, *The Viking-Age Rune Stones*, 148.

²⁹ Sawyer, *The Viking-Age Rune Stones*, 128.

living and even acted as stone wills, viz., evidence of wealth transference from one generation to the next.

The simply titled *Viking Art* (1966) represents a milestone work in the field of Viking Studies and is still widely regarded as the standard textbook on the topic. The chief intention of the authors, David Wilson and Ole Klindt-Jensen, was to record and classify the corpus of Viking art, which makes it a reasonably impartial source. More emphasis was placed on the ornamental and decorative designs rather than figural iconography, but this is hardly surprising given the scarcity of figural carvings. Nonetheless, with regard to the Anglo-Scandinavian mythologically-themed carvings, Wilson and Klindt-Jensen considered the Scandinavian influence only strong in the choice of mythological subject and its figural style. In other words, it was a style of Viking art outside the ‘mainstream development.’³⁰ Wilson and Klindt-Jensen also saw the carvings from the Isle of Man as belonging to a tradition much more in touch with the art of Scandinavia and the Northumbrian carvings as a more diluted and deviating strain.³¹

Matthew Townend’s *The Vikings and Victorian Lakeland: The Norse Medievalism of W.G. Collingwood and his Contemporaries* (2009) is a necessity for the student who wishes to know how Scandinavian Studies was brought to fruition in England. Although W. G. Collingwood is the central focus, large portions of this book are devoted to his Lakeland contemporaries, John Ruskin, Charles Arundel Parker, the Reverend William Slater Calverley and so on, as well as numerous others who helped shape the discipline. One of the strengths of the book is the way Townend has documented Collingwood’s study of the Vikings from a parochial to a transnational context and, finally, to stone sculpture, where his studies flourished. Townend did not really go into any specific detail concerning the iconography of Anglo-Scandinavian sculpture, but the book does give one a deep appreciation of how far Scandinavian Studies has come and a great deal of admiration for its pioneers.

³⁰ David Wilson and Ole Klindt-Jensen, *Viking Art* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1966), 107.

³¹ Wilson and Klindt-Jensen, *Viking Art*, 109.

Chapter One

Mythologically- and Heroically-themed iconography on
Anglo-Scandinavian stone sculpture

Introduction

The term ‘stone sculpture’ can refer to a wide range of objects, but this study will only investigate certain Christian commemorative stone monuments that date from between the mid-ninth and early eleventh centuries. The most common type of stone monument that was produced during the Anglo-Scandinavian period is the free-standing cross. These crosses vary greatly in height and shape, and many are too fragmentary for the original height to be calculated accurately.³² Somewhat often, I look at single ‘cross-shafts’ or ‘crossheads’ separately from one another and from the cross as a whole. This is because they are the two parts of the cross where carvings are traditionally located and, furthermore, it is not unusual for the imagery on a cross-shaft not to be related to the rest of the cross. In addition, I will investigate a number of tombs and grave-markers, upright and recumbent, some of which were set into church walls, some of which stood upright against them.³³ Last but not least, the famous ‘hogback’ type belongs to this group.³⁴

The essential purpose of this introductory chapter is to present informatively the monuments that display mythologically- and heroically-themed iconography and to present the most relevant and commonly accepted interpretations of the images. This will allow for a thorough understanding of the monuments and will prepare the reader for the following chapters, where certain aspects and details of the iconography will become the central focus. I have chosen to organise the chapter in terms of each myth presented separately because, at least in some cases, monuments that share a specific image(s) tend to come from the same region and/or share stylistic features which suggests that they also share the same carver or belong to the same workshop. It is also important to note that simply because a monument shows evidence of a certain iconographical tradition, it does not follow that every defining element of that tradition must be present. In fact, there is often so much variation in the way the myths and legends have been represented that it is sometimes difficult to be certain that one myth or tradition or another is intended, as they could easily have some other

³² Rosemary Cramp, General Introduction to *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture in England, I: County Durham and Northumberland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), xiv.

³³ Cramp, General Introduction, xiv.

³⁴ So-named for its general appearance and similarity in shape to a hog.

significance. This chapter is crucial to the structure of the thesis as it presents an overview of all the source material and the following chapters are cross-referenced to the monuments described in the following pages.

Within volumes I to VIII of the *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture*, monuments with non-Christian imagery constitute a very small percentage of the total number. In fact, throughout my study, I have only encountered thirty-one such examples in comparison to the several hundred where the ornament is purely decorative or of solely Christian significance. We can safely assume that over the course of the following centuries, many mythologically-themed monuments were destroyed or fragmented for various reasons; nevertheless, they must surely be considered a highly unusual and exceptional group of crosses.

Following the invasions of Britain by the earliest Anglo-Saxon armies during the fifth and sixth centuries AD, a heptarchy was established that was composed of seven kingdoms. These kingdoms were Northumbria, Mercia, East Anglia, Essex, Kent, Sussex and Wessex. The modern counties of England have their origins in these kingdoms and are mapped over them to an extent.³⁵ The overwhelming majority of the monuments discussed in Chapter One come from the ancient kingdom of Northumbria (itself composed from Bernicia and Deira), the northernmost of the heptarchy, where people of Anglo-Saxon, Celtic, Hiberno-Norse, Norwegian and Danish origins lived together more or less as a singular group from the early ninth century until about 1068 when the Norman armies brought the area under strict administrative control. Three monuments are located in modern-day Cumbria, six in County Durham, one in Northumberland, one in Westmorland, fifteen in North Yorkshire, one in West Yorkshire, one in East Yorkshire and three in the city of York. It is plain to see that monuments with mythologically- and heroically-themed iconography are heavily weighted to the eastern half of Northern England.

³⁵ The Local Government Act 1972, which came into effect on 1 April 1974, divided England outside Greater London and the six largest conurbations into thirty-nine non-metropolitan counties. Each county was divided into between two and fourteen non-metropolitan districts. As a result, all except two, Essex and Kent, of the original seven Anglo-Saxon 'kingdoms' have been partitioned and are now only preserved for historic and ceremonial purposes (sourced from <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1972/70>, date accessed 24/03/2014).

Although the scarcity of these monuments suggests that they could not have been widespread, the quality of the workmanship (especially at sites like Gosforth) and their geographic distribution reveals their significance and, further, indicates a fusion of Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian religious cultures. One of the main objectives of this chapter, and indeed the entire thesis, is to show that the images on the stone sculpture are to a certain degree indicative of a harmonious or syncretic relationship between Anglo-Saxons and Vikings (i.e. Danes and Norwegians). It has been conventional for some scholars to dismiss mythologically-themed carvings as ephemeral or evidence of the superior Anglo-Saxon culture triumphing over Scandinavian culture. I reject this view. Instead, it is my contention that the mythologically-themed images on Anglo-Scandinavian sculpture are too complex and the composition too deliberate to be regarded in such a way. They are visual expressions that integrate and accommodate two different traditions and worldviews and the various myths and legends that have been invoked were chosen to highlight or augment this harmonious relationship.

In this chapter, I shall explore and describe the mythologically- and heroically-themed iconography on Anglo-Scandinavian stone crosses in precise detail. I shall begin by discussing all the iconography that has been identified as depictions of the legend of Völundr the smith. Well known both to the Anglo-Saxons and the Vikings, the Völundr-themed imagery is some of the most interesting and elaborate from this period and can be found on six different monuments, among them the famous Leeds cross. I shall then discuss Sigurðr, another heroic figure, who is probably more familiar to modern audiences than Völundr through various literary retellings, most notably the Middle High German *Das Nibelungenlied* and the Old Norse-Icelandic *Völsunga saga*, one of the ‘legendary sagas’ or *fornaldarsögur*. Sigurðr has been identified on six crosses. Then, I shall discuss six monuments related to the concept of Ragnarök or ‘Destiny of the gods.’³⁶ Finally, I will explore a number of mythological figures that do not belong to the previous mythological schemes, but which are

³⁶ According to John Lindow (*Norse Mythology: A Guide to the Gods, Heroes, Rituals and Beliefs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 254), although most Viking Age poets and modern scholars use the term ‘Ragnarök,’ the word is always spelled ‘Ragnarøk’ (or ‘Twilight of the gods’) in manuscripts of Snorri’s *Edda*. This was famously used as the title of the last opera, *Götterdämmerung*, in Richard Wagner’s *Ring Cycle*.

nonetheless still significant. These include Þórr and the Miðgarðsormr; a number of Óðinn-themed images; women welcoming warriors into Valhalla; the symbolic ‘Hart and hound’ motif; and boar imagery associated with the Norse deity Freyr.

Part One: Völundr the smith

The story of a magical smith called Völundr (or Wēlund in Old English, Wiolant in Old High German) is one of the most widespread of the Germanic heroic legends and was particularly popular in Anglo-Saxon England, Scandinavia and other parts of northern Europe. Textual and visual evidence suggests that a variant of the myth was known in England that may have had more in common with a Continental version, rather than the Scandinavian, but a conclusive answer may never be reached.³⁷ The most popular episode on English crosses involves Völundr with his ‘flying contrivance’ and demonstrates that Anglo-Scandinavians had a special interest in his escape. It could be argued that this interest indicates a conscious decision by the Anglo-Scandinavian carvers to equate Völundr with the Christian angels and, I should mention, there are indeed a number of visual and abstract parallels between Völundr and angels that can be drawn (I discuss Völundr’s connection(s) with the Christian angels in Chapter Two). Lilla Kopár considered this interest in Völundr’s flight a way of rationalising the myth through a Christian framework, rendering it easier for contemporary audiences to understand how Völundr managed to fly and escape.³⁸ This certainly contrasts with the Old Norse texts (particularly *Völundarkviða*), where Völundr somehow took the shape of a bird.³⁹ In an overall sense, Kopár as well as others have argued that the Anglo-Saxon version of the Völundr story was to an extent influenced and modified by Christianity and this, if nothing else, certainly sets it apart from the Scandinavian version.⁴⁰

A dearth of written sources produced by the Scandinavian inhabitants in Anglo-Saxon England makes it necessary to draw on Old Norse literary sources and pre-Viking Anglo-Saxon sources in order to make sense of the Völundr legend. The eighth-century Northumbrian Franks casket is probably the oldest witness to the legend and shows an assemblage of pagan Germanic and Christian stories in perfect accord with the Church’s concept of universal history, much like many of the

³⁷ Lilla Kopár, *Gods and Settlers: The Iconography of Norse Mythology in Anglo-Scandinavian Sculpture* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 47.

³⁸ Kopár, *Gods and Settlers*, 48.

³⁹ Kopár, *Gods and Settlers*, 48.

⁴⁰ Kopár, *Gods and Settlers*, 47.

monuments discussed below.⁴¹ The most relevant textual sources are the Old English poem *Deor*, from the tenth-century Exeter Book (MS 15CID1G), the Old Norse *Völundarkviða*, preserved in the late thirteenth-century Codex Regius of the *Poetic Edda* (GKS 2365 4to) and the thirteenth-century Velent-episode (*Velents þáttur*) of the Old West Norse *Þiðreks saga af Bern*, probably based on German sources. *Völundarkviða* is the most complete, and probably the oldest of the Scandinavian sources, and therefore should be treated as the springboard for further examination.⁴²

The Franks Casket, so-called because it was donated to the British Museum by a certain Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks, can be traced back to a family in Auzon, Haute-Loire in France. In total there are five distinct sculptured panels and eleven different runic inscriptions. The *Völundr* legend appears on the left side of the front panel. The smith seems to be standing at his anvil and speaking to a woman, while a second one stands behind her. Underneath lies the headless body of one of *Níðuðr*'s young sons. In the background is a man with a number of birds, identified by R. I. Page, among others, as Egill, *Völundr*'s brother. To the right of the panel is the Adoration of the Magi. The runic inscription on the front refers to the type of material the casket is made from and is not a description of the images: firstly, *hronæs ban* or '(this is) whale's bone' and *fisc flodu ahof on fergenberig | warþ gasric grorn þær he on greut giswom*, 'the fish beat up the sea(s) on to the mountainous cliff. The king of ?terror became sad when he swam on to the shingle.'⁴³ The other image I want to mention concerns a battlescene on the lid of the casket. A group of armed men appear to be attacking a house defended by an archer. Behind him sits a figure thought to be a woman. Above the man's shoulder is the name 'æ g i l i' which has led many scholars to identify him as *Völundr*'s brother, Egill.⁴⁴ The other images on the casket depict the she-wolf feeding Romulus and Remus, Titus' capture of Jerusalem and a mysterious warrior and beast scene.

⁴¹ Leslie Webster, *Anglo-Saxon Art* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press 2012), 96.

⁴² Kopár, *Gods and Settlers*, 37.

⁴³ R. I. Page, *An Introduction to English Runes* 2nd edition (Woodbridge, UK: The Boydell Press, 1999), 174.

⁴⁴ Page, *English Runes*, 177.

The melancholic poem *Deor* is the oldest Old English literary source (partly) concerned with Völundr. I have provided the first two verses that treat the legend:

*Wēlund him be wurman, wræces cunnade
ānhȳdig eorl, earfoða drēag,
hæfde him tō gesīþþe, sorge and longap
wintercealde wræce. Wēan oft onfond
siþþan hine Nīðhād on nēde legde
swoncre seonobende, on sȳllan monn.
Ðæs oferēode, þisses swā mæg.*

*Beadohilde ne wæs, hyre brōþra dēap
on sefan swā sār, swā hyre sylfre þing,
þæt hēo gearolice ongietaþ hæfde
þæt hēo ēacen wæs; Æfre ne meahte
þrīste geþencan, hū ymb þæt sceolde.
Ðæs oferēode, þisses swā mæg.*

Weland, by way of the trammels upon him, knew persecution.
Single-minded man, he suffered miseries. He had as his
companion sorrow and yearning, wintry-cold suffering; often
he met with misfortune once Nithhad had laid constraints on
him, plinat sinew-fetters upon a worthier man.
- That passed away: so may this.

To Beadohild her brothers' death was not so sore upon her
spirit as her own situation, in that she had clearly realized that
she was pregnant. Never could she confidently consider what
must needs become of that.
- That passed away: so may this.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ S. A. J. Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry* 3rd edition (London: Everyman, 1995), 364.

Arguably the major disparity between the Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon traditions lies in the treatment of Völundr's flight and the supernatural elements of the legend. Another important difference that can be observed is that the core theme in *Völundarkviða* is the act of revenge itself, while *Deor* tends to focus on the sufferings of Völundr's situation (and the misery of the woman he raped).⁴⁶

The key episodes in *Völundarkviða* are as follows: Völundr has two brothers, Slagfiðr and Egill; all three live with their swan-maiden wives⁴⁷ near a lake; after nine years the wives leave and Völundr's brothers duly pursue them; Völundr waits, but in the meantime is captured by Níðuðr and, at his queen's behest, is hamstrung and imprisoned on an island near a place called Sævarstaðr; Völundr's ring is forcibly taken and presented to Níðuðr's daughter Böðvildr (known in Old English as Beaduhild), but Völundr takes his revenge when he lures the king's sons to the smithy and beheads them, fashions cups from their skulls, jewels from their eyes and a brooch from their teeth; Böðvildr is lulled into a drunken state by Völundr, who then rapes her, in the process fathering a son and, finally, escapes by rising into the air and flying away.

Turning now to the evidence on the sculpture, I begin by discussing Leeds 1, arguably the clearest example of the Völundr-themed crosses and one of the most significant of the whole corpus. Then, I look at Sherburn 2 and 3 which share depictions of Völundr with his flying contrivance - although only Sherburn 3 has potential evidence that Böðvildr might be present. Following this, I discuss York Minster 9 and Bedale 6, where Völundr and his flying contrivance are depicted and certain other figures from the story may be present. Lastly, I shall examine

⁴⁶ Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 102; John McKinnell ("Eddic poetry in Anglo-Scandinavian northern England," in *Vikings and the Danelaw: Select Papers from the Proceedings of the Thirteenth Viking Congress, Nottingham and York, 21-30 August 1997*, ed. James Graham-Campbell *et al.* (Oxford: Oxbow, 2001), 198-200) has also suggested a possible location of *Völundarkviða*'s composition in Anglo-Saxon England, which may explain certain Old English loan words and account for the presence of Old English metre.

⁴⁷ In the preceding text to *Völundarkviða* (but nowhere else), Völundr's and his brother's wives are called *valkyrior* or 'valkyries.' However, according to Carolyne Larrington (*The Poetic Edda*, 277), valkyries are not normally swan-maidens, so perhaps the two kinds of being have been conflated here, since both can fly and both eschew domesticity.

Egglescliffe 1, which is unique in that only Völundr and his contrivance are depicted with no one and nothing else.

II

The tenth-century cross Leeds 1 is one of the most complex carvings of the Viking Age and probably of all the Anglo-Scandinavian mythologically-themed monuments. It has had numerous resting places and so we are fortunate that it has survived in such good condition. It is also one of the most difficult crosses to interpret. Famous commentators on pre-Norman stone sculpture such as G. F. Browne, James Lang and W. G. Collingwood have all had diverging views. Leeds 1 is unusual in that its iconography seems to have a direct parallel to a few of the Gotland picture stones (but of this it impossible to be certain). For these reasons it needs to be discussed in detail. Firstly, I shall describe the monument as briefly as possible then I will carefully examine the iconography in detail.

On face *A*, panel *aii* (one of two panels of relevance to this chapter) is made up of fragments *c* and *d* and only survives on the right-hand side. A curly-haired figure dominates the panel. There is drapery wrapped around his shoulders, partly covering an arm from which his left hand emerges, possibly holding a book. These drapery curves have been interpreted as a wing. *Aiv*, the other pertinent panel, depicts a figure with a similarly carved head to the figure in panel *aii* and has the same drapery over his shoulders, but his hair is straighter. This figure holds a sword and a bird in profile is perched on the figure's shoulder. Face *C* has been divided into three fragments: *a*, *b* and *c*. On the left side of *c* there is a frontal figure with long hair that curves over his shoulders, but the middle of his body is missing. Slight remains of the top part of *c* have been interpreted as the hem of a robe and a foot below it. Panel *cii* comprises the remainder of fragment *d* that shows the left half of a frontal figure with hair covering his face. Panel *ciii* shows a female figure held aloft by a frontal figure entangled in an interlace pattern that ties him to a pair of wings. *Ciii* also contains a selection of smith's tools.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Elizabeth Coatsworth, ed., *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, VIII: Western Yorkshire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 200.

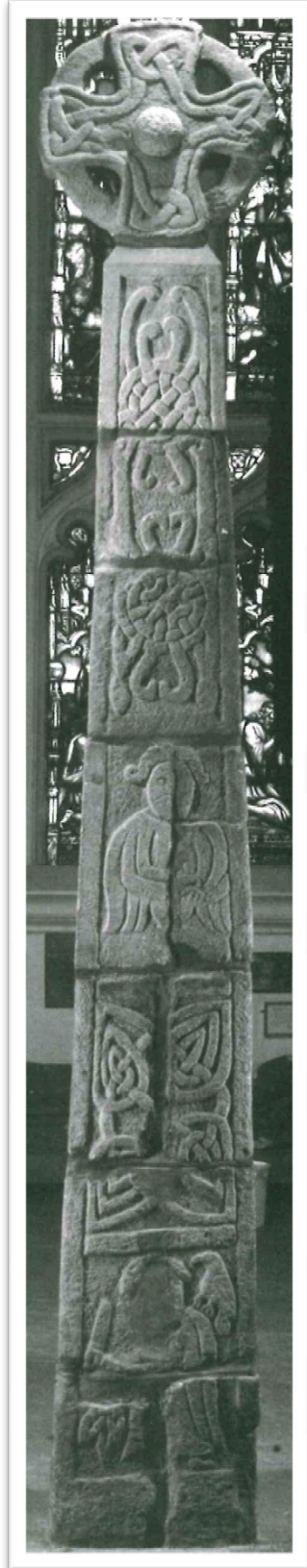


ILLUSTRATION 1: Leeds 1

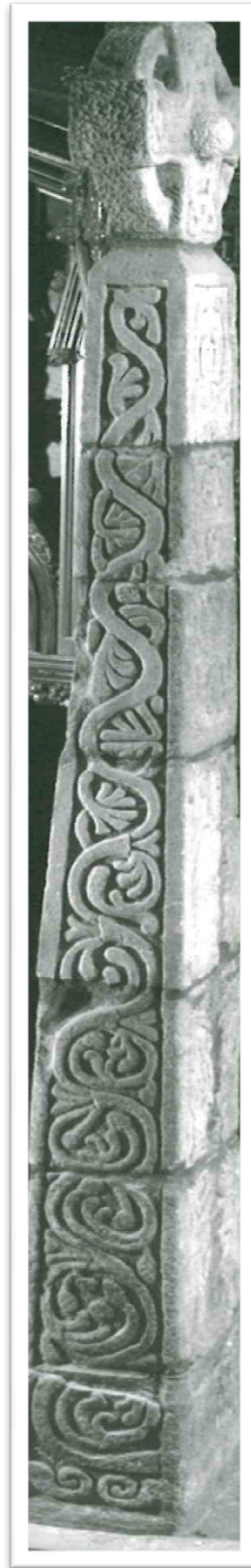
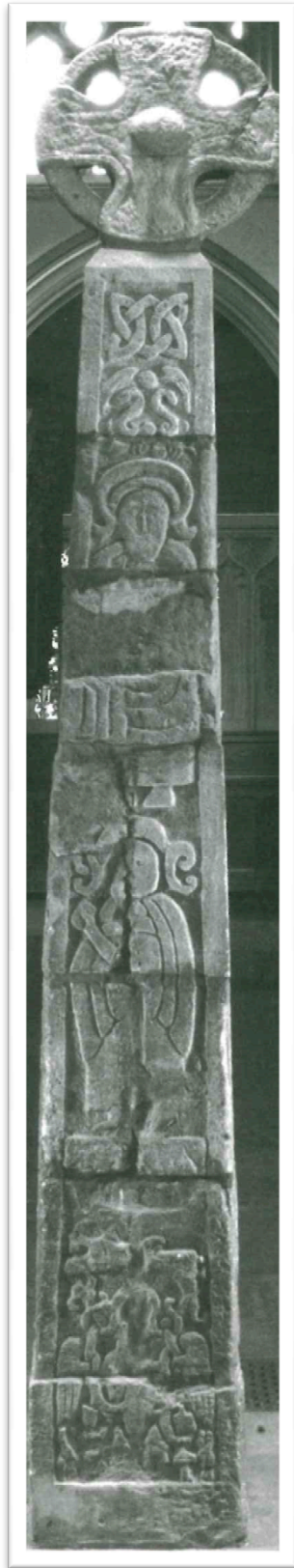


ILLUSTRATION 1 (continued)

The scene at the foot of face *C* was originally identified by G. F. Browne in 1885 as Völundr escaping from captivity by means of his flying contrivance and confirmed in a later study by James Lang.⁴⁹ Very close parallels to this particular image can be found at Sherburn 3, Bedale 6 and Leeds 2 and a similar escape scene appears on a tenth-century Gotland picture stone, Stora Hammars III of Lärbro Parish.⁵⁰ Further probable Völundr-themed scenes can also be found on the eleventh-century picture stones Ardre III, Ardre VIII (variously dated to between the eighth and ninth centuries), Alskog church (G 108) and on recent metalwork finds from Uppåkra, Sweden, dated to about the year 1000.⁵¹

The identity of the female figure is unknown unless it happens to be a conflation of a scene involving Böðvildr, the mother of Völundr's son (the latter known in Old English as Wudga or Widia, Old Norse as Viðga and Middle High German as Witege or Witige).⁵² Lang noticed close parallels to Leeds' saints and winged motif on an image from the Sherburn 2 cross.⁵³ The association of wings with Völundr recalls notions and images of angels, many of which have been depicted on contemporary stone carvings and, although a direct comparison between Völundr and angels would be unusual, "their common ability to fly and a familiarity with images of winged angels (used as representations of good in opposition to evil) made the iconography of the flying smith acceptable on Christian monuments."⁵⁴ The scene at the base of face *A* is considerably harder to interpret. Browne saw the figure as Sigurðr,⁵⁵ but Lang

⁴⁹ Coatsworth, *Western Yorkshire*, 200; G. F. Browne, "The ancient sculptured shaft in the parish church at Leeds," *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 41 (1885), 139.

⁵⁰ There is also a *triquetra* on the bottom left-hand corner of the main panel, a symbol that John McKinnell argued was used to 'label' Óðinn on some Gotland picture stones, viz., Alskog Tjängvide I, Lärbro Hammars I and Lärbro Tängelgårde I (John McKinnell, "Norse Mythology and Northumbria: A Response," in *Anglo-Scandinavian England*, Old English Colloquium Series no. 4 (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1989), 48).

⁵¹ Uppåkra Arkeologiska Center, *Ögonkontakt med sagans väsen* (date accessed: 26/02/2013) <http://www.uppakra.se/gravdagbok/2011-09-27-ogonkontakt-med-sagans-vasen/>

⁵² Coatsworth, *Western Yorkshire*, 202;

⁵³ James Lang, ed., *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, III: York and Eastern Yorkshire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 202.

⁵⁴ Kopár, *Gods and Settlers*, 49.

⁵⁵ G. F. Browne, "Early sculptured stones in England-II," *Magazine of Art* 8 (1885), 155.

argued it was Völundr as both sword and bird are attributes of the smith.⁵⁶ On the other hand, W. G. Collingwood considered it an example of a secular portrait, as can be found on the late seventh-century or early eighth-century Bewcastle cross in Cumbria.⁵⁷ This invokes a number of interesting questions, such as the strength of the link with the Anglo-Saxon tradition of portraiture and to what extent this survived under the inhabitants' new Scandinavian masters.⁵⁸ In short, explanation of faces *A* and *C* are matters of debate - however, that the Leeds cross is an attempt to present Scandinavian artistic elements in Christian terms is very probable.

I.II

A contemporary of the famous Leeds cross, the late ninth to early tenth-century cross-shaft at Sherburn 2 has been interpreted by James Lang as a depiction of Völundr alongside a number of other decorative Anglo-Scandinavian motifs.⁵⁹ At the top of face *A*, there is a bird-like motif flanked by vertical stripes that should be regarded as wings, according to Lang.⁶⁰ Below is a semicircular human head, crowned with a halo, probably indicating a saint. The general view on face *C* is, not



ILLUSTRATION 2: Sherburn 2

⁵⁶ See Chapter Two for discussion of the magical smith.

⁵⁷ W. G. Collingwood, "The early crosses of Leeds," *Miscellanea* 22 (1915), 307.

⁵⁸ Coatsworth, *Western Yorkshire*, 202.

⁵⁹ Lang, *York and Eastern Yorkshire*, 202.

⁶⁰ Lang, *York and Eastern Yorkshire*, 202; Lang, "Sigurd and Weland in Pre-Conquest Carving from Northern England," *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal* 48 (1976): 90-2.

that it is ‘defaced,’ as Collingwood put it over a century ago, but that it is encrusted by mortar.⁶¹ In spite of this, a pair of beasts in profile can be discerned, interlocked with each another.⁶² The combination of saint and winged motif has a parallel in the images on the Leeds cross and because of these elements Lang identified the figure as Völundr.⁶³ There is also a small amount of Jellinge style decoration that would suggest a late ninth- or tenth-century date. There is little else on Sherburn 2 that would help to identify the human figure, but Völundr is certainly just as possible as anyone else. It has been suggested that Sherburn 2 is very closely associated with Sherburn 3 though Lilla Kopár recently dismissed claims that they were once parts of the same original by reason of the dissimilarity of their interlace patterns. In addition, the Sherburn 2 cross lacks human limbs and smith’s tools.⁶⁴

I.III

Related in many ways to its namesake, Sherburn 3 also depicts a figure thought by James Lang to be Völundr as well as certain other defining features from the legend. At the base of face *A* is the upper half of a human face. Above this scene a single bird’s head with an incised eye points upwards, gripping a woman by her waist in its beak. The extended arm of another man below grasps both her pigtails and the train of her robe. Unfortunately, face *B* has been hacked away, leaving nothing, and face *C* contains little that can be identified. However, there are the remains of a profile beast on face *D* and an interlace pattern. The figure on the strongest-preserved face *A* was thought by James Lang to represent Völundr.⁶⁵ He is depicted with his flying contrivance and some ornament that could be interpreted as a bird’s head. According to Lang, literary sources throw no light on the seized woman, but a likely interpretation could involve the scene from *Völundarkviða* where Völundr abducts Böðvildr.

⁶¹ W. G. Collingwood, “Anglian and Anglo-Danish sculpture in the East Riding, with addenda to the North Riding,” *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal* 21 (1911): 272.

⁶² Lang, *York and Eastern Yorkshire*, 202.

⁶³ Lang, *York and Eastern Yorkshire*, 202.

⁶⁴ Kopár, *Gods and Settlers*, 43.

⁶⁵ Lang, *York and Eastern Yorkshire*, 203.

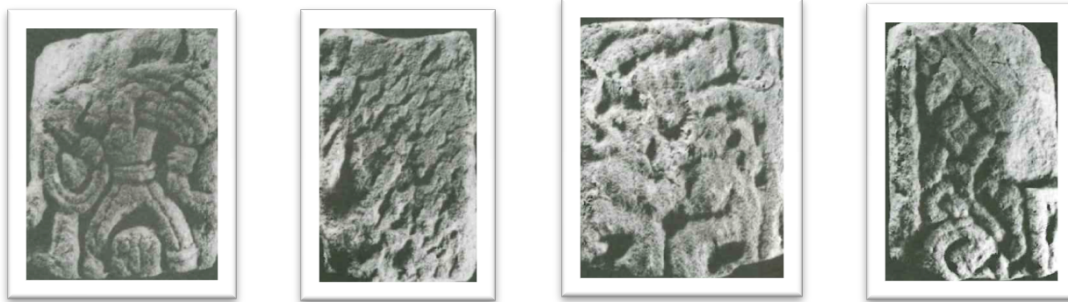


ILLUSTRATION 3: Sherburn 3

The components of this scene also appear on at least one of the Gotland picture stones – Stora Hammars III from Lärbro parish.⁶⁶ The appearance of Völundr here, as well as at certain other northern English locations, is evidence of unified interest in the Völundr legend among the Anglo-Scandinavian community during the Viking Age.⁶⁷ Overall, the evidence that countenances a Völundr-themed image is quite convincing.

I.IV

Tenth-century York Minster 9 probably also depicts Völundr and his flying contrivance. On face *B* the stone is broken away on the left-hand edge, the top of the face is cut back and only the rear half of a beast survives. The profile animal is typical of crouching beasts on Anglo-Scandinavian crosses although the contouring and scrooped joint on its leg are more embellished than usual. The beast adopts an S-stance, viz., its hind leg and tail are tucked behind its torso.⁶⁸ On face *A*, a naturalistic frontal human figure can be seen standing with arms outstretched. From these arms hang crude wings, with four feathers on each wing. According to James Lang, this winged figure is Völundr. However, it is just possible that it could be an angel, but this would be unusual in this place and at this time.⁶⁹ The flying contrivance is bound to the figure of Völundr who holds a woman, probably Böðvildr, above his head. Close parallels of the images on York Minster 9 can be found at Leeds 1, Bedale 3, Sherburn 3 and Nunburnholme 1 (all located in the greater Yorkshire area).

⁶⁶ Lang, *York and Eastern Yorkshire*, 203; Sune Lindqvist, *Gotlands Bildsteine* vol. 1 (Stockholm: Wahlström and Widstrand, 1941-2), pl. 30.

⁶⁷ Kopár, *Gods and Settlers*, 40.

⁶⁸ Lang, *York and Eastern Yorkshire*, 58.

⁶⁹ Lang, *York and Eastern Yorkshire*, 59; See Leeds 1, above.



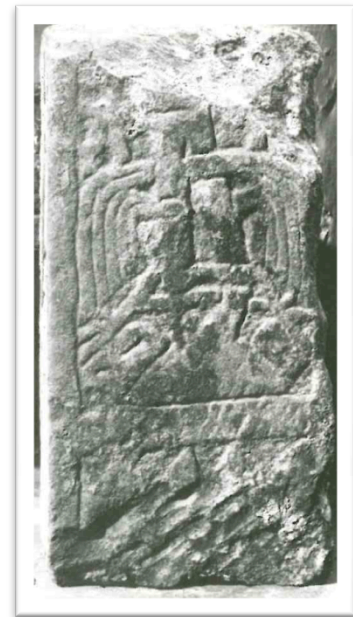
ILLUSTRATION 4: York Minster 9

These analogues are united not only thematically, but also in the conventional design, although it should be said that the York Minster 9 cross is simpler and less formalised.⁷⁰

I.V

Tenth-century Eggescliffe 1 may depict Völundr and his flying contrivance, but the evidence is slightly ambiguous. On side *A*, surrounded by grooved mouldings and vertical bands of plant and scroll design, there is a winged motif.⁷¹ In the higher panel it is thought that there may be the remains of the legs of two figures, while no trace of decoration or figural iconography survives in the lower. Face *D* has not fared well although some marks of decoration can still be seen. Despite the rather fragmentary nature of Eggescliffe 1, it can still be clearly associated with Anglo-Scandinavian ornament. Rosemary Cramp suggested that the figure on face *A* may be an abstract or part of a draped figure, but did not disagree with James Lang's 1972 interpretation of the figure as Völundr with his flying contrivance.⁷² This was also the view of Lilla Kopár, who likened Eggescliffe 1 to crosses at Crathorne and Brompton, both of which are located in North Yorkshire.⁷³ Whether one accepts

**ILLUSTRATION 5:
Eggescliffe 1**



⁷⁰ Lang, *York and Eastern Yorkshire*, 59.

⁷¹ Rosemary Cramp, ed., *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, I: County Durham and Northumberland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 75.

⁷² Cramp, *County Durham and Northumberland*, 75.

⁷³ Kopár, *Gods and Settlers*, 40.

the figure as Völundr or not, the decorative elements of the Egglescliffe cross clearly reflect Anglo-Scandinavian fashion and the figural iconography (at the very least) suggests that Völundr has been depicted.⁷⁴

I.VI

Despite a missing arm, it can be said with considerable certainty that face *A* on the early tenth-century Bedale hogback depicts a human bound into a flying contrivance with wings and tail feathers. On face *B* there is a seated figure in the centre of the panel that holds a crescent-shaped object, while a group of figures cluster around him, one of whom carries a ring. Faces *C* and *D* are very worn, but James Lang was able to distinguish two dragons and a profile bust of a man on *C*. Lang was convinced that the bound figure is Völundr with his ‘flying apparatus.’⁷⁵

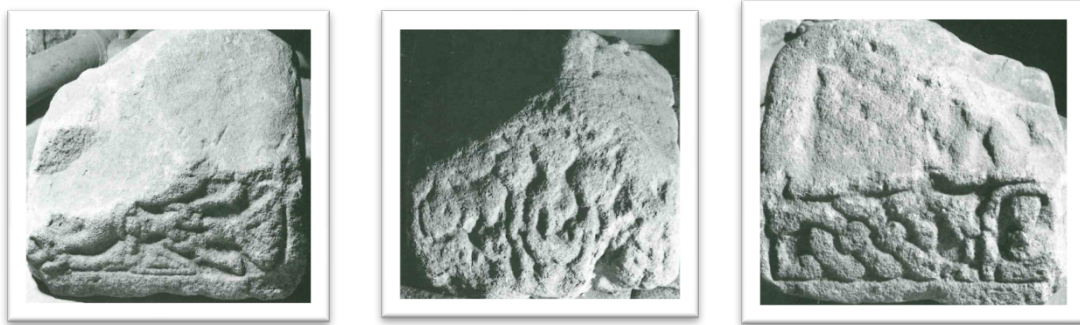


ILLUSTRATION 6: Bedale Hogback

He saw parallels at Leeds and Sherburn and argued that the figures on face *B* might be related to Völundr or even to Christian iconography such as the Epiphany, but admits that the carving is so worn away that it is hard to be precise. It is possible that the central figure could represent Níðuðr, Völundr’s captor, while the figure holding the ring could yield Böðvildr. This would make sense given the larger context. Overall, the degree of Scandinavian input might be minimal unless we can be sure that the figure on face *B* is related to the Völundr legend. On the other hand, it is possible that if face *B* displays Christian imagery, there might be some kind of intended significant correspondence or overlap between the pagan and Christian traditions.

⁷⁴ Cramp, *County Durham and Northumberland*, 75.

⁷⁵ James Lang, ed., *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, VI: Northern Yorkshire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 62; Lang, “Sigurd and Weland,” 92-3.

Part Two: Sigurðr

The story of Sigurðr (referred to in Old English as Sigemund and Old High German as Siegfried) and the Völsungar is one of the many elaborate medieval Germanic legends, involving a great many characters in addition to Sigurðr, who plays the central role. Textual variations occur from one tradition to another so it is not surprising to find differences in the surviving visual evidence as well. There are at least six representations of the Völsungar legend remaining in northern England that we know of, but the material from the Isle of Man is equally rich and further examples occur in mainland Scandinavia. These are discussed in Chapter Three.

As with the Völundr legend, there are many extant literary sources from different geographical and political contexts that were written down, in some cases, between two to three hundred years after the northern English monuments were erected. In order to recognize and understand the narrative program of the Sigurðr-themed images, these sources must be taken into account. The legend survives in a number of written sources, the most extensive and widely known of which are the Middle High German epic *Das Nibelungenlied* (c. 1200), a brief section in *Skáldskaparmál* (of the *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*), composed around 1225, and *Völsunga saga* (NKS 1824b4°), written in its present form c. 1400-25. It is also mentioned in *Þiðreks saga af Bern*, which has already been discussed in conjunction with Völundr. Some of the poems from the thirteenth-century *Poetic Edda*, preserved in the Codex Regius (GKS 2365 4to), treat the Sigurðr legend, including (organised in order of relevance) *Reginismál*, *Fáfnismál*, *Sigrdrífumál*, *Gripisspá*, *Atlakviða*, *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* and *Frá dauða Sinfjötla*. There are other poems in the *Poetic Edda* that relate to the Sigurðr legend but tend to focus more on the sufferings of the women in the legend and the events following his death. These include *Brot af Sigurðarkviðu*, *Guðrúnarkviða I*, *Guðrúnarkviða II*, *Sigurðarkviða hin skamma*, *Helreið Brynhildar*, *Dráp Niflunga*, *Oddrúnargrátr* and *Atlamál*. There are also references in three sources composed in England: *Beowulf*, dated to between the eighth and early eleventh centuries, *Widsith*, from the tenth-century Exeter Book and *Waldere*, usually dated to about the year 1000. The Old Norse anonymous *Eiríksmál*, composed in 954 or later, also contains references to Sigurðr, but where the poem was

composed and by whom remains unknown.⁷⁶ However, on linguistic grounds and grounds of poetic convention it would have to have been composed by a Norwegian or an Icelander.

The main events, as recounted in *Völsunga saga*, can be summarised as follows: Sigurðr is the son of Sigmundr, who dies in battle; the fragments of his sword are kept for his son; Sigurðr is sent to be fostered by Reginn, son of Hreiðmarr; Sigurðr chooses the horse Grani, a relation of Sleipnir, Óðinn's eight-legged horse;⁷⁷ Reginn incites Sigurðr to slay Fáfnir and retrieve Andvari's gold;⁷⁸ a cursed ring is given to Hreiðmarr in compensation for the death of Ótr, the third brother of Sigurðr; Reginn forges three swords for Sigurðr, two of which break, but the third is made from the fragments of Sigmundr's sword, is very strong and is named Gramr; Sigurðr kills Fáfnir and follows Óðinn's command by bathing in Fáfnir's blood; he becomes invulnerable except for a spot on his shoulder; at Reginn's request, Fáfnir's heart is roasted; Sigurðr burns his finger over the fire and sucks the blood off his thumb, allowing him to understand the speech of birds, who reveal Reginn's treacherous plan to deceive him; Sigurðr beheads Reginn; packs treasure on Grani; he marries Brynhildr, a valkyrie; Sigurðr is then deceived in forgetting his love for Brynhildr and marries Guðrún; the deception is revealed and Sigurðr is killed in bed by Guðrún's brothers, Gunnarr and Högni; these two suffer violent deaths at the court of the Hunnish king Atli; Högni's heart is cut out and Gunnarr is thrown into a snake pit.

Sue Margeson devised a list of diagnostic features to help with the identification of representations of the Völsungar legend on Anglo-Scandinavian stone crosses and they are as follows:

Sigurðr scenes:

- Reginn the smith forges a sword for the hero
- Killing of Fáfnir from below
- Roasting of Fáfnir's heart and Sigurðr sucking his thumb
- A bird warns of Reginn's treachery

⁷⁶ There is some uncertainty about this. See John McKinnell, "Eddic Poetry in Anglo-Scandinavian England," 328-29 for a full discussion.

⁷⁷ Lindow, *Norse Mythology*, 274.

⁷⁸ Andvari is a dwarf who lives under a waterfall and has the power to change into the form of a pike.

- Grani loaded with treasure

Gunnarr scenes:

- Bound figure surrounded by snakes playing a harp with his toes

On the basis of one or more of these episodes, she argued, we can surmise that the Sigurðr legend has been depicted.⁷⁹

I begin this section by discussing the York Minster 34 grave-cover. Then I shall discuss two monuments that originate from the same location, Kirby Hill 2 and 9. The first cross presents what is believed to be the decapitated Reginn and Sigurðr sucking his thumb, while the other depicts the loaded Grani and Sigurðr piercing Fáfnir's stomach from a pit. Then I discuss Ripon 4, where Sigurðr roasts and eat Fáfnir's heart. The final two monuments of this section, Nunburnholme 1 and the York Minster hogback, perhaps carry less scholarly weight, but there is no reason why they should be dismissed outright.

II.I

The grave-cover from York Minster 34 dates from the tenth century and is one of the most reliable examples of the Sigurðr legend in the British Isles. On the bottom of face *A*, there is an S-shaped dragon, its head in the corner, while to the right is a profile human figure with hand raised to its mouth. Overhead, there is a profile quadruped. At the end of face *C*, two profile animals are locked in combat, one on its back. Between them is a squatting bear-like profile animal.⁸⁰ On face *D*, a human figure stands in the centre. His legs are widely spread and he holds a raised sword. To the left of the figure, there is a knotted dragon, whose jaws gape at the swordsman. To the right, smaller dragons can be seen. At the feet of the human lies a severed dragon's head. It is probable that the swordsman is Sigurðr and the head is that of Fáfnir. James Lang has argued that the position of the figure means it is likely to be Sigurðr by reason of its similarity to other depictions in Scandinavia, such as the *Ramsundsberget* (Sö 101, Eskilstuna Municipality, Södermanland, Sweden), the

⁷⁹ Sue Margeson, "The Völsung Legend in Medieval Art," in *Medieval Iconography and Narrative: A Symposium*, ed. Flemming G. Andersen, Esther Nyholm, Marianne Powell and Flemming Talbo Stubkjær (Odense: Odense University Press, 1979), 184.

⁸⁰ Lang, *York and Eastern Yorkshire*, 71.

Drävle runestone (U 1163, now in the courtyard of the manor house Göksbo in Uppland, Sweden) and the Hylestad stave church portal (now in the Museum of Cultural History, Oslo).⁸¹ The smaller dragons and the bear-like animal are less easily identified. Lang thought of the figure on face *A* as the scene in which Sigurðr nurses his thumb after burning it over the fire. In addition, he thought the serpentine creature could be Fáfnir. The profile quadruped has been identified as Grani, Sigurðr's horse.



ILLUSTRATION 7: York Minster 34

Lang also pointed out a number of parallels of the image on the York Minster grave-cover at North Yorkshire locations such as Ripon and Kirby Hill and on several crosses from the Isle of Man.⁸² York Minster 34 has some of the most striking and conspicuous imagery from Old Norse mythology in the whole of northern England and is one of the finest examples of the Sigurðr-themed crosses.

⁸¹ Lang, "Sigurd and Weland," 83-4.

⁸² Lang, *York and Eastern Yorkshire*, 72.

II.II

As mentioned above, the early tenth-century cross Kirby Hill 2 has been decorated with a very similar Sigurðr-themed image to York Minster 34.⁸³ On face *A*, there are two relevant panels. On the first panel are the cross and the two feet of a crucifixion scene with Christ's toes pointed outwards. Below are two loops. At the top of the shaft on a long panel is a loosely displayed headless human body.

ILLUSTRATION 8: Kirby Hill 2



Underneath, there is a figure sucking his thumb and below that is the faint suggestion of an anvil. According to James Lang, Kirby Hill 2 was made according to an Irish and North Yorkshire Christian tradition (known as the ring- or plate-headed cross), but its figural iconography is of Scandinavian provenance.⁸⁴ The limp figure on *A* was identified as the decapitated smith Reginn and the figure below as Sigurðr, who cooks the dragon's heart while nursing his thumb. The loops on the neck of the cross might represent the slain Fáfnir. Lilla Kopár reasonably suggested that Kirby Hill 2 may be an example of a conflation of the Völundr and Sigurðr legends, as Reginn was not decapitated in a smithy.⁸⁵ The closest

comparable examples to Kirby Hill 2 are (apart from its namesake) at Ripon 4, York Minster 34, the churchyard cross at Halton and a number of Manx cross-slabs.⁸⁶

II.III

The Kirby Hill 9 cross, raised between the end of the ninth century and the mid-tenth century, has also been carved with a very reliable Sigurðr-themed image and is comparable to the Kirby Hill 2 cross - although they are distinct enough for one to surmise that they represent a broad pictorial tradition of the story in the North

⁸³ Lang, *Northern Yorkshire*, 130; Lang, *York and Eastern Yorkshire*, 71-2.

⁸⁴ Lang, *Northern Yorkshire*, 130; *Northern Yorkshire*, 37.

⁸⁵ Kopár, *Gods and Settlers*, 65.

⁸⁶ W. G. Collingwood, *Northumbrian Crosses of the Pre-Norman Age* (London: Faber and Gwyer, 1927), 159-60; Philip Kermode, *Manx Crosses, or the inscribed and sculptured monuments of the Isle of Man* (London and Derby: Bemrose and Sons, 1907), 170; Margeson, "The Völsung legend in medieval art," 185-9.

Yorkshire region.⁸⁷ Face *A* depicts an L-shaped dragon whose body is pierced by a sword with distinct hilts. The lower extremities of the dragon are bound by loops. Face *C* contains a horse in profile set below a pair of rectangles made up of smaller rectangles and a central dot. In 1870 G. Rowe suggested that Kirby Hill 9 may have been part of a larger cross, which indicates that further parts of the Sigurðr legend might be missing.⁸⁸ Nonetheless, there are two characters/beasts that both belong to the legend that have been identified - Grani and Fáfnir. Parallels for the horse can be found on the Halton cross and the York Minster 34 grave-cover, as discussed above.



FIG. 2: Kirby Hill 9

In the *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, VI: Northern Yorkshire*, James Lang pointed out that both the Anglo-Scandinavian and Manx representations of Sigurðr usually depict him wielding the sword as it strikes the dragon - and there are close parallels to this elsewhere in Europe, such as on an incised carving from Tandberg in Norway and on a Viking-made axe from Suzdal, Vladimir Oblast in Russia.⁸⁹ These comparisons that span thousands of kilometres attest to the deep fascination with the Völsungar legend felt by the various Germanic peoples.

⁸⁷ Kopár, *Gods and Settlers*, 65.

⁸⁸ G. Rowe, "On the Saxon church of All Saints, Kirby Hill, Boroughbridge," *Associated Architectural Societies' reports and papers* 10, pt. 1 (1870): 241.

⁸⁹ Lang, *Northern Yorkshire*, 133; cf. Richard Bailey, "Scandinavian Myth on Viking-period Stone Sculpture in England," in *Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society*, ed. Geraldine Barnes and Margaret Clunies Ross (Odense: University of Southern Denmark, 2003), 17; Emil Ploss, *Sigfried-Sigurd, der Drachenkämpfer* (Köln and Graz: Böhlau Verlag, 1966), 64.

II.IV

The late ninth- to early tenth-century Ripon 4 cross presents a somewhat contentious example of a Sigurðr-themed image and should be studied together with the Kirby Hill monuments. On face *A*, a kneeling or crouching figure holds one hand in front of him and touches his face, while the other arm is extended in front of him. This figure on *A* was identified by James Lang as Sigurðr sucking his thumb as part of a defining scene from the *Völsungar* legend, in which he roasts and eats Fáfnir's heart. However, Lilla Kopár was not convinced of this and looked to Sue Margeson, who argued the crouching figure was a devotee or saint - a popular figure on medieval Irish crosses such as SS Patrick and Columba at Kells in County Meath.⁹⁰ Kopár also noted that a Sigurðr-themed image on the head of a cross, usually reserved for strictly



ILLUSTRATION 9: Ripon 4

Christian iconography, was unusual since non-Christian images were normally confined to the cross-shaft.⁹¹ There is a striking parallel at Nunburnholme where a feast scene is presented that Elizabeth Coatsworth has connected to the Christian mass.⁹² The closest comparable example to the Ripon cross is on the Kirby Hill 2

⁹⁰ Margeson, "The *Völsung* legend in Medieval Art," 190.

⁹¹ Kopár, *Gods and Settlers*, 66.

⁹² Coatsworth, *Western Yorkshire*, 236.

cross where the decapitated Reginn and Sigurðr are arranged one below the other at the feet of the crucified Christ.⁹³

II.V

The late ninth- to early tenth-century cross-shaft from Nunburnholme 1 (split into two pieces) is one of the most elaborate monuments in Northumbria on which Sigurðr is thought to be depicted. On face *A*, fragment *a*, there is a frieze of two angels with wings set below a broad horizontal band. In an arched panel a deeply cut seated figure is shown in profile facing a crookedly set stool. His shins are covered in crude



ILLUSTRATION 10: Nunburnholme 1

⁹³ Coatsworth, *Western Yorkshire*, 236.



ILLUSTRATION 10 (continued)

drapery and his torso is clothed in a jacket-like garment, while his left hand grasps the hilt of a large sword and the right hand protrudes from under the chin.⁹⁴ At the top of fragment *b* is a heavily damaged profile figure who sits on a chair and whose legs drop down to the panel below that displays a centaur facing right. Within face *B* is an arched frontal figure with narrow feet who is draped in thick clothing. On face *C*, a pair of confronted wyverns with drooping tails that fill spandrels are depicted, each

⁹⁴ Lang, *York and Eastern Yorkshire*, 190.

adopting the S-stance with stumpy forelegs and leaf-shaped wings. Angels and beast motifs are shown on side *D*, while very little remains on *E* that can be identified. Overall, the Scandinavian elements are on the minimal side, but James Lang associated the secular figure with Viking-type sword and the pair of wyverns with the local Anglo-Scandinavian workshops.⁹⁵ The choice of scene is predominantly Christian with iconography described by Lang as ‘unusual.’ I. R. Pattison once identified the seated figure as Sigurðr in the smithy forging the magic sword, but both Lang and Lilla Kopár regarded it as the eating of the dragon’s heart.⁹⁶

II.VI

In spite of the fact that only fragments of the tenth-century York Minster hogback survive, it is possible that the scene from *Völsunga saga*, in which Gunnarr is trapped in a snake pit, has been depicted. On the vertical ‘roof’ of the hogback stands a frontal ‘demi-figure,’ arms outstretched and elbows dipped. Beneath the armpits there are two snakes’ heads, their ribbon bodies curling into the lower corners of the hogback. Strands loop the figure’s arms and his chin points slightly to the apex of the gable while his hands are spread. Interpretation of the figure is debatable: I. R. Pattison⁹⁷ and Elizabeth Coatsworth,⁹⁸ who cite local examples of serpents associated with crucifixion, are two of the many who have attempted to identify the image.⁹⁹



ILLUSTRATION 11: York Minster Hogback

⁹⁵ Lang, *York and Eastern Yorkshire*, 192.

⁹⁶ Kopár, *Gods and Settlers*, 64.

⁹⁷ I. R. Pattison, “The Nunburnholme cross and Anglo-Danish sculpture at York,” *Archaeologica* 104, (1973): 215.

⁹⁸ Elizabeth Coatsworth, “Worked stone fragments,” in *St. Mary Bishophill Junior and St. Mary Castlegate*, ed. L. P. Wenham *et al.* (London: Published for the York Archaeological Trust by the Council for British Archaeology, 1987), 163.

⁹⁹ Lang, *York and Eastern Yorkshire*, 77.

In view of the Sigurðr-themed images at York Minster 34, it is possible to argue that it depicts Gunnarr in the snake pit, but there is no harp, his chief characteristic.¹⁰⁰ The stance of the figure actually echoes that of Christ on the St Mary Castlegate crosshead and, according to Richard Bailey, the overlap may be intended.¹⁰¹ The position of the figure's arms are also similar to the crucifixion scene at Brigham 5 in Cumbria, where there are snake-like elements.



ILLUSTRATION 11 (continued)

James Lang has detected some Irish influence as well.¹⁰² In an area where Sigurðr-themed images are so widely distributed, one would be hard pressed to disregard this probable Gunnarr-themed image completely.

¹⁰⁰ Kopár, *Gods and Settlers*, 67.

¹⁰¹ Richard Bailey, *Viking Age Sculpture in Northern England* (London: Collins, 1980), 139.

¹⁰² Lang, *York and Eastern Yorkshire*, 78.

Part Three: Ragnarök

The ancient concept of Ragnarök constitutes one of the central narratives of Norse mythology. It is a story that tells of the final battle between the Æsir and a horde of monsters, in which the cosmic balance is upset and both groups are almost totally obliterated. As with many topics from the medieval period the surviving literary record is scanty, and most sources come almost exclusively from Iceland. The prophetic *Völuspá*, preserved in the Codex Regius of the *Poetic Edda* and thought by some scholars to be of late tenth-century origin due to various allusions to Christianity,¹⁰³ is the best known of the Eddic poems, but Snorri Sturluson also described the central eschatological events in *Gylfaginning*, for which he was largely indebted to *Völuspá*.¹⁰⁴ *Vafþrúðnismál*, *Lokasenna* and *Baldrs draumar* (the last in fact not included in the Codex Regius), also found in modern editions of the *Poetic Edda*, all contain further allusions to the eschatological events of Ragnarök. There is also a minor eschatological section that deals with Ragnarök in the *Hyndluljóð*, preserved in the *Flateyjarbók* from the late fourteenth century.

Composed in the *fornyrðislag* metre, *Völuspá* is recited by a *völva* or sibyl who can remember before the beginning of the world and can see into the future as far ahead as Ragnarök.¹⁰⁵ Óðinn is interrogating her in order to see what the future holds.¹⁰⁶ The salient events of Ragnarök in *Völuspá*¹⁰⁷ are as follows: the *völva* sees murderers and men who swore false oaths; Níðhöggr sucks the bodies of the dead; Fenrir is mentioned and the swallowing of the moon is foretold; the dog Garmr enters the story and the doom of the fighting gods is predicted; anarchy ensnares the earth; Heimdallr blows Gjallarhorn; Yggdrasill shudders and Garmr bays loudly; Hrymr comes from the east and the Miðgarðsormr writhes in the sea; Loki steers a ship across the sea; the Æsir take counsel; Óðinn is defeated by Fenrir; Viðarr kills Fenrir; Þórr defeats the Miðgarðsormr; the earth is destroyed; Baldr is revived; Höðr

¹⁰³ Lindow, *Norse Mythology*, 318.

¹⁰⁴ Kopár, *Gods and Settlers*, 108.

¹⁰⁵ Lindow, *Norse Mythology*, 317.

¹⁰⁶ Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 3.

¹⁰⁷ In this instance, I have followed Carolyne Larrington's 1996 translation of the the *Poetic Edda*.

survives; the poem ends with Níðhöggr in flight whilst carrying corpses; finally, it sinks down out of the vision of the *völva*.

I begin by discussing the Gosforth cross at length. This is necessary because its iconography and theological programme are so complex. Then I discuss three monuments, the Sockburn and Lythe hogbacks and Forcett 4, that depict the incident in which Týr puts his hand into Fenrir's mouth, as described by Snorri in *Gylfaginning*. Following this, I investigate Ovingham 1, where Fenrir appears to be about to swallow the sun and Heimdallr sounds Gjallarhorn, and lastly Gainford 4, where Fenrir and the 'Bound Devil' legend are thought to be depicted.

III.I

The cross at Gosforth in Cumbria stands apart from all other Viking Age crosses in northern England, not only in size and stature and the slender elegance of its cross-shaft, but also because of its carvings and its 'iconographic inventiveness.'¹⁰⁸ To begin with, I shall carefully describe the cross as it is presented in the *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, II: Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire North-of-the-Sands* and then I shall continue by examining the iconography of the cross in some detail.

On face *A* (west), apart from many complex and beautiful decorative elements, there are a number of significant figural compositions. First of all, beneath a downward-biting zoomorphic head, a human figure is presented wearing a belted kirtle and drawn full-faced, head sunk into shoulders. Below him a horseman is shown upside down. This figure also wears a belted kirtle and holds a horn in his outstretched hand. His pear-shaped head is likewise sunk deep into his shoulders. His left hand rests on the horse's neck, while his outstretched right arm holds a spear. Finally, in a curved scallop at the bottom of the panel, there is a pig-tailed man, whose head is set above the body of a captive. His arms and legs are manacled and a snake is

¹⁰⁸ Richard Bailey and Rosemary Cramp, ed., *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, II: Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire North-of-the-Sands* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 101.

knotted around his neck. Over the bound man is the kneeling figure of a pig-tailed woman who holds out a bowl.¹⁰⁹

Apart from vivid and elaborate decorative features, including spiral borders with animal heads, the iconography of face *B* (south) consists of one horseman and a number of beast-like creatures. At the top of face *B*, immediately below the ornamentation, is a horned quadruped. Beneath this, but set sideways, is a wolf or dog, whose legs are caught in a tangle of interlace. Further down the horseman is shown full-face with head sunk into his shoulders. He holds the bridle in his left hand and a spear in his right. The feet of the horse are set over a three-strand plain plait, while at the base of the panel, a creature with pointed open jaws can be seen.¹¹⁰

Visually speaking, face *C* (east) is very striking with four human figures and several serpents and beasts composed in a variety of ways. At the top of the shaft is a four-strand plait terminating at both ends in near identical beast-heads. The tongue of the lower head is split and wrapped around one leg of a human figure. The man's other leg is placed on the right-hand border so that he stands sideways in relation to the shaft. The figure wears a belted kirtle and presses with his left hand against the beast's upper jaw and holds a staff or spear in his outstretched right arm. Below is a run of ring-chain. The scene below contains a figure of the crucified Christ, with arms outstretched. He is also dressed in a kirtle and his head is pressed down into his shoulders. A moulding, representing a stream of blood, runs from the figure's right side down to the point of the kirtle. Underneath this is the head of a spear whose shaft passes under the frame. This is grasped by a profile figure, wearing a short belted kirtle which dips to points. Facing to the right is a female figure also shown in profile with a trailing dress and knotted pigtail. She carries a horn-like object with a bulbous base. Underneath these two figures, inside a curved scallop, are two ribbon beasts, bodies knotted together, each with contoured jaws and hollowed eyes.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Bailey and Cramp, *Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire North-of-the-Sands*, 100.

¹¹⁰ Bailey and Cramp, *Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire North-of-the-Sands*, 100.

¹¹¹ Bailey and Cramp, *Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire North-of-the-Sands*, 101.

The ornament of face *D* (north) is virtually identical to face *B*. At the top of the shaft panel is a *triquetra*, a shape formed of three *vesica piscis*, sometimes with an

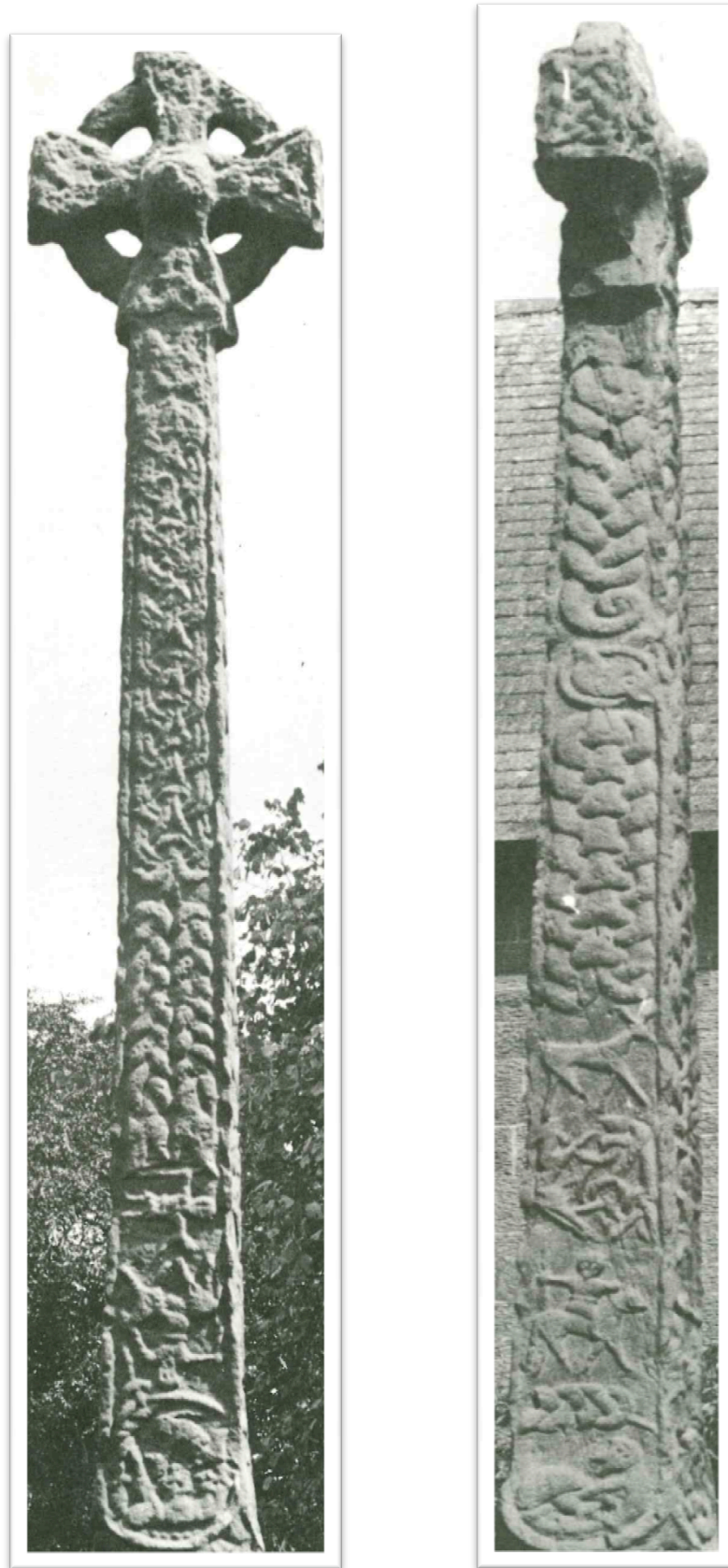


ILLUSTRATION 12: Gosforth 1



ILLUSTRATION 12 (continued)

added circle in or around it, which terminates below in an animal's head with outlined fanged jaws and single pointed eye.¹¹² Eight wing-like features are attached to a rod by rings. Below the beast's jaws are horsemen, one set above the other, with the lower one depicted upside down. Both are belted, full-face with heads sunk into shoulders. Each has his left hand on the horse's neck while the outstretched right hand grasps a spear. The rest of the panel is filled with four-strand plait.¹¹³

There are inevitable difficulties in interpreting any Viking Age cross, but the iconography of Gosforth must be one of the most challenging and enigmatic to explain of all crosses in the British Isles, perhaps in all of northern Europe.¹¹⁴ Essentially, Gosforth can be divided into two iconographical schemes: Christian and non-Christian or pagan (viz., Scandinavian). The only clear Christian scene is the crucifixion on the east face and yet even this one scene presents a number of puzzling questions and issues. The more numerous pagan scenes probably concern Ragnarök. However, these are not simply a hash of unrelated scenes pieced together at the last moment; indeed, the immediate parallel between the death of Christ and the downfall of the gods is one in a series of interrelations that are likely to be a deliberate attempt to create a complex and inventive theological programme. First of all, I shall discuss the crucifixion scene and then review the non-Christian scenes, supplementing both sets of discussions with evidence of the links and connections between the two iconographical schemes. Lastly, I should point out that this passage is largely based on Richard Bailey's tireless investigation into the Gosforth cross from the *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, II: Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire North-of-the-Sands*, without which writing this chapter would have been impossible.

Before I begin the analysis, I want to raise three problems that Bailey encountered in classifying the iconography. The first problem involves our inability to know whether the non-figural ornamentation, which seems unimportant, actually has some significance in the larger context of the cross. The second concerns the lack of panelling on the cross, which affects the relationships between the scenes, making

¹¹² See Glossary (p. 7).

¹¹³ Bailey and Cramp, *Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire North-of-the-Sands*, 101.

¹¹⁴ Bailey and Cramp, *Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire North-of-the-Sands*, 101.

boundaries difficult to establish. Finally, although literary sources from Scandinavia provide us with some understanding of the pagan scenes, they are distanced geographically and temporally from Viking Age England in such a way that they cannot be considered wholly reliable.¹¹⁵

The only clearly Christian scene on the Gosforth cross is the depiction of the crucifixion (of Jesus Christ) and even this does not fit into a conventional classification.¹¹⁶ For example, there are certain details found nowhere else in Britain on pre-Norman crosses. There is a parallel for the flow of blood at Maghera in County Londonderry, Northern Ireland,¹¹⁷ but Anglo-Saxon representations can only be found in manuscripts.¹¹⁸ The double-headed snakes beneath the attendant figures may be a rendering of the defeated devil familiar in Carolingian art. If so, there are comparable examples at Britton in Gloucestershire and Kirkdale in Yorkshire, but only at Gosforth does one find the double-headed creature. Finally, the cross-less crucifixion is rare and has only two English parallels: at Bothal in Northumberland and on the nearby Penrith plaque.¹¹⁹

Perhaps more puzzling are the supporting figures; Longinus, usually paired with Stephaton, is shown here with a female figure. Knut Berg suggested that the figure could represent Ecclesia and such groupings are known from Carolingian art.¹²⁰ However, according to Richard Bailey, Ecclesia should properly be placed so as to catch Christ's blood, but she is on the wrong side, which takes away some of the credibility from this suggestion.¹²¹ Instead, Bailey proposed that the figure could be

¹¹⁵ Hilda R. Ellis Davidson, "Gods and heroes in stone," in *The Early Cultures of North-west Europe*, ed. Cyril Fox and Bruce Dickins (Cambridge: H. M. Chadwick Memorial Lectures, 1950), 130.

¹¹⁶ Bailey and Cramp, *Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire North-of-the-Sands*, 101.

¹¹⁷ Arthur Kingsley Porter, *The Crosses and Culture of Ireland* (New York: Arno Press, 1979), 58.

¹¹⁸ For example, cf. Francis Wormald, *English Drawings of the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries* (London: Faber, 1952), pl. 21.

¹¹⁹ Bailey and Cramp, *Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire North-of-the-Sands*, 101.

¹²⁰ Knut Berg, "The Gosforth Cross," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 21 (1958): 31.

¹²¹ Bailey and Cramp, *Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire North-of-the-Sands*, 102.

an *alabastron*, the symbol of Mary Magdalene (who also appears on the Ruthwell cross), and the attendant figures as symbols of converted heathens and the establishment of the church. The converted warrior theme had a special appeal in Anglo-Saxon England and occurs in numerous Anglo-Saxon crucifixion images.¹²² This would link these figures with the ‘heathen nature’ of the rest of the cross.¹²³

According to Richard Bailey, at least three other scenes are non-Christian and can be associated with the mythological concept of Ragnarök.¹²⁴ Firstly, the figure with its arm(s) in a wolf’s jaw on the east face has been identified by Bailey as Viðarr, for it matches how Óðinn’s son avenges his father at Ragnarök, as narrated in *Snorra Edda* and *Vafþrúðnismál*, stanza three, line fifty-five (*kalda kiapta hann klyfia mun | vitnis vígi at*).¹²⁵ This is a depiction unparalleled in the surviving art. However, that Viðarr had his arm(s) in the wolf Fenrir’s jaws is not recorded anywhere in the textual sources. It is possible this is a conflation with Viðarr’s actions in chapter 51 of *Gylfaginning*, where it is written: *En þegar eptir snýsk fram Viðarr ok stígr öðrum fæti í neðra keypt úlfsins...Annarri hendi tekr hann inn efra keypt úlfsins ok rífr sundr gin hans ok verðr þat úlfsins bani* ‘that he will come forward and step with one foot on the lower jaw of the wolf...and he will grasp the wolf’s upper jaw and tear apart its mouth and this will cause the wolf’s death.’¹²⁶ An alternative interpretation could yield the figure of Týr, who in *Gylfaginning* does place his arm(s) in Fenrir’s jaws in order for the wolf to agree to be bound (*Týr lét hönd sína hægri ok leggr í munn úlfinum*).¹²⁷ However, the action involving Týr is not directly connected to Ragnarök, though one could argue that it is a prequel to it. The second Ragnarök scene occurs on the west face and was first identified by Charles Arundel Parker, the

¹²² Kopár, *Gods and Settlers*, 116.

¹²³ Bailey and Cramp, *Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire North-of-the-Sands*, 102.

¹²⁴ Bailey and Cramp, *Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire North-of-the-Sands*, 102.

¹²⁵ Neckel and Kuhn, *Edda*, 55; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 48: ‘the cold jaws of the beast he will sunder in battle.’

¹²⁶ Anthony Faulkes, ed., *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning* (London: University College London, 2000), 50-51; Anthony Faulkes, trans., *Edda Snorri Sturluson 3rd ed.* (London: Everyman, 1995), 54:

¹²⁷ Faulkes, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 28; Faulkes, *Edda*, 29: ‘Týr put forward his right hand and put it in the wolf’s mouth.’ Týr’s missing arm is also referenced by Loki in *Lokasenna*, 37-40 (Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 91).

renowned nineteenth-century Lakeland antiquarian, as Heimdallr, the watchman god, with Gjallarhorn¹²⁸ and may be the only clear depiction of Heimdallr on Anglo-Saxon sculpture.¹²⁹ Bailey points out that literary sources do not refer to any specific episode that might explain his encounter with the two beasts, but according to *Gylfaginning*, Heimdallr was involved in the final battle at Ragnarök (*En er þessi tíðindi verða þá stendr upp Heimdallr ok blæss ákafliga í Gjallarhorn ok vegr up öll guðin ok eiga þau þing saman*).¹³⁰ Finally, at the bottom of the west face, is a scene identified by Reverend William Slater Calverley as the bound Loki with his wife Sigyn.¹³¹ The figure of Loki has a complex literary evolution, but his significance here, according to Bailey, is that he is leading the forces of evil on the day of Ragnarök. It is interesting that the only other Ragnarök illustration of this type occurs in Scandinavia, on the Ardre VIII picture stone in Gotland.¹³² In the written sources, the onset of Ragnarök is signalled by Loki's escape as in *Baldrs Draumar* (*er lauss Loki liðr ór böndom | oc ragna rök riúfendr koma*),¹³³ while the story of his binding occurs in *Gylfaginning*,¹³⁴ immediately before the narrative of Ragnarök. Thus, the bound Loki is closely linked to the Ragnarök theme in the literary tradition.¹³⁵

Aside from these three scenes that can be associated with Ragnarök with certainty, there are a further three that might be related if the relevant literature is invoked. These are the following: a winged beast on the north face which was

¹²⁸ Lindow, *Norse Mythology*, 143.

¹²⁹ Bailey and Cramp, *Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire North-of-the-Sands*, 102; Charles Arundel Parker, *The Ancient Crosses at Gosforth, Cumberland* (London: Elliot Stock, 1896), 49.

¹³⁰ Faulkes, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 50; Faulkes, *Edda*, 54: 'And when these events take place, Heimdallr will stand up and blow mightily on Gjallarhorn and awaken all the gods and they will hold a parliament together.'

¹³¹ William Slater Calverley, "The Sculptured cross at Gosforth, West Cumberland," *Archaeological Journal* 40 (1883): 143-58; it is also worth pointing out a potential parallel between Sigyn and Mary Magdalene – for both have been depicted with pigtailed hair and while Sigyn holds a curved bowl, Mary holds a curved *alabastron*.

¹³² David M. Wilson and Ole Klindt-Jensen, *Viking Art* 2nd ed. (London: Faber and Gwyer, 1980), 79.

¹³³ Neckel and Kuhn, *Edda*, 279; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 245: 'until Loki is loosed, escaped from his bonds, and the Doom of the Gods, tearing all asunder, approaches.'

¹³⁴ Faulkes, *Edda*, 52.

¹³⁵ Bailey and Cramp, *Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire North-of-the-Sands*, 102.

identified by Richard Bailey as the giant Surtr,¹³⁶ a horseman on the south face identified as Óðinn with Mímir below (a figure from Old Norse mythology renowned for his knowledge and wisdom) and Garmr above, the blood-stained dog that guards Hel's gate. Based on the entanglement of human figure and serpent, Þórr and the Miðgarðsormr have also been suggested.¹³⁷ According to Bailey, these interpretations carry scholarly weight, but they may not be correct. Bailey noted that the presence of so many riders dovetails in with Snorri's account in *Gylfaginning* of the combatants riding to battle (*Í þessum gný klofnar himinninn ok ríða þaðan Muspells synir*)¹³⁸ and zoomorphic ornament is a highly appropriate means of representing the monstrous forces of evil with whom the gods engaged.¹³⁹

It would be reasonable to say that the positioning and organisation of the scenes on Gosforth represent a deliberate and inventive attempt at theological patterning, in that various elements from different stories have been woven together to create a comprehensible narrative.¹⁴⁰ It would seem unlikely to be sheer coincidence that Heimdallr and Loki appear on the same shaft unless we are being instructed to believe that they are enemies. More significant, however, is the larger context: the crucifixion of Jesus is set alongside and, by implication, compared with the end of the world from Scandinavian mythology. Also, it is well documented that Christian liturgy and teaching moved from contemplation of the crucifixion to evoking Christ's Second Coming, which suggests that Doom's Day is present in the theological patterning of the cross.¹⁴¹

¹³⁶ As far as I know, there is no evidence to suggest that Surtr was ever depicted as having wings.

¹³⁷ Kopár, *Gods and Settlers*, 113.

¹³⁸ Faulkes, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 50; Faulkes, *Edda*, 53: 'Amid this turmoil the sky will open and from it will ride the sons of Muspell.'

¹³⁹ Bailey and Cramp, *Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire North-of-the-Sands*, 102.

¹⁴⁰ One should recall the letter sent by Bishop Daniel of Winchester to the missionary Boniface, when he encountered pagan Germanic peoples on the continent. He warned against the unmitigated denial of the beliefs held by the pagans. 'Do not proffer opposition,' he wrote, '...and from time to time their superstitions should be compared with our, that is, Christian dogma of this kind.' According to Richard Bailey (*Viking Age Sculpture*, 130), this approach by the Christians led to a redefining of traditional beliefs, which is what seems to be happening on the Gosforth cross.

¹⁴¹ Bailey and Cramp, *Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire North-of-the-Sands*, 102; Bailey, *Viking Age Sculpture*, 129.

If this hypothesis is accepted then a whole series of parallels and contrasts can be invoked. Earthquakes, fires and summoning horns all play a part in the end of the world in both Christian and Scandinavian traditions.¹⁴² According to Lilla Kopár, “the extension of the parallel of these two scenes by a series of other mythological references in the iconographical programme of the whole artefact implies a connection between the end of not only two, but three different worlds: (1) that of Óðinn and the pagan gods (Ragnarök); (2) the end of the world of sin by the First Coming of Christ and his crucifixion; and (3) the apocalyptic end of the world (the Second Coming of Christ).”¹⁴³ Furthermore, Christ lived on after the crucifixion and it cannot be a mere coincidence that Viðarr, who is shown on the same cross-face, also survived the great purge, recorded in *Gylfaginning*¹⁴⁴ and *Vafþrúðnismál* (*Viðarr oc Váli byggja vé goða | þá er slocnar Surtar logi*).¹⁴⁵ As Kopár argued, “his eschatological role is similar to that of Christ, and the two scenes suggest a similar victory over the forces of evil and chaos.”¹⁴⁶ According to Richard Bailey, the patterning of the cross, if correctly interpreted, shows an original mind at work, exploiting links and contrasts in a manner that reflects a radical theological approach, which would otherwise never be suspected in Viking Age Cumbria.¹⁴⁷

The date of the cross is dependent on the style of carving and owes much to the art of Viking Age Norway. The strength of the Scandinavian connection is measured by the lack of Anglo-Saxon panelling, which puts the Gosforth cross much closer to Scandinavia as witnessed by the perishable media of wood and tapestries and in general the whole design is evocative of Scandinavian wood carving.¹⁴⁸ This connection can also be seen in the depiction of Mary Magdalene, whose trailing dress, pigtails and proffered horn-like object recall familiar details of Norwegian presentations in more stylised form on the Isle of Man. However, Richard Bailey

¹⁴² Berg, “The Gosforth Cross,” 33.

¹⁴³ Kopár, *Gods and Settlers*, 113.

¹⁴⁴ Faulkes, *Edda*, 56.

¹⁴⁵ Neckel and Kuhn, *Edda*, 54; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 48: ‘Vidar and Vali will live in the temple of the gods, when Surt’s fire is slaked.’

¹⁴⁶ Kopár, *Gods and Settlers*, 112.

¹⁴⁷ Bailey and Cramp, *Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire North-of-the-Sands*, 102.

¹⁴⁸ Bailey and Cramp, *Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire North-of-the-Sands*, 103.

issued a caution against regarding such links as an implication that Gosforth was carved in the early Viking Age.¹⁴⁹ According to Bailey, the use of Borre style motifs implies a tenth-century date,¹⁵⁰ while the same conclusion can be drawn from the fact that partial outlining of jaws can be found at Oseberg in southern Norway and in the Cumbrian circle-head school.¹⁵¹ Bailey suggested that a tenth-century date is most likely for this sculpture and a similar date for the other Gosforth carvings that share features like the cross-less crucifixion, their figural styles and interlace types.¹⁵²

III.II

Although not as spectacular as Gosforth 1, the Sockburn hogback, dated to between 875-925, has links not only across Northumbria, but also with the Gotland picture stones.¹⁵³ Face A presents one human figure, two beasts and two quadrupeds. The bareheaded, naked man dominates the scene. It appears his right hand is in the mouth of a beast while his left is below the jaws of another beast. On the far left is the first quadruped and the second is at the back of the scene, facing the man. Both animals have pointed open jaws, prominent fangs and pointed eyes. The quadruped



ILLUSTRATION 13: Sockburn Hogback

¹⁴⁹ Bailey and Cramp, *Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire North-of-the-Sands*, 103.

¹⁵⁰ David Wilson, "The dating of Viking art in England," in *Anglo-Saxon and Viking Age Sculpture and Its Context: Papers from the Collingwood Symposium on Insular Sculpture from 800-1066*, ed. James Lang (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 1978), 141.

¹⁵¹ Although the Oseberg hoard has now been dated by means of dendrochronology to the year 834; cf. Signe Horn Fuglesang, "Ekphrasis and Surviving Imagery," *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 3 (2007), 207.

¹⁵² Bailey and Cramp, *Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire North-of-the-Sands*, 103; Richard Bailey and James Lang, "The date of the Gosforth sculptures," *Antiquity* 49 (1975): 290-3.

¹⁵³ Cramp, *County Durham and Northumberland*, 143.

nearest the man has bound feet, but the other does not. On face *C* a frontal human figure stands in the centre with arms outstretched, flanked by three animals. On the left is probably a backwards-looking quadruped. Behind is another bound quadruped, whose gaping jaws meet the right hand of the man, but have not swallowed it. The man himself either holds a dagger or is gripping a chain-like feature.

The Sockburn hogback is a monument strongly influenced by Scandinavian traditions.¹⁵⁴ The scheme of the narrative scenes invites comparison with other hogbacks in north-west England, such as at Heysham in Lancashire, Lowther in Westmorland, Penrith in Cumberland, the narrative scenes from Gosforth and, more remotely, the Gotland picture stones. The depiction of the animals, in particular, resembles imports from Scandinavia very closely. The slim, backward-looking animals on face *C* can be paralleled in many Cumbrian Anglo-Scandinavian carvings and can also be found on the Gotland stones, such as the eighth-century Änge in Buttle parish.¹⁵⁵ Also, the treatment of the human face and figures parallels those on the Anglo-Scandinavian carvings from Gosforth, Heysham and Gainford. Richard Bailey was convinced that face *A* depicted Týr putting his arm(s) into the wolf Fenrir's mouth and, in addition, Garmr, who eventually kills Týr at Ragnarök.¹⁵⁶



ILLUSTRATION 13 (continued)

¹⁵⁴ Cramp, *County Durham and Northumberland*, 144.

¹⁵⁵ Cramp, *County Durham and Northumberland*, 143.

¹⁵⁶ Bailey, "Scandinavian Myth," 17.

The other animals portrayed on face *A* would then be monstrous beasts that join Fenrir in the last attack against the gods.¹⁵⁷ The figure with outstretched arms on face *C* could be interpreted as the Lord of the Animals; however, E. H. Knowles¹⁵⁸ argued that the stone depicts the Daniel in the Lion's Den motif and, furthermore, that the figure has arms extended in the position of crucifixion.¹⁵⁹ Lilla Kopár seemed to agree with Rosemary Cramp when she suggested that the Sockburn hogback could link the sacrifice of Týr with the sacrifice of Christ.¹⁶⁰ It is therefore not wholly unlikely that the Sockburn hogback represents an example of the expression of Old Norse legend in Christian ideas.¹⁶¹

III.III

The early tenth-century Lythe hogback may similarly depict Týr putting his arm(s) into Fenrir's mouth, but the evidence is not definitive. Face *A* is filled with rows of 2b tegulae, but for the remains of a figural scene on face *C*. The heads and torsos of these figures are flanked by serpentine creatures. James Lang has suggested that the iconography seems to be based on Scandinavian mythology, where figures struggle with serpents, but since face *C* is only visible in strong cross-lighting a decisive interpretation may never be reached. According to Lang, Lythe was an important burial ground and for this reason he likened the monument to the Gosforth hogback. There are other very close parallels at Lowther 4 and 5 and there is a similar figure carved onto the base of Great Clifton in Cumbria.¹⁶² Lang suggested these types of figures were popular because they could be used to express an Old Norse legend in Christian terms. A similar motif is Týr putting his arm(s) into Fenrir's mouth, but this could equally be Daniel in the Lion's Den, as at Sockburn 21. Indeed, there is a strong case for such an interpretation as the scene at Lythe is truncated at the

¹⁵⁷ James Lang, "Illustrative Carving of the Viking period at Sockburn-on-Tees," *Archaeologia aeliana or Miscellaneous Tracts Relating to Antiquity* 4 (1972): 240.

¹⁵⁸ E. H. Knowles, "Sockburn church," *Transactions of the Architectural and Archaeological Society of Durham Northumberland* 5 (1896-1905): 116.

¹⁵⁹ Cramp, *County Durham and Northumberland*, 144; Édouard Salin, *La Civilisation mérovingienne, d'après les sépultures, les textes et le laboratoire*, deuxième partie: *Les sépultures* (Paris: Picard, 1952), 259-340.

¹⁶⁰ Kopár, *Gods and Settlers*, 98.

¹⁶¹ Cramp, *County Durham and Northumberland*, 143. Cf. Lang, "Illustrative Carving of the Viking period at Sockburn-on-Tees," 248.

¹⁶² Bailey and Cramp, *Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire North-Of-The-Sands*, 107.

base and the arms are raised in the *orans* position. Perhaps the Lythe carver intended such an overlap. If this is the case then Lythe 21 is an illustration of the power of good defeating the forces of evil depicted in Old Norse rather than Christian form.¹⁶³



ILLUSTRATION 14: Lythe Hogback

III.IV

According to James Lang, a fragment from Forcett 4, dated to between 900-50, could also depict a Ragnarök scene involving Týr and Fenrir, although other interpretations are valid.¹⁶⁴ In the centre is a standing human figure with double halo and pointed hood. His left hand is extended over a dog. Lang dismissed the carving as



ILLUSTRATION 15: Forcett 4

clumsy and freehand, but he did argue that it could represent God the Father with the *Agnus Dei*.¹⁶⁵ A pagan reading could yield Týr and Fenrir (as at Sockburn 21 and the Lythe hogback, discussed above), but the evidence is so scant and Lang so terse on the subject that it is difficult to say with conviction. Kopár suggested that the halo and extended left (not right) hand seemed to exclude the possibility that Týr and Fenrir have been displayed, but she was not certain.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ Cramp, *County Durham and Northumberland*, 143-4; pl. 146, 767-8.

¹⁶⁴ Lang, *Northern Yorkshire*, 111; Cramp, *County Durham and Northumberland*, 143-4.

¹⁶⁵ Lang, *Northern Yorkshire*, 111.

¹⁶⁶ Kopár, *Gods and Settlers*, 99.

III.V

Traditionally regarded as a purely Christian scene, the late tenth to early eleventh-century Ovingham 1 has more recently been interpreted by Richard Bailey as a depiction of Fenrir and Heimdallr.¹⁶⁷ On face *A*, there is a frontal human figure with egg-like head and rounded shoulders, standing beneath a single arch. It has been suggested that there is a bird sitting on his right shoulder. Two humans and one quadruped can be seen on face *C*. The figure on the left is three-quarter turned and wears a hat or has very long hair. One hand is attached to a small quadruped, whose front feet and muzzle touch the body of the figure on its right. This figure is frontal and carries a club or horn in the right hand and wears a tunic. Beneath the heads of the two figures is a roughly round object with two irregular holes in it. According to Rosemary Cramp, this particular piece was only noticed when it was alleged to be closely related to Tynemouth 2, possibly from the same hand or the same workshop.

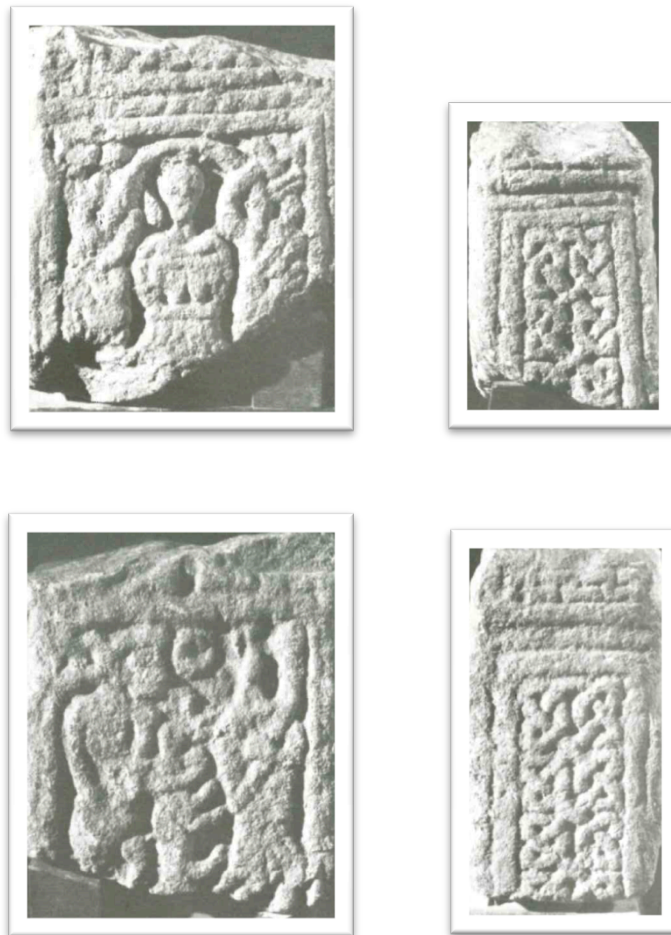


ILLUSTRATION 16: Ovingham 1

¹⁶⁷ Bailey, *Viking Age Sculpture*, 133; cf. Bailey, “Scandinavian Myth,” 19.

Indeed, the figure on face *C* does resemble the Christ in Majesty scenes, as found at Tynemouth (Tyne & Wear) and on the Ruthwell (now in the county of Dumfries and Galloway, Scotland) and Bewcastle crosses.¹⁶⁸ However, Bailey has more recently interpreted it as a Ragnarök scene in which the left hand figure is Loki bursting his bonds, the central animal Fenrir about to swallow the sun, and the figure on the right Heimdallr with Gjallarhorn. This interpretation seems to have merit and is made more credible, as Cramp pointed out, by the identification of the central roundel as the sun, something which otherwise might have been viewed as a space filler, not dissimilar to the circle under the legs of the centaur on face *C* of the Tynemouth monument.¹⁶⁹ In her analysis, Kopár noted that such an interpretation would constitute a “conflation of the various events in one concise image,” which she admitted is not particularly unusual as a compositional technique.¹⁷⁰ Overall, the depiction is rather crude and the iconographical program unknown so it is hard to be certain that any one interpretation is correct - however, it is possible that both Christian and Scandinavian elements are present.¹⁷¹

III.VI

Similarly to Ovingham 1, the Gainford 4 cross, dated to between 900-950, might also depict Fenrir, alongside what could be a ‘Bound Devil’ figure. On face *A*, a figure of a man riding a horse is shown in profile with hair tied in a pigtail. This figure holds the reins in one hand, giving the impression that he is reining the horse in. In the other hand he holds a spear. On face *B*, a bird with a round head and outstretched wings and tail pecks at a snake and stands over a beast, whose gaping jaws are bound. This beast stands with its head turned and thrown back. On face *C* is a frontal figure with grotesquely hunched shoulders, possibly holding a club or hammer in his right hand.¹⁷² Horse and rider with pigtail seems to be an established Scandinavian motif and is found in a similar form on a cross at Hart in County Durham, where it is combined with Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon ornament. Horse

¹⁶⁸ In *Viking Age Sculpture* (p. 253), Richard Bailey explained how the Christ in Majesty figure was drawn from the same stencil or template which produced a similar figure at Tynemouth.

¹⁶⁹ Cramp, *County Durham and Northumberland*, 216.

¹⁷⁰ Kopár, *Gods and Settlers*, 101.

¹⁷¹ Cramp, *County Durham and Northumberland*, 215.

¹⁷² Cramp, *County Durham and Northumberland*, 82.

and rider are also found on the Chester-le-Street cross, as is the bound canine on the Gainford 12 cross.¹⁷³ If the bird on face *B* is attacking a snake and the bound beast is the wolf Fenrir then it is a clear illustration of Scandinavian myth, perhaps Ragnarök.¹⁷⁴ Lilla Kopár suggested that although the canine figure may well be Fenrir, the representation of the ‘Bound Devil’ might actually be based on Christian tradition influenced by the story of Loki.¹⁷⁵ Much like the ‘Bound Devil’ of Kirkby Stephen, the horned man on face *C* could be a Scandinavian feature and the connection would be strengthened if one were certain that what he held in his right hand was a hammer.¹⁷⁶



ILLUSTRATION 17: Gainford 4

¹⁷³ G. Adcock, *A study of the types of interlace on Northumbrian sculpture* (M.Phil thesis, University of Durham, 1974), 320.

¹⁷⁴ Cramp, *County Durham and Northumberland*, 82.

¹⁷⁵ Kopár, *Gods and Settlers*, 108.

¹⁷⁶ Cramp, *County Durham and Northumberland*, 82.

Part Four: Þórr and the Miðgarðsormr, Óðinn, Women, Valkyrior and Valhöll and sacred boars

In this final section of Chapter One, I discuss the monuments that do not correspond to the above traditions. Firstly, I investigate the unique carving on Gosforth 6, the ‘Fishing stone,’ in which it is thought that Þórr and the Miðgarðsormr are locked in combat. The main Old Norse literary sources for this duel are *Hymiskviða* and the skaldic poem *Húsdrápa*. A number of ninth to tenth century fragments also contain references to the encounter, such as Bragi Boddason’s *Þórr* 1-6, among others.¹⁷⁷ *Völuspá* from the *Poetic Edda* mentions the battle between Þórr and the Miðgarðsormr at Ragnarök but not the fishing expedition. It has also been recorded on three Scandinavian picture stones: the Altuna runestone (U 1161) from the eleventh century in Uppland, Sweden, Ardre VIII (dated to between the eighth and eleventh centuries) in Gotland, Sweden and the Hørdum stone (dated to between 800-1250) from Thisted Municipality, North Denmark.¹⁷⁸ Next, I discuss Sockburn 3, Sockburn 6, Kirklevington 2 and Baldersby 1, in which the figure of Óðinn can be established, but not the event of Ragnarök. Finally, I examine Sockburn 15, Forcett 1 and the Lowther hogback, which depict non-Christian scenes more distantly related to Old Norse mythology, such as women welcoming heroes into Valhöll, warrior and berserk scenes and sacred animals.

IV.1

The early tenth-century slab from Gosforth 6, known as the ‘Fishing stone,’ supposedly depicts the god Þórr and the giant Hymir fishing for the Miðgarðsormr¹⁷⁹ and also provides a close parallel with the Gosforth cross in terms of its theological

¹⁷⁷ Including Ölvir hnufa (*Þórr*), Eysteinn Valdason (*Þórr*) and Gamli gnævaðarskáld (*Þórr*).

¹⁷⁸ Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, “Thor’s Fishing Expedition,” in *Words and Objects: Towards a Dialogue Between Archaeology and History of Religion*, ed. Gro Steinsland (Oslo: Norwegian University Press, 1986), 260.

¹⁷⁹ The Miðgarðsormr, also known as Jörmungandr (‘Mighty-wand’), was a giant serpent and one of three monstrous children sired by Loki and the giantess Angrboða. According to *Gylfaginning*, Óðinn tossed Jörmungandr into the great ocean that encircled Miðgarðr, where he grew so large that he was able to surround the earth and bite his own tail. As a result he was called the Miðgarðsormr or World Serpent. Þórr was especially the enemy of the Miðgarðsormr.

patterning.¹⁸⁰ The slab is divided into two horizontal panels. At the top of the visible face there is a quadruped whose front legs are fettered by the knotted body of a snake. This snake's triangular head appears below the beast's stomach, while its knotted tail extends between its two rear legs. The beast's head is now broken, but Rosemary Cramp conjectured that it may have been backwards-biting or backwards-thrown. The upper part of the scene below is occupied by a horizontal arm of fleshy three-strand plait, terminating to the right in a terminal curl. Below are two men in a double-ended boat separated by a mast. The figure to the right holds the stern with his left hand and grips an axe in his right. The other figure holds a hammer in his right hand and a fishing line in his left. The line terminates below the vessel in an animal's head with two ears, around which cluster four fish.¹⁸¹

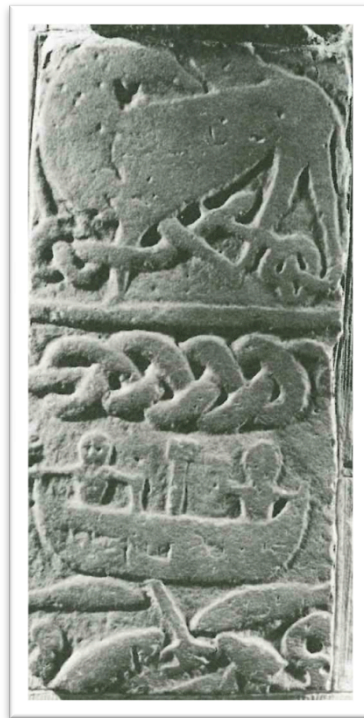


ILLUSTRATION 18: Gosforth 6

The significance of the top scene was discussed by Richard Bailey and James Lang in 1975, who both argued that it was probably the work of the carver that

¹⁸⁰ Bailey and Cramp, *Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire North-of-the-Sands*, 108.

¹⁸¹ Bailey and Cramp, *Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire North-of-the-Sands*, 108.

produced the other Gosforth monuments.¹⁸² The shape of the figure's heads are identical to those on the Gosforth cross and the serpent's body is comparable to the knotted strands impressed below the wolf's body on the south face. Rosemary Cramp proposed a tenth-century date, based on these comparisons and the Borre style elements on Gosforth 1. The lower scene has traditionally been regarded as Þórr and Hymir fishing for the Miðgarðsormr, which was recorded by the ninth-century skald (or 'poet') Bragi, whose narrative was inspired by a shield-painting.¹⁸³ There is a tenth-century depiction from Iceland in *Húsdrápa* and other versions in *Hymiskviða* (which survives in the *Poetic Edda*) and *Gylfaginning*, preserved in *Snorra Edda*. The motif of the ox-head is found in the latter two sources and is clearly represented on the stone, as is the giant's axe. The whole scene does not appear anywhere else on stone crosses in the British Isles, but is found in Scandinavia, on the Swedish Ardre VIII, the eleventh-century U 1161 from Altuna, on a pre-Viking metal mount from Solberga in Östergötland and on a Viking Age stone carving from Hørdum in Denmark. Together with Lowther 4 the 'Fishing stone' is one of only two representations of a ship on Anglo-Scandinavian crosses and should be compared with the vessels depicted on carvings in Dorestad in the Netherlands and the Gotlandic carvings. The chief importance of the 'Fishing stone' lies in the fact that both scenes depict themes of good struggling with evil. In the upper scene a snake wrestles with a stag or hart, a long established symbol of Christ's conflict with Satan or the devil, while in the lower scene a deity struggles with evil in the form of a serpent. It would be somewhat of a leap to suggest that Gosforth 6 reflects the victory of good over evil (and by association, the supremacy of Christianity over Old Norse paganism), as some scholars have proposed.¹⁸⁴ Rather, as Cramp saw it, the patterning of the scene reflects the mind of the carver who designed and planned the iconography of the Gosforth cross.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸² Bailey and Lang, "The date of the Gosforth sculptures," 290-293.

¹⁸³ According to the poem *Hymiskviða*, the giant Hymir, in addition to being Þórr's fishing companion, is the owner of the kettle Þórr gets to brew the ale of the gods and is also the father of Týr. Other references to Þórr's interactions with Hymir are recorded in *Gylfaginning*.

¹⁸⁴ Kopár, *Gods and Settlers*, 92.

¹⁸⁵ Bailey and Cramp, *Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire North-of-the-Sands*, 109.

IV.II

The early tenth-century Sockburn 3 is thought to depict the chief Norse deity, Óðinn. Face *A* has two separate panels. In the upper panel there is a snake, a horseman and a bird. The knotted snake is large and forms a canopy over the rider below. The horseman faces to the right, holding a bird in one hand and the halter of the horse in the other. He is shown in profile and is bareheaded or wears a tight-fitting cap. He also has a drooping moustache. The bird sits on his hand and the horse seems to be in motion. The lower panel depicts the remains of two figures. On the left is a woman with smooth, wig-like hair, who holds onto the lips of the person opposite. The corresponding figure shows a man drinking, his right hand supporting a horn; in his left he holds a shield. Sadly, little survives of face *B*. Similarly, face *C* is broken and worn; however, one figure clearly survives. He is depicted in movement, carrying a shield, and has the same facial type as the figure on the opposite side. Face *D* is the least worn and has been decorated with elaborate ring-chain motifs. The rider on face



ILLUSTRATION 19: Sockburn 3

A is different to most horsemen of the Viking Age.¹⁸⁶ On the Gainford and Hart crosses the riders hold spears and on the Chester-le-Street cross, which seems to be the closest surviving relative, they wear helmets and carry shields. The bird and serpent are common attributes of Óðinn and James Lang suggested that whether it should be identified as Óðinn or a foot soldier it is still related to the scene below.¹⁸⁷ Lilla Kopár was somewhat ambivalent - she agreed that Óðinn could be depicted, but also suggested that the woman on face *A* might be welcoming one of the *einherjar* or that even a reconciliation situation between cleric and warrior is equally possible.¹⁸⁸ Lang compared Sockburn with the Klinte Hunninge picture stone in Gotland, dated to between the eighth and eleventh centuries, where a mounted warrior is welcomed by a horn-bearing woman.¹⁸⁹ Although the two scenes seem like distinct episodes, there is



ILLUSTRATION 19 (continued)

¹⁸⁶ Cramp, *County Durham and Northumberland*, 136.

¹⁸⁷ James Lang, "The Chronology of Viking-Age Sculpture in Northumbria," in *Anglo-Saxon and Viking Age Sculpture and Its Context: Papers from the Collingwood Symposium on Insular Sculpture from 800-1066*, ed. James Lang (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 1978), 173-203.

¹⁸⁸ Kopár, *Gods and Settlers*, 136.

¹⁸⁹ Lang, "Illustrative Carving of the Viking period at Sockburn-on-Tees," 242.

arguably a strong link with Scandinavian material.¹⁹⁰ One should also recall the Leeds cross that depicts a figure with a bird or the Staveley cross in Yorkshire, where a figure with a dog and horn is depicted. It is difficult to be certain that there is either a secular or religious narrative, but the decorative elements of the carving are certainly of Scandinavian origin.

IV.III

The cross-shaft on Sockburn 6, also dated to the early tenth century, might present Óðinn or an unidentified warrior, though the evidence is slightly unclear. On face *A*, there are two distinct panels, each containing two human figures. In the upper panel a right-facing man reaches out towards a woman, who is frontally posed and has her hair pulled back. In the lower section two figures face each other. The figure on the left is seated in a high-backed chair and seems to be playing a lyre or similar



ILLUSTRATION 20: Sockburn 6

¹⁹⁰ Cramp, *County Durham and Northumberland*, 136.

instrument. The figure on the right stretches his arms down and has his right leg extended forwards. The remaining faces are purely decorative except for two loose terminals on face *C* that end in animal heads. In terms of the ornamental scheme of the figures and decoration, Sockburn 6 is clearly linked with the cross-shaft and –neck on Sockburn 3.¹⁹¹ In fact, they may even be the work of the same carver, as Rosemary Cramp has argued.¹⁹² That the Sockburn 3 cross depicts an Óðinn-themed image or is simply an unidentified warrior portrait (or not) is enigmatic at best, but if one accepts Cramp’s theory of a singular carver the notion should not be thrown aside.¹⁹³

IV.IV

Although not agreed upon by all scholars,¹⁹⁴ the Kirklevington 2 cross, dated to between 900-950, could yield Óðinn-themed iconography, although other ‘secular’ interpretations are valid.¹⁹⁵ On face *A*, beneath a panel of elaborate decorative carving, is a frontal human figure wearing a conical cap. This figure was incised with a ‘hook and eye’ motif and has arms that hang vertically. Legs and feet are pointed



ILLUSTRATION 21: Kirklevington 2

towards the viewer and two birds perch on his shoulders. The remaining faces are purely decorative. As one of the most superior Anglo-Scandinavian carvings, the figure’s ‘plasticity’ is most striking, having the solidity and volume of the figure

¹⁹¹ Cramp, *County Durham and Northumberland*, 138.

¹⁹² Cramp, *County Durham and Northumberland*, 138.

¹⁹³ Cramp, *County Durham and Northumberland*, 138.

¹⁹⁴ In particular, John McKinnell, “Norse Mythology and Northumbria: A Response,” 48.

¹⁹⁵ Lang, *Northern Yorkshire*, 143.

carvings on the high crosses of tenth-century Ireland.¹⁹⁶ The significance of the birds is unclear. W. G. Collingwood considered them doves and the man a portrait of the deceased.¹⁹⁷ James Lang suggested Óðinn with his ravens. A third possibility could be that the hooded figures refer to a ‘*berseki* spirit.’¹⁹⁸ Such suggestions do not appear far-fetched when one considers that Óðinn-themed imagery is located not far away at Sockburn in County Durham, albeit completed by a different carver’s hand.¹⁹⁹

IV.V

On the early tenth-century shaft fragment at Baldersby, there is carving that James Lang has identified as a berserk.²⁰⁰ On face *A* there is a great deal of decorative ornament but, more significantly, a horse and rider holding a slanted lance are depicted facing left. Face *C* is a square panel consisting of two standing figures, one of whom carries a broadsword over his shoulder, while the other is a stout figure with a canine-like face. According to Lang, this cross probably belongs to the Allertonshire Workshop with its trademark of the locking ring.²⁰¹ In addition, the figural scenes are



ILLUSTRATION 22: Baldersby 1

¹⁹⁶ Rosemary Cramp, “Tradition and innovation in English stone sculpture of the tenth to eleventh centuries,” in *Kolloquium über spätantike und frühmittelalterliche Skulptur*, ed. V. Milojević (Mainz: Universität Heidelberg, Institut für Ur- und Frühgeschichte, 1972), 147-8.

¹⁹⁷ W. G. Collingwood, “Anglian and Anglo-Danish sculpture in the North Riding of Yorkshire,” *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal* 29 (1907): 352.

¹⁹⁸ Lang, *Northern Yorkshire*, 58; Berserks were a group of furious warriors often associated with Óðinn. In *Ynglinga saga*, Snorri Sturluson provides a description of *berserksgangr*, ‘going berserk’ (Lindow, *Norse Mythology*, 75).

¹⁹⁹ Lang, “Illustrative Carving of the Viking period at Sockburn on Tees,” 239.

²⁰⁰ Lang, *Northern Yorkshire*, 58.

²⁰¹ One of four Anglo-Scandinavian workshops known from the area – the others being the ‘Brompton School,’ the ‘Lythe Workshop’ and the ‘Lower Wensleydale Workshop.’

of particular interest. They all have parallels across Northumbria - on the Gainford 4 cross in County Durham and the Sockburn 14 cross in West Yorkshire where even the lances are held in the same position and even abroad, such as at Santon, Isle of Man, and Old Kilcullen from County Kildare, Ireland.²⁰² Making sense of their meaning, however, is slightly difficult. It seems that they are probably warriors of some description, possibly berserks, and berserk-themed images may appear on other crosses in the vicinity, such as Kirklevington 2, as discussed above.

IV.VI

An interesting and, given what has just been said, rather unusual early tenth-century carving on a fragment of a hogback from Sockburn 15 might be an example of a woman (or *valkyrja*, 'valkyrie') welcoming a hero into Valhöll. There are only two remaining sides to this hogback, *A* and *C*. On face *A*, a bird and a woman are depicted. The bird has a long curving neck, pouting breast, is squared off at the tail and stands stiffly on one thick foot. The woman, whose head is missing, wears a long dress that trails to a point. She is represented in profile, advancing with outstretched hands, in which she holds some objects. On face *C*, only part of a coiled tail and some intricate decoration remains. According to James Lang, this scene should be compared with the carving on the Sockburn 3 cross, where a horn-bearing woman or *valkyrja* is receiving the slain warriors.²⁰³ I am of the view that both scenes should be interpreted as maidens performing a welcoming reception of heroes of some description and it is possible that this could be a reference to the last wishes of the



ILLUSTRATION 23: Sockburn 15

²⁰² Peter Harbison, *The High Crosses of Ireland: an iconographical and photographic survey*, 2 vols. (Bonn: R. Habelt, 1992), fig. 534.

²⁰³ Lang, "Illustrative Carving of the Viking period at Sockburn-on-Tees," 241.

deceased (for whom the hogback has been raised).²⁰⁴ Rosemary Cramp also pointed out that the woman's dress has clear points of similarity with images both in England, such as on the Gosforth cross, and on some stone monuments in Scandinavia.²⁰⁵ With this information in mind, a potential *valkyrja*-themed interpretation of the figural iconography is possible.

IV.VII

Another unusual carving, this time on Forcett 1, dated to between 900-950, was reported by James Lang to be a depiction of the legendary 'Hart and hound' motif with some images of boars, animals sometimes associated with the god Freyr.²⁰⁶ On face *A*, a cross has been divided vertically creating two panels. The lower left panel is filled with decorative interlace, while the right contains three quadrupeds, probably boars. *B* and *D* are 'built in' and do not enter into the present study, but face *C* clearly depicts a coiled serpent and a distinctive 'Hart and hound' image. This secular



ILLUSTRATION 24: Forcett 1

²⁰⁴ Kopár, *Gods and Settlers*, 151.

²⁰⁵ See Cramp (*County Durham and Northumberland*, 141) for more detail.

²⁰⁶ Freyr, an important god and member of the Vanir, is the son of Njörðr and brother of Freyja. It is said in *Grímnismál* that Freyr has two precious objects, one of which is the boar Gullinborsti (Gold-bristle) or Slíðrugtanni (the other object being the ship Skíðblaðnir). Both objects are made by the dwarves Ívaldi and Brokkr, according to Snorri Sturluson's *Skáldskaparmál*.

hunting motif occurs locally on Kirklevington 11 and is widely distributed from Yorkshire through Cumbria to the Isle of Man. The coiled snake has parallels at Crathorne 1 in North Yorkshire, Melsonby 4 in North Yorkshire and Stanwick 4 in the church of Stanwick St John in North Yorkshire and is a hallmark of Anglo-Scandinavian design.

IV.VIII

The tenth-century Lowther 4 cross does not depict any specific characters or events from the Scandinavian heroic or mythological tradition, but Rosemary Cramp did compare it with certain picture stones of Gotland and the images on the Gosforth cross.²⁰⁷ Face *A* is occupied by several warriors, a serpent and, quite rare for Anglo-Scandinavian art, a warship. This warship laden with warriors, their shields slung over oar ports, is set over the coiling body of a serpent. Between the snake and vessel is a fish with a clear dorsal fin, while in the centre is a row of at least eight (but possibly ten) warriors, each carrying round shields. Face *C* is rather more simplified, where there are merely six so-called ‘demi-figures’ set above the curling body of a serpent. John McKinnell saw this as Freyja taking her half of the slain.²⁰⁸ According to Cramp, the main figural scenes on *A* and *C* parallel two of the picture stones from Gotland and therefore probably represent a scene from Scandinavian mythology. This interpretation is further strengthened by the fact that the scene is placed over the coiling body of a serpent in a manner that suggests the ‘all-enveloping nature’ of the

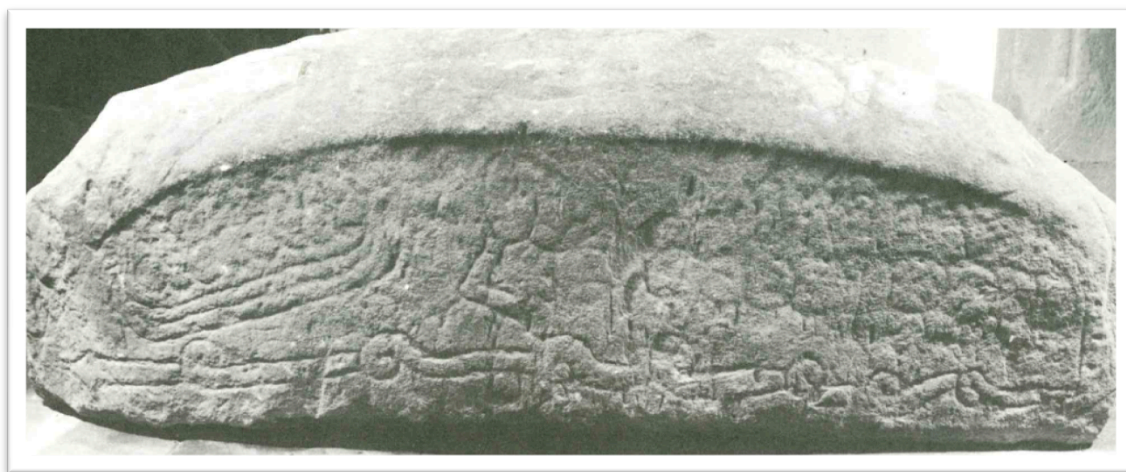


ILLUSTRATION 25: Lowther Hogback

²⁰⁷ Bailey and Cramp, *Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire North-of-the-Sands*, 130; Lindqvist, *Gotlands Bildsteine*, figs. 81 and 86; Wilson and Klindt-Jensen, *Viking Art* 2nd ed., pl. 19.

²⁰⁸ McKinnell, “Eddic Poetry in Anglo-Scandinavian England,” 343.

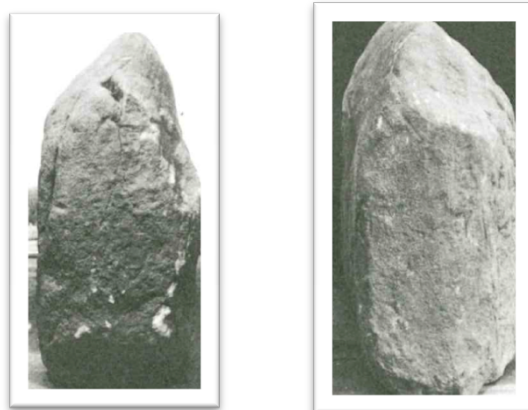


ILLUSTRATION 25 (continued)

Miðgarðsormr.²⁰⁹ On the other hand, Cramp argued that similar serpent motifs have been found at Penrith 7 and Cross Canonby 5, both located in Cumbria – not far from Lowther - and could simply be ephemeral local fashion. With respect to face C, a Scandinavian background for the figures seems likely as their ornaments are composed in a similar way to the human figures found on the Oseberg tapestries and the picture stones of Gotland. Lilla Kopár saw the ‘demi-figures’ on face C as the *valkyrja* Hildir and the everlasting battle between Heðinn and Högni.²¹⁰ Cramp argued

²⁰⁹ McKinnell, “Norse Mythology and Northumbria,” 49.

²¹⁰ Kopár, *Gods and Settlers*, 153; *Hjaðningavíg* (the ‘battle of the Heodenings’), also known as the *Legend of Heðinn and Högni* or *the Saga of Hild* concerns a never-ending battle and is the subject of parts of *Sörla þátr*, *Ragnarsdrápa*, *Gesta Danorum*, *Skíðaríma* and *Skáldskaparmál*. It is also held to appear on the picture stone Stora Hammars I in Lärbro Parish, Gotland. Moreover, it is alluded to in the Old English poems *Deor* and *Widsið* and in the Old Norse *Háttalykill inn forni*.

that these scenes were probably carried to England on materials such as fabrics, wood carvings and shield paintings. Furthermore, she argued that their presentation in stone in England and Gotland is the result, not of direct contact, but of the existence of independent traditions of stone sculpture in both societies.²¹¹

IV.IX

The classic 'Hart and hound' motif occurs frequently in all the Viking colonies (Northern England, Normandy, Isle of Man etc.) and is especially abundant in the British Isles. Some have suggested a Celtic origin and this would certainly be in keeping with the evidence. Richard Bailey has suggested Christian heritage, but James Lang was more inclined to attribute them to the Hiberno-Norse settlements of the early tenth century.²¹² Kirklevington 11 is a clear early tenth-century example of the 'Hart and hound' motif, where a stag with branched antlers is being assailed by a springing hound.²¹³ At Melsonby 3, dated to the years 850-950, only the legs and torso remain of one animal, while a lower animal, thought to be a hart, has missing antlers.²¹⁴ W. G. Collingwood²¹⁵ certainly considered it a 'Hart and hound' motif but Bailey²¹⁶ was less convinced. The carving on the early tenth-century Wath 4 cross (like all the Wath material) is poorly wrought, but does furnish an example of the 'Hart and hound.'²¹⁷ One of the more elaborate examples of this motif is on the early tenth-century Stanwick 4 cross which Lang has likened to similar motifs that occur in the Isle of Man and Norway. According to Lang, Stanwick 4 has a close parallel at Bride 97A in the Isle of Man, where an antlered stag is flanked by a saltire fret in exactly the same manner.²¹⁸ These frets were supposedly introduced into Northumbria in the early tenth century by Hiberno-Norse settlers.²¹⁹ There are further parallels

²¹¹ Bailey and Cramp, *Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire North-of-the-Sands*, 130.

²¹² Bailey, *Viking Age Sculpture*, 220.

²¹³ Lang, *Northern Yorkshire*, 146.

²¹⁴ Lang, *Northern Yorkshire*, 177.

²¹⁵ Collingwood, "Anglian and Anglo-Danish sculpture in the North Riding of Yorkshire," 371.

²¹⁶ Richard Bailey, "The meaning of the Viking-age shaft at Dacre," *Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society* 2 (1977): 70.

²¹⁷ Lang, *Northern Yorkshire*, 219.

²¹⁸ Kermodé, *Manx Crosses*, 42.

²¹⁹ Harbison, *The High Crosses of Ireland*, II, fig. 111.

between Stanwick 9 and other monuments such as Thorsteinn's Cross at Braddan, Isle of Man, and the Oseberg wagon from the county of Vestfold in southern Norway.²²⁰

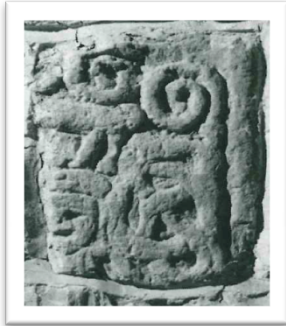


ILLUSTRATION 26: Stanwick 4



FIG. 3: Wath 4

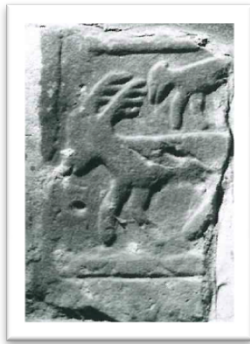
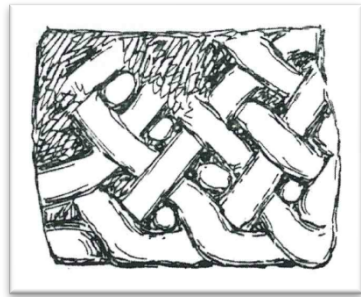


ILLUSTRATION 27: Kirklevington 11

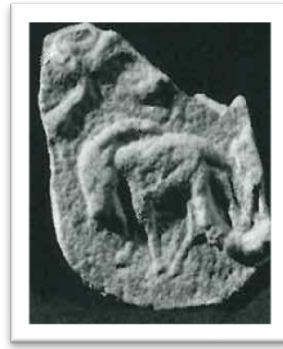


ILLUSTRATION 28: Melsonby 3

²²⁰ Lang, *Northern Yorkshire*, 206; David Wilson and Ole Klindt-Jensen, *Viking Art* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1966), 28.

Part Five: Unknown

V.I

Part of a cross-shaft at Kirkby Stephen in Cumbria, better known as the ‘Bound Devil Stone,’ is rather badly damaged so that any clear interpretation of the images would be difficult, but Rosemary Cramp has suggested Völundr, Loki or Gunnarr (among others) as potential subjects.²²¹ The only face with any substantial amount of figural iconography depicts a man with arms hanging down vertically and his palms spread out. Below the figure’s mouth is a beard or (more likely) a chain running into the open neckline of his clothing. The figure is bound by a circular strip across his



ILLUSTRATION 29: Kirkby Stephen 1

stomach and behind his legs and wrists and his calves are bound by rings. The identity of the figure on the Kirkby Stephen cross is difficult to establish. Close parallels can be found on the various stone objects of Leeds Museum (in the city of Leeds, West Yorkshire) and at Great Clifton in Cumbria, where Völundr is thought to be depicted (though there is some doubt about this).²²² However, such parallels do not tell us much about the significance of the figure. Perhaps a more likely potential explanation

²²¹ Bailey and Cramp, *Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire North-of-the-Sands*, 121.

²²² Richard Bailey (*Viking Age Sculpture*, 140) has argued that the Kirkby Stephen cross provided (some of) the inspiration for the background on Haraldr ‘Bluetooth’ Gormsson’s Jellinge stone (DR 41, Nørrejylland).

concerns the morbidly-titled ‘Bound Devil,’ though the downward-pointing horns have no parallel on the stone crosses from the British Isles (or Scandinavia for that matter). Cramp advised that it is probably best to arbitrate variously between potential identifications as the ‘Bound Devil,’ the story of Christ’s struggle with the Devil, Völundr, Loki, Gunnarr, Mors, or the biblical story known as the Damned in Hell – a list that represents only the most probable of a long series of possibilities.²²³



ILLUSTRATION 29 (continued)

²²³ Bailey and Cramp, *Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire North-of-the-Sands*, 121; Mors is the personification of death in Roman mythology.

Conclusion to Chapter One

As will now be evident, in spite of the fact that there are really only a handful of mythologically-themed crosses, it is rather difficult to describe and interpret them with complete accuracy. Gosforth 1 and the Leeds cross are in the minority in that their images are not ambiguous because they have stood the test of time better than the rest of the crosses of the Viking Age. Therefore, our inability to produce definitive explanations is something that must be realised and acknowledged at all times. On the other hand, we are able to speculate and judge according to the evidence and in this chapter I have demonstrated that multiple interpretations for each monument are possible. However, I have also urged caution and have refrained from committing to a single interpretation where several theories exist. I have also striven to convey the immense depth and complexity of the Old Norse myths and heroic legends that are alluded to and the quality of the masonry, of which these crosses are the legacy. I have tried to de-emphasise the individual descriptions in order to concentrate on the images, but I cannot stress enough the supreme abilities and inventive minds of the Anglo-Scandinavian craftsmen. Ultimately, this chapter has primarily been a means of presenting the sculpture as objectively as possible to equip the reader with the relevant knowledge and ideas required for the following chapters.

Chapter Two

The Relationship between Norse paganism and Christianity

Introduction

In Chapter One, I gave an outline of the corpus of Viking Age sculpture in northern England that depicts mythologically-themed images. I described the specific monuments as accurately as possible to provide the reader with an idea of the significance of the images and their possible meanings. The purpose of Chapter Two is to demonstrate that there is a great significance particularly in the parallels, but also in the general relationship, between Old Norse mythologically-themed images and images and/or stories from Christian lore. This chapter will explore these parallels and examine the myths and legends in conjunction with their Christian counterparts.

The relationship between Norse pagan and Christian imagery in an Anglo-Scandinavian context is a topic of some contention. In this chapter, I will argue that a number of the myths and legends that can be observed on the crosses have a deep connection with Christianity and were deliberately chosen by the carvers and their patrons for this reason. The myths and legends include the following: the legend of Völundr, the Sigurðr legend, the idea of Ragnarök and the combat between Þórr and the Miðgarðsormr. Each of the respective legends is related to an aspect of Christian lore in a different way. For instance, the Völundr legend has a specific affinity with the iconography of angels and saints, but is not limited to that; the Sigurðr legend forms a striking parallel with crucifixion imagery and certain other aspects of Christian thinking; Ragnarök can be compared with a number of traditional Christian images, including Christ in Majesty, Daniel in the Lions' Den, the 'Bound Devil' and, most importantly, the theme of the apocalypse; and Þórr's contest with the Miðgarðsormr exemplifies the 'good versus evil' dichotomy, a common theme in Christian imagery.

It is my hypothesis that the significance of the relationship between images of Christian and Norse mythological provenance runs deeper than previously thought. I would suggest that considering the small but vital body of research conducted into pagan and Christian imagery on stone sculpture, most scholars would agree that there are, at the very least, certain elements of syncretism present in Anglo-Scandinavian sculpture. However, as far as I know, there is no systematic or definitive work on the topic and many studies are often too short or do not look at the corpus of sculpture as

a whole. The most useful (and most recent) work to investigate Viking Age sculpture in this way is Lilla Kopár's 2013 *Gods and Settlers: The Iconography of Norse Mythology in Anglo-Scandinavian Sculpture*. Although the major focus of this monograph is to reinvestigate the corpus of stone sculpture in order to further understanding of the topic, Kopár presented a number of interesting arguments concerning this syncretic relationship. On the other hand, there are some scholars who have taken the opposing view. These authors have argued that Anglo-Scandinavian pagan images act as evidence of the power of Christian monotheism triumphing over the weak, polytheistic Viking religion. It should be said that opinion over the nature of pagan and Christian images on Viking Age sculpture is to an extent divided. It is therefore necessary, before I analyse the specific examples, to give a summary of the current arguments on the topic in order to demonstrate what is distinctive about my own approach.

As I mentioned previously, certain scholars have interpreted one or many of the Anglo-Scandinavian sculptures either as not providing evidence of a syncretic relationship or as an indication of the superiority of Christianity. Knut Berg's article "The Gosforth Cross" (1958) is a landmark work, which made some important contributions to our knowledge of this most famous cross. His main argument seems to be that the images on Gosforth were a didactic message to the invading Vikings, more or less accounting for the downfall of their own native gods and praising the establishment of Christianity.¹ With respect to the Manx crosses, David Wilson concluded in 1967 that the Sigurðr-themed images were "not particularly pagan" and had obvious parallels with certain parts of the Gospels and the Christian view of evil, but did not take the analogy further.² Alfred Smyth, in his 1979 *Scandinavian York and Dublin*, saw a "fundamental contradiction" in the use of the figure of Sigurðr in Christian contexts, as the latter's association with the cult of Óðinn made the legend "alien to Christian sentiment."³ More recently, in an article entitled "Norse mythology and Northumbria: a response," (1989) the eminent scholar John McKinnell denied

¹ Knut Berg, "The Gosforth Cross," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 21 (1958): 33.

² David Wilson, "The Vikings' Relationship with Christianity in Northern England," *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 3 (1967): 40.

³ Alfred Smyth, *Scandinavian York and Dublin* (Dublin: Templekieran Press, 1979), 271.

any Christian syncretic elements on the Gosforth ‘Fishing stone,’ traditionally regarded as one of the more clear-cut examples of this phenomenon.⁴

At the opposite end of the spectrum, some scholars have interpreted the images as evidence of syncretism, parallelism or pre-figuring. Lilla Kopár’s *Gods and Settlers* is so far the only attempt to tackle the subject as a whole, but a number of other works should be mentioned. James Lang noted several parallels between Sigurðr and the biblical story of *Genesis* and refers to the works of Emil Ploss in his suggestion that, in this context, Norse pagan iconographical images were used as a means of redeeming pagan ancestors.⁵ Richard Bailey took Sophus Bugge’s contention that the Sigurðr-themed carvings on Norwegian church portals represented the “pagan iconography of Christian ideas” and applied it to Viking Age sculpture in northern England.⁶ Bailey also resuscitated the idea that the Old Norse pagan and Christian images on the Gosforth cross are somehow related⁷ – however, unlike Knut Berg, he stressed the links between the two traditions. Sue Margeson, in relation to Manx crosses, emphasised the social function of the Old Norse pagan images, suggesting that a parallel was intended between the greatness of the gods or heroes depicted and the greatness of the deceased.⁸ And, finally, Elizabeth Ashman Rowe found it difficult to accept that Sigurðr should be considered as an antecedent to Christ, but was convinced that when Óðinn was depicted flanking a crucifixion scene, some sort of religious significance was intended.⁹

⁴ John McKinnell, “Norse mythology and Northumbria: a response,” in *Anglo-Scandinavian England: Norse-English relations in the period before the Conquest* Old English Colloquium series no. 4, Berkeley, California (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1989), 50.

⁵ James Lang, “Sigurd and Weland in Pre-Conquest Carving from Northern England,” *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal* vol. 48 (1976), 94.

⁶ Richard Bailey, *Viking Age Sculpture in Northern England* (London: Collins, 1980), 124.

⁷ Bailey, *Viking Age Sculpture*, 129.

⁸ Sue Margeson, “On the Iconography of the Manx Crosses,” in *The Viking Age in the Isle of Man* ed. Christine Fell *et al.* (University College London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1981), 104-5.

⁹ Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, “Quid Sigvardus cum Christo? Moral Interpretations of Sigurðr Fáfnisbáni in Old Norse Literature,” *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* vol. 2 (2006), 191.

Chapter Plan

In Part One of this chapter, I discuss the connections and parallels between Völundr and the corresponding Christian imagery on the following monuments: Leeds 1, Sherburn 2, York Minster 9 and the Bedale hogback. Then, in Part Two, I discuss the images on the monuments that depict the Sigurðr legend and corresponding Christian imagery: Kirby Hill 2, Ripon 4, Nunburnholme 1 and the York Minster hogback. Next, I investigate the monuments which depict Ragnarök and its corresponding Christian imagery: Gosforth 1, the Sockburn hogback, the Lythe hogback, Forcett 4, Ovingham 1 and Gainford 4. In the final section, Part Four, I explore the connections between Þórr and the Miðgarðsormr and the notion of ‘good versus evil’ as presented on these monuments: Gosforth 6, Sockburn 3, Kirklevington 2 and Forcett 1.

How I interpret the monuments

Before I analyse the specific monuments, a few things need to be said about my interpretative method. Parts of this sub-section have been inspired by Lilla Kopár’s recent publication and so I am indebted to her work in this area. By ‘interpretative method’ I mean the lens through which one can look at a Viking Age monument with mythologically-themed iconography and compare or make judgments about its relationship with images or stories from Christian lore. According to Kopár, there are two established modes of doing this. The first is called ‘typology,’ which has been used for centuries by scholars of theology, in order to discuss certain aspects of salvation history that are thought to share parallels. The second is called *figura* or ‘figurative thinking,’ which has its roots in twentieth century intellectualism, but is slightly different to ‘typology.’ The following is a summary of these two ways of thinking as conceptualised (in part) by Kopár.

‘Typology,’¹⁰ derived from Greek *τύπος* (‘pattern,’ ‘model,’ ‘imprint’), is a hermeneutic concept, in which a biblical place, person, event, institution, office or object provides a pattern within which later persons or events are interpreted due to

¹⁰ Typology was embraced by the Christian Anglo-Saxons as early as 716; for instance, Bede refers to visual typology (of the symbolic parallels between the Old and New Testaments) in the church of St. Paul at Jarrow and in his theoretical considerations in *The Art of Poetry and Rhetoric* (otherwise known as *De arte metrica et de schematibus et tropis*).

the supposed interrelatedness of events within salvation history.¹¹ Essentially, typological interpretation involves the recognition of these patterns of salvation events. An event that is held to anticipate another event is called a ‘type,’ while the fulfilment of this event is called an ‘antitype.’ The Bible is held to contain many references of a typological nature and the tradition of typological interpretation extends back to the era of St. Paul. These ‘types’ and ‘antitypes’ are usually taken from Old and New Testament examples; however, certain events can come from outside these contexts. According to Jean Daniélou, the essence of typology lies within the Old Testament in what he called a ‘twofold movement.’ Daniélou argued that the Old Testament recalls the great works of God in the past, but only as a foundation for great works to come. This has been asserted by A. G. Herbert among others and holds good for all the themes that Daniélou studied, such as the Flood and Exodus.¹² Further, as God had set man in Paradise so must Israel wait to be brought into a New Paradise – this is the crux of typology, to show how past events are figures of events to come.¹³ Beryl Smalley argued that the early Christian scholar and theologian Origen (c. 185-254) inherited the Christian teaching that the Old Testament prefigures or foreshadows the New: *omnia in figura contingebant illis*.¹⁴ According to Smalley, here drawing on Jean Daniélou, Origen found four kinds of ‘type’ in the Old Testament: “prophecies of the coming of Christ, prophecies of the Church and her sacraments (the Red Sea, for instance, signifying baptism), prophecies of the Last Things and of the kingdom of heaven, finally, figures of the relationship between God and the individual soul as exemplified in the history of the chosen people.”¹⁵ The German medievalist Friedrich Ohly devised a theory known as ‘semi-biblical typology,’ a term used to describe an occasion when neither the type nor the antitype comes from the Bible, but their basis lies in Christian teaching. According to

¹¹ Lilla Kopár, *Gods and Settlers: The Iconography of Norse Mythology in Anglo-Scandinavian Sculpture* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 187.

¹² A. G. Herbert, *The Authority of the Old Testament* (London: Faber and Faber, 1947), 150.

¹³ Jean Daniélou, S. J., *From Shadows to Reality: Studies in the Biblical Typology of the Fathers*, trans. Dom Wulfstan Hibberd (London: Burns and Oates, 1960), 12.

¹⁴ Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1952), 6.

¹⁵ Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 7 (cf. Jean Daniélou, “Les sources bibliques de la mystique d’Origène,” *Revue d’ascétique et de mystique* 23 (1947): 128).

Lilla Kopár, it is tempting to apply Ohly's theory to Viking Age iconography, but it does not describe it perfectly.¹⁶ This is because the biblical or Christian 'antitype' does not necessarily fulfil the non-Christian type by which it is pre-figured or paralleled. A possibly more accurate and appropriate mode of understanding Viking Age iconography may be what Kopár calls *figura* or 'figural thinking.'¹⁷

A comparable expression, 'figural interpretation,' was first proposed by Erich Auerbach in 1958 and has since then been subject to some intense intellectual scrutiny. The major difference between Auerbach's theory and Lilla Kopár's understanding of the concept is that while Auerbach's figural interpretation is based on strict biblical typology and operates in fulfilment of an earlier type in the later antitype, "'figural thinking' establishes connections between biblical and non-biblical events and characters with little or no emphasis on their temporal sequence [and] no fulfillment...in the typological sense."¹⁸ Kopár's understanding of *figura* is therefore not an interpretative method, but what she described as a 'mindset' or 'mental furniture.'¹⁹ Furthermore, while figural interpretation presupposes a teleological concept of history, for Kopár's understanding of figural thinking it is the co-existence, unity and interrelation of the past, present and future that is emphasised, rather than the linearity of time. In fact, the temporal sequence is somewhat unclear and yet Kopár's 'figurative thinking' suggests a more intertwined co-existence of past, present and future. In a northern English context, the Scandinavian narratives would be the 'types' and the Christian salvation story the 'antitype.' Otto Gschwantler investigated the connection between heathen and Christian imagery, and came to the conclusion that "from there it is no great step to relate many narratives of the gods, in the manner of a typology, insofar as they demonstrate a certain similarity with a prefiguring of the new religion."²⁰ However, it is probably more accurate to speak of

¹⁶ Kopár, *Gods and Settlers*, 189.

¹⁷ Kopár, *Gods and Settlers*, 190.

¹⁸ Kopár, *Gods and Settlers*, 191.

¹⁹ Kopár, *Gods and Settlers*, 191.

²⁰ Otto Gschwantler, "Christus, Thor und die Midgardschlange," in *Festschrift Otto Höfler zum 65. Geburtstag I*, ed. Helmut Birkhan and Otto Gschwantler (Wien: Verlag Notring, 1968), 163: *Von da ist es kein grosser Schritt, auch manche Göttererzählungen, insofern sie eine gewisse Ähnlichkeit mit Vorstellungen der neuen Religion zeigen, in der Art einer Typologie auf das Christentum zu beziehen.*

the Scandinavian stories as enriching or illustrating rather than fulfilling Christian salvation history.²¹

²¹ Cf. Margaret Clunies Ross, “Stylistic and Generic Definers of the Old Norse Skaldic Ekphrasis,” *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 3 (2007): 170.

Part One: Völundr

How angels are significant within Christianity

To give a comprehensive summary of the significance of angels in a medieval context would be a difficult task to undertake; however, a few things must be said before I proceed. First of all, the role of the majority of angels is held to be to serve as intermediaries between humans and God. Angels are generally considered to be anthropomorphic and in medieval art usually appear as male. Although it is not widely reported in biblical sources, it is understood from *Isaiah* 6:2,6 that some angels have wings; for example, Seraphim are said to have six wings.²² Angels have ‘sublime natures’ and are fully engaged in temporal events, but at the same time, are fully detached from them.²³ According to David Keck, angels deliver the law (to humans) and have appeared throughout history as “aeviternal beings who enjoy ordered hierarchical stability and beatific peace.”²⁴ Further, medieval Christians could appeal to either previously mentioned aspect of these beings as their own devotional or institutional needs required. In short, angels served as models for humans on earth. Apparently the desire for supernatural perfection and the hope of being with the angels led men and women living in the Middle Ages to devotional practices. In sum, the concept of angels in the medieval period had considerable significance and basically “permeated the life of the church.”²⁵

Medieval angel iconography has a long and complex history and artists began depicting angels with wings after the conversion of Constantine in 312. However, it was not until after the year 787 that angel-inspired artworks flourished, when it was decreed at the Council of Nicea that artists were officially allowed to portray angels. Consequently, angels became very popular subjects, many of them depicted appearing before humans. David Keck has this to say on angels’ wings as an artistic device: “as an iconographic tradition, wings were a useful means of distinguishing angels from saints and other humans.”²⁶ In addition, depicting wings was a way for artists seeking

²² David Keck, *Angels and Angelology in the Middle Ages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 30.

²³ Keck, *Angels and Angelology*, 209.

²⁴ Keck, *Angels and Angelology*, 209.

²⁵ Keck, *Angels and Angelology*, 210.

²⁶ Keck, *Angels and Angelology*, 30.

to decorate spandrels to show off. Furthermore, “medieval art provided a focus for the imagination, and the presence of angels in stone spandrels and illustrated manuscripts provided a constant reminder of the ubiquity of God’s messengers.”²⁷

The concept of the magical *smiðr* in medieval Germanic society

The magical smith was afforded a special place in the myths and legends of the Germanic peoples. He was admired and feared, viewed with awe and treated with deference.²⁸ According to Randi Barndon, his skills of technology and magic were of a godlike sort that aligned him to the gods and made him a magician as well as a smith.²⁹ However, Scandinavian attitudes towards smiths in mythological literature (among other highly skilled members of the community) were decidedly ambivalent. For although the upper classes relied on them for luxury items and precious objects it is possible that they were unable to control smiths in the way they would have liked (cf. Völundr’s troubled relationship with Níðuðr).³⁰ Völundr is possibly the most famous of magical smiths in Old Norse literature, but he is not the only one.³¹ Indeed, Reginn the would-be murderer of Sigurðr was a smith who forged the legendary sword Gramr. Albrich, the maker of Naglbringr and Ekkisax, is another. He appears in *Piðreks saga af Bern* and *Das Nibelungenlied*, where he dwells in a ‘hollow hill,’ possesses a *tarnkappe* (‘cloak of invisibility’) which makes the wearer invisible and guards the Nibelung hoard. Then there is Mímir, a smith from the medieval German poems who also appears in *Piðreks saga af Bern*, maker of the sword known as Mimming.³² Finally, John Hines has argued that Skalla-Grímr of *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, one of the *Íslendingasögur*, perfectly represents the view that skilled smiths were perceived both as highly valued and respected figures, but nonetheless volcanic and menacing to society, especially to the aristocracy and, above all,

²⁷ Keck, *Angels and Angelology*, 211.

²⁸ Lotte Motz, “New thoughts on *Völundarkviða*,” *Saga-Book of the Viking Society* XXII (1986-88): 51.

²⁹ Barndon, “Myth and Metallurgy: Some cross-cultural reflections on the social identity of smiths,” 102.

³⁰ Margaret Clunies Ross, *A History of Old Norse Poetry and Poetics* (Cambridge and New York: D.S. Brewer, 2005), 90-1.

³¹ Randi Haaland, “Iron in the making – Technology and Symbolism: Ethnographic perspectives on European iron working,” in *Old Norse religion in long-term perspectives: Origins, changes, and interactions*, ed. Anders Andrén, Kristina Jennbert and Catharina Raudvere (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2006), 84.

³² H. R. Ellis Davidson, “Weland the Smith,” *Folklore* 69 (1958): 154.

royalty.³³ One of the oldest groups of magical smiths was the *Grinkenschmied* of Westphalia, who created ploughshares that would never rust. These smiths would also lend their spits (for cooking meat) against payment for all festive gatherings.³⁴ In the *fornaldarsögur* the smith is depicted, above all, as the creator of precious weapons that may be magically endowed.³⁵ However, smiths were also highly regarded for their skills in the art of fettering and binding (cf. the binding of the wolf Fenrir).³⁶ According to H. R. Ellis Davidson, these four supernatural smiths (Völundr, Reginn, Albrich and Mímir) all seem to be descended from or in some way related to the giant race.³⁷

The legend of the magical smith is, however, not confined to northern Europe. In Greek mythology, Hephaistos played a vital role in the delivery of Athena from the head of Zeus and begat living beings by creating servants out of gold. Ptah, the Egyptian smith god, gave birth to all living creatures on earth. And on a related note, the dwarf-smiths of the Germanic world shaped a living creature, namely Freyr's boar, with golden bristles, and they themselves were ultimately derived from the earth or from the blood and bones of a slaughtered giant.³⁸ A further comparison can be drawn between Hephaistos and Völundr in that both were handicapped: Hephaistos was hurled through the sky so that he was lamed and Völundr was hamstrung thus disabling him.³⁹ Lotte Motz has suggested that this should possibly be considered as a further pan-European smith motif.⁴⁰ With respect to the legend of Völundr, Motz has argued that it shares a number of salient elements with the mythologies of the Siberian peoples. For example, in Ugric mythology we are told that when the sky god descended to the earth he was shot at by men thinking he was an ordinary bird and

³³ John Hines, "Myth and Reality: the Contribution of Archaeology," in *Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society*, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross (Viborg, Denmark: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2003), 33.

³⁴ Motz, "New thoughts on *Völundarkviða*," 59.

³⁵ Motz, "New thoughts on *Völundarkviða*," 59.

³⁶ Motz, "New thoughts on *Völundarkviða*," 60.

³⁷ Davidson, "Weland the Smith," 154.

³⁸ Motz, "New thoughts on *Völundarkviða*," 59.

³⁹ For a discussion of the smith-god Hephaistos and his Latin counterpart Vulcan see Richard L. Dieterle, "The Metallurgical Code of the "*Völundarkviða*" and Its Theoretical Import," *History of Religions* 27 (1987): 4.

⁴⁰ Motz, "New thoughts on *Völundarkviða*," 61.

they were punished with death (cf. the manner in which Völundr takes vengeance on Níðuðr and his children).⁴¹

Völundr's associations with angels

First and foremost, it should be said that Völundr can be described as a godlike (even demonic) being.⁴² As I mentioned earlier, the medieval smiths were viewed primarily in terms of their ability to make weapons imbued with magical power. In addition, they often aroused feelings of superstition, amazement and fear. Völundr, in particular, has been associated with the elves, a powerful supernatural race of beings about whom the written sources are very terse (he is described as *vísi álfa* or a 'prince/master of the elves' in the introductory prose passage to *Völundarkviða*). Völundr's exact status in society as viewed by Scandinavian poets is also somewhat unclear. According to John McKinnell,⁴³ the poet who composed *Völundarkviða* regarded him as a man, but in H. R. Ellis Davidson's view he is "more at home in the other world."⁴⁴ In fact, no poet or saga writer has ever told us how he died – simply that his bones never lay in an earthly grave.⁴⁵ Furthermore, the fact that many magical smiths were thought to live in secluded, hidden dwellings, remote from mainstream society, suggests that Völundr could be more god, deity or angel than man.⁴⁶

In *Völundarkviða* the poet mentions Völundr's being *á fitiom* 'on [his] webbed feet,' perhaps suggesting he was transformed into a being able to fly like a bird.⁴⁷ There is more on the Franks Casket, which shows the dismembered bodies of

⁴¹ Motz, "New thoughts on *Völundarkviða*," 57.

⁴² Ælfric of Eynsham mentions smiths who wrought idols for 'devils' in his *de correctione rusticorum* (John C. Pope, ed., *Homilies of Ælfric: A Supplementary Collection* 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967-68), 716).

⁴³ John McKinnell, "The Context of *Völundarkviða*," *Saga-Book of the Viking Society* XXIII (1990-93): 24.

⁴⁴ Ellis Davidson, "Weland the Smith," 159.

⁴⁵ Ellis Davidson, "Weland the Smith," 159; Cf. Roberta Frank, "Germanic legend in Old English literature," in *The Cambridge companion to Old English literature*, ed. Malcolm Godden and Michael Lapidge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 93.

⁴⁶ See also Anne Burson's discussion in "Swan Maidens and Smiths: A Structural Study of *Völundarkviða*," *Scandinavian Studies* 55 (1983): 8.

⁴⁷ Gustav Neckel and Hans Kuhn, ed., *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius Nebst Verwandten Denkmälern* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag, 1962), 123; Carolyne Larrington, trans., *The Poetic Edda* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 278: 'webbed feet.'

Níðuðr's sons below the anvil of the smithy, suggesting that this was the result of Völundr's powerful wrath. The final point I would like to make concerns the placement of *Völundarkviða* in the *Poetic Edda*, where it is positioned between *Þrymskviða* and *Alvíssmál*. In other words, among the mythological poetry and before the collection of heroic tales. This seems to suggest *Völundarkviða* should be thought of as a mythological text (and therefore Völundr as a figure of mythological provenance) rather than one that involves semi-historical/humanoid characters. I would therefore conclude that Völundr's relationship with the Christian angels can be built on fairly solid theoretical grounds.

Völundr can be linked or associated with the angels in five different ways. Two are by means of abstract ideas from literary sources and two are observed on the basis of what is included on the Anglo-Scandinavian stone images. Firstly, Völundr and the angels share the ability to fly.⁴⁸ In *Völundarkviða*, it is written in stanza 38 that:

Hlæiandi Völundr hófz á lopti;
enn ókátr Níðuðr sat þá eptir.^{49 50}

As far as I know, the flight of angels is reported on at least two occasions in the Bible. This occurs firstly in *Isaiah* 6:2,6, where the seraphim⁵¹ are being described: "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying."⁵² And again in *Revelation* 14:6, where the angels are referred to *en masse*: "Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the

⁴⁸ See Dieterle ("The Metallurgical Code," 13) for an alternative discussion of Völundr's ability to fly.

⁴⁹ Gustav Neckel and Hans Kuhn, *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius Nebst Verwandten Denkmälern* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag, 1962), 123; Carolyne Larrington, trans., *The Poetic Edda* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 108: 'Laughing, Volund rose in the air, and Nidud sadly sat there behind.'

⁵⁰ In this chapter, and the dissertation as a whole, I follow Carolyne Larrington's 1996 translation of the *Poetic Edda* when I reference *Völundarkviða* or any other eddic poetry.

⁵¹ An angelic being, regarded in traditional Christian angelology as belonging to the highest order of the ninefold celestial hierarchy, associated with light, ardour, and purity.

⁵² This and all other quotations from the Christian Bible are taken from the *New International Bible* (1984), accessed from: <http://www.biblegateway.com/versions/New-International-Version-NIV-Bible/#copy>

eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people.” That angels bore wings is well attested in the Bible and is chronicled on no fewer than a dozen occasions. I shall give two examples. The first is in *2 Chronicles* 3:11, where the wings of the Cherubim⁵³ are being measured: “The total wingspan of the cherubim was twenty cubits. One wing of the first cherub was five cubits long and touched the temple wall, while its other wing, also five cubits long, touched the wing of the other cherub.” The second example comes from *Ezekiel* 10:5: “The sound of the wings of the cherubim could be heard as far away as the outer court, like the voice of God Almighty when he speaks.”

A clearly articulated set of wings appears on three northern English Völundr-themed crosses. These are the tenth-century Leeds cross (p. 37), the late ninth- to early tenth-century Sherburn 2 (p. 41) and the Bedale hogback (p. 45), probably raised in the tenth century. With respect to the Leeds cross, Völundr and his pair of wings can be observed on the base of face *C*. On the Sherburn cross, a figure identified by James Lang as Völundr is flanked by a vertical set of wings. On face *A* of the Bedale hogback, Völundr has been depicted bound into his flying contrivance⁵⁴ alongside a pair of wings and some tail feathers. As far as I know, the idea that Völundr has wings of the traditional sort cannot be found in the surviving literary evidence. This motif should therefore be treated as a modification on the part of the patron or carver. The use of wings as an artistic device is puzzling. Lilla Kopár dismissed a direct connection between Völundr and angels, but to me such an interpretation does not seem out of the question. It is also worth pointing out that bird motifs are very prevalent in the Völundr legend and occur in much of the surviving visual evidence. For example, four long-necked birds can be distinguished on the floor of the smithy as depicted on the Franks Casket and a huge bird arises from the smithy on the Gotland picture stone *Ardre VIII*. Furthermore, the swan is frequently the love partner of the gods in Ugric mythology (among others) and Völundr and his

⁵³ A winged angelic being described in biblical tradition as attending on God, represented in ancient Middle Eastern art as a lion or bull with eagle’s wings and a human face and regarded in traditional Christian angelology as an angel of the second highest order of the ninefold celestial hierarchy.

⁵⁴ Refer to Chapter One: Part One for description and significance of Völundr’s flying contrivance.

brothers all marry swan-maidens,⁵⁵ two of whom, Svanhvítr and Alvittr, have by-names that indicate their swan natures.⁵⁶ The second artistic device that links Völundr to the angels concerns certain figures on two northern English crosses who appear to be saints or angels. On the previously mentioned Sherburn 2, there is a figure with marks above his head identified by James Lang as a halo. The other monument is the tenth-century York Minster 9 (p. 43), which shows a figure that has been identified, again by James Lang, both as Völundr and an angel. Lilla Kopár has suggested that this image displays “mixed iconography” and is thus evidence of an attempt by the patron and/or craftsman to reconcile the pagan gods and Christianity.⁵⁷ This would help explain why the parallels between pagan mythology and Christian lore were emphasised. Consequently, some scholars have treated this as evidence for arguing that the images reflect a conscious opposition of the two traditions with the stories being contrasted to underscore the superiority of Christianity. However, this argument does not stand firm when one considers that juxtaposing Völundr and an angel or saint figure hardly betokens the primacy of Christianity over paganism.

In support of Völundr as a being with godlike qualities, the extreme measures that he goes to in order to exact revenge on Níðuðr and his family is extraordinary and go way beyond what one might expect of a normal human to the point where Völundr’s actions could be viewed as godlike or supernatural. In the mythological literature Völundr was often associated with divine beings (*reginkunnr*), a word that derives from a root word, *ráða*, meaning ‘to give counsel.’ A runic inscription (Vg 119, Sparlösa, Västergötland) from around the year 600 has the word in a compound that means: “descended from the divine powers” (although this inscription does not refer to Völundr or to smiths in general).⁵⁸ We know from *Völundarkviða* that Völundr performed two extreme acts of revenge. Firstly, he killed Níðuðr’s young ‘cubs’ and fashioned precious objects from their body parts (*sneið af haufuð*

⁵⁵ They are called valkyries (*valkyrior*) in the prose introduction to *Völundarkviða* (possibly of later date than the poem itself), but valkyries usually cannot be swan-maidens.

⁵⁶ Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 277.

⁵⁷ Kopár, *Gods and Settlers*, 192.

⁵⁸ Randi Barndon, “Myth and Metallurgy: Some cross-cultural reflections on the social identity of smiths,” in *Old Norse religion in long-term perspectives: Origins, changes, and interactions*, ed. Anders Andrén, Kristina Jennbert and Catharina Raudvere (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2006), 102.

húna þeira).⁵⁹ Secondly, he seduced Böðvildr with drink (*Bar hann hana bióri | þvíat hann betr kunni | svá at hon í sessi um sofnaði*)⁶⁰ and sired a child with her (*þótt vér qván eigim | þá er þér kunnið | eða ióð eigim innan hallar*).⁶¹ One can naturally understand the need for Völundr to exact some kind of retribution; after all, he was abducted, lamed and imprisoned all because of a tyrant's greed. However, punishing his children instead of Níðuðr directly seems somewhat disproportionate to the crime and, I would add, recalls the forms of retaliation meted out by gods and deities from other European mythologies and legends. For example, John McKinnell⁶² is reminded of the exchange between Cadmus and Dionysus at the end of Euripides' *The Bacchae*:

Cadmus: but your vengeance is too heavy.

Dionysus: I am a god; and you insulted me.

Gods, as Dionysus explains, must take vengeance, "that mortal men may know that the gods are greater than they." I also previously mentioned the ancient Ugric story about the wounded sky god who descended to earth and saw fit to bring death to his attackers.⁶³ Further north, the mistreatment of a god and his vengeance in the story of Agnarr and Grímnir (Óðinn) in *Grímnismál* does not seem so dissimilar. As Kaaren Grimstad has argued, there remains something about Völundr of the vengeful god confronting a human being who has injured him.⁶⁴

To summarise, angels were of immense importance for medieval Christians, for whom they acted as role models, while angel-themed iconography is well supported in the artistic record. The probable relationship between Völundr and angels or gods in the minds of the creators of northern English stone sculpture can be distilled into five different areas of similarities. (a) Völundr and the angels share the power of flight; (b) they were both depicted with wings or wing-like features in artwork; (c)

⁵⁹ Neckel and Kuhn, *Edda*, 121; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 106: 'he cut the heads off those young cubs.'

⁶⁰ Neckel and Kuhn, *Edda*, 121; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 106: 'he overcame her with beer, because he was more experienced, so that on the couch she fell asleep.'

⁶¹ Neckel and Kuhn, *Edda*, 122; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 107: 'though I have a wife who is known to you, and we have a child inside your hall.'

⁶² McKinnell, "The context of *Völundarkviða*," 24.

⁶³ Motz, "New Thoughts on *Völundarkviða*," 57.

⁶⁴ Kaaren Grimstad, "The Revenge of Völundr," in *Edda: A collection of essays*, ed. R. J. Glendinning and Haraldur Bessason (Winnipeg, Canada: University of Manitoba Press, 1983), 198-201.

Völundr was sometimes depicted with a saint/angel or (in one case) cannot be distinguished from an angel/saint; and (d) the lengths to which Völundr goes and the nature of his vengeance on Níðuðr's family is way beyond what a human being might do and strays into the realms of the divine.

Part Two: Sigurðr

What is crucifixion and how is it significant to Christianity?

The ancient method of punishment for criminals known as crucifixion has been well known throughout history, chiefly owing to its most famous victim, Jesus Christ. Practised in parts of Europe and North Africa for much of the pagan and early Christian era, from about the sixth century BCE to the fourth century AD, it was eventually abolished by Emperor Constantine I in the year 337, out of veneration for Jesus. The event of the Crucifixion of Christ, believed by Christians to be the Son of God, occurred sometime during the first century AD. According to Christian tradition, Christ was arrested, tried then sentenced to be scourged and executed on a cross by Pontius Pilate, the fifth commander of the Roman province of Judaea from AD 26-36. The *Gospel of Mark* recounts that Jesus endured the torment of Crucifixion for about six hours before he finally died. Following Christ's death, his body was removed and buried in a rock-hewn tomb by Joseph of Arimathea and two days later he was resurrected. These events are collectively referred to as the Passion and constitute one of the central dogmas/beliefs of Christian theology. Christians regard the Crucifixion of Christ as a genuine historical event and it is mentioned in all four canonical Gospels as well as in a number of non-Christian sources.

Is there a tradition of crucifixion imagery in Christian art?

Although now a common image, portrayals of the crucifixion of Christ in Christian art were basically non-existent until the eighth century. In fact, it was only after the year 692 that Jesus, it was decreed, could be represented in human form instead of as a lamb.⁶⁵ Despite this absence for much of the early Christian era, there is an established theological complexity to crucifixion imagery in Anglo-Saxon art, most of which dates from after the early ninth century. Reasons for this 'great reserve' have been the great shame associated with crucifixion as a form of execution, the stigma attached to worshipping a crucified deity and the fear of persecution (by

⁶⁵ André Grabar, *Christian Iconography: A Study of its Origins* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), 17.

God).⁶⁶ One of the earliest examples from the British Isles is at Athlone, Ireland, from the eighth century, where Christ is shown with open eyes and is therefore classified as Christ of the Second Coming rather than the Suffering Christ.⁶⁷ Stephaton and Longinus, the names given to the Roman soldiers present at Christ's death, appear regularly on crucifixion scenes from the time of the Syriac Rabbulen Gospels of 586 and are standard additions on Anglo-Saxon examples. One perennial issue that should be mentioned has been which side of Christ was pierced by Longinus – in Anglo-Saxon imagery, his left side was traditional.⁶⁸

Sigurðr's relationship with the Crucifixion and Christian thinking

Both Sigurðr and Christ are said to have confronted and eventually destroyed a dragon or serpent of immense size and strength. Sigurðr's clash with the serpent Fáfnir occurs in chapter 18 of *Völsunga saga*, immediately following the scene in which Sigurðr takes his revenge on King Lyngvi, murderer of Sigurðr's father and brothers. Fáfnir's impressive stature is revealed by the size of his footprints:

Þá mælti Sigurðr, 'Þat sagðir þú, Reginn, at dreki sjá væri eigi meiri en einn lyngormr, en mér sýnask vegar hans æfar miklir.'⁶⁹

'You told me, Regin,' said Sigurd then, 'that this monster was no bigger than any serpent, but his tracks look very big to me.'

And just a few lines later it is said that the earth tremors caused by Fáfnir's crawling were so violent that *öll jörð skalf í nánd*.⁷⁰ Shortly afterwards Sigurðr dealt Fáfnir his death blow by piercing his vulnerable left shoulder:

Þá hleypr Sigurðr upp ór gröfinni ok kippir at sér sverðinu ok hefir allar hendr blóðgar upp til axlar. Ok er inn mikli ormr kenndi síns banasárs, þá

⁶⁶ Jeffrey Spier, *Picturing the Bible: The Earliest Christian Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press; Fort Worth: In association with the Kimbell Art Museum, 2007), 227.

⁶⁷ Grabar, *Christian Iconography*, 18.

⁶⁸ Grabar, *Christian Iconography*, 20.

⁶⁹ R. G. Finch, ed. and trans., *The Saga of the Volsungs* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1965), 30.

⁷⁰ Finch, *Volsungs*, 31: 'all the land round about shook.'

laust hann höfðinu ok sporðinum svá at allt brast í sundr er fyrir varð.⁷¹

Then Sigurd leapt out of the pit, wrenching back the sword, and getting his arms bloody right up to the shoulders. And when the huge dragon felt its death wound, it lashed with its tail and head, shattering everything that got in its way.

Jesus's victory over a dragon came under different circumstances. Probably the most obvious reference to this comes from *Isaiah* 27:1, in a passage entitled *Deliverance of Israel*: "In that day, the Lord will punish with his sword, his fierce, great and powerful sword, Leviathan the gliding serpent, Leviathan the coiling serpent; he will slay the monster of the sea." However, there are other mentions of Leviathan in *Job* 3:8, *Job* 40:25, *the Psalms* 74:14 and *the Psalms* 104:26. Secondly, it is well established that Christ defeated Satan. This occurs in *John* 12:31, where it is written that "now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out." This is significant because Satan was often represented in serpent form, as is evident in *Revelation* 12:9: "the great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray."

Both Sigurðr and Jesus are betrayed by their close associates in events that ultimately lead to their deaths. Sigurðr is killed by Gunnarr and Högni, the brothers of his wife Guðrún, whereas Jesus is double-crossed by Judas Iscariot to the Sanhedrin priests and thereafter crucified. In *Völsunga saga* Brynhildr pleads with her husband Gunnarr to kill Sigurðr in an act of revenge for the aspersion that Sigurðr cast on her when he married Guðrún. In Chapter thirty-two of *Völsunga saga* Brynhildr explains her desire for retribution to Gunnarr:

‘Ek vil eigi lifa,’ sagði Brynhildr, ‘því at Sigurðr hefir mik vélt ok eigi síðr þik, þá er þú lézt hann fara í mína sæng. Nú vil ek eigi tvá menn eiga senn í einni höll, ok þetta skal vera bani Sigurðar eða þinn eða minn, því at hann hefir þat allt sagt Guðrúnu, en hon brigzlar mér.’⁷²

‘I don't want to live,’ said Byrnhild, ‘for Sigurd betrayed me and he betrayed you no less when you let him sleep with me. Now I'll not have

⁷¹ Finch, *Volsungs*, 31.

⁷² Finch, *Volsungs*, 57.

two husbands at one and the same time in one hall, and this will mean Sigurd's death or yours or mine, for he's told Gudrun everything, and she taunts me with it.'

That Gunnarr had misgivings about Brynhildr's treasonous orders is confirmed just a few lines later:

Gunnarr varð nú mjök hugsjúkr ok þóttisk eigi vita hvat helzt lá til, alls hann var í eiðum við Sigurð, ok lék ýmist í hug, þótti þat þó mest svívirðing ef konan gengi frá honum.⁷³

Gunnar now grew very distressed. He did not know, he thought, what had best be done, for he was bound to Sigurd by oath, and his mind toyed now with this, now with that, but he thought it would be a terrible disgrace if his wife left him.

A further example of how Sigurðr could have been the victim of (potential) betrayal comes from an earlier part of *Völsunga saga*. In Chapter Nineteen, immediately after Sigurðr killed the dragon Fáfnir at Reginn's behest, he roasts the dragon's heart and *er freyddi ór, þá tók hann fingr sínum á ok skynjaði hvárt steikt væri*,⁷⁴ he jerked his finger to his mouth. As a consequence of this Sigurðr could understand the language of birds (*þá skilði hann fuglarödd*). Just a few lines later Sigurðr overhears a group of birds twittering in a nearby thicket, and they give him a warning of Reginn's evil intentions: *Þar liggr Reginn ok vill véla þann sem honum truer*.⁷⁵ Naturally wishing to avoid his own demise, Sigurðr draws his sword Gramr and strikes Reginn's head off: *bregðr nú sverðinu Gram ok høggr höfuð af Regin*.⁷⁶ Jesus's betrayal is recorded in the gospel of *Matthew*. In *Matthew* 10:4 Jesus lists his twelve apostles and Judas's misdeeds are anticipated: "These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son

⁷³ Finch, *Volsungs*, 57.

⁷⁴ Finch, *Volsungs*, 33: 'and when the juice sputtered out he touched it with his finger to see whether it was done.'

⁷⁵ Finch, *Volsungs*, 34: 'there lies Regin meaning to play false the man who trusts him.'

⁷⁶ Finch, *Volsungs*, 34: 'then he drew the sword Gram and struck off Regin's head.'

of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.” And it is in *Matthew 26:14* where there is evidence that Judas performs the act of betrayal: “Then one of the Twelve—the one called Judas Iscariot—went to the chief priests and asked, “What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?” So they counted out for him thirty silver coins. From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over.”

I now turn to the visual evidence. There are three crosses that warrant a special mention because they either depict scenes from the Sigurðr legend alongside an image of the crucifixion of Jesus or (deliberately) recall to mind images of the crucifixion. The first of these is the Kirby Hill 2 cross (p. 50) in North Yorkshire, which was probably raised in the early tenth century. The Kirby Hill monuments were studied by James Lang and his findings were published posthumously in 2001.⁷⁷ According to Lang, on the first panel there is a crucifixion scene depicted with Christ’s toes pointing outwards set atop two ‘loops.’ Further below this scene is a limp headless figure, identified by Lang as Reginn, and another figure shown sucking his thumb, whom Lang thought was probably Sigurðr roasting the heart of Fáfnir over a fire. Lang chose not to elaborate on the question of why the crucifixion scene was portrayed directly next to a scene from an Old Norse legend; however, it seems to me that it was deliberately done so to highlight the affinities between Jesus and Sigurðr, particularly the shared elements of their deaths (even though Sigurðr is depicted as alive and well Anglo-Scandinavian audiences would have been aware of the details of the legend).⁷⁸ Both Jesus and Sigurðr, as I explained above, were betrayed by close associates and consequently both were unjustly killed.

The second cross I want to draw attention to is the York Minster hogback (p. 55), raised in the tenth century, investigated by Rosemary Cramp and published in

⁷⁷ James Lang, *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, VI: Northern Yorkshire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 130.

⁷⁸ According to Richard Bailey (*Viking Age Sculpture*, 103), Völundr seems to have been well known to King Alfred’s audience (hence the rhetorical question – Where are the bones of Wayland?) - it would not be too great a stretch to infer that Sigurðr was also reasonably familiar. Furthermore, there is an account of a dragon killing in the Old English *Beowulf*, although there it was Sigurðr’s father Sigmundr who was responsible for this deed.

1991. According to Cramp, it depicts a scene from the extended Völsungar legend, specifically where Gunnarr, brother of Högni and Guðrún, is trapped in a snake pit (and later dies) that can be compared and studied alongside other Anglo-Saxon crucifixion scenes. Although Cramp was unable to find anything that resembled a harp, the instrument Gunnarr plays when thrown into the snake pit, most agree that he has probably been depicted.⁷⁹ Like Lang with the Kirby Hill cross, Cramp did not speculate on the precise meaning of the iconography on the York Minster hogback, although Richard Bailey argued that the overlap of presenting a crucifixion of Christ scene and an episode from Scandinavian legend that shows the deserved fate of one of the persons responsible for Sigurðr's death may be intended.⁸⁰ I would agree with this surmise. This particular scene involving Gunnarr was also one of the commonest ways of representing the Völsungar legend, as Sue Margeson argued when presenting her list of visual diagnostic features.⁸¹ Although *Völsunga saga* is in excess of fifty modern book pages, Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian audiences would have recognised Gunnarr in the snake pit as one of the final events of the Sigurðr legend.⁸²

The Ripon cross (p. 52), raised circa 900, is another North Yorkshire cross studied by James Lang and published in 2001. This is a very special cross that, according to Lang, presents Sigurðr roasting and eating the heart of Fáfnir.⁸³ There is no actual crucifixion scene that can be made out; however, a number of scholars have argued that the crouching figure may well have affinities with *orantes* or 'devotees' in similar positions on Celtic crosses⁸⁴ and Elizabeth Coatsworth saw a connection between the Ripon cross and the mass scene on the Nunburnholme cross.⁸⁵ More significantly perhaps, Sigurðr is depicted on the head of the cross, a position usually

⁷⁹ *Atlakviða*, st. 32; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 215.

⁸⁰ Bailey, *Viking Age Sculpture*, 139.

⁸¹ See Chapter One (p. 37) for an explanation of Margeson's diagnostic features for the Völsungar legend.

⁸² John McKinnell, "Eddic Poetry in Anglo-Scandinavian England," in *Vikings and the Danelaw: Select Papers from the Proceedings of the Thirteenth Viking Congress, Nottingham and York, 21-30 August 1997*, ed. James Graham-Campbell, Richard Hall, Judith Jesch and David N. Parsons (Oxford: Oxbow, 2001), 330.

⁸³ Elizabeth Coatsworth, *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, VIII: Western Yorkshire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 236.

⁸⁴ Margeson, "The Völsung legend in Medieval Art," 190.

⁸⁵ Coatsworth, *Western Yorkshire*, 236.

reserved for solely Christian images.⁸⁶ This positioning could well be an indication that Sigurðr was highly regarded by Christian Anglo-Scandinavians and was an attempt to focus attention on the Christ-like virtues of Sigurðr and his affinities with certain aspects of Christian thinking.⁸⁷

To summarise, the crucifixion of Jesus Christ was one of the decisive events in Christendom and crucifixion imagery became very popular throughout the medieval period and beyond. Sigurðr the Völsungar can be compared with some aspects of Christ and Christianity more broadly in the following ways: (a) both Sigurðr and Christ slew an extremely powerful serpent, a creature often associated with the idea of evil; (b) both Jesus and Sigurðr were betrayed and killed by people with whom they shared close ties; (c) an image of the crucifixion and Sigurðr has appeared on at least one stone cross in northern England; (d) there is a possible deliberate Christian/Scandinavian overlap on at least one stone cross that depicts iconography from the Völsungar legend and (e) there is at least one stone cross that depicts Sigurðr on the head of the cross, a space normally reserved for strictly Christian iconography.

⁸⁶ Kopár, *Gods and Settlers*, 66.

⁸⁷ It is also possible that Sigurðr has *replaced* a Christian scene, in which instance it could be seen as an example of reinterpretation and commentary – in other words, the “pagan iconography of Christian ideas” (see Bailey, *Viking Age Sculpture*, 125 for more detail).

Part Three: Ragnarök

What is Christian eschatology?

The term ‘eschatology’ essentially means the part of theology concerned with death, judgement and the final destiny of the soul and of humankind. The most important Christian eschatological texts are found in the gospels of *Matthew*, *Mark* and *Luke* and are known as the ‘synoptic apocalypse,’ the ‘judgment teaching’ in *Matthew* 25, the *Books of Daniel* chapters 7-12 and the *Revelation of John*.⁸⁸

What are the salient eschatological features of Ragnarök?

In Chapter One, I gave a complete summary of the events at Ragnarök as they occurred according to *Völuspá* (the most extensive of the literary sources), and here I shall only highlight the parts that refer specifically to the physical end and rebirth of the world. In stanza 41 it is written that *svort verða sólscin of sumor eptir* ‘sunshine becomes black the next summer’⁸⁹ and that *veðr öll válynd* ‘all weather is vicious.’⁹⁰ In stanza 45 the world *steypiz* ‘plunges headlong.’⁹¹ In stanza 46 Gjallarhorn is blown, signalling the advent of Ragnarök. In stanza 47 Yggdrasill shudders and in stanza 48 *gnýr allr iötunheimr* ‘all Giantland groans.’⁹² *Griótbiörg gnata* ‘rocky cliffs split open’⁹³ and *enn himinn klofnar* ‘and the sky splits apart’⁹⁴ in stanza 52. Following the battle, in stanza 57:

sól tér sortna, sígr fold í mar,
hverfa af himni heiðar stiörnor;
geisar eimi við aldrnara,

⁸⁸ Anders Hultgård, “Old Scandinavian and Christian Eschatology,” in *Old Norse and Finnish Religions and Cultic Place-Names*, ed. Tore Ahlbäck (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1987), 345.

⁸⁹ Neckel and Kuhn, *Edda*, 10; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 9.

⁹⁰ Neckel and Kuhn, *Edda*, 10; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 9.

⁹¹ Neckel and Kuhn, *Edda*, 11; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 10.

⁹² Neckel and Kuhn, *Edda*, 12; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 11.

⁹³ Neckel and Kuhn, *Edda*, 12; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 11.

⁹⁴ Neckel and Kuhn, *Edda*, 12; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 11.

leicr hár hiti við himin síalfan.⁹⁵

In stanza 59 the earth is reborn and in stanzas 62 and 63 we are told of the gods who survive the great purge and of the great harmony now established over the earth.

In what ways is Ragnarök linked to Christian thinking, especially eschatology?

First of all, I want to discuss the crucifixion scene, the only purely Christian carving on the Gosforth cross. The figure of the crucified Christ can be made out on the bottom of face *C* or the east face. His arms are outstretched and a flow of blood runs vertically down his right side to the point of his kirtle. Below this, on the left side, is a male figure holding a spear and on the right is a woman with knotted pigtail proffering a horn-like object. According to Richard Bailey, the rendering of the crucifixion is unusual and she was unable to find similar examples anywhere else in the north of England. The attendant figures of Longinus with a woman (who is possibly Ecclesia, see Chapter One) also have no parallel, as Longinus was traditionally paired with Stephaton. In Bailey's view the position of the crucifixion amidst some scenes from Ragnarök invites the viewer to compare and relate the stories of the Bible with those from Old Norse mythology. It requires the viewer to think about the relationship between the stories and legends that are alluded to and consciously explore these links. The positioning also suggests that the two traditions could co-exist in a state of harmony or syncretism.

Earthquakes, fires and summoning horns all play a part in both Ragnarök and Christian eschatology as reported in the written sources. In *Völuspá*, stanza 46, the Gjallarhorn is mentioned:

Leica Míms synir, enn miötuðr kyndiz
at ino gamla Gjallarhorni;
hátt blæss Heimdallr, horn er á lopti.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Neckel and Kuhn, *Edda*, 14; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 11: 'sun turns black, earth sinks into the sea, the bright stars vanish from the sky; steam rises up in the conflagration, a high flame plays against heaven itself.'

⁹⁶ Neckel and Kuhn, *Edda*, 11; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 10: 'The sons of Mim are at play and fate catches fire at the ancient Gjallarhorn; Heimdall blows loudly, his horn is in the air.'

In stanza 52 the earth begins to self-destruct: *griótbiörg gnata...enn himinn klofnar* ‘the rocky cliffs crack open...and the sky splits apart.’⁹⁷ In stanza 57 we are told of the destruction of the heavens and completion of the earth by fire:

Sól tér sortna, sígr fold í mar,
hverfa af himni heiðar stiörnör;
geisar eimi við aldrnara,
leicr hár hiti við himin síalfan.⁹⁸

The same natural phenomena occur in the *Book of Revelation*, traditionally regarded as the central biblical text on the apocalypse. In *Revelation* 6:12 the author envisaged “a great earthquake...the sun turned black...the whole moon turned blood red” and in 6:13 the stars fell from the sky. Then in 6:14 the heavens “receded like a scroll” and every mountain and island vanished from the face of the earth. In *Revelation* 8 the narrator describes the trumpets blown by the angels as they tear the earth apart piece by piece. The earth became burnt up, the creatures in the sea were destroyed, the water became bitter and the sun was struck. In *Revelation* 9:17, fiery horses and riders with the heads of lions entered the sky and proceeded to pelt the earth with fire and sulphur and killed a third of the earth’s population.⁹⁹

A parallel can be established between Viðarr and Christ. Both of these figures are witness to the ends of their respective worlds and both survive the great purge. That Viðarr did not perish at Ragnarök is recorded in chapter 52 of *Gylfaginning* and *Vafþrúðnismál* stanza 51, where Vafþrúðnir tells Óðinn about the outcome of Ragnarök: *Viðarr oc Váli byggja vé goð | þá er slocnar Surtar logi* ‘Vidar and Vali will live in the temples of the gods when Surt’s fire is slaked.’¹⁰⁰ That Jesus outlasted the apocalypse is recorded in *Revelation* 22, where the author concludes his vision

⁹⁷ Neckel and Kuhn, *Edda*, 12; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 11.

⁹⁸ Neckel and Kuhn, *Edda*, 13; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 11: ‘The sun turns black, earth sinks into the sea, the bright stars vanish from the sky; steam rises up in the conflagration, a high flame plays against heaven itself.’

⁹⁹ The eleventh-century Skarpåker stone (Sö 154) in Södermanland also alludes to these cosmic upheavals in its runic inscription, which reads: *iarð skal rifna ok upphiminn* (Otto von Friesen, *Nordisk Kultur: Samlingsverk* Runer 6 (Oslo: Bonnier, 1933), 158).

¹⁰⁰ Neckel and Kuhn, *Edda*, 12; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 48.

and it is revealed that Jesus commanded the angels to restore the earth back to life. According to Richard Bailey, the figure of Viðarr with his arm(s) in the wolf's jaws can be observed on the east face of the Gosforth cross. However, as evidence for this is scarce, Týr may be a more likely candidate, although it must be said that Týr and the wolf are not associated in Old Norse myth directly with Ragnarök. Nonetheless, Týr with his arm(s) in Fenrir's jaws is actually depicted on three other northern English crosses: the Sockburn hogback (p. 68) in County Durham, the Lythe hogback (p. 70) in North Yorkshire and the Forcett cross (p. 71) in North Yorkshire. With respect to the Sockburn hogback, Richard Bailey and Lilla Kopár agreed that depicting Týr in this way implies a connection between his sacrifice (of his arm) and the sacrifice of Christ. James Lang worked along the same lines in his suggestion that depiction of Týr on the Lythe hogback represents the victory of good over evil in Old Norse mythological terms enriched with Christian ways of thinking.

In both end of the world traditions an evil serpent has an important role.¹⁰¹ In *Revelation* 20:1-3, the narrator describes that a serpent to be identified as Satan is to be thrown into the abyss for a thousand years but destined to be set loose: “And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.” This very much recalls the Miðgarðsormr that, according to *Snorra Edda*, was cast into the sea by Óðinn, but destined to meet in battle with Þórr at Ragnarök.¹⁰² That *mun Óðins sonr ormi mæta* ‘Odin’s son must meet the serpent’¹⁰³ is mentioned in *Völuspá* in stanza 55 and the actual battle takes place in stanza 56:

Þá kœmr inn mæri mögr Hlóðyniar,

¹⁰¹ Hultgård (“Old Scandinavian and Christian Eschatology,” 356) and others have observed that terms like *Miðgarðs ormr* for ‘Satan-Leviathan’ were used in some early translations of Latin texts such as *Niðrstigningar saga*.

¹⁰² John Lindow, *Norse Mythology: A Guide to the Gods, Heroes, Rituals, and Beliefs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 230.

¹⁰³ Neckel and Kuhn, *Edda*, 13; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 11.

gengr Óðins sonr við úlf vega.¹⁰⁴

In both traditions it is also foretold that the people will turn against one another and eventually descend into total chaos. This is recorded in *Völuspá* in stanza 39 (generally regarded as the beginning of the Ragnarök section in *Völuspá*):

Sá hon þar vaða þunga strauma¹⁰⁵

menn meinsvara oc morðvarga,

oc þannz annars glepr eyrarúno.¹⁰⁶

And this theme is further elaborated in stanza 45, where murder, deception and adultery utterly consume the earth's inhabitants:

Bræðr muno beriaz oc at bönom verðaz,

muno systrungar sifiom spilla;

hart er í heimi, hórdómr mikill,

sceggöld, scálmöld, scildir ro klofnir,

vindöld, vargöld, áðr verold steypiz;

mun eigi maðr öðrom þyrma.¹⁰⁷

The many atrocities of men at the end of the world are recorded in *Matthew* 10:21 in a

¹⁰⁴ Neckel and Kuhn, *Edda*, 13; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 11: 'Then the glorious son of Earth, Odin's son, advances to fight against the serpent.'

¹⁰⁵ Hultgård ('Old Scandinavian and Christian Eschatology,' 355) sees a parallel here with the Iranian idea of the eschatological fire and men's passing through it, which may well have reached the author of *Völuspá* through the intermediary of Christian eschatological legend.

¹⁰⁶ Neckel and Kuhn, *Edda*, 9; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 9: 'There she saw wading in turbid streams men who swore false oaths and murderers, and those who seduced the close confidantes of other men.'

¹⁰⁷ Neckel and Kuhn, *Edda*, 10; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 10: 'Brother will fight brother and be his slayer, brother and sister will violate the bond of kinship; hard it is in the world, there is much adultery, axe-age, sword-age, shields are cleft asunder, wind-age, wolf-age, before the world plunges headlong; no man will spare another.'

passage entitled *Jesus sends out the twelve*: “Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death.” The sexual immorality of the human race at the end of the world was recorded in *Revelation* 9:21, where it is told that the people of the earth refused to “repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts” and in *Revelation* 17:2, where it is foretold that even the kings of the earth shall commit adultery.

In summary, Christian and Norse eschatology are in certain aspects remarkably similar and share a number of salient features.¹⁰⁸ Earthquakes, fires and summoning horns and trumpets are present in the respective traditions; both Viðarr and Christ survive the great purge and Týr may have been depicted to underscore the ultimate victory of good over evil; in both traditions there is a wicked serpent; and the people of the earth resort to theft, murder, avarice and all sorts of transgressions as the end draws nigh.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ It should be noted that I am aware of the many scholars who have held the view that the anonymous compiler(s) of the *Poetic Edda* (and the earlier (c. 1225) *Snorra Edda*) was influenced by Christianity and consequently altered or modified the stories (in particular the details regarding the end of the world found in *Völuspá*) to reflect a Scandinavian society already dominated by Christianity. It is worth recalling that all mythologically-themed Anglo-Scandinavian crosses are earlier than any Old Norse text and since we rely on these texts in order to identify and make sense of the crosses we must be cautious when applying the written legends to the crosses as changes will invariably have been made.

¹⁰⁹ For evidence of the influence of Christian eschatology in Old Norse literature cf. Gustav Indrebø, ed., *Gammal Norsk Homilieboek, Cod. AM. 619 4* (Oslo: Dybwad forlag, 1931), 101, 15-102, 11.

Part Four: Þórr and the Miðgarðsormr

The symbolism of the hart

The stag or hart (Old English: *heorot*, *heort*, Old Norse: *hjörtr*) was one of the most sought after animals in medieval hunting practice and is also known as a symbol of Christ and Christianity itself. Harts were some of the most elusive and difficult creatures to catch and for this reason and because of their other qualities (including nimbleness and elegance) they were often drawn upon by medieval commentators in allegorical comparisons with Christ. The *Physiologus*, variously dated to between the year AD 140 and the early sixth century, was one of the most popular and widely read books of the Middle Ages and contains legends of beasts, stones and trees. The Old English version, preserved in the late tenth-century *Exeter Book*, was the first vernacular translation of the *Physiologus* and is sometimes attributed to Cynewulf. According to the Latin edition of the *Physiologus*, the stag is the natural enemy of the dragon, who “flees from the stag into the cracks of the earth, and...drinking from a stream... [the stag] then spits out the water into the cracks and draws the dragon out and stamps on him and kills him.”¹¹⁰ A further early medieval example of the symbolic use of the hart can be found in the tenth-century Anglo-Latin *Vita S. Eustachii*, in which a Roman general named Placidus pursued a stag with a large golden cross between its antlers that reveals itself as none other than Jesus Christ, who urges Placidus to undergo baptism.¹¹¹ Stags and harts continued to be popular subjects in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

The cosmic struggle between Þórr and the Miðgarðsormr is one of the definitive episodes of Norse mythology and appears regularly in the literary sources and on some material objects as well. The Miðgarðsormr’s casting into the sea by Óðinn, recorded in *Gylfaginning*,¹¹² and the prediction of its battle with Þórr in

¹¹⁰ Michael J. Curley, trans., *Physiologus* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 58.

¹¹¹ Michael Lapidge, “Æthelwold and the *Vita S. Eustachii*,” in *Anglo-Latin Literature 900-1066*, ed. Michael Lapidge (London and Rio Grande, Ohio: The Hambledon Press, 1993), 214.

¹¹² Anthony Faulkes, trans., *Edda Snorri Sturluson* (London: Everyman, 1995), 27.

*Völuspá*¹¹³ are two of the most important literary references. However, the source that goes into the greatest detail of the enmity between the two is in *Hymiskviða*, where Þórr wounds the Miðgarðsormr with the aid (or the meddling ways) of the giant Hymir.¹¹⁴ The earliest known mention of this epic clash has survived in some verses which may be part of *Ragnarsdrápa*, composed by Bragi Boddason (traditionally reckoned to be the first skald whose work has survived).¹¹⁵ This encounter is also the subject of the early tenth-century Gosforth ‘Fishing stone’ (p. 58), extensively studied by Rosemary Cramp and James Lang and thought to depict Þórr and Hymir in a boat using an ox-head¹¹⁶ as bait and the Miðgarðsormr resisting in the sea. According to Cramp, the encounter between Þórr and the Miðgarðsormr invites the viewer to draw comparisons with certain scenes and ideas from Christian thought. Þórr is not equivalent to the Christian God or Christ, nor should the three be compared. However, Þórr’s achievements are legendary among the Norse gods and the foes that he conquers are usually tremendously strong or great in stature. Further, it has been suggested that during the late stages of paganism he was probably the most important god.¹¹⁷ The Miðgarðsormr, on the other hand, had an obvious affinity in Christian thinking in the form of the evil serpent or Leviathan, thought by many to be the personification of Satan.¹¹⁸ This was clearly the view of the Icelandic translator of Nicodemus’s story of Christ’s descent into Hell¹¹⁹ (published in Old Norse as *Niðrstigningsarsaga*), where Satan is described variously as *Miðgarðs ormr* (the Serpent of the World), *jöfurr helvítis* (Prince of Hell) and *dauða skilfingr* (Lord of Death).¹²⁰

¹¹³ Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 11.

¹¹⁴ Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 81.

¹¹⁵ Lindow, *Norse Mythology*, 86.

¹¹⁶ The text here supporting this detail may be missing (stanza 19) in *Hymiskviða* but it can be substituted from *Gylfaginning* in Snorri’s *Edda* chapter 48 in Faulkes’ translation (*Edda*, 47).

¹¹⁷ John McKinnell, *Both One And Many: Essays on change and variety in late Norse Heathenism* (Rome: Il Calamo, 1994), 57.

¹¹⁸ According to Richard Bailey (*Viking Age Sculpture*, 132), the Anglo-Saxon monk Bede described Leviathan in a way which closely resembles the Miðgarðsormr, encircling the whole world.

¹¹⁹ G. Turville-Petre, *Origins of Icelandic Literature* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1967), 128.

¹²⁰ According to Christian tradition, Nicodemus was a disciple of Christ. He lends his name to the Medieval Latin apocryphal text *Gospel of Nicodemus*.

This concept that Þórr and the Miðgarðsormr may have Christian overtones is strengthened by the fact that in the panel above Þórr on the ‘Fishing stone’ (p. 75) is an image of a hart wrestling with a serpent, traditionally regarded by medieval Christians as an allegory of Christ’s struggle with Satan or the devil. The idea of the serpent as the personification of Satan or the devil is well supported in the Old Testament as well as in much scholarly literature on the subject. In *Revelation* 20:1-3 (which I referenced in the previous section), a serpent that is explicitly named as Satan or the devil is apprehended by an angel and imprisoned for a thousand years. Also, *Revelation* 12:9 describes an ancient serpent called the devil or Satan, who would lead the world astray, but was hurled to earth along with his angels. In the standard Bible, Leviathan is mentioned on five separate occasions: in *Job* 3:8, *Job* 40:25, *Job* 41:1, *the Psalms* 74:14, *the Psalms* 104:26 and *Isaiah* 27:1. Throughout the Old Testament Leviathan is described as a fearsome beast and in *Job* 3:8 the author curses the day on which he will be set free, but the best description of Leviathan’s ferocity and power is in *Job* 40:25 (which I shall quote at some length):

“I will not keep silence concerning his limbs, or his mighty strength, or his orderly frame. Who can strip off his outer armour? Who can come within his double mail? Who can open the doors of his face? Around his teeth there is terror. His strong scales are his pride, shut up as with a tight seal. One is so near another that no air can come between them. They are joined to one another; they clasp each other and cannot be separated. His sneezes flash forth light, and his eyes are like the eyelids of the morning. Out of his mouth go burning torches: sparks of fire leap forth. Out of his nostrils smoke goes forth as from a boiling pot and burning rushes. His breath kindles coals, and a flame goes forth from his mouth. In his neck lodes strength, and dismay leaps before him. The folds of his flesh are joined together, firm on him and immovable. His heart is as hard as a stone, even as hard as a lower millstone. When he raises himself up, the mighty fear: because of the crashing they are bewildered. The sword that reaches him cannot avail, nor the spear, the dart or the javelin.”

This very much recalls descriptions of the Miðgarðsormr as presented in the mythological poetry. For example, the Miðgarðsormr’s immense strength is recorded in *Gylfaginning*, as when Þórr finally hooks the serpent it *brá hann við svá hart at báðir hnefar Þórs skullu út á borðinu* ‘jerked away so hard that both Thor’s fists banged down onto the gunwale’¹²¹ and when he hauled the Miðgarðsormr up onto the gunwale, Snorri described the terrifying image of Þórr staring into the eyes of the

¹²¹ Anthony Faulkes, ed., *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning* (London: University College London, 2000), 44; Faulkes, *Edda*, 47.

Miðgarðsormr spitting poison:

En þat má segja at engi hefir sá sét ógurligar sjónir er eigi mátti þat sjá er Þórr hvesti augun á orminn, en ormrinn starði neðan í mót ok blés eitrinu.

And one can claim that a person does not know what a horrible sight is who did not get to see how Thor fixed his eyes on the serpent, and the serpent stared back up at him spitting poison.¹²²

The Miðgarðsormr's extreme strength is also conveyed in *Hymiskviða* - when Þórr strikes its head with his hammer, *Hreingálcn hlumðo, | enn hölen þuto, | fór in forna | fold öll saman* 'the sea-wolf shrieked and the underwater rocks re-echoed, and all the ancient earth was collapsing.'¹²³

The portrayal of these two images from different yet related traditions surely must be perceived as an attempt to highlight the special relationship between the legends of Old Norse paganism and the biblical stories. According to Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, picture stones are our most authentic source from the Viking Age that can reveal to us (a) which myths were prevalent and (b) the elements that were important to the stone carver or patron.¹²⁴ Arguably what was most important for the artist of the 'Fishing stone' was the climax as recounted in *Hymiskviða* when the duel between Þórr and the Miðgarðsormr (good and evil) was at its most crucial point. Above this is an image of Christ wrestling with Satan, represented in animal form. Therefore, what is displayed is essentially the opposition between good and evil. Christ is put on an equal footing with Þórr, Satan with the Miðgarðsormr. The life of Þórr as it is depicted in mythological poetry differs significantly from the life of Christ and, during the period of late paganism, medieval Scandinavian sources present the conversion as a struggle between Þórr and Christ.¹²⁵ In spite of this, on the 'Fishing stone' they stand for the same purpose – the defence of good and the defeat

¹²² Faulkes, *Edda: Prologue and Glyfaginning*, 45; Faulkes, *Edda*, 47.

¹²³ Neckel and Kuhn, *Edda*, 92; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 81:

¹²⁴ Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, "Thor's Fishing Expedition," in *Words and Objects: Towards a Dialogue Between Archaeology and History of Religion*, ed. Gro Steinsland (Oslo: Norwegian University Press, 1986), 257.

¹²⁵ Lindow, *Norse Mythology*, 290.

of evil. I would add that the outcome of Þórr's fishing expedition (itself an ambiguous topic) is superfluous and thus did not interest the carver and does not alter the shared meaning of the images.¹²⁶

To summarise, the event of Þórr's struggle with the Miðgarðsormr that is depicted on the Gosforth 'Fishing stone' is exemplified by a good and evil dichotomy. The hart and serpent depicted above this recall many of the same ideas and should be viewed as a conscious attempt to bind the two traditions together.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ On the other hand, it could be argued that Þórr's defeat at the hands of the Miðgarðsormr could be treated as evidence of his inferiority to Christ, who destroyed Satan without his own sacrifice. However, I would still maintain that on the 'Fishing stone' Þórr and Christ should be regarded as equals. On this point, the sources are divided: for example, in Úlfr Uggasons's *Húsdrápa* Þórr succeeds in killing the Miðgarðsormr, while Snorri and Bragi seem to prefer the version in which the monster escapes to await a second encounter with Þórr.

¹²⁷ Aleks Pluskowski, "Apocalyptic Monsters: Animal Inspirations for the Iconography of Medieval North European Devourers," in *The Monstrous Middle Ages*, ed. Bettina Bildhauer and Robert Mills (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), 159.

Conclusion to Chapter Two

I have now demonstrated that at least four Old Norse mythological/heroic legends could have been thought by Anglo-Scandinavians to have deep intrinsic relationships with certain biblical stories and aspects of Christian thinking. Although Anglo-Scandinavian stone sculpture constitutes the basis for my arguments, I have also drawn on the Old Norse literary record as much as possible in order to supplement the sculpture and to show that these relationships have their basis earlier in time, as the mythological poems (based on oral versions and folk tales) are the most complete type of source material.

To begin with I demonstrated that the character of Völundr can be compared, in certain respects, with the Christian angels and on some levels with higher deities. On the Anglo-Scandinavian stone sculpture, Völundr was often depicted with a pair of wings and, according to the mythological literature, had the ability to fly, much like the angels of Christian provenance. The (magical) smith was a revered yet highly ambiguous and mysterious member of Old Norse society, who was often blessed with the power to make objects endowed with magical properties. Völundr was no exception in this regard and it is reported that he crafted precious jewels from the body parts of his captor's sons. Angels were similarly famous for the marvellous acts that they performed and great feats of strength that they displayed. Finally, Völundr's terrible lust for vengeance in many ways recalls the punishment dealt by gods, deities and religious figures from other Indo-European mythologies.

I then discussed Sigurðr, the hero of the tragic *Völsunga saga*, who shares a number of strong parallels with Christ, including certain salient features concerning their respective deaths and the deeds that they performed during their lifetimes. Most conspicuously, both Sigurðr and Christ slew a dragon or serpent of immense size and strength. A further parallel is provided by the fact that both Sigurðr and Christ were killed in comparable circumstances – Sigurðr was murdered by Gunnarr and Högni, his brothers-in-law, and Christ was betrayed by a close associate. Sigurðr also appears on a number of Anglo-Scandinavian stone crosses, sometimes with other figures from *Völsunga saga*, while other times he flanks a crucifixion scene and on one particular cross Sigurðr is positioned on the headstone, a place usually reserved for strictly Christian iconography.

Next I argue that Ragnarök appears remarkably similar to the Christian eschatology, something that has been agreed upon by many scholars for some time now. I hope that I have resuscitated this point of view by inserting it into a context that treats other Old Norse myths and legends in a similar fashion. One of the most obvious links between the two eschatologies must surely be the earthquakes, fires and summoning horns that are presented in both the Old Norse *Völuspá* and the biblical account of *Revelation*. There also seems to be a special relationship between Víðarr (and/or Týr although this is somewhat dubious) and Christ as both survive the great purge, owing chiefly to their innocence in the affairs of the deities/God. Also, in both traditions an evil serpent of great power plays a menacing role. Finally, as the end of the world draws ever closer, the inhabitants of the earth in both traditions resort to theft, murder, adultery and other unspeakable acts.

Finally, I discussed the Gosforth ‘Fishing stone’ which, it should be noted, has an indisputable connection to Christianity in that a widely known image of Christ and Satan is set alongside Þórr warring with the Miðgarðsormr, another widely known image of Old Norse provenance. I think this particular monument should really be regarded as one of the more unequivocal examples of syncretism as both images present us with a reasonably clear understanding of their meaning and significance.

Overall, it can be said that the mythologically-themed images on Anglo-Scandinavian crosses had a special connection with certain stories of the Bible and aspects of Christian thinking. I have argued that this connection runs deeper than has previously been acknowledged and can be observed both in the images themselves and in the broader context of mythological Old Norse literature. By giving a close analysis of each myth as it appears on the crosses, I have demonstrated that the links between Old Norse myth and biblical myth were no mere accident of history – it is my contention that they were to a certain extent deliberately chosen for this exact reason. On another level, I have also demonstrated that more links can be provided by the literary record (which may very well have been influenced by Christian thinking) and further connections can be established between the Old Norse myths, the Christian stories and mythologies, and cosmologies from other Indo-European traditions. In this chapter I have (essentially) discussed the Anglo-Scandinavian material from the north of England almost exclusively; however, there is a significant

number of mythologically-themed crosses, tombstones and picture stones from Scandinavia and the Viking Age colonies outside England that deserve some attention. It is to these non-English crosses that I turn in the next chapter.

Chapter Three

The Monuments and Picture stones (*bildstenene*) of
Scandinavia and the Isle of Man

Introduction

Having dealt with the Anglo-Scandinavian stone monuments, I will now focus on the purely Scandinavian material (and the crosses from the Isle of Man, one of the Viking colonies) that, as we shall see, is both related to northern English sculpture and distinct from it.

I begin with an acknowledgement about the definition of the term ‘runestone.’ To be clear, a runestone is a manipulated or cut piece of stone that has runes carved on it. Thus, it would make sense that all other types of stones should not be called runestones but something else. To avoid confusion, all runestones and picture stones are henceforth termed ‘stone monuments,’ regardless of whether they bear a runic inscription or not (however, it is important to note that the monuments could be arranged into three categories: one for stones with images only, one for stones with images and inscriptions, and one for stones with inscriptions only). From time to time, I may also use the term ‘runestone’ to refer to certain monuments that do bear runic inscriptions and it should be noted that monuments from the island of Gotland and the Isle of Man are hereafter referred to as ‘picture stones’ and ‘stone crosses’ respectively. In addition, the following monuments are also not conventional runestones: the Gök stone (Sö 327) is a carved piece of natural rock, Norum (Bo NYIR; 3) is a baptismal font, the stone at Tandberg is an incised carving, the Hylestad church portals and the Oseberg wagon are wood carvings and the Hørdum stone is an unworked piece of stone.

I start with the Swedish material because it is unquestionably the most extensive of all Scandinavian artefacts and quite varied. Of the sixteen Swedish stone monuments, three Old Norse legends that we have encountered in previous chapters have been represented on them. These are the legends of Sigurðr, Völundr the smith and Þórr’s famous battle with the Miðgarðsormr. About two thirds or eleven of the Swedish monuments belong to the Sigurðr category, three to Völundr and three to Þórr. In fact, from within Scandinavia it is only in Sweden that we find iconography from the Völundr legend at all. The three artefacts from Norway deal exclusively with Sigurðr, while the one Danish stone shows Þórr. The Isle of Man repertoire is entirely from the Sigurðr legend.

Many of the monuments with images from Old Norse mythology from Sweden and the Isle of Man bear runic inscriptions, though none from Norway and Denmark do. The reason behind this phenomenon is partly due to their dating and the public response to Christianity in the area (in general, it seems that Sweden appears to have been much more resistant to Christianity than Norway and Denmark), as early monuments are far more likely to contain runic inscriptions than those raised after the conversion (tenth- to eleventh-century depending on the location).¹²⁸ Furthermore, runic inscriptions on the Swedish monuments were often used as a way of declaring inheritance or lineage,¹²⁹ invoking the gods and casting spells or curses. The Norwegian material is largely either very early, as in the case of the Oseberg ship burial (c. 834) where a runic inscription was not inscribed, or well after the Viking age, as in the case of the Hylestad stave church. The Danish Hørdum stone has not been inscribed either and is one of only a few (in comparison to Sweden) Danish stone monuments. Only one stone cross from the Isle of Man has a runic inscription but it is very telling in that it declares that the carver was responsible for ‘all’ the crosses in Man.

Giving a date for each monument is difficult and in many cases I am only able to provide approximate dates that do not often satisfy.¹³⁰ In other cases, however, more precise dating is possible. For example, the wood from the Oseberg hoard have been dated to the year 834 by means of dendrochronology. On the other hand, it is virtually impossible to date many of the Swedish monuments with any great accuracy, though most are supposed to fall between the early eleventh and early twelfth centuries. It is generally thought that the crosses from the Isle of Man were completed before the year 1000, a date we can infer from a combination of archaeology and written history, as written records in the British Isles are relatively reliable from this period. The latest monuments we shall look at are probably the church portals

¹²⁸ Birgit Sawyer, *The Viking-Age Rune-Stones* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 19.

¹²⁹ Signe Horn Fuglesang, “Ekphrasis and Surviving Imagery,” *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 3 (2007): 212.

¹³⁰ See Anne-Sofie Gräslund, “Dating the Swedish Viking-Age rune stones on stylistic grounds,” in *Runes and their Secrets*, ed. Marie Stoklund, Michael Lerche Nielsen, Bente Holmberg and Gillian Fellows-Jensen (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2006), 117-41, for her analysis of the Upplandic runestones based on stylistic grounds.

recovered from Hylestad, which were probably built no later than the early thirteenth century. In general though, most of the image stones that we are dealing with come from the late tenth- to early twelfth-centuries.

In a similar way to the Anglo-Scandinavian stone crosses, the legends alluded to on some of the Scandinavian monuments invite the viewer to consider the links between Norse paganism and Judeo-Christian thought. The best example of this may well be at Hylestad where several scenes from the Sigurðr legend once decorated the doorway of a stave church. This potential example of ‘pre-figuring’ was noted by Dan Lindholm and Walther Roggenkamp in 1969 when they contended that the exterior of the stave church is related to the interior in the same way as the Old Testament relates to the New Testament, but here the Sigurðr carvings take the place of the Old Testament.¹³¹ To answer the question ‘why?’ would be a difficult endeavour, but Lindholm and Roggenkamp were convinced that newly-converted medieval Scandinavians, in their inner lives, still lived according to the legends, moods and imagery belonging to the fading pre-Christian mythology. With regard to the idea of Christian eschatology, the common people apparently continued to transmit beliefs connected with the Ragnarök tradition.¹³² One can also include many of the Swedish stone monuments that depict Judeo-Christian crosses alongside mythologically-themed iconography as evidence of the incorporation of both pagan and Christian ideas together. Some scholars have noted the high regard medieval Scandinavians had

¹³¹ Dan Lindholm and Walther Roggenkamp, *Stave Churches in Norway: Dragon Myth and Christianity in old Norwegian Architecture*, trans. Stella and Adam Bittleston (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1969), 48.

¹³² Anders Hultgård, “Old Scandinavian and Christian Eschatology,” in *Old Norse and Finnish Religions and Cultic Place-Names*, ed. Tore Ahlbäck (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell International, 1987), 344.

for St. Michael¹³³ and St. George, who it should be noted, battled against an evil dragon, much like Sigurðr.¹³⁴

¹³³ St. Michael and the dragon also appear on three Anglo-Saxon English monuments: the tympana at Southwell and at Hoveringham in Nottinghamshire and the carved stones at St. Nicholas in Ipswich (Signe Horn Fuglesang, “The Relationship Between Scandinavian and English Art,” in *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Culture*, ed. Paul Szarmach (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications Western Michigan University, 1986), 232); Aleks Pluskowski, “Apocalyptic Monsters: Animal Inspirations for the Iconography of Medieval North European Devourers,” in *The Monstrous Middle Ages*, ed. Bettina Bildhauer and Robert Mills (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), 160.

¹³⁴ Lindholm and Roggenkamp, *Stave Churches in Norway*, 51.

Part One: Sweden

Sweden has by far the highest number of runestones of all the Scandinavian lands (and colonies), totalling a figure somewhere in the several thousands.¹³⁵ However, few of these have mythologically-themed iconography and in this section I am going to discuss seventeen of those that do (that I know of). Most of these monuments are located on the eastern regions of Sweden and apart from the very early Gotland picture stones all date from the early eleventh to the early twelfth century. To be exact, a total of three monuments come from Södermanland in the south west, four from the island of Gotland in the Baltic Sea, three from Uppland, just north of Stockholm, three from Gästrikland on the eastern coast, one from Bohuslän in the west which borders the Norwegian county of Østfold and lastly a metal-mount from Östergötland in the south east of the country.¹³⁶ The Swedish section has been divided into three parts, one (long part) for Sigurðr and two (short parts) for Völundr and Þórr. Many of the monuments have runic inscriptions on them and wherever possible I have provided these in their transliterated form, their Old (West) Norse form and in Modern English. Though the inscriptions rarely relate to the images on the runestones, they do tell us a great deal about their purpose, which was often to commemorate or praise a deceased family member¹³⁷ or declare inheritance claims.¹³⁸ It also seems clear that the heathen heroes and deities were frequently invoked to either protect the souls of the deceased or compare them in likeness and deed. On some runestones, Christian messages can sometimes be detected. Occasionally, crucifixes were incorporated into the design of the image and in other cases the inscription itself can simply allude to Christianity, as in the case of the important Ramsund stone, which was raised alongside a bridge - the act of bridge-building was supposed to procure (Judeo-Christian) salvation and protection for one's soul.¹³⁹

¹³⁵ Sawyer, *The Viking-Age Rune-Stones*, 7.

Uppland alone has some 1300 examples, around half of the Swedish runestones.

¹³⁶ However, as information on the Solberga metal-mount is scanty and no photographs can be obtained I have decided not to include it in my thesis.

¹³⁷ Sawyer, *The Viking-Age Rune-Stones*, 92.

¹³⁸ Sawyer, *The Viking-Age Rune-Stones*, 47.

¹³⁹ Sawyer, *The Viking-Age Rune-Stones*, 134.

Ramsundsberget (Sö 101, Södermanland)

In Scandinavia, the earliest iconographic example of the Sigurðr legend is on the eleventh-century Ramsund stone, known in Swedish as *Ramsundsberget* (completed around the year 1030, according to Klaus Düwel),¹⁴¹ in Jäder, Södermanland and its “rather helpless” copy on the Gök boulder near Hårad.¹⁴² These two monuments illustrate the Sigurðr legend through several consecutive images, which is unusual for Viking art.¹⁴³ The *Ramsundsberget* has a runic inscription that reads:

**siripr : kiarþi : bur : þosi : muþir : alriks : tutir : urms : fur salu :
hulmkirs : faþur : sukrupar buata sis**

*Sigríðr gerði brú þessa, móðir Alriks, dóttir Orms, fyrir sálu Holmgeirs,
föður Sigrøðar, bónda síns.*

Sigríðr, Alríkr's mother, Ormr's daughter, made this bridge for the soul of Holmgeirr, father of Sigrøðr, her husbandman.¹⁴⁴

The dragon has been turned to good use, for he has become the ornamental border of the picture on which the runes are carved. To be precise, there are multiple dragons, but the creature that concerns us is the one whose body forms the base of the picture, for a small but determined figure, thought to be Sigurðr (who appears to be kneeling), plunging a sword into its rune-ornamented body.¹⁴⁵ Above and to the left a twisted tree with two birds on its branches can be clearly seen and a horse, probably Grani, with what has been identified as a chest on its back (though it might merely be a saddle) is tethered to it. To the left of this group is a seated figure, clumsily but

¹⁴⁰ Refer to Chapter One for details of the Sigurðr legend.

¹⁴¹ Klaus Düwel, “On the Sigurd representations in Great Britain and Scandinavia,” in *Languages and Cultures: Studies in Honor of Edgar C. Polomé*, ed. Mohammad Ali Jazayery and Werner Winter (Berlin; New York; Amsterdam: Mouton de Gruyter, 1988), 133.

¹⁴² Although Gs 9, discussed later, may be of slightly earlier date.

¹⁴³ Fuglesang, “Ekphrasis and Surviving Imagery,” 212.

¹⁴⁴ Erik Brate, *Södermanlands Runinskrifter* vol. I (Stockholm: Wahlström and Widstrand, 1924-36), 72.

University of Aberdeen, Scotland, *Runic Dictionary (Samnordisk runtextdatabas*, 2008) (date accessed: 13/02/2013),

<http://abdn.ac.uk/skaldic/db.php?if=runic&table=mss&id=16033>

¹⁴⁵ Hilda Ellis Davidson, “Sigurd in the Art of the Viking Age,” *Antiquity* 16 (1942): 221.

vigorously portrayed, with enormous hands. One hand is positioned near his mouth



ILLUSTRATION 30: Sö 101

(possibly his thumb and possibly indicating sucking) while the other hand holds some sort of object. To the left of this figure is a quadruped, identified by Lilla Kopár as Ótr (the brother of Reginn and Fáfnir), portrayed standing up on its hind legs and the decapitated figure of Reginn, with tongue hanging out of the mouth,¹⁴⁶ surrounded by his smith's tools (to be exact, a hammer, a pair of tongs and an anvil).

Gök (Sö 327, Södermanland)

The Gök stone (which is not a true runestone but a carved piece of natural rock), of the mid-eleventh century, has been criticized by many as a “helpless copy” of the *Ramsundsberget*, but this should not diminish its art historical value.¹⁴⁷ The main characteristics are essentially the same. A dragon or serpent forms the border for the picture except for a small figure (more stooped perhaps than the one on the *Ramsundsberget*) who is piercing its body with an enormous blade. Both the tree and horse are present although much less clearly defined and more erratic. One bird and one quadruped (identified by Klaus Düwel as an otter, probably representing Ótr with Andvari's ring in its mouth)¹⁴⁸ can also be seen in odd positions near the top and bottom borders respectively and a figure who carries smith's tools seems to be waving

¹⁴⁶ Düwel, “On the Sigurd representations,” 135.

¹⁴⁷ Düwel, “On the Sigurd representations,” 133.

¹⁴⁸ Düwel, “On the Sigurd representations,” 137.

at them in a rather haphazard fashion. A further figure seems to be prostrate to the left of the horse, but no trace of his/her head can be detected. The runic inscription has been labeled ‘nonsense’ by the Nottingham Runic Dictionary and no successful attempt to translate it has been made; nonetheless, it reads: ... **(i)urari : kaum : isaio : raisti : stai : ain : þansi : at : : þuar : fauþr : sloþn : kbrat : sin faþu... ul(i) * hano : msi +**¹⁴⁹



ILLUSTRATION 31: Sö 327

Västerljung (Sö 40, Södermanland)

The eleventh- or twelfth-century Västerljung runestone is a tall upright monument (2.96 metres), very narrow all over but thinnest at the top. The iconography is small and possibly for this reason virtually nothing has been written about it. At the extreme top there is a wheel-like cross which may suggest that it was

¹⁴⁹ University of Aberdeen, Scotland, *Runic Dictionary (Samnordisk runtextdatabas*, 2008) (date accessed: 13/02/2013), <http://abdn.ac.uk/skaldic/db.php?if=runic&table=mss&id=16232>

raised in a Christian context. However, the dragon or serpent (represented in a knot-like fashion reminiscent of the Jellinge stone (DR 41, Nørrejylland) commissioned by Haraldr 'Bluetooth' Gormsson) that has been depicted below is without doubt the

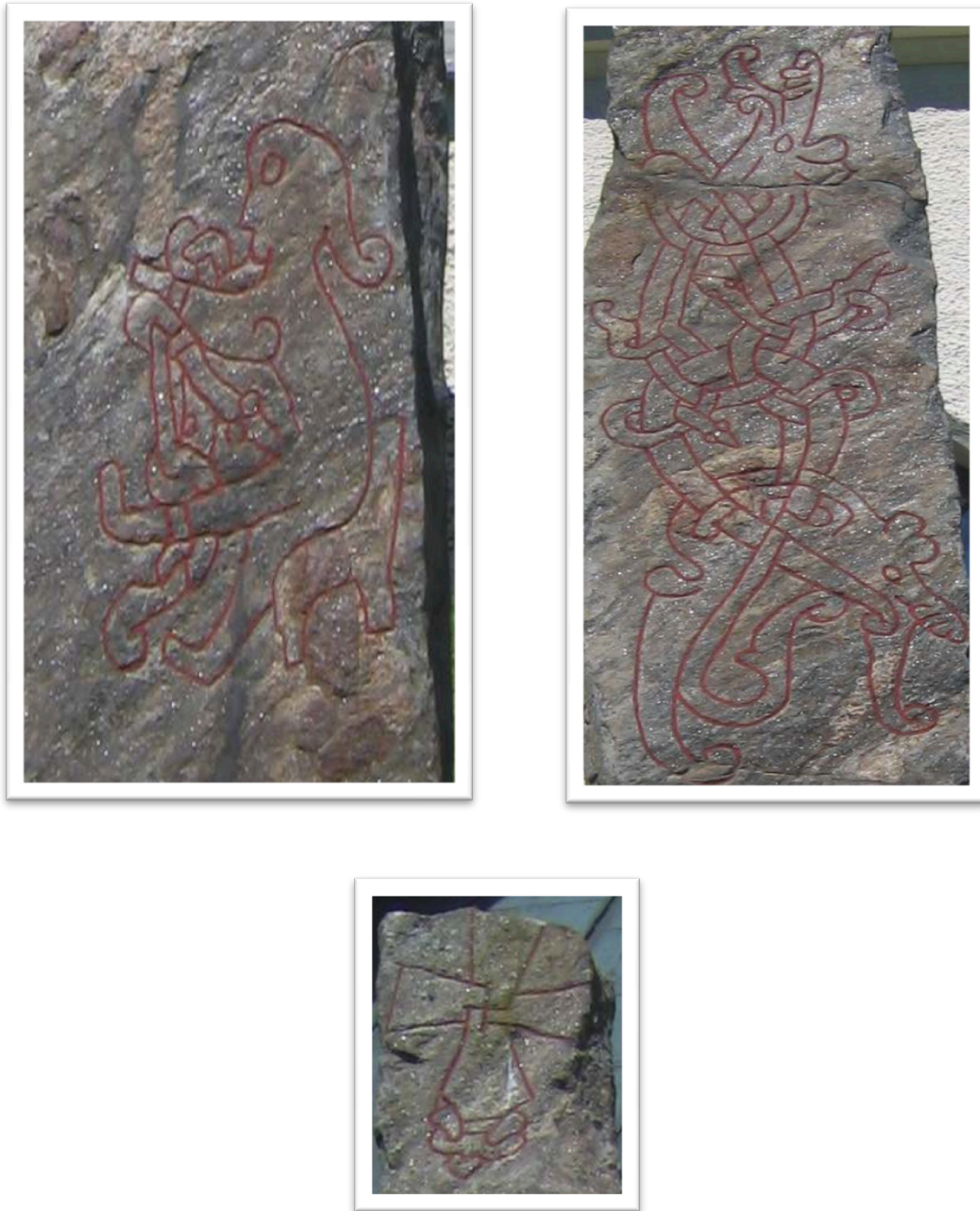


ILLUSTRATION 32: Sö 40

dominant feature of the runestone. The inscription, which has been written on the opposite side, reads as follows:

**haunefr + raisti * at * kairmar * fapur * sin + haa * ir intapr * o *
þiusti * skamals * hiak * runar þarsi +**

Hónefr reisti at Geirmar, föður sinn. Hann er endaðr á Þjústi. Skammhals hjó rúnar þessar.

Hónefr raised (the stone) in memory of Geirmarr, his father. He met his end in Thjústr. Skammhals cut these runes.^{150 151}

The remaining image is of a man either sitting or kneeling, who seems to be concerned with some sort of object or activity. According to Lilla Kopár, this figure represents Sigurðr's brother-in-law Gunnarr, who has been bound and is being attacked by snakes.¹⁵²

Klinte Hunninge I, Gotland

On the eighth- or ninth-century picture stone Klinte Hunninge I a man thought to be Gunnarr lies within a rectangular frame to the left in the main panel. He is surrounded by snakes and a woman approaches from the right. No harp at his feet has been detected, however. A series of shapes has been set above the figure that resemble a serpent of some description though this is far from clear. A Viking ship in full sail with warriors on board has been depicted in the centre. In the top panel, separated from the main scene by a crisscross design are two warriors with swords and shields, one holding a large ring (that Lilla Kopár believed referred to the Völsungar legend),¹⁵³ one rider with a long spear, a woman proffering a drinking horn and a quadruped. At the bottom, below the possible Gunnarr, are six figures. One, a woman, proffers a drinking horn on the left hand side. Next to her is a man who appears to be holding a serpent. In the middle are three archers and on the far right hand side are the two remaining figures, though their purpose here is not clear. According to Signe Horn Fuglesang, there may be several related scenes on other Scandinavian and Anglo-Scandinavian monuments: on the lower right hand corner of Ardre VIII, on the Oseberg wagon and possibly a panel identified as Loki's punishment on the Gosforth cross.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁰ University of Aberdeen, Scotland, *Runic Dictionary (Samnordisk runtextdatabas*, 2008) (date accessed: 13/02/2013), <http://abdn.ac.uk/skaldic/db.php?if=runic&table=mss&id=15982>

¹⁵¹ *Skammhals* or 'Short-neck.'

¹⁵² Lilla Kopár, *Gods and Settlers: The Iconography of Norse Mythology in Anglo-Scandinavian Sculpture* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 54.

¹⁵³ Lilla Kopár, *Gods and Settlers*, 149.

¹⁵⁴ Fuglesang, "Ekphrasis and Surviving Imagery," 204.

Drävle (U 1163, Uppland)

The Drävle stone, erected in the eleventh century, shows what is thought to be Sigurðr piercing the serpent from below. Similarly to Sö 101 and Sö 327, Drävle has a serpent border that snakes around the major part of the stone forming an upright rectangular shape. A figure, who is clearly kneeling, positioned at the top of the



ILLUSTRATION 33: Klinte Hunninge I



ILLUSTRATION 34: U 1163

runestone pierces the body of the serpent from below. Klaus Düwel is convinced that this figure represents Sigurðr.¹⁵⁵ Below this to the left is another figure who is wearing a large ring and appears to be running and who may have shoulder-length hair. It is unclear what function this figure is performing or if he/she is related to the serpent slayer above. There is possibly another figure (or perhaps a bird) to the right,

¹⁵⁵ Düwel, "On the Sigurd representations," 139.

but I am unsure of this due to his/her diminutive stature and lack of identifying features. Sue Margeson thought that this scene probably represents the wooing of Brynhildr.¹⁵⁶ The rest of U 1163 has been decorated with rather complex interlacing curves that join with the body of the serpent below. The inscription, much like Sö 101 and Sö 327 in that it is written along the serpent's body, reads:

**uiþbiurn × ok : karlunkr : ok × erinker : ok × nas(i) × litu × risa × stii
× þina × eftir × eriibiun × f[apu]r × sii × snelan**

Viðbjörn ok Körlungr ok Eringeirr/Eringerðr ok Nasi/Nesi létu reisa stein þenna eptir Erinbjörn, föður sinn snjallan.

Viðbjörn and Karlungr and Eringeirr/Eringerðr and Nasi/Nesi had this stone raised in memory of Erinbjörn, their able father.¹⁵⁷

U 1163 stands in an 'old tradition' of Scandinavian composition implied by the picture poems and picture stones like Ardre VIII and the Oseberg wagon.¹⁵⁸

Stora Ramsjö (U 1175, Uppland)

The Stora Ramsjö runestone, of the eleventh century, shows Sigurðr piercing the serpent from below (although this has been disputed).¹⁵⁹ The composition of the image is rather like that of U 1163 in that the serpent's body forms an upright rectangular border and the sword-bearer is positioned at the top of the runestone. However, U 1175 is unfortunately rather badly preserved and finding subtle details from photographs has been difficult. Perhaps because of its imperfect condition, the runic inscription is nonsensical and cannot be understood.¹⁶⁰ I suspect that, like U 1163, there are figures flanking Sigurðr on each side, but one cannot be sure. The tail/head of the serpent terminates in a series of complex interlacing strands that surround what seems to be a Celtic cross. However, due to the sorry condition of U 1175 this cannot be confirmed.

¹⁵⁶ Sue Margeson, "On the Iconography of the Manx Crosses," in *The Viking Age in the Isle of Man*, ed. Christine Fell, Peter Foote, James Graham-Campbell and Robert Thompson (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1983), 193.

¹⁵⁷ University of Aberdeen, Scotland, *Runic Dictionary (Samnordisk runtextdatabas*, 2008) (date accessed: 13/02/2013), <http://abdn.ac.uk/skaldic/db.php?if=runic&table=mss&id=17973>

¹⁵⁸ Fuglesang, "Ekphrasis and Surviving Imagery," 214.

¹⁵⁹ Düwel, "On the Sigurd representations," 139.

¹⁶⁰ 'Nonsensinskrift, runliknande tecken,' University of Aberdeen, Scotland, *Runic Dictionary (Samnordisk runtextdatabas*, 2008) (date accessed: 13/02/2013), <http://abdn.ac.uk/skaldic/db.php?if=runic&table=mss&id=17985>



ILLUSTRATION 35: U 1175

Österfärnebo (Gs 2, Gästrikland)

The eleventh-century monument at Österfärnebo (reconstructed) shows a considerable assortment of figures and animals as well as Sigurd, who is characteristically piercing the serpent from his hiding pit. According to Klaus Düwel, the figure's sword is much too short to reach the serpent's body and thus could not represent Sigurd,¹⁶¹ though how he has reached this conclusion I do not know as the top section of the runestone is completely missing. On each side of Sigurd are figures who hold pole-like objects, but what they truly are is unknown as the top section of

¹⁶¹ Düwel, "On the Sigurd representations," 139.

Gs 2 is missing. On the left side of the monument there is an animal that looks like a mythological flying beast, but one cannot be certain of this. Below this is a figure who points with one hand and holds a ring or chain in the other. On the opposite side there is a quadruped (presumably a dog) and another pointing figure.



ILLUSTRATION 36: Gs 2

Below these is a two-legged animal (or possibly a human), but which type is impossible to know as the head has been scratched away. In the centre of the image is an ornamental cross or tree of a rather simple design. Like U 1163 and U 1175, the serpent's body has been used to form the border for the main panel and also contains the (incomplete) runic inscription which reads:

**[ily]iki : ok : f[uluiki × ok : þurkair- × sin × snilan] : kuþ ilubi
on(t)[a]**

Illugi ok Fullugi ok Þorgeirr sinn snjallan. Guð hjalpi anda.

Illugi and Fullugi and Thorgeirr ... their able ... May God help (his) spirit.

Much like U 1163 in Drävle, Gs 2 stands in an old tradition of Scandinavian composition implied by the ‘picture poems’ and picture stones like Ardre VIII and the Oseberg wagon.¹⁶²

Årsunda (Gs 9, Gästrikland)

There is very little written about the Årsunda stone (erected circa 1000), although it seems obvious that Sigurðr is slaying Fáfnir from below, as once argued by Klaus Düwel among others.¹⁶³ Once again, the serpent’s body forms the frame for the main scene and acts as the background on which the following runic inscription (reconstructed from a 1690 drawing)¹⁶⁴ is written:

(i)nu-r : sun : r[u]p[u](r) at × [uili](t)... ...[ris:]t eftir : þurker : brupu[r] : sin : ok : kype=lfí : muþur : sina : uk] : eft[i]r : [a]sbiorn : o[k] : o]ifub

Önun[d]r(?), sonr <rupur>(?) at <uilit...> ... eptir Þorgeir, bróður sinn, ok Guðelfi, móður sína ok eptir Ásbjörn ok <oifub>.

Önundr(?)’s son, in memory of in memory of Thorgeirr, his brother and Guðelfr, his mother, and in memory of Ásbjörn and [...]¹⁶⁵

The small figure of Sigurðr, who this time seems to be doing the splits rather than kneeling, plunges what must be a sword into the serpent’s body though the sword has been well worn away. To the right is a figure who seems to be looking up at Sigurðr and holds a ring-like object in his/her right hand, very similar to the lowest figure on the left hand side on Gs 2, also in Gästrikland. Apart from these two figures, there is a great amount of floral decoration. A hybrid cross/tree seems to emerge out of the gap between the serpent’s head and tail and both figures seem somehow connected to the tendrils, which act like branches.

¹⁶² Fuglesang, “Ekphrasis and Surviving Imagery,” 214.

¹⁶³ Düwel, “On the Sigurd representations,” 139.

¹⁶⁴ Henrik Schüek, “Två Sigurdsristingar,” *Fornvännen* 27 (Stockholm: Swedish National Heritage Board, 1932), 257-265.

¹⁶⁵ University of Aberdeen, Scotland, *Runic Dictionary (Samnordisk runtextdatabas*, 2008) (date accessed: 13/02/2013), <http://abdn.ac.uk/skaldic/db.php?if=runic&table=mss&id=18354>



ILLUSTRATION 37: Gs 9

Ockelbo (Gs 19, Gästrikland)

The eleventh-century stone at Ockelbo is one of the more detailed Scandinavian monuments, though much of it has unfortunately eroded (indeed, most of it is actually a copy of the original that was destroyed in a fire in 1904). Once again the serpent's body forms a border for the action and Sigurðr is again positioned at the top of the panel, piercing the serpent from below, though Klaus Düwel has concluded that the serpent can no longer be recognised because of its fragmentary state of preservation.¹⁶⁶ The runic inscription, which is cut short at the end, reads:

**[blesa × lit × raisa × stain×kumbl × þesa × fa(i)(k)(r)(n) × ef(t)ir × sun
sin × suar×aufþa × fr(i)þelfr × u-r × muþir × ons × siionum × kan :
inuart : þisa × bhum : arn : (i)omuan sun : (m)(i)e(k)]**

Blesa lét reisa steinkuml þessi fagru eptir son sinn Svarthöfða. Friðelfr v[a]r móðir hans <siionum> <kan> <inuart> <þisa> <bhum> <arn> <iomuan> son <miek>.

Blesa had these fair stone-monuments raised in memory of his son Svarthöfði. Friðelfr was his mother. ...¹⁶⁷

Gs 19 shows Sigurðr piercing the serpent from below. However, all immediate artistry below Sigurðr has been completely worn away by the elements except for sporadic limbs and odd shapes. It is clear though that there is a horse in the upper centre of the image, which could well be Grani, although no chest has been detected. To the horse's left a pair of figures are sitting together and one has one hand lifted to his/her mouth. This could easily be Sigurðr nursing his burnt thumb and Reginn surreptitiously plotting his downfall. Below is an animal, but I am unable to identify it. To the right is a figure who holds some sort of longish object. On the opposite side is another figure who grips some of the tendril interlace and faces the object-bearing figure opposite. Above there may be another type of animal, but it is too worn away to tell. In the centre there is floral decoration, but it is less tree-like than Gs 2 or U 1175 and I cannot find a cross at all.

¹⁶⁶ Düwel, "On the Sigurd representations," 139.

¹⁶⁷ University of Aberdeen, Scotland, *Runic Dictionary (Samnordisk runtextdatabas*, 2008) (date accessed: 13/02/2013), <http://abdn.ac.uk/skaldic/db.php?if=runic&table=mss&id=18364>



ILLUSTRATION 38: Gs 19

Norum (Bo NYIR; 3, Bohuslän)

Norum in Bohuslän is not a runestone, but a baptismal font (or at least has been fashioned into one since its creation) made of slate and dates from around the year 1100. On one of the long sides, below a runic message, a figure is straddled by some

complex interlacing designs. The short runic inscription that was partially destroyed in a cemetery fire in 1847 reads:

svæn : kærðe <m>

Sveinn gerði m[ik](?).

Sveinn made me(?).¹⁶⁸

These designs could represent Fáfnir, though this is far from certain. Accordingly, the figure could easily represent Sigurðr, though I cannot find a sword and he certainly does not seem to be attacking or defeating the serpent (if it is one) in any way. According to Lilla Kopár, the carving could represent Gunnarr's imprisonment in the snake pit or the pattern may have been borrowed from pre-Christian iconography to represent a tormented soul in Hell.¹⁶⁹ Regardless, the Norum baptismal font is representative of one of many potential Sigurðr carvings.



ILLUSTRATION 39: Bo NYIR; 3

¹⁶⁸ University of Aberdeen, Scotland, *Runic Dictionary (Samnordisk runtextdatabas*, 2008) (date accessed: 13/02/2013), <http://abdn.ac.uk/skaldic/db.php?if=runic&table=mss&id=18420>

¹⁶⁹ Kopár, *Gods and Settlers*, 54.

Ardre VIII, Gotland

The picture stone Ardre VIII, dated variously between the eighth and tenth centuries, has often been described as the best visual comparison to the Völundr-themed Anglo-Scandinavian carvings.¹⁷¹ According to David Wilson and Ole Klindt-Jensen, at the top there is thought by to be a representation of Valhöll, similar to the Tjängvide stone but more defined. An eight-legged horse (possibly Sleipnir) is shown above in a rather hurried style. Above is what seems to be a dead warrior and in front a group of people are preoccupied with a pole-like object. At the bottom a Viking ship in full sail is depicted and a lookout and a helmsman can be clearly identified. To the top right two men are kneeling with a sack-like object in a house (?) and another figure stands outside. Below are two men in knee-length tunics who lie side by side, head to toe, tied together by interlacing ribbons.¹⁷² A woman in a long dress is next to them carrying a sword in each hand. Below them are two soldiers in knee-length tunics and swords, one with a raised hand. To the right is a man in a rectangular frame with four snakes coiled around this. To the left stands a woman holding a drinking horn in each hand. The woman has been identified as Sigyn, waiting to catch the venom that would otherwise fall on her imprisoned husband Loki. There is a quadruped and a figure of a woman holding a horn to the immediate left which may be related. In the centre of the field is a scene thought to be from the legend of Völundr.¹⁷³ The smithy with a curved roof of terminating serpent heads is in the centre and a pair of hammers and tongs are inside. To the left a man disguised as a bird flies away from the woman, probably Böðvildr, who has been depicted with the trailing dress, plait and angular features of the ‘Yorkshire women.’¹⁷⁴ According to

¹⁷⁰ Refer to Chapter One, p. 33, for details of the Völundr legend.

¹⁷¹ Sune Lindqvist (*Gotlands Bildsteine* (Stockholm: Wahlström and Widstrand, 1942), 139) gives an eighth-century date, whereas Lori Eschleman (*The Monumental Stones of Gotland: A Study in Style and Motif* (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 1983), 306-08) and Lisbeth Imer (“Gotlandske billedsten: datering af Lindqvists gruppe C og D,” *Aarbøger for nordisk oldkyndighed og historie* vol. 2001 (2004), 477-111) give ninth- and tenth-century dates respectively.

¹⁷² David Wilson and Ole Klindt-Jensen, *Viking Art* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1966), 81.

¹⁷³ Fuglesang, “Ekphrasis and Surviving Imagery,” 204.

¹⁷⁴ James Lang, “Sigurd and Weland in Pre-Conquest Carving from Northern England,” *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal* 48 (1976): 91.

James Lang, Völundr seems to be contained in a flying device very similar to the Leeds-Sherburn type, with wings, wedge-shaped tail and bird-head.¹⁷⁵ To the right are the bodies of Níðuðr's young *húnnar*.¹⁷⁶



ILLUSTRATION 40: Ardre VIII

Stora Hammars III, Gotland

The picture stone Stora Hammars III from Lärbro parish (also known as Lärbro St. Hammars III) depicts what is thought to be Völundr as he is transformed into a winged bird-like creature. This scene has been carved at the very top of the picture stone beneath another figural scene that is almost completely worn away. Völundr is here represented in the form of an enormous creature with large wings, though a

¹⁷⁵ Lang, “Sigurd and Weland,” 91.

¹⁷⁶ ‘Cubs.’

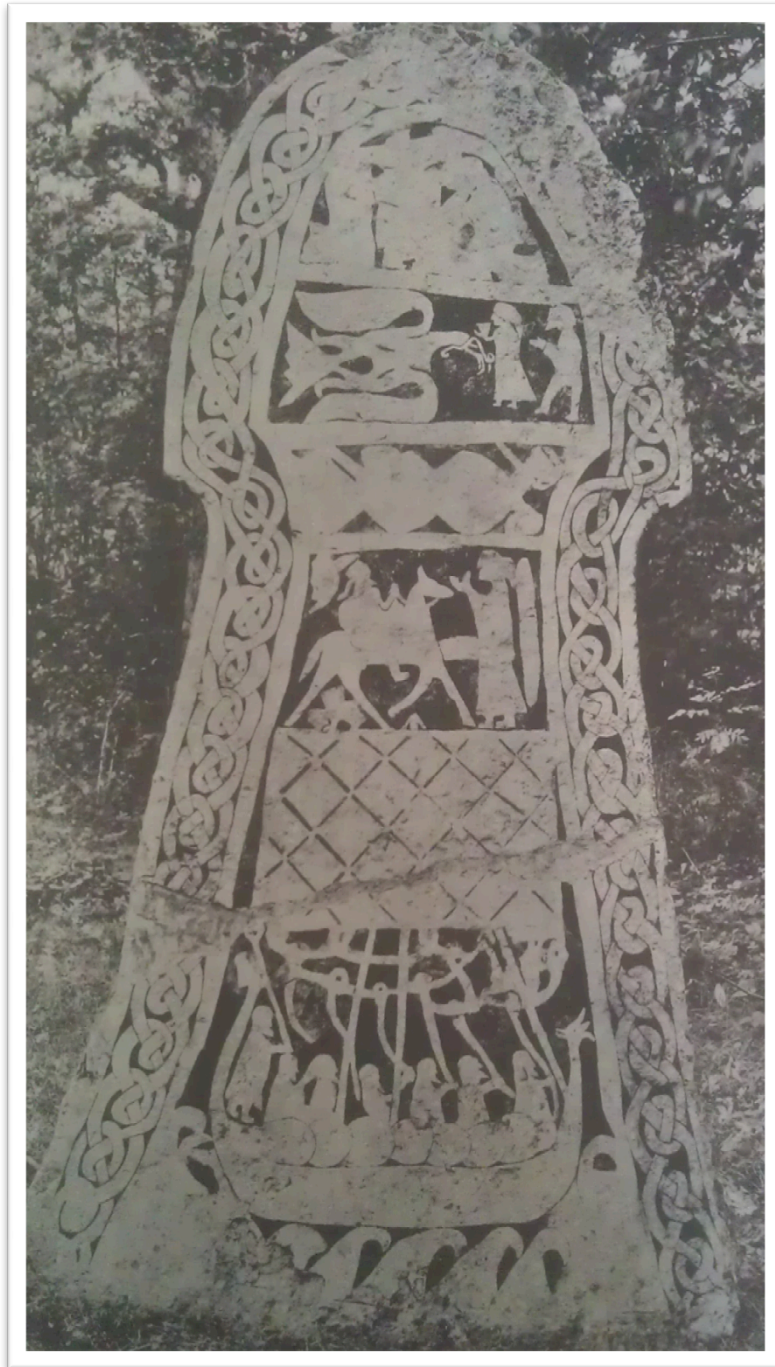


ILLUSTRATION 41: Stora Hammars III

man's legs are clearly attached to the abdomen. It does seem as though the artist has deliberately carved elements of both man and bird to document Völundr's flight from captivity. Facing the horizontal pseudo-beast 'Völundr' is a woman, who has been identified as Böðvildr, and a man though his identity is less clear (possibly Níðuðr). Below is a scene of a horse and rider confronted by a figure with a raised hand. They

seem almost to be standing on the mast of a very large Viking ship in full sail at sea with warriors equipped with rounded shields.

Alskog kyrka (G 108, Gotland)

A stone cist panel from Alskog church and the picture stone G 113 have recently been reappraised by Sigmund Oehrl who thought that it alludes to the Völundr legend.¹⁷⁷ According to Oehrl, four water birds and two female figures surround a large winged ‘bird-suit,’ while a smith with bent knees is forging rings next to a beheaded figure. The latter is clearly a reference to Völundr’s revenge on Níðuðr and his sons, though I am unsure of these birds and the accompaniments. In

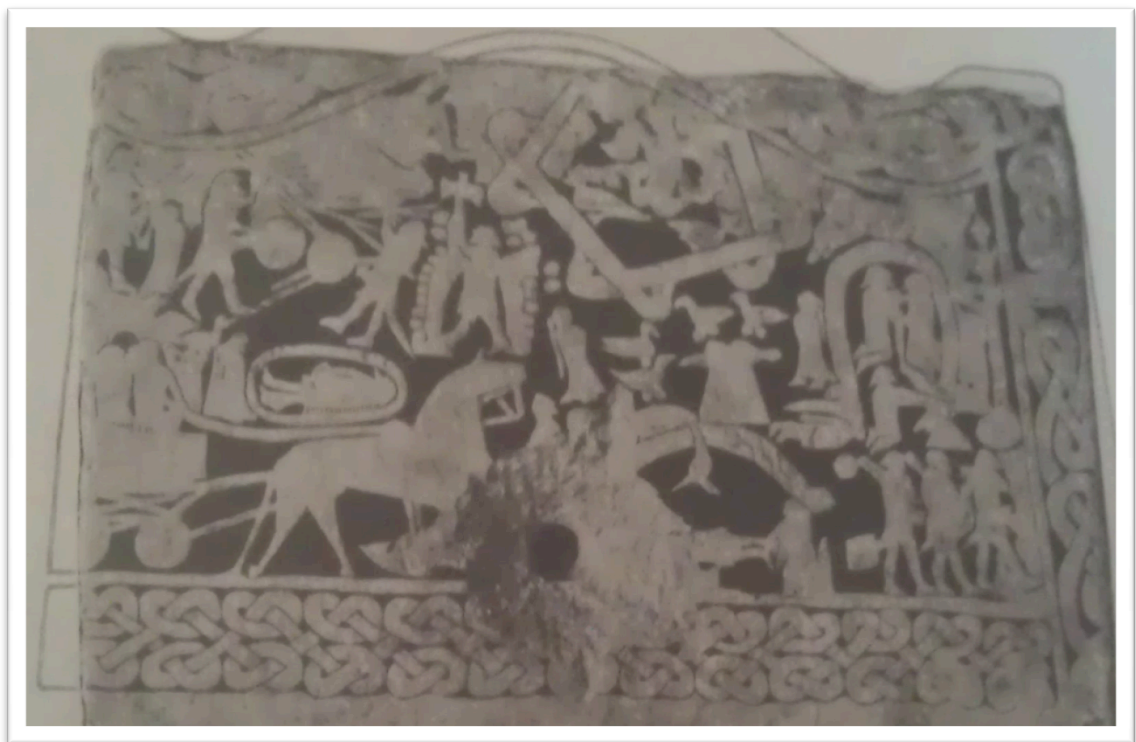


ILLUSTRATION 42: G 108

Oehrl’s view this group refers to the swan maiden story (i.e. the prologue to the revenge-and-escape myth) while the bird-suit may be an allusion to the dual nature of the swan maidens, though this is by no means a singularly held view. The rest of the panel is very active, one might even say confusing. To the right of the ‘saucer-like’ indentation half a human body is visible with the tips of his/her feet pointing

¹⁷⁷ Sigmund Oehrl, “Wieland der Schmied auf dem Kistenstein von Alskog kyrka und dem Runenstein Ardre kyrka III. Zur partiellen Neulesung und Interpretation zweier gotländischer Bildsteine,” *Analecta Septentrionalia: RGA-E-Band 65* (2009): 542-550.

downwards. There is a woman who is facing the man who sits on something (a brick or log seat). Sune Lindqvist identified these figures as Loki and Sigyn respectively.¹⁷⁸ On the bottom right hand corner three warriors march in a line. On the diagonally opposite corner from the left is one upright figure with a pole-like object next to a kneeling figure and to the right two fully armed warriors are fighting. Further to the right again is a figure holding what appears to be an axe. In a clockwise direction is a crouching figure next to another figure inside what appears to be a pit or ritual space. Below again is a horse and wagon carrying two figures.

Ardre III (G 113, Gotland)

According to Sigmund Oehrl, the eleventh-century picture stone Ardre III also depicts Völundr twice.¹⁷⁹ The (main) foreground of the panel is dominated by a series of symmetrical interlacing loops that terminate in what appear to be serpent's or dragon's heads. There are two small figures situated on this panel. One is in the centre and seems to be holding something. Oehrl has identified this as Völundr forging a ring. The other figure is positioned in the bottom left of the panel and though I am unable to make out any fine details, in Oehrl's view this is a representation of the bound and tied Völundr. The figures are certainly composed in an unusual way, which Oehrl has identified as depicting the characteristics of a bird, and I think that this may be possible, though no further identifying features can be discerned. There is also a runic inscription written around the edges of the stone that reads:

÷ **utar + ak + kairuatr + ak + aiuatr + þar + setu + stain + ebtir +
likna(t) + faþur ÷ sen +
÷ raþialbr + ak + kairaiu(t)- + þair kiarþu + merki + kuþ + ubtir +
man + saaran ÷ likraibr + risti + runar**

*Óttarr ok Geirhvatr ok Eihvatr þeir settu stein eptir Líknhvat, föður sinn.
Ráðþjalfr ok Geirnjót[r] þeir gerðu merki góð eptir mann snaran.
Líknreifr risti rúnar.*

Óttarr and Geirhvatr and Eihvatr, they placed the stone in memory of Líknhvatr, their father. Ráðþjalfr and Geirnjótr, they made the good landmark in memory of ... man. Líknreifr carved the runes.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ Lindqvist, *Gotlands Bildsteine* vol. I, 14.

¹⁷⁹ Oehrl, "Wieland der Schmied," 550-552.

¹⁸⁰ University of Aberdeen, Scotland, *Runic Dictionary (Samnordisk runtextdatabas*, 2008) (date accessed: 13/02/2013), <http://abdn.ac.uk/skaldic/db.php?if=runic&table=mss&id=15299>



ILLUSTRATION 43: G 113

Ardre VIII, Gotland

Below the Völundr scene are what appear to be two boats and two oars, thought to depict Þórr and Hymir fishing from a boat with a bull's head as bait (though Sune Lindqvist had his doubts about this).¹⁸² Below is a creature with five heads. The other scene also portrays two men fishing from a boat and one has speared a fish. Below is a fishing net. At the base of the field in the centre is a representation of a stable in which are a cow and two men, one of whom carries a club over his shoulder. Just outside the stable is another man who appears to be untying the cow's halter.¹⁸³

Altuna (U 1161, Uppland)

The long and narrow eleventh-century Altuna runestone shows what is thought to be Þórr's fight with the Miðgarðsormr on a side panel. Þórr stands at the top with his feet clearly penetrating the boat in order to pull the Miðgarðsormr onto the gunwale. He is holding Mjöllnir in one hand and some fishing line in the other. The Miðgarðsormr, represented by a series of knots and interlacing curls, is depicted below struggling with the mighty god. As far as can be discerned, Hymir is missing (though Hymir is not always present in the Old Norse literary record). On the opposite side of the stone the rather long runic inscription reads:

**uifasþr + fulkahþr + kuþar + litu + resa + sþten + rþti + sen + faþur
+ ulfasþ + arfast beþi + feþrkag + burnu + e(n) ...(r) + bali + fresþen
+ liþ + lifsþen... .. Q beþi + feþrkag + burnu + e(n) ... + bali + fresþen
+ liþ + lifsþen**

Véfastr, Folkaðr, Guðvarr(?) létu reisa stein eptir sinn föður Holmfast, Arnfast.

*Báðir feðgar brunnu, en [þei]r Balli, Freysteinn, lið Lifstein[s ristu].
Ö Báðir feðgar brunnu, en [þeir] Balli, Freysteinn, lið Lifsteinn.*

Véfastr, Folkaðr, Guðvarr(?) had the stone raised in memory of their father Holmfastr, (and in memory of) Arnfastr.

¹⁸¹ Refer to Chapter One for details of Þórr and the Miðgarðsormr.

¹⁸² Lindqvist, *Gotlands Bildsteine* vol. I, 95-6.

¹⁸³ Wilson and Klindt-Jensen, *Viking Art*, 82.

Both father and son were burned, and Balli (and) Freysteinn, of Lífsteinn's retinue, carved. Both father and son were burned, and Balli (and) Freysteinn (and) Lífsteinn (carved?).¹⁸⁴



ILLUSTRATION 44: U 1161

¹⁸⁴ University of Aberdeen, Scotland, *Runic Dictionary (Samnordisk runtextdatabas*, 2008) (date accessed: 13/02/2013), <http://abdn.ac.uk/skaldic/db.php?if=runic&table=mss&id=17971>

Conclusion

It should first be acknowledged that Sigurðr was an extremely popular choice of subject on the Swedish runestones. It is therefore worth asking the question of why this is. A definitive answer may never be reached, but there are a number of possibilities. One of these possibilities may be that eleventh- and twelfth-century Swedes, as a response to the growing dominance of Christianity, saw connections between the old and new religions. I argued that this was the case in the previous chapter, that Sigurðr and Jesus Christ share a number of characteristics and underwent similar experiences (to a certain degree). I therefore think that it is very possible that (some) people were aware of these parallels and raised these runestones in the knowledge that both sets of deities were being appeased. However, it is impossible to know if all the runestones in Sweden were raised for this purpose, though I would suggest that many, if not most, were. Some of the Sigurðr-themed runestones are more explicitly Christian than others – for example, the inscription on Sö 101 refers to the *sál* ‘soul’ of the deceased Holmgeirr.¹⁸⁵ In addition, U 1175 and Gs 2 have been decorated with what we can reliably call Christian crosses. It should be noted that all three runestones were raised in the eleventh century and should be regarded as relatively early (certainly not late) and are located in the regions of Sweden where other Sigurðr-themed runestones can be found.

Many of the Sigurðr-themed stones in Sweden have been composed/designed in a similar way to each other and this cannot be regarded as mere accident. Fáfñir has been used to form the border for seven of the ten runestones and, of these seven, two (Sö 101 and Sö 327) depict Sigurðr stabbing the dragon from outside the serpent border, while the other five (U 1163, U 1175, Gs 2, Gs 9 and Gs 19) depict him stabbing it from the centre. The absence of the serpent border on the remaining three monuments seems mainly to be an issue of space, as Sö 40 and Bo NYIR 3 are very narrow and very small respectively, and artistic style in the case of Klinte Hunninge I, a Gotlandic stone that does not conform to the rest of the group. Further to the point, Sö 40 and Klinte Hunninge I depict Gunnarr in the snake pit and probably did not require a serpent of the same scale. With regard to the eight runestones that depict Sigurðr (and not Gunnarr) there is an arguable style/method to the way he has been

¹⁸⁵ Sawyer, *The Viking-Age Rune-Stones*, 140.

carved. The clearest example is probably on Sö 101 where Sigurðr crouches and appears to be wearing some kind of helmet or a conical cap (represented by a pointed cranium). A helmeted Sigurðr can also be seen on Sö 327, U 1163, U 1175 and Gs 9. The figure of Sigurðr on the other Gästrikland monuments are too distorted to be sure that he wears a helmet. Sö 101, Sö 327, Gs 2 and Gs 19 or half of the runestones that depict Sigurðr also have an array of animals and beasts often with unnatural oddly-shaped heads and bodies and distinct large eyes (some possibly related to the legend, some not) that fill the empty spaces that the serpent border provides. Of these, Sö 101 and Gs 19 depict horses that we could well identify as Grani. We can also infer that where birds appear there is a reference to the part of the legend in which birds inform Sigurðr of Reginn's treachery (in *Völsunga saga*, immediately after Sigurðr roasts the heart of Fáfnir). There are also a number of artistic links that can be made between the Swedish Sigurðr-themed runestones and their counterparts in Northumbria.

The most significant and unusual thing to say about the Völundr stones is that all extant examples come from the island of Gotland, located in the Baltic Sea about ninety kilometres from the Swedish mainland. In a way, all discussion of the Völundr stones in Gotland must begin with *Ardre VIII*, a *bildsten* with more mythologically-themed (and not simply Völundr) iconography than many of the runestones on the mainland combined. However, all four picture stones are valuable in their own right. One of the most important aspects common to all four is the unfortunate lack of precise dating. It is virtually impossible to date any of the stones with any precision and so we must be content to assign them to anywhere between the eighth to tenth centuries. These limits, in themselves, are very important for they tell us that they predate (a) many (possibly all) of the other Swedish runestones (including all those that are Sigurðr-themed), (b) most Northumbrian mythologically-themed stone crosses (with a possible few exceptions) and (c) the advent of Christianity in Scandinavia. We are then left with a small group of (very) early stone monuments that not only depict various scenes of Old Norse mythological provenance, but can also be said to be purely heathen in design. It is very interesting that one to two centuries later across the North Sea in northern England we know of at least six stone crosses that depict, in many respects, the Gotlandic version of Völundr bound up with what I argued were Christian ideas/terms. To try to establish a direct connection between Gotland and Northumbria may ultimately be unreachable, but it does demonstrate that

knowledge of the Völundr legend was vivid and spread beyond the Scandinavian kingdoms and additionally the Anglo-Scandinavian artists were aware of the Gotlandic picture stones, either by memory or preservation on portable artworks and their appearance in some skaldic poetry, which were used as sources of inspiration.

With regard to the Þórr stones, it is interesting that only two examples of this legend are extant from Sweden, especially when one considers that Þórr was arguably one of the most popular deities during the late Viking Age. However this may not seem so surprising when it is learned that invocations to Þórr only appear on four or five runestones in total in the whole of Scandinavia (three from Denmark (DR 110, DR 209 and DR 220), one from Västergötland (Vg 150) and one from Södermanland (Sö 140)).¹⁸⁶ Furthermore, revised interpretations of the latter two Swedish runestones with runic inscriptions that mention Þórr suggest that they are explicitly pagan when it is generally agreed that runestones are Christian monuments. Nonetheless, Þórr was seen as one of the gods more acceptable to Christianity and a representative of the fight between good and evil, and Þórr has probably been endowed with Christian meaning on the early tenth-century Gosforth 'Fishing stone' in Northumbria. Since U 1161 has a runic inscription and is of eleventh-century date we can suggest that there may well be a parallel here between Þórr and Jesus Christ, who also fought and destroyed an evil serpent. Ardre VIII is more enigmatic. Its potential very early creation and slightly unclear iconography precludes a definitive judgment, though it may eliminate any association with Christian influence, which distinguishes it greatly from U 1161.

¹⁸⁶ Sawyer, *The Viking-Age Rune-Stones*, 128.

Part Two: Norway and Denmark

There are three mythologically-themed Norwegian carvings and one Danish carving that are of interest to us. Of these four artefacts, one is a stone sculpture, one is a stave church portal carving, one is a carving on the side of a wooden wagon and one of them is (more) a lump of rock (than a runestone or stone cross). The three from Norway, in order of discussion, are the Tandberg incised carving from Buskerud, the Hylestad stave church portals of Aust-Agder and the Oseberg wagon from Vestfold. The Danish contribution is the Hørdum stone located in the Thisted municipality. The three Norwegian carvings all show elements of the Sigurðr legend whereas the Hørdum stone involves Þórr's encounter with the Miðgarðsormr. Although Sweden (particularly the east coast) is undoubtedly the home of the surviving mythologically-themed monuments in Scandinavia, it could be argued that the Hylestad church portals and the Oseberg wagon panels are two of the most widely circulated examples of the Sigurðr legend represented in the art historical record. It can also be argued that these two artefacts are both very different from the Swedish runestones, both in their medium and the way in which Sigurðr and others are portrayed – most conspicuously, that they are both wooden carvings and are now fixed permanently in museums.

Tandberg incised carving (N 1..., Buskerud)

Four fragments of the Tandberg picture stone, completed around the year 1100, have survived and one of these is thought to depict Fáfnir, as first identified by Emil Ploss in 1966.¹⁸⁷ Though Sigurðr is missing we can be fairly certain Fáfnir was the intended subject because of its similarity to other Scandinavian picture stones and one important attribute, a sword. For example, a comparison can be drawn with the images on the axe from Suzdal at Vladimir Oblast, Russia. James Lang also noted that the Tandberg carving shows the slain Fáfnir with the sword still transfixing the body in an identical way to the early tenth-century Kirby Hill cross in North Yorkshire.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷ Emil Ploss, *Siegfried-Sigurd, Der Drachenkämpfer* (Köln and Graz: Böhlau Verlag, 1966), 64; Ploss, *Sigedfried-Sigurd*, 85.

¹⁸⁸ Lang, "Sigurd and Weland," 86.

Hylestad, Aust-Agder (now in National Museum of Cultural History, Oslo)

The two Hylestad stave church portals are now on display in the National Museum of Cultural History in Oslo, but were originally used to decorate the entranceway to a stave church in Setesdal that was built in the late twelfth or early thirteenth century and demolished in the seventeenth century. According to Dan Lindholm and Walther Roggenkamp, the sight of “wriggling snakes or dragons” as you entered a stave church prompts a slight hesitation, as if one would not be able to walk through thoughtlessly.¹⁸⁹ On these two panels (that measure 2.15m and 2.22m high respectively) there are seven carvings that deal with the legend of Sigurðr with three scenes on the first panel and four scenes on the second.¹⁹⁰ Starting with the right portal, the scene at the bottom shows a bearded Reginn and a helmeted Sigurðr at the forge.¹⁹¹ The next scene has Sigurðr testing the strength of the sword on the anvil.¹⁹² The third and highest scene on this portal depicts Sigurðr, who is dressed in full armour and equipped with a shield, stabbing Fáfnir from below.¹⁹³ The bottom scene on the left portal shows Sigurðr roasting three pieces of the serpent’s heart on a spit over a fire and he has his thumb in his mouth. Meanwhile, to the left, Reginn appears to be sleeping.¹⁹⁴ The next scene shows a tree with two birds sitting on its branches and a horse with a chest tethered to its back.¹⁹⁵ We can infer that the birds must surely be those that divulged Reginn’s wicked plans to Sigurðr and the horse should be Sigurðr’s Grani. The penultimate scene depicts Sigurðr killing Reginn, while the last scene depicts a bound Gunnarr in a pit, playing a harp with his feet so as to charm the threatening snakes.¹⁹⁶

Oseberg wagon, Vestfold (now in National Museum of Cultural History, Oslo)

The scenes on the boards of the Oseberg wagon (c. 834) depict snake-like creatures round the curved edge of the front board. They form a frame for a group of scenes, one of which portrays a man grappling with a number of snakes and a single

¹⁸⁹ Lindholm and Roggenkamp, *Stave Churches In Norway*, 14.

¹⁹⁰ Gunnar Nordanskog, *Föreställd Hedendom: Tidigmeltida Skandinaviska Kyrkportar i Forskning och Historia* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2006), 240.

¹⁹¹ Nordanskog, *Föreställd Hedendom*, 240.

¹⁹² Nordanskog, *Föreställd Hedendom*, 240.

¹⁹³ Nordanskog, *Föreställd Hedendom*, 240.

¹⁹⁴ Nordanskog, *Föreställd Hedendom*, 240.

¹⁹⁵ Nordanskog, *Föreställd Hedendom*, 240.

¹⁹⁶ Nordanskog, *Föreställd Hedendom*, 240.



ILLUSTRATION 46: Tandberg



ILLUSTRATION 46: Hylestad



ILLUSTRATION 47: Oseberg

quadruped, which are attacking him. Another scene shows a man fighting a quadruped, while the rest of the space is filled with fighting birds, animals and snakes. The man being overwhelmed by snakes is thought to be Gunnarr, who met his end in a snake pit, although it is unclear who the rest of the figures may represent. In his 1959 investigation of Oseberg, Thorleif Sjøvold suggested that the remaining figures may portray a scene from ‘Hiadnings Myth’ or *Hjaðningar*.¹⁹⁷ The fighting man could be Sigurðr as would befit his warrior status, though the absence of Fáfnir means this is doubtful.

Hørdum stone, Thisted municipality, Denmark

The eighth- to eleventh-century carving on the Hørdum stone, which is really a lump of rock rather than a smoothed off piece of stone, shows in very basic form the story of Þórr and the Miðgarðsormr as first identified by Johannes Brønsted in 1955.¹⁹⁸ This time Þórr is accompanied by Hymir. Presumably Hymir occupies the

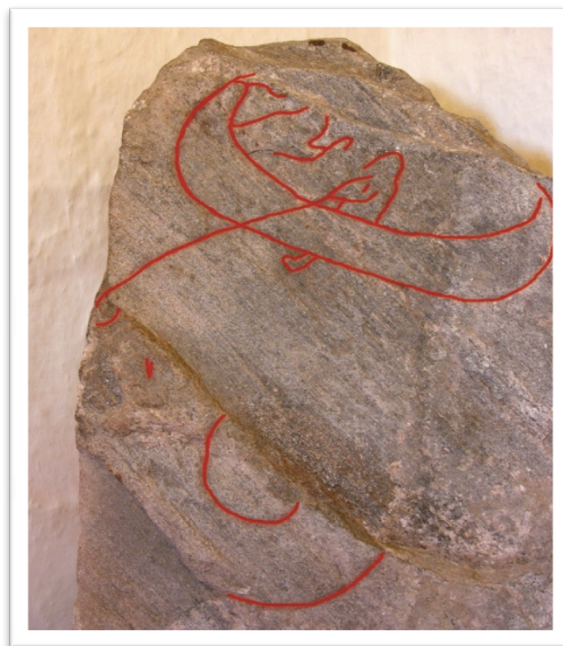


ILLUSTRATION 48: Hørdum Stone

¹⁹⁷ Thorleif Sjøvold, *The Oseberg Find and the other Viking Ship Finds* (Oslo: Universitetets Oldsaksamling, 1959), 34.

¹⁹⁸ Johannes Brønsted, “Thors fiskeri” in *Nationalmuseets Arbejdsmark* (København: Gyldenalske Boghandel - Nordisk Forlag, 1955), 90-104. Also see: Peter Vang Petersen, *Skalk* (Højbjerg: 1993), 28; and Erik Moltke, *Runes and their Origin. Denmark and Elsewhere* (Copenhagen: Nationalmuseets Forlag, 1985), 252.

left of the image and may have his hands in the air, probably pleading with Þórr to return to shore. He seems to be carrying some curved object, possibly a dagger, and according to one version of the story, actually uses this to cut the fishing line out of fear. Þórr on the other hand has one foot through the bottom of the ship and grips the fishing line which is connected to the Miðgarðsormr, shown here in very simplified form as a large tubular shape.

Conclusion

It would seem that the practice of carving mythological legends on runestones was almost non-existent in Norway and Denmark. Apart from the Tandberg stone, the two examples I have discussed are both very different from the Swedish material. The Hylestad portals present a very clear example of the insertion of a pagan myth into a Christian context. Here Sigurðr the dragon-slayer is guarding the entrance-way to a Christian church. He is being directly associated with Christian thinking, probably symbolizing the victory of good over the forces of Satan/evil. However, as far as we know (since the original church was destroyed) Sigurðr only appeared on the outside, not the interior of the church. This was reserved for purely Judeo-Christian iconography. Therefore, at Hylestad we have a very clear distinction between the old and new gods. I am not sure if this is an example of pre-figuring or simply a way of conveying the transition from heathendom to enlightened Christianity in terms that medieval Norwegians understood. If this is the case then Sigurðr has been placed lower in the Christian hierarchy, rather than on an equal footing with Jesus as has been suggested on the Gosforth 'Fishing stone,' where Þórr, it seems, is portrayed as a Christ-like figure. One explanation for this could be that Christianity was already firmly entrenched in Norway at this time and tolerance for the old ways was waning. Regardless, the Hylestad portals constitute a very unusual blend of Christian architecture and elements of pagan Germanic legend. It is also significant to remember that this is the so-called 'developed' Sigurðr. Hylestad presents seven different panels, each depicting a scene from Sigurðr's life. For most other Sigurðr-themed monuments we may only have one scene and often have to rely on diagnostic features (animals, smith's tools etc.) for identification. Hylestad leaves us in no such doubt and it is important to note that the final five scenes (Sigurðr stabbing the serpent; the heart roasting; birds and the loaded horse; Sigurðr killing Reginn; Gunnarr in the snake pit) were some of the most common ways of representing the

Sigurðr legend on the Anglo-Scandinavian stone crosses, all of which predate the Hylestad portals by two to three centuries.

On the other hand the Oseberg wagon only shows one or two scenes from the Sigurðr legend. The more likely of the two is thought to show Gunnarr in the snake pit, which appears throughout Scandinavia and the British Isles: on the last Hylestad portal, the Swedish runestones Sö 40, Klinte Hunninge I and Bo NYIR 3, on the Anglo-Scandinavian York Minster hogback and possibly the Kirkby Stephen cross and on the Manx cross at Kirk Andreas (121 (95)). In view of this, it is very likely that Gunnarr has been depicted at Oseberg. There is also a fighting figure that has been carved, who has been identified, though not unanimously agreed, as Sigurðr. However, no dragon or serpent can be located, which means this could just as well be any regular warrior. On the other hand, given that Gunnarr has likely been depicted, the probable Sigurðr should not be ruled out. In fact, it is not uncommon for many elements of the Sigurðr legend to be present on any one monument. For example, the Hylestad portals depict seven different Sigurðr scenes, large serpents but no Sigurðr appears on Sö 40 and Bo NYIR 3 and both Gunnarr and Sigurðr have been depicted together on the Kirk Andreas cross. In short, the Oseberg wagon could well have dual Sigurðr scenes.

The main problem with the Hørdum stone is its lack of precise dating. The iconography is clear enough but we are unable to date it more precisely than sometime between the eighth and eleventh century. Nonetheless, Hørdum is quite unique in that it is one of only three Scandinavian monuments to depict Þórr and the Miðgarðsormr. The others are both in Sweden, the bottom scene on Ardre VIII and U 1161. It is also one of two that include Hymir (Ardre VIII does not). Hørdum and U 1161 both show Þórr with his feet through the bottom of the boat. Also, the Miðgarðsormr on Ardre VIII is a five-headed beast, whereas the same creature on Hørdum and Altuna is a more decorative kind of sea-serpent. Bearing in mind that Hørdum and U 1161 share more iconography than Ardre VIII it might be possible to give it a date on the late side, possibly tenth- or eleventh-century.

Part Three: Isle of Man

The Isle of Man (Manx: *Ellan Vaninn*) is a self-governing British Crown Dependency located about halfway between the islands of Great Britain and Ireland in the Irish Sea. It has been inhabited by people of Celtic stock since the around the year 6500 BC and was invaded by the Anglo-Saxons in the seventh century and subsequently the Vikings in the early ninth century, whose vestiges can still be traced to this day. Early medieval Manx art is rich and varied, probably owing to its close contact with the artistic traditions on both side of the Irish Sea and indeed with Scandinavia. Stone sculpture is particularly abundant on the island and many of these objects bear elaborate designs that have been remarkably well preserved. It is to three of these Manx stone crosses that I turn now.

Background to the crosses

There are three crosses on the Isle of Man that are decorated with scenes from the Sigurðr legend. They are the Jurby cross, in Michael Sheading, the Malew cross, in Rusten, and the Kirk Andreas cross, in Ayre. All three were carved by the same artist, a man known as Gautr. One more cross, Maughold, is sometimes included in this group, but it is rather fragmentary and is not one of Gautr's crosses, having been erected around the year 1000. Little can be said of this Gautr, although his name is clearly of Scandinavian origin. On the Kirk Andreas cross, there is an inscription that reads: *en Gautr gerði, sunr Bjarnar frá Kolli* ('and Gautr made [the cross], son of Björn of Coll')¹⁹⁹ and some scholars see Kollr as a probable Celtic word, although this does not necessarily indicate Celtic heritage. Furthermore, there is an inscription on a cross at Kirk Michael (II) that reads: **kaut : kirþi : þana : auk : ala : imaun x**, *Gautr gerði þenna ok alla i Mön*, 'Gautr made this [cross] and all in Man.'²⁰⁰ Regardless of whether this statement is true or not, all three crosses were raised certainly after the year 950.²⁰¹ According to Sue Margeson, from the pictures on the crosses from the Isle of Man, we can postulate the form of the elements of the Sigurðr legend in the tenth century, which are the following: (a) the otter and the salmon

¹⁹⁹ Terje Spurkland, *Norwegian Runes and Runic Inscriptions*, trans. Betsy van der Hoek (Woodbridge, United Kingdom: The Boydell Press, 2005), 129.

²⁰⁰ Spurkland, *Norwegian Runes and Runic Inscriptions*, 128.

²⁰¹ Margeson, "On the iconography of the Manx Crosses," 100.

(Maughold); (b) Reginn the smith (elements at Maughold and Kirk Andreas); (c) the dragon killing (Jurby, Malew and Kirk Andreas); (d) the heart roasting (Malew and Kirk Andreas); (e) the horse Grani and the treasure (Malew, Jurby, Kirk Andreas and Maughold); (f) Gunnarr (Kirk Andreas).²⁰² To Margeson, the pagan and Christian motifs on these crosses were given equal prominence and equivalence, a surmise I would agree with wholeheartedly. Finally, although there can be no direct link established between the Sigurðr crosses from the Isle of Man and their Scandinavian counterparts, the Manx crosses are probably the closest relatives of the Scandinavian picture stones and show signs of similar development. They also predate any other sculptured stone in Scandinavia outside Gotland.²⁰³ It is therefore appropriate that they should be included in an investigation on the broad topic of mythologically-themed Scandinavian monuments.

Jurby (119 (93), Michael Sheading)

At Jurby, set up as a gatepost to a field at the entrance to the churchyard, there is a slab that measures 7ft. by 10-20 in. wide and 6.5 in. thick that depicts a figure killing a dragon from a pit that was first identified by P. M. C. Kermode as Sigurðr and Fáfnir. The dragon is actually fitted vertically against the upright cross-shaft and the small figure at its side, but a semicircular line between Sigurðr and Fáfnir indicate that he is attacking from below.²⁰⁴



FIG. 4: Jurby 119 (93)

²⁰² Margeson, "On the Iconography of the Manx Crosses," 103-4.

²⁰³ David Wilson, *The Viking Age in the Isle of Man* (Odense: Odense University Press, 1974), 30.

²⁰⁴ Davidson, "Sigurd in the Art of the Viking Age," 218.

Below this is another scene of a figure with one hand raised to his mouth while his other hand is holding a stick or spit with something on the end of it. This is an image of Sigurðr roasting Fáfnir's heart. Below this is quite clearly a horse, presumably Grani. The other face of the Jurby cross is almost worn off but does show the left arm of a crucifix and, near the bottom, the remains of a tendril pattern.²⁰⁵ The (rather garbled) runic inscription reads:

[... ..un * si]n : in : onon : raiti ¶ --- * aftir þorb-...

... .. [s]on sinn, en annan reisti/rétti [hann](?) eptir Þor...

... .. his son and raised(?) another ... in memory of Thorb-...²⁰⁶



ILLUSTRATION 49: Jurby 119 (93)

²⁰⁵ P. M. C. Kermode, *Catalogue of the Manx Crosses with the Runic Inscriptions and Various Readings and Renderings Compared*, 2nd ed. (Ramsey, Isle of Man: C. B. Heyes, 1892), 15-16.

²⁰⁶ University of Aberdeen, Scotland, *Runic Dictionary (Samnordisk runtextdatabas*, 2008) (date accessed: 13/02/2013), <http://abdn.ac.uk/skaldic/db.php?if=runic&table=mss&id=21498>

Malew (120 (94), Rusten)

In the churchyard at Malew, near the entrance, is a broken slab 5ft. by 1ft. 6in. and 2in. to 3in thick. Like the Jurby cross, the main figural scene takes place beneath the right lateral arm of the cross. This first panel depicts Sigurðr wearing a helmet stabbing a richly decorated Fáfnir from the right hand side, with Fáfnir positioned on the left, in a similar manner to Jurby. Above this is another depiction of Sigurðr in a pointed cap (as identified by Canon G. F. Browne)²⁰⁷ armed with a sword, and holding on a spit the heart of the dragon Fáfnir above ‘pointed’ and ‘conventional’ flames.²⁰⁸ Below this figure to the left, separated by a broad band and an elaborate knot, is a horse that has been broken off at the neck. Below further, separated by a band, there is some ‘device’ that has now completely worn away.²⁰⁹



ILLUSTRATION 50: Malew 120 (94)

²⁰⁷ As asserted by Kermode, *Catalogue of the Manx Crosses*, 17.

²⁰⁸ Davidson, “Sigurd in the Art of the Viking Age,” 219.

²⁰⁹ Kermode, *Catalogue of the Manx Crosses*, 17.

Kirk Andreas (121 (95), Ayre)

On a Fragment, 2ft. 3in. by 1ft. 4in. and 3in. thick, at Kirk Andreas, there are four potential scenes from the Sigurðr legend. On the left arm of the cross face, the slithery Fáfnir is being killed by Sigurðr who holds a short pointed weapon that plunges into the twisted folds of (presumably) Fáfnir's serpentine body. Also on this left hand side is a helmeted figure, with thumb in his mouth, crouching over three pointed flames, holding a stick or pole with three pieces of the heart over the flames of the fire.²¹⁰ Also depicted is the horse Grani with a runic inscription of the word 'kan'²¹¹ written on it and the head of a bird that Kermodé described as a 'talking' bird.²¹² In addition, there is also a bound figure being accosted by snakes that may represent Gunnarr in the snake pit, though of this none are certain. The corresponding face of the cross depicts a robed figure, in Kermodé's view - Loki, manacled and being attacked by a serpent.²¹³



ILLUSTRATION 51: Kirk Andreas 121 (95)

²¹⁰ Davidson, "Sigurd in the Art of the Viking Age," 219-220.

²¹¹ Margeson, "On the Iconography of the Manx Crosses," 100.

²¹² Kermodé, *Catalogue of the Manx Crosses*, 7-8.

Apropos the runic inscription, the Nottingham Runic Dictionary has this to say about the Kirk Andreas inscription: "Mycket speciella runor med många kvistar och bågar, går ej att tyda." University of Aberdeen, Scotland, *Runic Dictionary (Samnordisk runtextdatabas*, 2008) (date accessed: 13/02/2013),

<http://abdn.ac.uk/skaldic/db.php?if=runic&table=mss&id=21487>

²¹³ Kermodé, *Catalogue of the Manx Crosses*, 7-8.

Conclusion

The Manx Sigurðr-themed crosses are certainly some of the most remarkable of all the monuments I have investigated. There is virtually no ambiguity that Sigurðr has been presented on the crosses. At Jurby we find two familiar scenes – the dragon killing and Grani with the treasure. At Malew, Sigurðr is roasting Fáfñir’s heart and Grani is with the treasure. And at Kirk Andreas, certainly the most elaborate Sigurðr-themed cross in Man, we find depictions of Reginn, the dragon killing, the heart roasting, Grani with treasure and the bound Gunnarr. Then there are of course the fragments from Maughold that supposedly depict the otter and the salmon, a bound Reginn and Grani. The Manx crosses are also remarkable in that we can be relatively sure that they were all carved at approximately the same time and by the same artist. As to the question of whether the Manx crosses qualify as examples of syncretism or pre-figuring, it is, as usual, hard to say. Sue Margeson certainly thought that the blend of pagan and Christian ideas demonstrated a response to a mingling of Viking and Celtic peoples and traditions.²¹⁴ I am of the view that there is certainly reason to suggest this. Stone crosses are inherently Christian objects and heathen and Christian motifs can be found on many of the other Manx crosses. For example, on the Kirk Andreas fragment 128 (102) we see Óðinn, with a spear and a raven, and his foot in the jaws of Fenrir. There is a Christian scene on the other side that depicts a figure holding a book and a cross, a fish as well as serpents above and below. Aleks Pluskowski considered this a type of religious syncretism, reflecting the negotiation of pagan and Christian beliefs.²¹⁵ And on another cross at Jurby 128 (99) there is a hanging man, who has been identified as Óðinn, as well as a boar and a hart, a long established symbol of the conflict between Satan and Jesus Christ.²¹⁶ These scenes show that the artist(s) did not consider the old religion at odds with the new and that heathen motifs were thought continuous within a broad Christian framework. In sum, the heathen and biblical images on Kirk Andreas 128 (102) and Jurby 128 (99) ought to be considered as equivalents rather than a celebration of the triumph of the glories of Christianity over the antiquated, uneducated pagans and it is entirely possible that this was also the case for the Manx Sigurðr-themed crosses.

²¹⁴ Margeson, “On the Iconography of the Manx Crosses,” 104.

²¹⁵ Pluskowski, “Apocalyptic Monsters,” 158.

²¹⁶ Margeson, “On the Iconography of the Manx Crosses,” 96.

Conclusion to Chapter Three

In this third and final chapter I have presented the Scandinavian monuments that depict mythologically-themed images as clearly as I can and interpreted them using the latest scholarship and my own perspective. In many ways, dealing with the Scandinavian material has been a very different experience from the Anglo-Scandinavian artefacts. For example, where the Anglo-Scandinavian monuments are often fragmented, sketchy, sometimes outright lost or missing (and therefore only exist as a reconstruction based on drawings – and this is also true of a few Swedish runestones) and frequently unreliable, in general the Scandinavian material has been quite satisfying to examine. In fact, I would argue that for most of the examples I have looked at we can be reasonably sure of our identification of the various myths and heroic legends.

There is then a clear gulf between the Anglo-Scandinavian and purely Scandinavian material. One should first consider the context and then chronology. Firstly, most of the Anglo-Scandinavian crosses are indicative of a fusion of cultures and religions, an unusual concept in itself, so it is not surprising that a lot of the images on the crosses are raw, experimental and radical. This is certainly true of some of the Scandinavian material, most especially the crosses from the Isle of Man and the Hylestad church portals, but not the vast majority, which in general were made before the adoption of Christianity. Also, it is reasonably well documented that many of the Scandinavian picture stones are products of what Signe Horn Fuglesang has called an ‘old tradition’ of image making in Scandinavia that stretches all the way back to the artistry on the Oseberg wagon.²¹⁷ In this light, it is not surprising that the Scandinavian examples appear more ‘developed’ in comparison to their English counterparts – although definite similarities can be established and it is clear that the Scandinavian images of myths and legends served as sources of inspiration and perhaps even as visual templates for the later Anglo-Scandinavian artists. I have also tried to account for the very large number of stone monuments in Sweden in comparison to the other Scandinavian nations and to provide some understanding and meaning of the runic inscriptions, of which there are quite a number. The inclusion of

²¹⁷ Fuglesang, “Ekphrasis and Surviving Imagery,” 214.

the Manx crosses may come as a slight shock to some (considering its remoteness from Scandinavia), but I think it a just choice as they are often regarded as more Scandinavian (or Hiberno-Norse perhaps) than Anglo-Scandinavian or Insular and moreover were certainly created by a Scandinavian artist who decorated them with runic inscriptions in the Old Norse language.

General Conclusion

In Chapter One, my aim was to present the various Anglo-Scandinavian stone monuments with images from Old Norse mythology and legend as clearly and objectively as possible. I looked at three major Old Norse stories as well as a number of other figures and legends from the Old Norse mythological world. I began with Völundr. I argued that Völundr appears on six Anglo-Scandinavian crosses – Leeds 1, Sherburn 2 and 3, York Minster 9, Bedale 1 and Egglecliffe 1. Many of the Völundr-themed crosses are in good condition and I am able to say that the crosses at Leeds, Sherburn and York Minster provide very strong evidence. Bedale and Egglecliffe are less convincing because of missing identifying features. I then looked at the Sigurðr legend where I surveyed another six crosses – York Minster 34, Kirby Hill 2 and 9, Ripon 4, Nunburnholme 1 and the York Minster hogback. The first three monuments are very reliable, while Ripon needs to be studied and compared with more trustworthy Sigurðr-themed images, Nunburnholme is too elaborate to be completely certain and the York Minster hogback is rather fragmented. However, most scholars agree that the Sigurðr-themed crosses are in general quite reliable. I then discussed the images from the mythic understanding of Ragnarök, expressed in the final section of *Völuspá*, and in six Anglo-Scandinavian crosses – Gosforth 1 (in particular), the Sockburn hogback, the Lythe hogback, Forcett 4, Ovingham 1 and Gainford 4. The Gosforth cross and Sockburn hogback are arguably the two most reliable Ragnarök-themed monuments as they both have very strong iconography and potential comparable material in Scandinavia. The others are probable Ragnarök-themed monuments, mainly owing to generally clear iconography – they do not match up to Gosforth or Sockburn because of the potential presence of other (some unrelated) figures from Old Norse mythology, Christian biblical history and medieval artistic motifs, such as the ‘Bound Devil’ figure. I then looked at a range of Old Norse deities and figures on nine different crosses – including, the Gosforth ‘Fishing stone,’ Sockburn 3, 6 and 15, Kirklevington 2, Baldersby 1, Forcett 1 and the Lowther hogback. In addition, I investigated the ‘Hart and hound’ legend which appears on Kirklevington 11, Melsonby 3, Wath 4 and Stanwick 9. Objectively speaking, the only monuments one can be absolutely certain of are the ‘Fishing stone’ and Sockburn 3, where the iconography is more or less simple and clear. The images on

many of the other crosses, such as Sockburn 6 and 15, Kirklevington 2, Baldersby 1 and Forcett 1, have been associated with Old Norse mythology by various scholars (most notably, the editors of the *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture*) – contradictory interpretations exist because of their resemblance to certain Judeo-Christian artistic motifs (which may or may not have been intended by the carvers). The last cross I examined was from Kirkby Stephen where the general Scandinavian influence is very strong, but a single clear interpretation would be difficult.

Chapter Two was an investigation of the relationship between Norse paganism and Judeo-Christian thought as presented on the Anglo-Scandinavian crosses and mythological Old Norse literature. I began by discussing the parallels, as I saw them, between Völundr and the Christian angels. I chose five parallels, including the subject(s) of their shared ability to fly, the fact that both were depicted with wings, Völundr's propensity for unbelievable acts of revenge and the conflation or association of Völundr with angels on some Anglo-Scandinavian crosses. I also argued that Völundr could be viewed as more 'divine being' than human. For example, the positioning of *Völundarkviða* in the *Poetic Edda* gives him much more in common with the other mythological figures of the Old Norse world than with the heroes and legendary characters. Völundr has also been associated with the elves, a divine race of mysterious power (most notably in the introductory prose passage to *Völundarkviða*, where he is described as *vísi álfa* or 'prince/master of the elves'). I then discussed Sigurðr and the similarities between his life and that of Jesus Christ, specifically, the event of the crucifixion. I argued that both figures are conquerors of monstrous dragons, that they were both killed by close associates, that Sigurðr-themed images appear with crucifixion imagery on some Anglo-Scandinavian crosses, that there is a Norse and Christian overlap on at least one Anglo-Scandinavian cross and, finally, that a Sigurðr-themed image appears on the headstone of at least one medieval English cross. I then examined the relationship between Norse and Judeo-Christian eschatology, specifically the parallels between the end of the world in Ragnarök from *Völuspá* and the apocalyptic sections of the Christian Bible. In the last section of Chapter Two, I looked at the similarities between the figures of Þórr and Jesus Christ and the Miðgarðsormr and Satan-Leviathan where they have been presented on the Gosforth 'Fishing stone.'

In Chapter Three I surveyed the images inspired from Old Norse mythology on the picture stones and runestones of the Scandinavian kingdoms and the Isle of Man. I began by looking at the picture stones of Sweden, where they are the most numerous and varied. I divided the stones into three categories – Völundr-themed stones, Sigurðr-themed stones and Þórr-themed stones. I then moved onto looking at the stones from Norway and Denmark, where Þórr was a popular choice of subject. It is also here that we find the two most conspicuous examples of Old Norse mythological imagery – on the Oseberg wagon and the church portals from Hylestad, both from Norway. I then looked at the crosses from the Isle of Man, where mainly Sigurðr was depicted – although there are many other images from Old Norse mythology and some Christian motifs as well that provide a striking parallel with the Anglo-Scandinavian material.

In general the Völundr-related evidence on the Anglo-Scandinavian crosses is very strong. It is clear that the Anglo-Saxons had a special interest in Völundr even before the Viking invasions. He appears on the eighth-century Franks Casket (which was in fact made in Northumbria), is invoked in the tenth-century lamentation poem *Deor* and is frequently mentioned in various texts as the maker of splendid swords. Furthermore, there is another scene on the Franks Casket besides Völundr – the Christian scene known as ‘Adoration of the Magi.’ Thus, what we have here is an old object with images from both pagan Germanic legend and a Judeo-Christian biblical story. It can then be argued that the Franks Casket prefigures the Anglo-Scandinavian crosses where the objective was much the same – to present pagan Germanic and Judeo-Christian ideas together. One should also consider the Neolithic chamber tomb in Oxfordshire popularly known as ‘Wayland’s Smithy’ that was visited by the Saxons four thousand years after it was built.

There is also an arguably old tradition (perhaps older, perhaps not) of Völundr-themed image-making in pre-Viking Scandinavia as well (cf. the crosses from Gotland). As I see it, there is a definite parallel between the Leeds 1 cross and Ardre III and VIII and Alskog church (G 108). In all three images the way the human figures and the bird-heads have been portrayed and their positions are rather similar and probably all belong to the same artistic tradition. I also consider Sherburn 2 and 3 and York Minster 9 as closely related to the Gotlandic material as the treatment of the

figures and overall composition seems to have been heavily influenced by G 108 and the Ardre stones. Bedale 6 is too worn to compare it with anything abroad (for the exception, see below), but the images on the Eggescliffa cross recall Sherburn 3 and York Minster 9 quite strongly.

Finally, the figure of Völundr and his flying device on the Anglo-Scandinavian and Scandinavian carvings have been composed in a very similar way. James Lang saw this on the Ardre VIII picture stone and associated it with what he called the ‘Leeds-Sherburn’ type, as sharing similar wings, wedge-shaped tail and bird-head. There is possibly clearer evidence of this parallel on Stora Hammars III, where the bird motif strongly resembles the depiction of Völundr on the Leeds cross, Sherburn 2 and, in particular, the Bedale hogback, where he has been depicted horizontally with comparable curving wings. G 108 would also fit into this group on artistic grounds quite easily. The other Ardre stone (III) has no clear parallel with the Anglo-Scandinavian crosses probably for the reason that (if Sigmund Oehrl is correct) Völundr has been depicted bound and tied, which is a motif entirely absent from the Anglo-Scandinavian material. Oehrl thought of the figures on Ardre III as having the characteristics of birds and, indeed, on much of the Völundr-themed carvings in England and Scandinavia images of birds and bird-like creatures (some possibly related to the legend) form a strong common theme and further remind us of Völundr’s close association with them.

Although an old tradition of Sigurðr-related material cannot be traced (or may never have existed with the exception of *Beowulf*) in Anglo-Saxon England there are the same number of extant Sigurðr-themed crosses as there are for Völundr. On the other hand, there is a very old and long tradition of Sigurðr-themed image-making in Scandinavia that stretches from the early thirteenth century all the way back to the images on the Oseberg wagon. In Chapter Three I argued that Sigurðr was the most popular choice of subject on the Scandinavian monuments (particularly those from Sweden) that predate many of the Anglo-Scandinavian crosses by around a century. It is not a coincidence that Sigurðr was very popular in Anglo-Scandinavian England as well and I argued that there are a number of parallels that can be drawn between both sets of monuments. Firstly, the image on York Minster 34 has been composed in a very similar way to, most notably, Gs 9, Sö 101 and U 1163, but also more remotely

to Sö 40. I would even suggest that the first three may have been known (perhaps by memory) to the carvers of the York Minster cross and possibly served as a sort of template. The Kirby Hill 2 cross and Sö 101 share depictions of a headless body (presumably Reginn) set beneath smith's tools. The horse (probably Grani) on Kirby Hill 9 has been carved in a similar way to the quadrupeds on Gs 19 and the Manx crosses of Jurby 119 (93), Kirk Andreas 121 (95) and Malew 120 (94). The slightly slanted bird on Ripon 4 is very similar to those sitting in the tree on Sö 101. The York Minster hogback could be viewed as comparable to the carvings on the Oseberg wagon and the church portals from Hylestad and possibly the Kirk Andreas cross as they are the only surviving examples of Gunnarr.

The Ragnarök-themed crosses of Northumbria are quite uniform in appearance, as I explained in Chapter One, but to find parallels with the Scandinavian material has been difficult as only a few Ragnarök scenes of the same type survive. There is arguably a strong parallel between the bottom image on the west face of the Gosforth cross and Ardre VIII, where Sigyn is catching the dripping venom with a basin before they fall on her husband Loki. This seems to be the only Ragnarök-themed scene on Ardre VIII. Rosemary Cramp saw a parallel between the backwards-looking beasts on the Sockburn hogback and the Buttle Änge picture stone on Gotland that she identified as the wolves/dogs that join Fenrir at Ragnarök. On the Kirk Andreas fragment 128 (102) is an image of Óðinn with his feet in the jaws of Fenrir, but according to *Gylfaginning* the wolf swallows Óðinn at Ragnarök followed by Viðarr stepping into his jaws, ripping them apart.²¹⁸

The engagement between Þórr and the Miðgarðsormr that appears, most notably, on the Gosforth 'Fishing stone' among others, has a few clear parallels with the Scandinavian material. Quite some time ago, Rosemary Cramp argued for a connection between Gosforth 6 and Ardre VIII, U 1161, the Hørdum stone and the Solberga metal mount. Having consulted these monuments I can say that I agree with her argument for U 1161 and the Hørdum stone, but I am unable to find a similar scene on Ardre VIII (just a boat with warriors) and Solberga that, as I previously mentioned, only has a runic inscription and no images. Cramp also saw a likeness

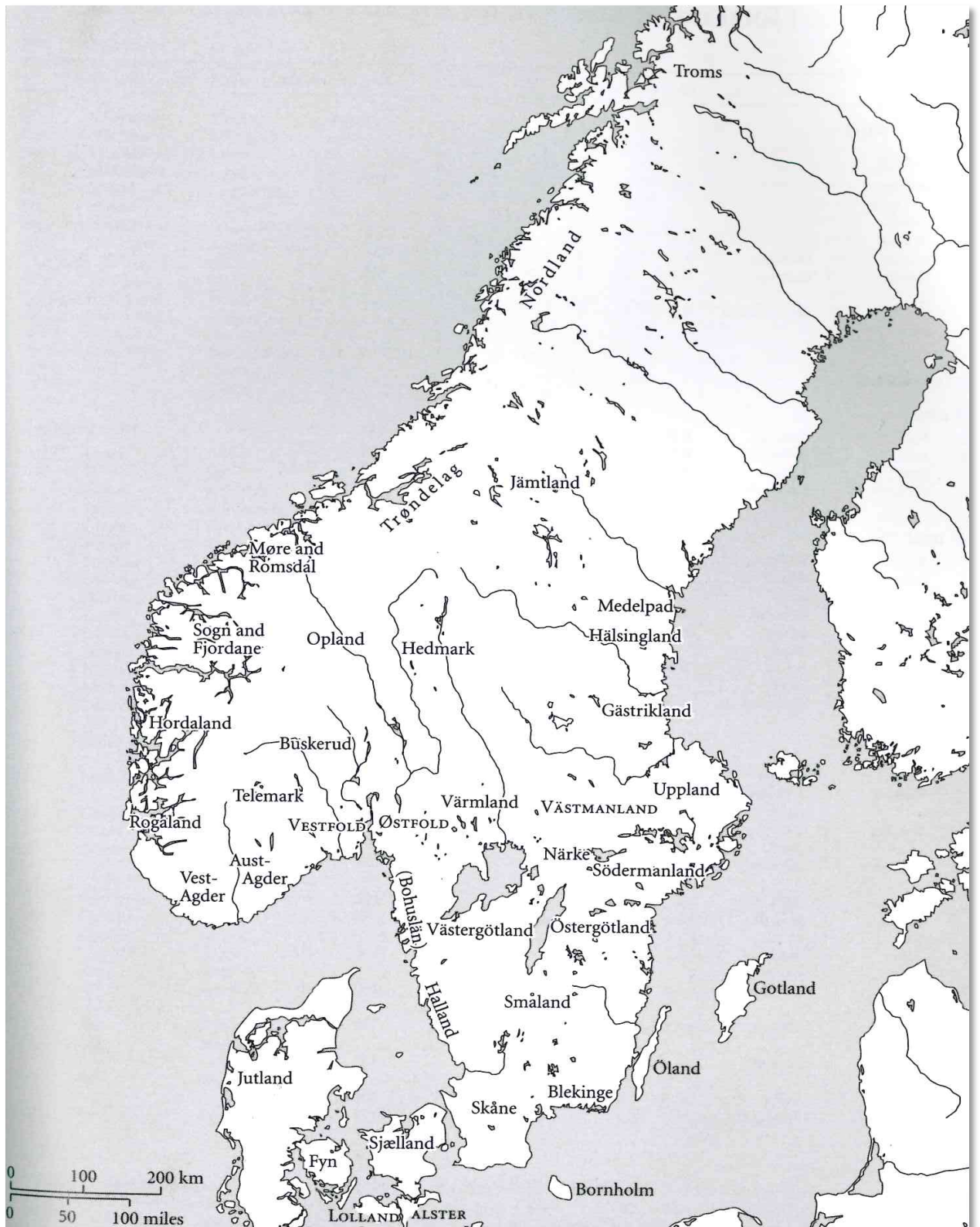
²¹⁸ Anthony Faulkes, ed., *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning* (London: University College London, 2000), 54.

between the warriors on a warship on Lowther 4 and the treatment of the human figures on the Oseberg wagon – however, evidence for this is perhaps somewhat sketchy. I definitely agree with James Lang’s suggestion that the Óðinn image on Sockburn 3 has a parallel with Klinte Hunnige I from Gotland. Lastly, the elaborate ‘Hart and hound’ legend on the Stanwick cross may well have a parallel at Oseberg but it is impossible to be certain without a close examination of the Norwegian material.

There are two main arguments in this thesis that need to be elucidated. Firstly, the stone crosses/monuments from Northumbria, Isle of Man and Scandinavia can be compared on a number of levels and all belong to an old tradition of image making in Northern Europe. In Anglo-Scandinavian England there is the largest number of examples, but the Isle of Man has some of the best preserved crosses (and were completed by a known Scandinavian artist, who signed his work) and Scandinavia, as one might expect, has some of the boldest images available. That the crosses from the three areas are similar needs no elaboration – however, it still remains to be seen how this came to be. Some scholars have argued that many of the images on the crosses from England and Isle of Man were carved by craftsmen who may have been responsible for the mythologically-themed monuments in Scandinavia (of those that survive) or knew of them from memory, oral poetry or even visual templates of the images on wood and stone. There is a strong argument for this especially for the material from Gotland, but many of the other Scandinavian examples, including the Oseberg wagon, seem to have connections with the Anglo-Scandinavian and Manx crosses. Although Ragnarök may be the most conspicuous parallel, Sigurðr and Völundr occupy the place of the most popular figures from Old Norse mythology on crosses/objects from England, Isle of Man and Scandinavia. There are a number of very strong similarities between certain crosses from these areas that I have already established, both in this conclusion and other parts of the thesis.

My second argument concerns the ways in which Old Norse paganism intersected with Christianity. This is very significant in Northern England (and to a lesser extent the Isle of Man and Scandinavia), where the majority of the crosses I have looked at present Old Norse and Christian images/ideas together or invite the viewer to explore the connections between the two traditions. The obvious parallel is

between the story of Ragnarök and the eschatological sections of the Bible. There is a debate about this topic that has led some scholars to argue that parts of the Ragnarök tradition were altered or ‘Christianised’ to bring it into concord with the Bible, which may well be true. Of course, one should not forget that the Anglo-Scandinavian crosses predate the adoption of Christianity in Scandinavia and the composition of both Eddas so some of the shared aspects of the end-of-the-world accounts in both traditions must have arisen independently. It is impossible to establish much more than that. Perhaps not quite as conspicuous, in terms of parallels, is Sigurðr, who shares a number of similarities with Jesus Christ and some other aspects of Judeo-Christian doctrine. One of my subordinate arguments concerned the notion that Sigurðr was thought of as acceptable to Christianity – hence his appearance on a number of monuments from England, Isle of Man and Scandinavia with Christian images/ideas. In addition, there is even evidence on runestones from Scandinavia (where the transition to Christianity took place relatively late) that suggests Sigurðr was invoked by followers of Christianity despite his pagan associations. Völundr is much more novel – in fact it is only in Northumbria that he appears next to Christian images and ideas. There appears to be a long tradition in the north of England that stretches all the way back to the Franks Casket. In sum Völundr must have been seen as acceptable in the broader Christian framework for at least two centuries. In Scandinavia, Völundr was a very popular choice of subject on the picture stones of Gotland, but many are far too early to expect any association with Christianity – however, they do provide irrefutable parallels for the material from Anglo-Scandinavian England.



Map 2. Provinces in Scandinavia (reproduced from Birgit Sawyer, *The Viking-Age Runestones: Custom and Commemoration in Early Medieval Scandinavia* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 199.

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