

# The Cross Motif on Late Viking Age Art Picture Runestones in Västergötland

BY LISE GJEDSSØ BERTELSEN

## Abstract

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The Christian cross was a favourite high-status motif – that is, the most important motif of a picture field – on a large number of Late Viking Age art objects, and thus appeared on a monumental scale on picture runestones. By a picture runestone is meant a memorial stone or a grave stone equipped with both runic text and image, the latter in the form of either a designed head, legs and tail of rune bands or a free-standing image, or both. Parallel to picture runestones are runestones with only an inscription and picture stones with only an image. The Mammen, Ringerike and Urnes styles constitute Late Viking Age art in the Viking world in the period c. 950–1135 AD. The picture runestones of Västergötland are predominantly executed in the Ringerike style, which flowered especially in the first half of the 11th century, at the time of King Canute the Great, when the earls of Västergötland probably recognized the king's supremacy. Christian symbolism in images was communicated efficiently by Scandinavian designs, often elegantly executed. The widely travelled Vikings were familiar with Christian symbolism, such as the cherished legend about the Golgotha drama, as well as the intimate relationship between three of the most important symbols: the serpent, the Arbor Vitae/tree of life and the cross of Christ.

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## Introduction

On 18 April 2013, the Department of Scandinavian Languages of Uppsala University held a one-day Elisabeth Svärdström Colloquium arranged by Senior Lecturer Marco Bianchi and Professor Henrik Williams. The theme of the day focused on one of Sweden's significant but perhaps not so well-known runologists: Elisabeth Svärdström (1909–2008). Two of the lectures that day dealt with the iconography of the picture runestones of Västergötland. The first of these lectures, by Anne-Sofie Gräslund, was about the ornamentation and chronology of runestones in Västergötland. The second lecture, by me, forms the basis for this

article and was about the cross motif depicted in Late Viking Age art on picture runestones in Västergötland.

## The cross motif, numeral symbolism, geometrical symbolism and a meaningful pictorial language

According to all four gospels in the New Testament, Jesus Christ was crucified at Golgotha ("The Place of the Skull") just outside Jerusalem on Good Friday; he was positioned

between two thieves, with one on either side of him (Matthew 27:32–50; John 19:17–30; Luke 23:26–46; Mark 15:21–37). This is the most famous crucifixion in world history, and the cross motif became the symbol of Christ and the resurrection; over time it came to be the most iconic and widespread symbol of Christianity – as it is in Late Viking Age art. The cross of Christ – in different types and elaborations – became the favourite high-status motif on a large number of Late Viking Age art picture runestones in Scandinavia generally, also in Västergötland. The vast majority of the crosses are outline drawings (Figs. 3a, 4–16a and 17), a technique which makes the motif grander, but crosses drawn in simple lines also appear as on Vg 186 Timmele kyrkogård (*kyrkogård* = churchyard), Timmele sn. (*sn./socken* = parish). Runestone numbers beginning with the signature Vg refer to the corpus *Västergötlands runinskrifter* (Jungner & Svärdström 1940–1970) and to *Samnordisk runtextdatabas* 2008, <http://www.nordiska.uu.se/forskn/samnord.htm>.

Late Viking Age art consists of three styles: the Mammen style, the Ringerike style and the Urnes style, all prevalent in the Viking world and used on a large number of different materials (wood, stone, bone, tooth, antler, amber, metal, textiles, etc.). All three appear on a monumental scale (for instance, on picture runestones), as well as on a miniature scale (for instance, on pendant necklaces, bracelets, brooches, weapons, trial pieces).

The Mammen style was the great fashion in the second half of the 10th century AD, and picture runestones designed in the Mammen style were dominant in the Danish areas (Bertelsen 2002, 19 ff. & 61 f.). The finest representative of the Mammen style is the large Jelling stone DR 42, King Haraldr's three-sided pyramidal picture runestone in Jelling, Southern Jutland, Denmark (Bertelsen 2010, 140, fig. 2a; Matthiesen *et al.* 2009, <http://vimeo.com/36756973>; Wamers

1999, 48 f., figs. 1–2). Runestone numbers beginning with the signature DR refer to the corpus *Danmarks Runeindskrifter* (Jacobsen & Moltke 1941–1942) and to *Samnordisk runtextdatabas* 2008, <http://www.nordiska.uu.se/forskn/samnord.htm>. This unique and elegant piece of art is the beating heart of the Jelling monuments, standing at its original place exactly in the middle between the north mound and the south mound (for a schematic drawing of the Jelling monuments, see Roesdahl 2011, 355, fig. 3). It has been written that the image on the C side/Christ side of the large Jelling stone did not influence the subsequent picture runestones' iconography (Fuglesang 2005, 89), but this is incorrect. Both the image on this picture runestone's B side/animal side and to an even greater extent its C side/Christ side had an immense influence on the iconography of later picture runestones.

The Ringerike style was the great fashion in the first half of the 11th century, that is, for instance, during the reign of King Haraldr's grandchild King Canute the Great (Bertelsen 2002, 24 ff. & 62 ff.). The Ringerike style is dominant in images on the picture runestones of Västergötland.

The youngest of the three styles, the Urnes style, was the great fashion in the second half of the 11th century and ran into the second quarter of the 12th century. This style is dominant on a very large numbers of picture runestones in Uppland (Bertelsen 2002, 27 ff. & 65 ff.).

However, it must be remembered that the three styles did not only develop from each other; they also overlapped and competed against each other, and sometimes – when we are far enough into the future, of course – they even occur on the same object. An excellent example of the latter is the walking-stick handle of antler, likely a trial piece and design catalogue, from about AD 1100, found at Klim, close to Fjerritslev, Northern Jutland, Denmark (National Museum of Denmark

inv.no. D 604/1978) (Liebgott 1978, 10 ff.; Bertelsen 2002, 69). The north-west coast of Denmark was part of the sea route to a place like Dublin, known for its many trial pieces.

The Mammen, Ringerike and Urnes styles were refined, Scandinavian designs in continued development with a large European, Christian symbolic content (Bertelsen & Gotfredsen 1998, 14). The three styles drew from the same groups of motifs, of which the cross of Christ and the Golgotha drama are among the most prominent. The Christian doctrine of salvation is rooted in Christ's death and resurrection. The pictorial structure of Late Viking Age art is in accordance with the Christian pictorial structure, which is based on centring around the middle axis, which echoes the structure of Christianity, placing the one and only (= God) in the middle axis. The cross as the high-status motif normally takes the most prominent place in the picture field, which means that it is located topmost, centrally and on the middle axis, and it is always reproduced in the grandest way: en face, which means facing forwards, whereby it communicates with and addresses itself directly to the viewer (Bertelsen 2003a, 27; 2006, 47 ff.). Furthermore, numeral and geometrical symbolism and a meaning-bearing pictorial language with specific messages played a major role, as was also the case in Romanesque art. Christianity had taken over the numerology which the Egyptians, Babylonians and the Greek Pythagoreans had previously used to describe the cosmos, but of course Christianity, guided by the Bible and the specific demands of the Christian myths, associated its own concepts with this (Gotfredsen & Frederiksen 1988, 54 ff.). The cosmos was built up of symbolic numbers, to which different values were attributed; but the meanings of the numbers must of course in each case be seen in their proper contexts.

In Christian culture the high-status number – that is, the most important of numbers

– is one, which is the holy number symbolizing God the Father. And the geometrical figure corresponding to this is the circle, which has no beginning or end, and in which God occupies the centre. The circle fences, protects and sanctifies that which is inside its circumference. The unending circle is a static figure of cosmic dimensions; it symbolizes eternity, eternal life and perfection. That is why we have engagement and wedding rings, and why we send a wreath to a funeral as a symbol of eternity. The spiral, on the contrary, is a dynamic figure, which symbolizes movement, life and growth. So, for instance, when we notice one or more spirals at the foot of the cross of Christ, it is an elegant allusion to the tree of life inside the cross of Christ, as will be discussed later in the article.

The number three is the heavenly number, which symbolizes the Holy Trinity – the belief that God the Father, God the Son/Jesus Christ and God the Holy Spirit are of one being. This definition was stated at the synod in Constantinople in the year AD 381 (Gotfredsen & Frederiksen 1988, 55). The number three is visualized in the equilateral triangle, the triquetra, the three-lobed acanthus leaf, etc.

The number four is the earthly number, the number representing the world. There are four corners of the world, four gospels, etc., and the union of three and four makes seven, a number which symbolizes perfection because it is the fusion of the heavenly (symbolized by the number three) and the earthly (symbolized by the number four). Even today we say that we are in the “seventh heaven” of delight if something specifically good or happy has happened to us.

The number five is correlated with Christ's passion, because Christ had five wounds. In Christian tradition the number five symbolizes the passion and transformation, because Christ suffered five sacred piercing wounds during the crucifixion; he was nailed to the cross through the wrists and feet and pierced in the side by Longinus' lance.

The number eight symbolizes baptism and resurrection, and even today a number eight placed horizontally is the symbol of infinity in the language of mathematics.

To get closer to an understanding of the world of images in the Late Viking Age, in this case the cross motif on picture runestones in Västergötland, it is necessary to consider the above-mentioned and to remember that in the world of Christian symbols three of the most important motifs – the serpent, the Arbor Vitae/tree of life and the cross of Christ – share identity (Fig. 1). That is why we see acanthus leaves or the cross of Christ growing out of the body of a rune serpent (Bertelsen 2002, 28 f., fig. 20a–20b) or acanthus leaves and serpents growing out of the cross of Christ (Bertelsen 2002, 29, fig. 20c); there is nothing strange about that. In Late Viking Age art – as well as in Romanesque art – artists and patrons continually emphasized this common identity between the serpent, the Arbor Vitae/tree of life and the cross of

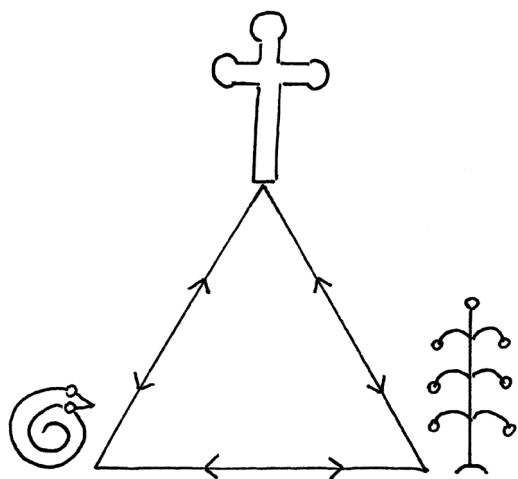


Fig. 1. In the world of Christian symbols, three of the most important motifs – the serpent, the Arbor Vitae/tree of life and the cross of Christ – share identity. They can all occur alone, but very often two or even all three of them appear together. Drawing by Lise Gjedssø Bertelsen.

Christ, and especially that between the tree of life and the cross of Christ (Bauerreiss 1938).

The serpent is one of the oldest motifs in man's pictorial world. Due to the unique form of the serpent's body, this animal can be drawn just as readily as a line, a circle, a spiral or a figure eight. From the earliest times the serpent has had an intimate association with the tree of life/plant of life, already known from *Gilgamesh*, an epic poem from Mesopotamia and one of the earliest surviving works of literature from the second millennium BC. Gilgamesh the prince searched for eternal life, represented by the plant of life, but he was overtaken during his quest by the serpent, which was the first creature to find the unique plant and to eat it. Some of the serpent's most prominent symbolic values are therefore, not surprisingly, strength, wisdom and eternal life, the latter represented in the serpent's ability to shed its skin and thereby renew its life. It is understandable that the wise serpent, which possessed eternal life, became the rune serpent on picture runestones, an animal that carries a message written on its body for future generations. The rune serpent makes its entry in public on Late Viking Age art picture runestones from the back/side B of DR 41, King Gormr's small Jelling stone from about AD 950 (Krogh 1983, 191, fig. 8a-8b; Matthiesen *et al.* 2009, <http://vimeo.com/36756973>).

The legend about why the Christian tree of life and the cross of Christ are two sides of the same coin is known from Jacobus de Voragine's famous *Legenda Aurea/The Golden Legend* from the 13th century, but by that time the legend had already put its mark on art for centuries. The legend tells that when the old Adam was dying, he sent his son Seth to the gates of Heaven to get a spring of the tree of life to comfort him in his last moments. Seth succeeded in getting a spring of the tree, but in the meantime Adam had already died and was buried at Golgotha Hill/"Skull Hill".

Therefore the spring of the tree of life was planted on Adam's grave, where it grew up to become an exceedingly beautiful tree. Later it was cut down to be used as building material in King Solomon's temple, but the tree would not fit into the building and was put away. Later still, the Queen of Sheba dreamed that this tree would one day cause great suffering for our Saviour. Therefore it was thrown into a stream; it later floated ashore, where it was found one day by the carpenter who was searching for material with which to build the cross of Christ. And now it had reached its final provision. The Arbor Vitae and the cross of Christ are therefore one and the same, and the old Adam was buried at the foot of the cross of Christ as a prediction of the new Adam/Christ crucified in the tree of life (Godefresen & Frederiksen 1988, 89 f.; Bertelsen 2010, 139).

The Vikings were well versed in this legend, which they knew, for instance, from the Insular West. Thus the famous Anglo-Saxon Ruthwell stone cross – located in the kingdom of Northumbria at that time (now southern Scotland) – tells in its rune text how the personified tree trembled when the mighty King climbed on to it and was nailed to it (Bertelsen 2002, 22). What the Ruthwell cross communicated in words, the large Jelling stone DR 42 C communicated in one picture centuries later.

The Golgotha drama is elegantly visualized in Viking Age art on, for instance, a gold bracelet from Råbylille, Moen, Denmark (Bertelsen 2002, 18, fig. 9; 2010, 141, fig. 3(a); Price 2013, 189, fig. 39), a type of cross coins from the time of King Haraldr himself (Bertelsen 2010, 139, fig. 1; Price 2013, 189, fig. 40) and, as mentioned, on DR 42, King Haraldr's large picture runestone (Fig. 2a-b-c). Side C/the Christ side of the latter had an overwhelming impact on the iconography of later picture runestones (Bertelsen 2006, 58 ff., fig. 9a-b, 10a-b, 11a-b).

For the first time we meet the Golgotha drama on a monumental scale in Late Viking Age art on King Haraldr's large picture runestone DR 42 side C/the Christ side, popularly known as Denmark's baptismal certificate. The royal monument, dated to about AD 965, has an intimate interrelationship between inscriptions and pictures on each

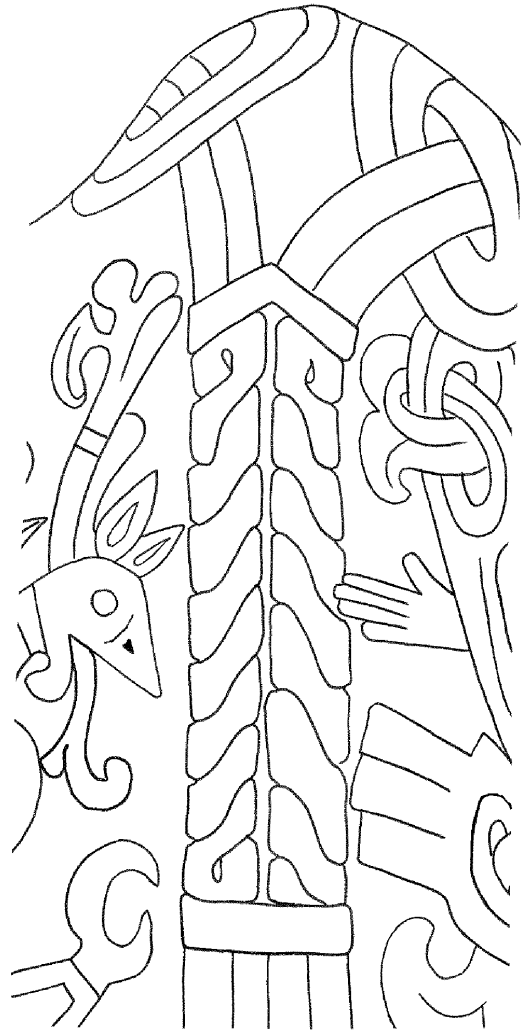


Fig. 2a. The common piece of the frame between side B & C on the large Jelling stone DR 42, indicating a seam between two pages in a Christian illuminated manuscript. Drawing by Lise Gjedssø Bertelsen.

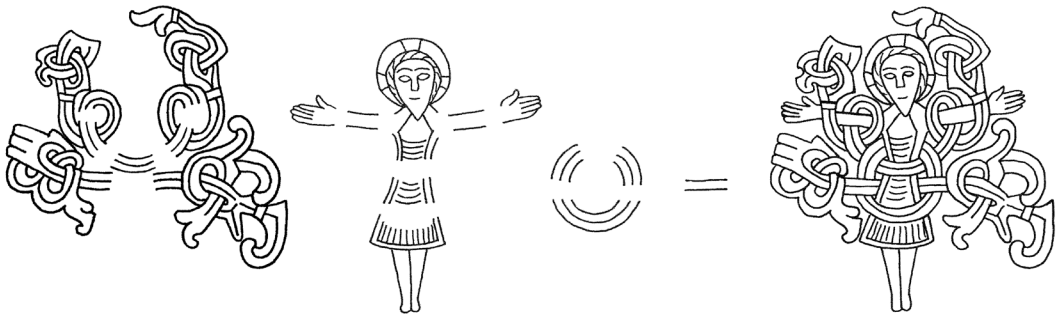


Fig. 2b. Plotted details of the high-status motif, Christ crucified on the tree of life, on the large Jelling stone DR 42 side C/the Christ side. Acanthus scrolls and leaves (= *pars pro toto* for the Christian tree of life) + cross (formed by Christ himself) + double circle. Mammen style. Drawing by Lise Gjedssø Bertelsen, from Bertelsen 2006, 58 f., fig. 9b.



Fig. 2c. Rubbing of the high-status motif, Christ crucified on the tree of life, on the large Jelling stone DR 42 side C/the Christ side. Note that the nail through Christ's left wrist could still be seen when the rubbing was made. Mammen style. Rubbing by Ludvig Stubbe Teglbjærg, from Teglbjærg 1982, 8, fig. 57.

side and between all three sides. The reading of the written text as well as of the images starts on side A/the inscription side (contains most of the text), continues on side B/the animal side and reaches its absolute peak on side C/the Christ side. The text reports that King Haraldr ordered this monument made in memory of Gormr, his father, and in memory of Pyrvé, his mother, and that Haraldr won all Denmark for himself (on side A and the beginning of side B), and Norway (on side B) and made the Danes Christian (on side C).

Normally rune inscriptions were arranged vertically on the stones, as for instance on the small Jelling stone DR 41. But the rune inscription on the three sides of the large Jelling stone DR 42 is arranged horizontally to make it look like a text in a Christian illuminated manuscript.

At the top of side A, the interlace of the front part of the serpent likewise might hint at (but is not) an elaborate initial letter in a Christian illuminated manuscript (Wamers 1999, 50 f.) and the twisted rope as the common framework between side B and C is an imitation of a seam between two pages in a Christian illuminated manuscript (Møller 1994; Bertelsen 2002, 20 ff.) (Fig. 2a).

The rendering of the Golgotha drama on DR 42 C is solid symbolism of the highest

calibre. A tangible cross is not depicted, but it is symbolized by the posture of Christ himself, with his head kept straight up, the arms outstretched horizontally and the legs held together (Fig. 2b). And that the cross of Christ and the tree of life are one and the same is elegantly suggested by the two acanthus scrolls, which keep Christ in the cross position. A double circle holds the acanthus scrolls and the cross-shaped Christ together. Both ends of the topmost acanthus scroll form a triquetra on both sides of Christ's head. The one on his left side winds itself up to build an acanthus leaf, which points in a most elegant way towards Christ to show us what it is all about. It is evident from a rubbing of this side of the stone carried out by Ludvig Stubbe Teglbjærg that Jelling's Christ originally had nails through the wrists (Fig. 2c) (Stubbe-Teglbjærg 2009, 121; Teglbjærg 1982, 8, fig. 57).

## Selected examples of the cross motif on picture runestones in Västergötland

The most common type of cross on picture runestones is the Greek cross with equally long bars. Then comes the Latin cross with a longer vertical bar transected above the midpoint by a shorter horizontal bar. The tau cross, shaped like the Greek letter T, can also be seen. No one knows what the cross of Christ looked like; it might, for example, have been a tau cross.

The cross can appear as a simple cross (without any elaborations), but it can also appear as a serpent cross (serpent + cross are one), a ring cross (cross + circle/ring together), a tree-of-life cross (acanthus vegetation or growth symbolism + cross) or a tree-of-life ring cross (acanthus growth symbolism + cross + circle/ring). Vegetation symbolism, a *pars pro toto* rendering of the Christian tree of life at this

time, can appear as acanthus buds, acanthus palmettes or acanthus leaves, or it can be hinted at by, for instance, the organic, rounded, leaf-like ends of the cross arms, or by one or more spiral(s) – a symbol of growth – at the foot of the cross. The cross motif often occurs together with other motifs, such as portals, quadrupeds/lions, ships, human-like figures.

*Some examples of simple crosses (without elaborations or fusion with other motifs) in Västergötland*

The high-status motif on **Vg 90 Torestorp, Håkantorps sn.** (*sn.* = parish) is a small, simple cross, seen en face, with equally long bars placed on the middle axis of a rune portal (Fig. 3a). The many rune portals on the picture runestones undoubtedly represent a passage in the New Testament (John 10:9), where Christ says that he is the door/gate and whoever enters through him will be saved. Contemporary miniature fibulae/pendant jewellery decorated with an acanthus-palmette-crowned portal or gable of a church with a door in the middle axis as the high-status motif are known, for instance, from Soldalgaard 2, Northern Jutland, Denmark (National Museum of Denmark, inv.no. D 453/2006). Two serpents frame and protect the high-status motif (Fig. 3b).

The stone was raised by Bróðir, who placed the stone in memory of his son, “a very good valiant man”. The name Bróðir is wrongly spelled Bórðir on the stone. The word good in rune texts in Västergötland is, as here, often mentioned in an empathetic way at the end of the text, and it occurs linked to words such as man, thegn (*þegn*), boy, farmer etc. (Herschend 1998, 69). The stone is 2.1 m high, 1.3 m wide and 0.2 m thick. The material is limestone; the text and cross are carved on one side. It is the first known picture runestone mentioned in literature and is cited as a boundary mark between Gudhem's monastery and Håkantorps town in a letter from 1287

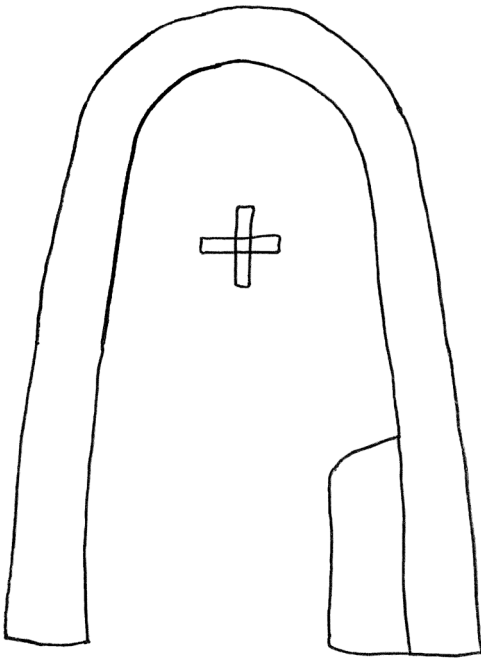


Fig. 3a. Vg 90 Torestorp, Håkantorps sn. Cross with equally long bars inside a rune portal. Drawing by Lise Gjedssø Bertelsen. The runes are omitted in the drawing.



Fig. 3b. Small fibula/pendant jewellery decorated with an acanthus-palmette-crowned portal or gable of a church with an entrance in the middle axis as the high-status motif. Two serpents frame and protect the high-status motif. From Soldalgaard 2, Northern Jutland (National Museum of Denmark, inv.no. D 453/2006). Photo by the National Museum of Denmark.

by King Magnus Ladulås of Sweden. Practical information on these picture runestones – such as, for instance, their texts – are obtained from *Samnordisk runtextdatabas* 2008, <http://www.nordiska.uu.se/forsk/samnord.htm> and from the corpus *Västergötlands runinskrifter* (Jungner & Svärdström 1940–1970). The latter is provided with a photograph of each picture runestone.

The high-status motif of **Vg 55 Källby ås** (*ås* = ridge), **Källby sn.** is a 3 m high Latin cross, seen en face, placed in a rune portal (Fig. 4). In spite of the simple rendering without elaborations, this cross is most impressive. The two entwined acanthus leaves at the top of the portal point to what it is all about: the cross of Christ. This detail of pointing out the high-status motif is, in my view, inherited directly from the large Jelling stone DR 42 C, where an acanthus leaf from the topmost

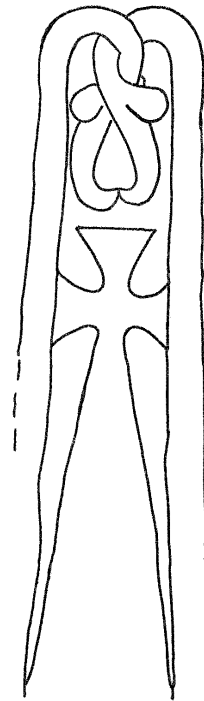


Fig. 4. Vg 55 Källby ås, Källby sn. Acanthus leaves pointing down towards the cross of Christ. Ringe-rike style. Drawing by Lise Gjedssø Bertelsen. The runes are omitted in the drawing.



scroll at the left side of the head of Christ points to Christ (Fig. 2b-c). Vg 55 Källby ås was raised by Ulfr and Ragnarr in memory of their father Fari, of whom it is said that he was a Christian man with good belief in God. The stone, probably standing in its original position, is a huge and worn red limestone. It is 4.4 m high, 1.3 m wide, 0.2 m thick, and is executed in the Ringerike style and carved on one side. The stone is almost as high as the tallest picture runestone in Sweden, the 4.6 m high Vg 117 Levene Kyrka, Levene sn., now in the churchyard.

*An example of a serpent cross (serpent + cross are one) in Västergötland*

The high-status motif on **Vg 193 Svenljunga gamla kyrka** (*gamla kyrka* = old church), **Svenljunga sn.**, now Svenljunga gamla kyrkogård, is a Latin cross, seen en face, with the lower vertical bar curved in an organic way (Fig. 5a-b). This clearly reveals that the cross shares an identity with the serpent/rune serpent. The cross springs from the serpent's tail and is one and the same with it. Unfortunately, the stone is damaged; as a result, the rune serpent's head or the beginning of the rune text – as well as more of the text – is lost, so that we know only that the stone was raised in memory of Sæfi's brother.

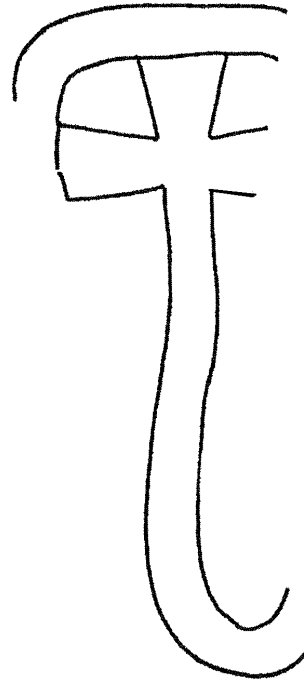


Fig. 5a-b. Vg 193 Svenljunga gamla kyrka, Svenljunga sn., now Svenljunga gamla kyrkogård. Fig. 5a (left): S. Welin in Karl Torin's "Vestergötlands runinskrifter", published in *Västergötlands fornminnesförenings tidskrift* 1, 1871–93. Fig. 5b (right): Drawing by Lise Gjedssø Bertelsen. The runes are omitted in this drawing.

Today the stone stands in the old churchyard, but it was previously built into the chancel of the old church, where it was found in 1887. The stone is 1.7 m high, 0.6 m wide and decorated on one side. The material is granite.

*Some examples of ring crosses (cross + circle/ring)*  
 The high-status motif of **Vg 197 Dalums kyrka, Dalums sn.**, now in the churchyard, is a ring cross, seen en face (Fig. 6). A Greek cross is combined with a circle around the centre of the cross. The cross fills the whole rune portal. As mentioned earlier, the rune portals of the picture runestones, in my opinion, represent the New Testament (John 10:9), where Christ says that he is the door/gate and whoever enters through him will be saved. The stone was raised by Tóki and his brothers in memory of their brothers, of whom one died in the west and the other in the east. The stone is 1.8 m high, 1.5 m wide, decorated on one side. When it was taken out of the church floor in 1941, it was already broken into multiple pieces. The material is granite.

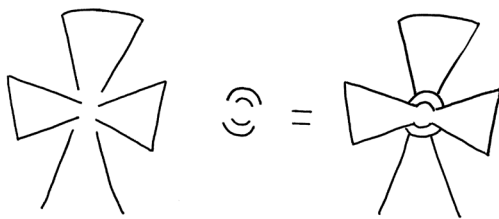


Fig. 6. Vg 197 Dalums kyrka, Dalums sn., now in the churchyard. Cross + circle = ring cross. Drawing by Lise Gjedssø Bertelsen. The rune portal is omitted in the drawing.

The high-status motif on **Vg 74 Vinköl, Vinkölsn.**, now the schoolyard/the old churchyard, is a Greek cross, seen en face, placed on top of a rune portal (Fig. 7). The symbolism of the number five is demonstrated by

five dots and five circles; one paired group is found around the centre of the cross, and the other four link this circle to the cross arms. In Christian tradition the number five symbolizes the passion and transformation, because Christ suffered five sacred piercing wounds during the crucifixion; he was nailed to the cross through his wrists and feet and pierced in the side by Longinus' lance. The crucified and risen Christ is the mediator between God and man. The cross is elegantly placed on top of the rune portal, the meaning of which has been explained previously. Since 1928 the stone has stood near Vinköl school in the grounds of the old churchyard. It was earlier built into the churchyard wall of Vinköl old church, which has been demolished. The stone was raised by Ágoti(?) in memory

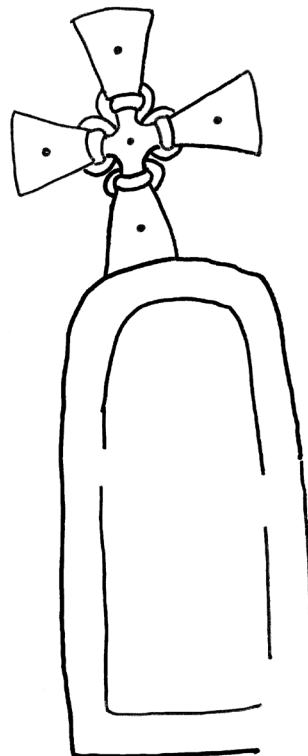


Fig. 7. Vg 74 Vinköl, Vinköl sn., now in the schoolyard/the old churchyard. Cross + circle(s)/ring(s) = ring cross. Drawing by Lise Gjedssø Bertelsen. The runes are omitted in the drawing.

of Ásgautr, his father(?), a very good thegn (Herschend 1998, 66 ff. & 130 f.). The deceased men mentioned in this article at Vg 8 Hjalstad (Fig. 11a-b), Vg 151 Eggvena kyrka (Fig. 14) and Vg 152 Håkansgården (Fig. 10) were also mentioned as having been thegns. The stone is 2.3 m high, almost 1 m wide and decorated on one side. The material is dark granite.

*Example of a tree-of-life cross (symbol(s) of movement/growth and/or vegetation + cross)*

The high-status motif on **Vg 33 Stommen, Mellby sn.** is a Latin cross, seen en face, which stands on the middle axis at the base of the picture field under a tall, slim rune portal (Fig. 8). At its foot, the cross is embellished with a spiral, a dynamic detail which symbolizes movement and growth and thereby hints at the tree of life in the cross of Christ in an elegant way. The symbolism of the portal has been mentioned previously. The stone is 1.6 m high, 0.6 m wide and decorated on one side. The material is gneiss. The inscription says that Geirvarr(?)/Geirvôr(?)/Gróa(?) raised the stone in memory of Tosti(?), his son. And that Þóra fetched(?) the stone, which means brought it there. Since 1936 the stone has stood in a garden near Mellby Stommen; it was at one time broken into two pieces, but

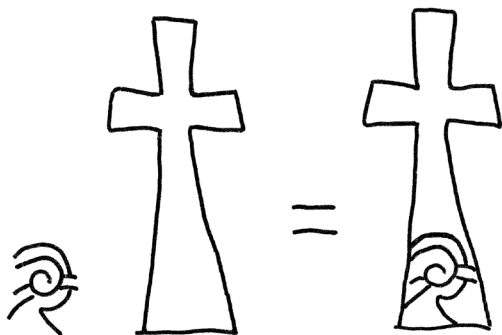


Fig. 8. Vg 33 Stommen, Mellby sn. Symbol of movement/growth here in the shape of a dynamic spiral + cross. Drawing by Lise Gjedssø Bertelsen. The rune portal is omitted in the drawing.

they are united today. The lower part was taken out of a bridge at Stommen field in 1870. The upper part was found in 1918 in a now demolished house in Stommen garden, so the original location of the stone was probably somewhere nearby.

*Some examples of the tree-of-life ring cross (symbol(s) of movement, growth and/or vegetation + cross + circle)*

On **Vg 156 Remmene kyrka, Remmene sn.**, now in the churchyard, the high-status motif is a most elegant tree-of-life ring cross, seen en face, which is composed of acanthus leaves from the Christian tree of life + cross + circle (Fig. 9a). The cross is a Latin cross, and as an extra clarification of the tree of life as the cross of Christ, the foot of the cross ends in two spirals, symbolizing movement/life/growth, and the cross arms are shaped organically as rounded living leaves. The latter resemble the rounded leaves on, for example, the upper of two fragments of a limestone slab with a tree-of-life ring cross also in Ringerike style from the City of London (British Museum inv.no. 1883.1219,1) (Fig. 9b). The cross from London has been interpreted as a “rosette-shaped floriate cross with diagonally placed pear-shaped cross arms separated verti-

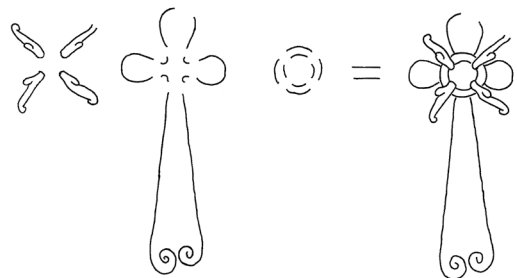


Fig. 9a. Vg 156 Remmene kyrka, Remmene sn., now in the churchyard. Acanthus leaves (*pars pro toto* for the Christian tree of life) + cross + circle. The rounded cross bars are shaped organically as leaves and there are spirals at the foot of the cross. Ringerike style. Drawing by Lise Gjedssø Bertelsen.

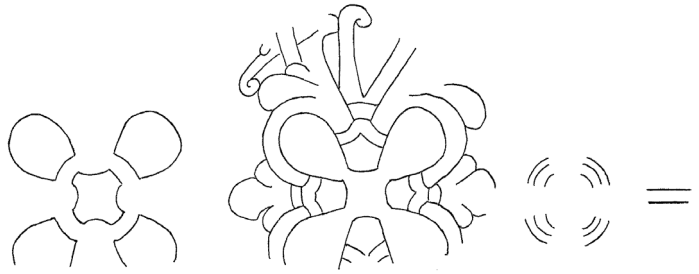


Fig. 9b. Upper fragment of two of a limestone slab from the City of London (British Museum inv.no. 1883.1219,1). Pear-shaped acanthus leaves (*pars pro toto* for the Christian tree of life) + cross built up of acanthus tendrils and palmettes + circle. Drawing and photo by Lise Gjedssø Bertelsen.

cally by tendrils and horizontally by tri-partite lobes” (Fuglesang 1980, 190 & pl. 54). In my view, however, the situation is the reverse: the four pear-shaped figures represent organically rounded acanthus leaves, whereas the cross itself is made up of the acanthus tendrils and palmettes/tripartite lobes. Leaves and cross are kept together by the circle as seen often before.

The cross of Christ with organic rounded arms is well known from coins in the 11th century, as for instance on Canute the Great’s coins of the so-called “Jewel Cross” type (Lager 2002, 132, fig. 47 right) and on Harald Hen’s coins (Jensen 1995, 112–113). Pendant crosses with equivalent organic rounded arms are also known, as for example from Steninget in Northern Jutland, Denmark (Nilsson 1994, 71, fig. 10), Keldur and Rauðnefsstaðir in Southwest Iceland (Bertelsen 1994, 61, fig. 4) and Bonderup, Zealand, Denmark (Bertelsen 2002, 25, fig. 16). The latter is furthermore provided with acanthus leaves.

Vg 156 Remmene stands today in the churchyard, but was previously built into the church wall. The text of the stone tells us that the stone was raised by Þorbjörn in memory of his brother’s son Þórir, who was a very

good lad. A lad is normally understood as a free man and warrior, but of lower rank than a thegn (Herschend 1998, 66 f. & 130 f.). The stone is 1.6 m high, 0.7 m wide, somewhat damaged. It is decorated in Ringerike style, carved on two sides. The material is grey granite. The craftsman might have been the same one who also carved Vg 151 Eggvena kyrka (Fig. 14) and Vg 152 Håkansgården, also in Eggvena (Fig. 10).

The high-status motif on **Vg 152 Håkansgården** (*gård* = farm), **Eggvena sn.** is the cross of Christ, rendered en face, positioned in the finest place of the picture field and on the middle axis (Fig. 10). The cross is the tree-of-life ring cross composed of acanthus stalks from the tree of life + cross + circle. In this case, however, the acanthus stalks spring directly from the circle. There are implications here that the cross of Christ and the tree of life from Paradise are one and the same; this point is underscored in an elegant way by the rounded cross arms designed as organic leaves. The cross is placed in a rune frame, which forms a portal with the symbolism explained above. Vg 152 Håkansgården stands in its original place next to the road between Eggvena church and Brättensby, an area rich in church-

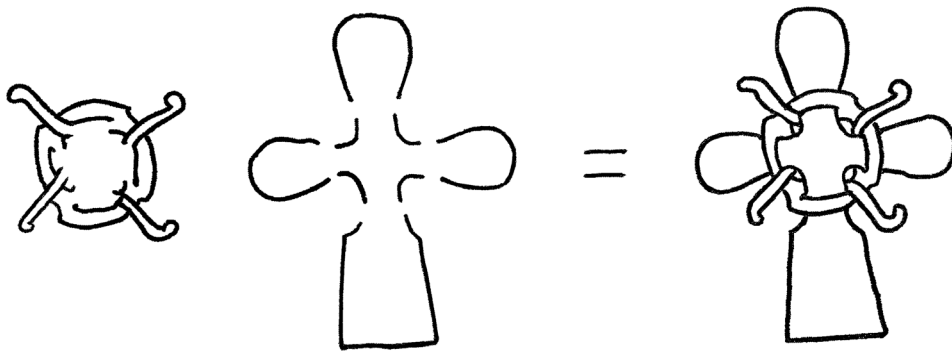


Fig. 10. Vg 152 Håkansgården, Eggvena sn. Acanthus stalks (*pars pro toto* for the Christian tree of life) + cross + circle (from which the stalks in this case spring, which is also the case concerning Vg 151 Eggvena kyrka (Fig. 14)) and organic rounded cross arms. Ringerike style. Drawing by Lise Gjedssø Bertelsen. The rune portal is omitted in the drawing.

es. The cross with organic rounded arms is also well known from the miniature objects of the time, as pointed out earlier. The text says that Gunnvör raised this stone in memory of Kani, her husband, a very good thegn. Like Vg 8 Hjalstad kyrka's Geirmundr (Fig. 11a-b), Vg 74 Vinköl's Ásgautr (Fig. 7) and Vg 151 Eggvena kyrka's Vífi (Fig. 14), Kani had been a good thegn, which probably meant a free man and a senior warrior in the king's service. The stone is 2.4 m high, 2 m wide and executed in Ringerike style on one side. The material is gneiss. It is possible that the craftsman who carved this stone was the same man who also carved Vg 151 Eggvena at the churchyard (Fig. 14) and Vg 156 Remmene (Fig. 9a).

**Vg 8 Hjalstad kyrka, Hjalstad sn.**, now in Hjalstad churchyard, is of granite and has a rhombic shape (the tree-of-life ring cross, Fig. 11a-b, is depicted on the front of the stone). The text tells us that Geitingr(?) raised this stone in memory of Geirmundr, his brother, a good thegn. Just like the other deceased men commemorated on Vg 74 Vinköl (Fig. 7), Vg 151 Eggvena kyrka (Fig. 14) and Vg 152 Håkansgården (Fig. 10) – all mentioned in this article – Geirmundr had been a good thegn,

a distinguished title probably for a high-ranking freeman, who held land from the king in return for serving the king in a military position. During the reign of Canute the Great, Västergötland might have been attached to the king's expanded realm. The text ends with a prayer to God. The decoration is distributed with elegant consistency over three surfaces, with the largest in the middle flanked by two smaller related sections; the decoration is arranged in a way that remind us of a Christian triptych. The high-status motif appears on the front face on the middle axis: an immense tree-of-life ring cross, seen en face, combined with extended acanthus leaves as *pars pro toto* for the tree of life + cross + double circle. The foot of the cross is made up of an acanthus palmette. The head of the rune serpent with round eyes is seen in a bird's-eye view. The rune serpent is placed from bottom at the heraldic right picture side of the stone (the head of the serpent), along the top above the tree-of-life ring cross on the front side (the body of the serpent), and it descends to the heraldic left picture side (the tail of the serpent) pointing up to a small cross staff.

The cross of Christ is thereby rendered twice on this stone: first on the front on a



Fig. 11a. Vg 8 Hjälstad kyrka, Hjälstad sn., now in Hjälstad churchyard, all three decorated faces. Photo from *Västergötlands Runinskrifter*.

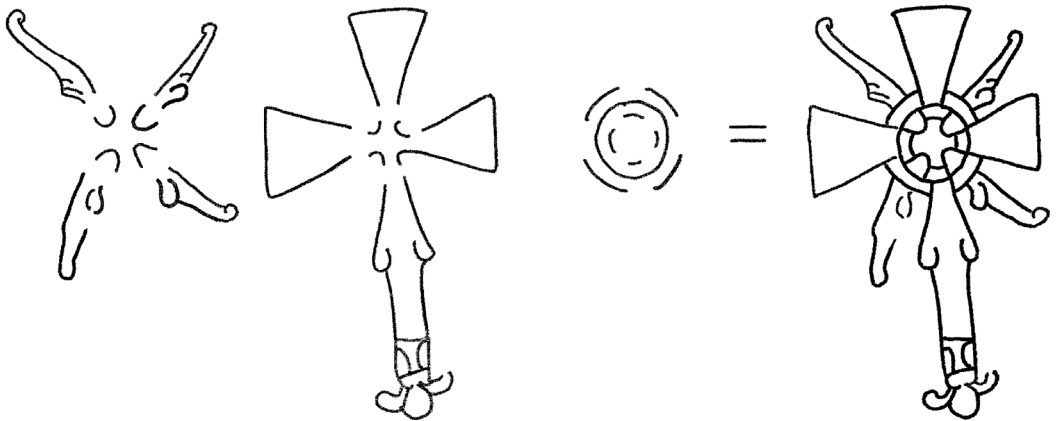


Fig. 11b. Vg 8 Hjälstad kyrka, Hjälstad sn., now in Hjälstad churchyard. Acanthus leaves, acanthus buds and acanthus palmette (*pars pro toto* for the Christian tree of life) + cross + circle. Ringerike style. Drawing by Lise Gjedssø Bertelsen. The rune portal is omitted in the drawing.

large scale, with explicit overtones of the tree of life in the cross and the circle of eternity, and the second time at the heraldic left side of the stone on a small scale, with overtones of the cross. This way of showing the cross of Christ twice on an object – as both the tree-of-life cross and the cross – was widespread at the time, and not only on picture runestones. It is also the case, for instance, on a coin from the reign of Canute the Great. The name of the moneyer was Alward in Lund. On the obverse, the cross of Christ is depicted springing up between the branches of the living tree on Golgotha, and on the reverse of the coin the cross of Christ is depicted as a cross (Jensen 1995, 54 f. & 140). The latter is equipped with five round dots, a number symbolism hinting at the Passion.

The four-sided granite block is 1.6 m high, 0.75 m wide, 0.30 m thick, executed in the Ringerike style and decorated on three sides. In 1890 the stone was taken out of the church, and in 1937 it was raised on its present spot.

On **Vg 127 Larvs hed** (*hed* = heath), **Larvs sn.** the high-status motif is a Christian cross, seen en face, and positioned at the most distinguished part of the picture field: top-most and on the middle axis (Fig. 12). The tree-of-life ring cross is composed of acanthus palmettes from the tree of life + cross + double circle. The rune serpent, with its head seen

from a bird's-eye view and its tail ending in an acanthus leaf, forms the protective portal around the tree-of-life ring cross. The embellishment has a certain resemblance to that on Sö 174 Aspö kyrka but is more elegant. Vg 127 Larvs hed stands along the road between the churches of Larv and Edsvära. The text says that Ôlvir(?) and Áskatla raised the stone in memory of Gunnarr, Sigtryggr's son, a good valiant man. May the Lord God save his spirit (Herschend 1998, 66 f. & 130 f.). The material is grey granite. The stone is 2.7 m high, 1.5–1.8 m wide, 0.4–0.5 m thick and decorated in Ringerike style on one side. The arrangements of the palmettes here are akin to the arrangements on some coins of the time, for instance from the reigns of Ethelred the Unready, Canute the Great, Hardecanute and Magnus the Good (Lager, 2002, 132, fig. 44, 45, 46).

*Some examples of the cross motif with the hill of Golgotha shown or hinted at on picture runestones*

The high-status motif on **Vg 175 Silarps bro** (*bro* = bridge), **Dalums sn.** is the cross of Christ standing on Golgotha Hill, which is reproduced here almost in perspective – a mode of presentation which is early and unusual (Fig. 13). The Latin cross, seen en face, is placed highest and on the middle axis. The

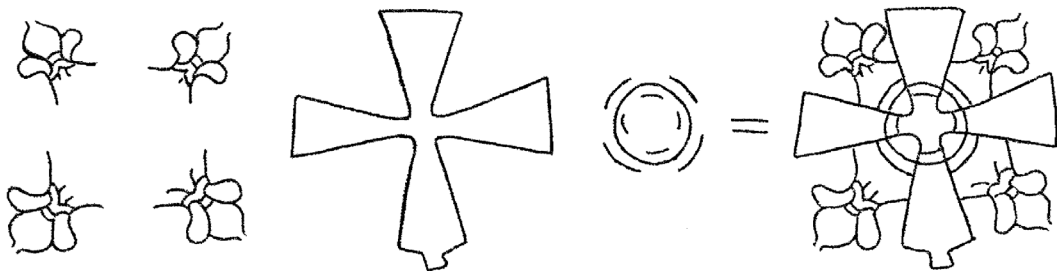


Fig. 12. Vg 127 Larvs hed, Larvs sn. Acanthus palmettes (*pars pro toto* for the Christian tree of life) + cross + double circle. Ringerike style. Drawing by Lise Gjedssø Bertelsen. The rune frame is omitted in the drawing.

rune bands are seen one on each side and ending underneath the horizontal bars of the cross. The text says that Refr and Vésteinn raised this stone in memory of Þorsteinn, their father. The stone is 1.7 m high, 0.9 m wide and 0.25 m thick. It was found in 1898, placed in the Silarp bridge. After being removed from the bridge it was raised at its present location on a grave mound in an area with more grave mounds not far from the Silarp bridge over the Sile river. Given the Christian context of picture runestones in Västergötland this tendency – seen in recent times – of moving a newly found stone and placing it on a grave mound is misleading.

On **Vg 151 Eggvena kyrka, Eggvena sn.**, now in the churchyard, the high-status motif is the tree-of-life ring cross, seen en face, and positioned at the finest position in the picture field and on the middle axis (Fig. 14). The cross is the tree-of-life ring cross, consisting of acanthus stalks from the tree of life + cross + circle. But in this case, thin acanthus stalks spring directly from the circle, which was also the case in regard to Vg 152 Håkansgården, Eggvena sn. (Fig. 10). Suggestions that the cross of Christ and the tree of life from Paradise are one and the same are also subtly intimated by the organic rounded cross arms, and by the fact that the cross blends in with/grows out of the ground as a living tree. This hints that the cross of Christ was constructed from the material which originated with the spring of the tree of life in Eden; this spring later grew on Golgotha hill at the old Adam's grave. The cross at Vg 151 Eggvena kyrka is arranged inside a rune portal, alluding to John 10:9 in the New Testament, as mentioned before. The stone today close to the church stands. The text says that Véfastr raised this stone in memory of Vífi, a very good thegn. For the word thegn, compare Vg 8 Hjalstad kyrka (Fig. 11a-b), Vg 152 Håkansgården (Fig. 10) and Vg 74 Vinköl (Fig. 7) (Herschend 1998, 66 f. & 130 f.). The stone is of gneiss, 1.35 m

high, 1.15 m wide at the base, 0.2 m thick and executed in Ringerike style on one side. It is likely that the stone was carved by the same carver who made Vg 152 Håkanstorp (Fig. 10) and possibly also Vg 156 Remmene (Fig. 9a).

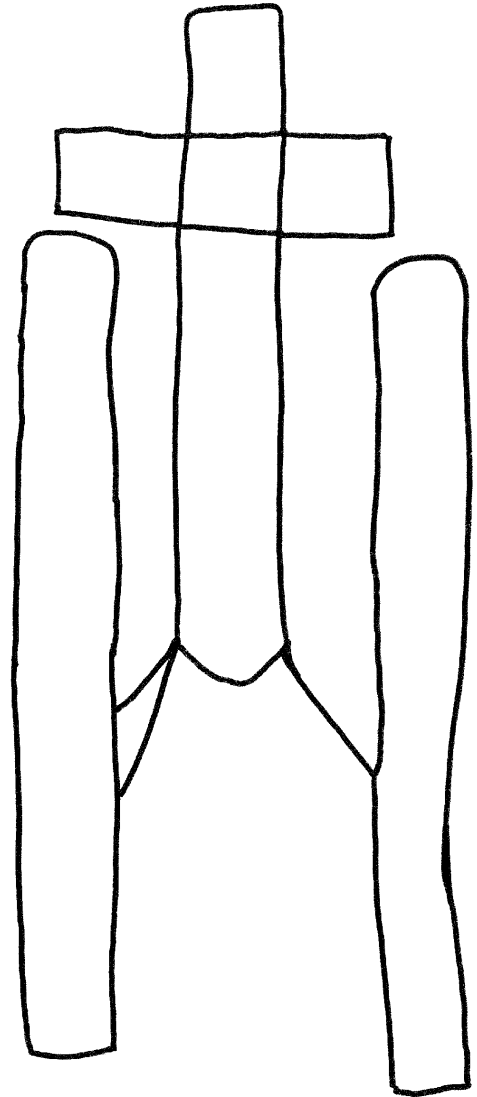


Fig. 13. Vg 175 Silarps bro, Dalums sn. Drawing by Lise Gjedssø Bertelsen. The runes are omitted in the drawing.



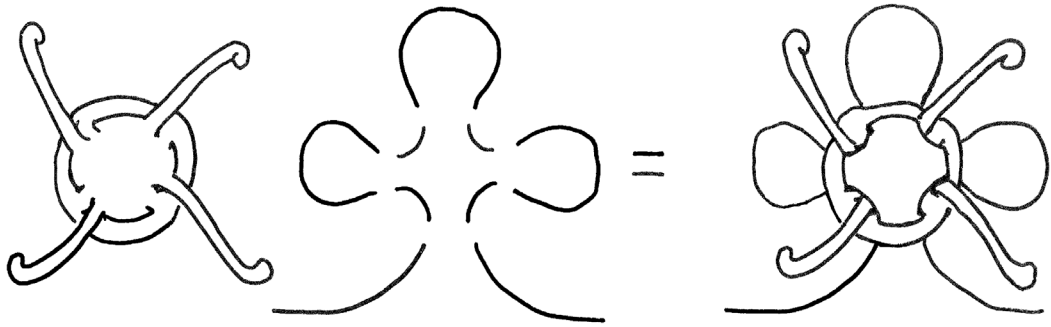


Fig. 14. Vg 151 Eggvena kyrka, Eggvena sn., now in the churchyard. Acanthus stalks (*pars pro toto* for the Christian tree of life) + cross + circle (from which the leaves spring in this case, as was the case on Vg 152 Håkansgården) and organic, rounded cross arms. Ringerike style. Drawing by Lise Gjedssø Bertelsen. The rune portal is omitted in the drawing.

*Examples of some picture runestones where the cross of Christ occurs together with other motifs, such as a quadruped/lion, a ship and a human being inside a portal*

The high-status motif on one of Västergötland's most beautiful and famous picture runestones **Vg 181 Olsbro, Frugården, Norra Åsarp sn.** is the Christian cross, seen en face, placed at the prime position of the picture field: topmost and on the centre axis (Fig. 15a-b). The cross, which is carried by a big quadruped/lion is the tree-of-life ring cross composed of acanthus buds from the tree of life + cross + circle. The quadruped is a descendent of the quadruped/lion on side B/ the animal side of King Haraldr's large picture runestone DR 42 in Jelling (Lindahl 1982, 40 f.; Wideen 1955, 252, fig. 87 & 253, fig. 88). In my interpretation, it is a lion, but over the years different interpretations of the four-legged animal have been made (Oehrl 2011). The rune serpent, with its head seen in profile, is depicted with a three-part acanthus-bud tongue, an acanthus tail and a three-part acanthus lappet emanating from the top of its head. This signals that the ambivalent serpent, possessing powerful forces of both chaos and cosmos, is in this case highlighted as a positive

symbol because it carries parts of the tree of life inside its body. The rune serpent fences and protects the cross and the quadruped/lion and with its acanthus tongue it points at the high-status motif. The text tells us that Gufi raised this stone in memory of Ólafr, his son, a very good valiant man. He was killed in Estonia. Hávarðr(?) cut the stone (Jesch 2001, 230). The stone is 2.1 m high, 1.6 m wide, 0.3–0.5 m thick and ornamented in Ringerike style on one side. The stone was carved by Hávarðr(?), who probably also carved Vg 158 Fännesslunda, which high-status motif is a similar tree-of-life ring cross, but with more extended acanthus leaves (Christiansson 1959, fig. 95).

On **Vg 51 Husaby kyrkogård, Husaby sn.**, since 1902 in Statens Historiska Museum/the Swedish History Museum in Stockholm, inv.no. 11.645, the high-status motif is the tree-of-life ring cross as mast and sail of a Viking ship (Fig. 16a). The cross, seen en face, is placed at the finest position of the picture field on the middle axis, and it fills most of the picture field inside the frame. At the top and sides, the frame consists of a rune portal; at the bottom, it consists of the hull of the ship seen from the left side. The ship's



Fig. 15a. Vg 181 Olsbro, Frugården, Norra Åsarp sn. Photo from *Västergötlands Runinskrifter*.

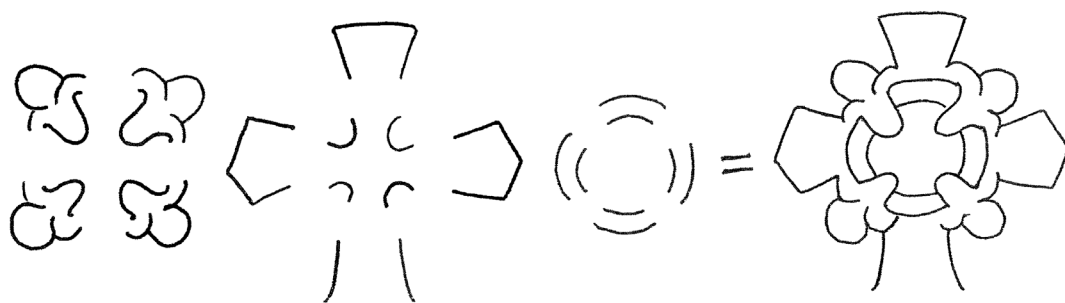


Fig. 15b. Vg 181 Olsbro, Frugården, Norra Åsarp sn. Acanthus buds (*pars pro toto* for the Christian tree of life) + cross + circle. Ringerike style. Drawing by Lise Gjedssø Bertelsen.

prow is equipped with a dragon or serpent's head, which shows us that it is a longship/warship, not a merchant ship. The dragon or serpent's head with acanthus-top lappet is seen in front of the rune band. The stern of the vessel ends in a tapering, which is held in place by the rune band. The rune portal visualizes Christ as the door/gate to salvation, as mentioned earlier, and the ship motif in traditional Christian symbolism is the Christian church itself, in the sense of both the Christian congregation and the nave/the largest room of a church building, where the assembly is held. Ships are mentioned several times in the Bible. In Genesis 6–9 in the Old Testament, we hear about Noah's ark, the ship by which God saved Noah, his family and a remnant of the world's animals from the flood. In Mark 4:35–41, Luke 8:22–25 and Matthew 8:23–27, in the New Testament, we are told of one of Christ's miracles: he calmed the waves when he and his disciples were crossing the Sea of Galilee in a boat one evening and nearly drowned.

The text of the picture runestone tells us that Ólafr placed this stone in memory of Hreiðarr, his son. So Hreiðarr might figuratively be a passenger on a safe journey to eternity in a boat, with the Christian tree-of-life ring cross as mast and sail.

The stone was found in multiple pieces

in the wall of the Husaby churchyard, but it had previously been placed as a stepping stone in the eastern cemetery gate. The material is sandstone; it is 2.10 m high and 1 m wide and decorated in the Ringerike style on one side.

It is debated whether this stone is a regular picture runestone or a rock from an early Christian grave monument (Åhfeldt 2012, 155). The fact that the text says that the stone "was placed" might support the theory of a picture runestone.

In Late Viking Age art, the ship motif makes its entry on a monumental scale as the contour of the text and as the bottom part of the frame of DR 42 B/the animal side of the large Jelling stone (Fig. 16b) (Christiansson 1953, 78, fig. 4a-b). Concerning the master plan of the Jelling monuments (for a schematic drawing of the Jelling monuments see Roesdahl 2011, 355, fig. 3), I see it as a sophisticated detail that the likely huge ship setting inside the palisade is "sailing" parallel to the ship at the bottom of DR 42 side B/the animal side. The ship on the large Jelling stone is seen without mast and sail but equipped with ram bows. This is also the case for depictions of other ships following immediately after, as for instance on DR 271 Tullstorp (Christiansson 1953, 82, fig. 7) and on one of the fragments of DR 258 Bösarp (Bertelsen 2003b, 21, fig. 6b), both Scania,

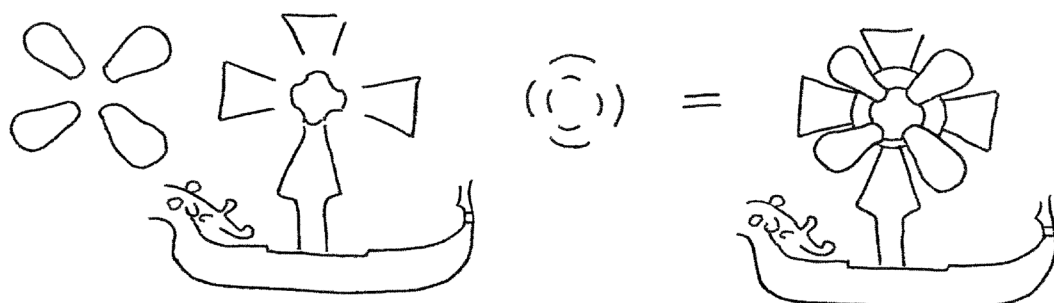


Fig. 16a. Vg 51 Husaby kyrkogård, Husaby sn., since 1902 in Statens Historiska Museum/the Swedish History Museum in Stockholm, inv.no. 11.645. Ringerike style. Drawing by Lise Gjedssø Bertelsen. The rune portal is omitted in the drawing.

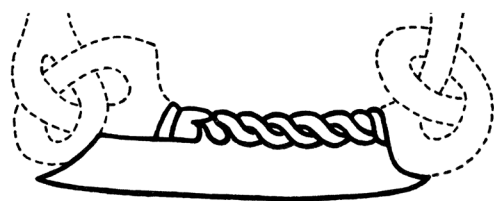


Fig. 16b. The large Jelling stone DR 42 lower part of side B. Top: Retouched detail. Bottom: Reconstructed runeband outline, the runes are omitted in the drawing. From Christiansson 1953, 78, fig. 4a–b.

and both executed in a younger phase of the Mammen style. The phenomenon of the tree-of-life ring cross as mast and sail on a ship is younger and belongs to the Ringerike style; these ships take up a large part of the picture field and have become its high-status motif.

Sö 122 Skresta (Christiansson 1959, fig. 100), Sö 154 Skarpåker (Varenius 1992, 93, fig. 66) and Sö 164 Spånga (Christiansson 1959, fig. 33; Jesch 2001, 121) are all excellent examples of this. Sö 164 Spånga has even got the ship itself equipped with the tree-of-life ring cross as mast and sail drawn inside the whole frame. The text of this stone announces that Guðbjörn (and) Oddi raised this stone in memory of Guðmarr, their father. He who died stood valiantly in the stem of the ship; (now) lies inhumed in the west. The picture of a ship therefore also fits very well with the deceased's profession when alive.

The high-status motif on **Vg 32 Källands-Åsaka kyrka, Källands-Åsaka sn.**, now in the churchyard, is a Greek cross, seen en face, and placed in the finest place of the picture field: topmost, on the middle axis and just beneath the top of the portal which fences and protects what is inside it (Fig. 17). The portal is closed at the bottom by a horizontal rune line. Above this, and underneath the cross, stands a man seen in profile; it must be remembered that the profile rendering is of a lower status than one seen en face (Bertelsen 2006, 47 f.). He is humble compared to the Christian cross, of course. The man wears a pointed, conical hat or helmet on his head and is dressed in a robe with slits above the knees and long sleeves. Around the man's right wrist is seen either a cuff of a sleeve or a bracelet; around the waist

he is wearing a belt, which does not end in a belt bracket, but rather in an acanthus leaf, a *pars pro toto* for the tree of life. It is straightforward to understand the depicted man under the portal as the deceased knocking at the

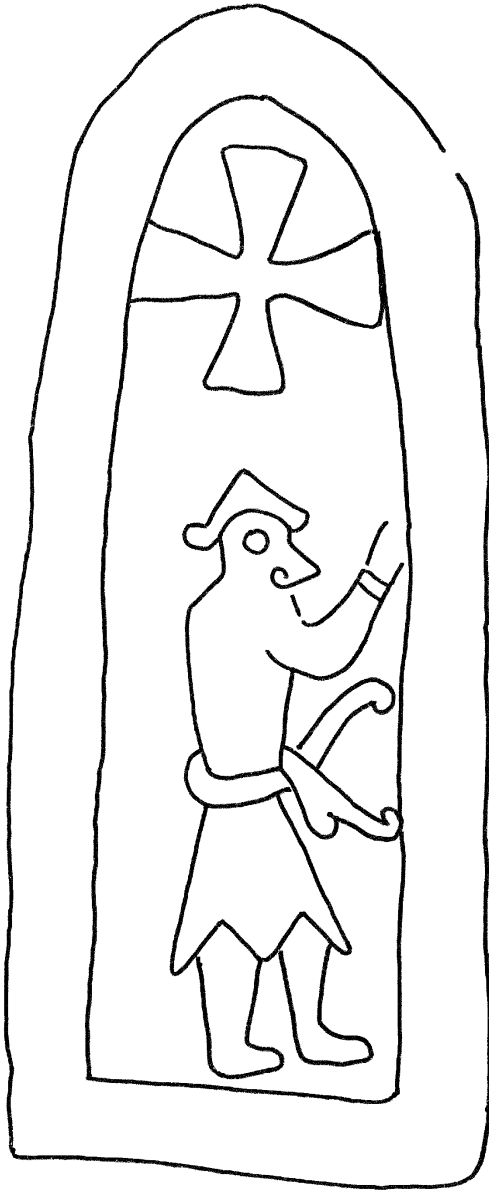


Fig. 17. Vg 32 Källands-Åsaka kyrka, Källands-Åsaka sn., now in the churchyard. Ringerike style. Drawing by Lise Gjedssø Bertelsen. The runes are omitted in the drawing.

door of Paradise when one remembers the text from John 10:9 in the New Testament about Christ being the door/gate to salvation. The material of the stone is gneiss, and it measures 1.75 m in height, 0.55 m in width and 0.23 m in thickness. It was discovered in 1874, where it had been built into the southern external wall of the chancel. It was taken out and has been standing in the churchyard since 1936. The text informs us that Þórðr and Þórunnr raised this stone in memory of Erri, an excellent valiant man. The style is Ringerike, with decoration on one side.

## Conclusion

Scandinavian picture runestones are monumental representations of Late Viking Age art that range in time from *c.* 950 to 1135 AD. This art contains three styles: Mammen, Ringerike and Urnes style. The pictures on the stones were Scandinavian designs in continuous development, conveying first of all Christianity. The Christian cross – in different types and elaborations – was a dominant motif. The most frequent types were the Greek and Latin crosses, but for instance the tau cross occurred as well. Among the elaborations the most frequent are the tree-of-life cross, the ring cross and the tree-of-life ring cross, but the large Jelling stone DR 42 C/Christ side also shows Christ. When Christ is depicted crucified on the cross, the image is called a crucifix (from Latin *cruci fixus*, which means a person (here Christ) fixed to a cross), but the message is the same as that of the cross: the dissemination of the Christian faith in resurrection and eternal life.

The tradition of raising picture runestones in Scandinavia has its source first of all in King Harald's large picture runestone DR 42, executed in Mammen style and from about AD 965. The text as well as the images of this stone pay tribute to the founding of

the Jelling dynasty (face A of the stone), the founding of the kingdom of Denmark (including Norway) (Denmark's birth certificate) (face B) and the Christianization of the Danes (Denmark's baptismal certificate) (face C). Not surprisingly the following picture runestones, raised by people of certain standards (although not of King Haraldr's rank) signal status, kinship, religious and political allegiances, and cosmopolitanism, and they may also constitute legal documents.

The distribution area of the Scandinavian picture runestones extends roughly from Jelling in Denmark to Frösö in Jämtland, Sweden, with Västergötland in the middle and with Uppland as the province with the highest density of the stones. The tradition spread from south to north and went out of fashion during this propagation; Danish monuments are the oldest, while the Norwegian and Swedish ones are younger. Generally the stones go through the evolution from a Christian memorial stone to a Christian tombstone, eventually telling about a person buried inside a church (Gräslund 2001, 117, fig. 35), or as on Vg 50 Husaby kyrka, executed in Urnes style, where the text clearly states that Ózurr and Sveinn and Þórir "laid this stone over" their mother Ólôf. May God and God's mother and all of God's angels help her soul. Today this stone stands raised with the help of a cement plinth in the churchyard, but should rightly be lying down. The original position of a picture runestone is most often not known because many of the stones were reused in church buildings in the Early Middle Ages, as well as later as material in bridges, roads etc.

Most of the picture runestones of Västergötland are executed in the Ringerike style, the vogue in the first half of the 11th century at the time of the reign of Canute the Great of England, Denmark, Norway and parts of Sweden; in the latter case, Canute's position was probably one of overlordship rather than as a direct ruler. The thegn stones signalled

political allegiance, probably to King Canute the Great, and the two largest groups of thegn stones are near Mariager Fjord in Denmark, and just on the opposite side of the Kattegat in Västergötland.

The widely travelled Vikings were familiar with Christianity and Christian symbolism. Through their art they were able to communicate highly abstract theological relations, as for instance between three of the most important symbols: the serpent, the Arbor Vitae/tree of life and the cross of Christ, and they adored the legend about the Golgotha drama that revealed why the Christian tree of life and the cross of Christ are one and the same. That this relationship was understood by the Vikings has been proven by the fact, that it was conveyed in a fully understandable way on the large Jelling stone DR 42/side C throughout Late Viking Age art and into Romanesque art.

Nothing instantly communicates abstract intellectual religious thoughts better than pictures, because a long story, like for instance the Golgotha drama, can be contained in a single illustration. And nothing attracts man's attention more than pictures, because sight is man's dominant sense (Den Store Danske Encyklopædi 2009, syn). About a millennium ago, the images and icons on the picture runestones and their texts glowed in bright colours in Scandinavian landscapes during spring, summer, autumn and winter, radiating their messages, first of all about the Christian salvation and resurrection. The Christ side of the large Jelling stone DR 42, standing since its earliest origins in front of a church, proclaims – like a modern-day film poster – this message: "Look, come inside and see and hear what we can report!"

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