

The Late Viking Age Runestones of Västergötland

On Ornamentation and Chronology

BY ANNE-SOFIE GRÄSLUND

Abstract

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The runestones of Västergötland are investigated as to ornamentation in order to find out whether there is a possibility to divide them chronologically, as has previously been done with regard to the runestones of Uppland. A certain number of the Västergötland runestones show iconographic elements responding positively to such an inquiry, some of them with zoomorphic ornamentation, others with elements typical of Ringerike ornamentation. Apparently, the runestone fashion flourished in Västergötland from the end of the 10th century up to the middle of the 11th. The inscription on one of the youngest traditional runestones tells that the stone was laid over a mother by her three sons. This shows that the time of standing memorial stones was over, replaced by gravestones lying in horizontal position or early Christian box-tombs, in all probability at a consecrated burial ground, perhaps even a churchyard.

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Earlier research

The task of publishing the rich runestone material of the province of Västergötland was originally given to the philologist Hugo Jungner by the Royal Academy of Letters. The aim was to publish the volume in the series *Sveriges runinskrifter*. Before his death in 1940, Jungner managed to publish two fascicules of plates. After Jungner's death, the task was assigned to the runologist Elisabeth Svärdström, who worked with this for many years, contemporaneously with other duties. In 1958, fascicule 3 (*Runic inscriptions on runestones and grave-slabs from the county of Skaraborg*) and fascicule 4 (*Runic inscriptions on runestones and grave-slabs from the counties of Älvsborg and of Göteborg and Bohus*) appeared. Finally, in 1970, fascicule 5 was published,

consisting of a general introduction to the runic inscriptions of Västergötland as well as a catalogue of inscriptions on other objects than runestones or grave-slabs. The five fascicules together form volume 5 of *Sveriges runinskrifter (Västergötlands runinskrifter 1940-1970)*.

In April 2012, an all-day seminar was held at the Department of Scandinavian Languages at Uppsala University, dedicated to Elisabeth Svärdström's achievements in Swedish runology. Naturally, the runestones of Västergötland played an important role at this seminar. This article is a fuller version of my contribution there.

Elisabeth Svärdström reports 130 real runestones (erected stones) and 67 gravestones with runic inscriptions (lying slabs, lid- and gable-slabs of box-tombs, so-called Eskilstuna

sarcophagi, as well as coffin-shaped slabs). In my opinion, this is an understandable but questionable division, as several erected stones, at least in Uppland, have a clear connection to Late Viking Age graves and some of the latest runestones in all probability served as gravestones in churchyards (Gräslund 1987 & 1991a).

In a section of her introduction with the subtitle *Inskrifternas anordning. Ornamentik. Runristare (The arrangement of inscriptions. Ornamentation. Rune carvers, 1970, XXVIII ff.)*, Svärdström mentions the “ancient arrangement of the inscription without framing lines” that is represented on four out of the 128 erected runestones inscribed with runes of the younger futhark (Vg 5, 39, 116, 119 y; Vg 5, according to Svärdström, is dubious). Her opinion is that the later so common framing lines originally were dividing lines, and probably at the same time ledger lines. She points out that in close to half of the number of erected runestones the frame of the inscription has no decoration. When ornamentation occurs, it could be a spiral, either at the end of the loop or at the beginning. For 20 stones, she notices that the runic band begins with a serpent’s head seen from above, while for ten stones it begins with an animal head seen in profile with an eye. Most of these heads are, in her view, clumsily and awkwardly executed. Moreover, there are bird’s heads and intertwined knots and junctions. She has no further comments on ornamentation, and does not attempt to use it for dating.

Her section of the introduction with the subtitle *Tidsbestämning (Chronology, XLIX ff.)* turns out to be founded almost entirely on linguistic grounds. She declares that she has deliberately laid the main stress on graphic and linguistic indications and only secondarily considered the ornamental content of the stones. She refers to Hans Christiansson’s stylistic thesis (1959, see more below), and comments that he had underestimated the

linguistic possibilities.

It is interesting to note that Ragnar Kinander, who published the first fascicule of the runic inscriptions of the province of Småland in 1935, had a more open-minded approach to the question of chronology than Svärdström. His starting point was certainly the shape and sound value of the runes, but also the concept of the arrangement of the runes, where he tries to classify the design and layout of the inscriptions. In Småland, the proportion of zoomorphic runestones is only 10%, to be compared with the provinces of Västergötland and Östergötland, both of them with 25% zoomorphic design of the total number of runestones.

Kinander classified the layout of non-zoomorphic inscriptions into three groups: row system, central loop pattern and edge-following loop pattern (Kinander 1935, 10 f.). With the exception of the oldest inscriptions, where the runes were placed in horizontal or vertical rows in an arbitrary order, he regards carvings where the inscription runs vertically in one or more rows as the earliest (cf. for example Vg 2, Vg 18 and Vg 160). When two such rows are connected through a bow, he calls the pattern central loop if the rows are close to each other and leave broad margins at the carved surface (for example Sm 33 and Sm 36). If, on the contrary, the rows are edge-following and leave an open space in the centre of the surface area, he calls the pattern edge-following loop (cf. Vg 33, Vg 35 and Vg 155). There could also be several windings of the inscription band, more or less covering the whole surface, as on Vg 4, Stora Ek, Ek parish. Depending on how many windings the rune band consists of, Kinander operates with some subgroups. For the runestones of Uppland, von Friesen (1913) indicates a chain of evolution of the edge-following loop design that coincides rather well with Kinander’s subgroups.

A scholar who should be mentioned with

regard to the study of the runestones of Västergötland is the art historian Harald Wideen, whose thesis *Västsvenska vikingatidsstudier* (*Viking Age Studies of western Sweden*) appeared in 1955. He pays a good deal of attention to the runestones of Västergötland, their location and their ornamentation. He classifies the runestones according to their physical shape (Wideen 1955, 137 ff.). When it comes to chronology, his dating is mainly based on comparisons with Danish historical inscriptions as well as with Swedish historical inscriptions concerning the *Danegeld* (large payments of tribute as a result of Viking expeditions to England 991–1018) and inscriptions on the stones mentioning the Ingvar expedition to Serkland (248 f.). With regard to layout of the ornamentation, he finds a close connection between runestones from the northern part of Jutland and Västergötland.

In his thesis from 1959, *Sydskandinavisk stil: Studier i ornamentiken på de senvikingatida runstenarna* (*South Scandinavian Style: Studies in the Ornamental Art on the Late Viking Runestones*), Hans Christiansson deals with the runestones from Västergötland and those from Jutland, Skåne, Södermanland and Ringerike. Having analysed in detail a large number of the runestones of south Scandinavia he finds that they represent a specific style. His definition of the south Scandinavian style is that details are included in a symmetrical pattern that destroy the symmetry, and that there may be a “concealed” pattern in relation to the “evident” pattern, as well as other illusions and optical phenomena. The line pattern or the line rhythm is made up of mainly very hard curve- and angle-shaped lines, often cut off by crossing lines, breaking up the composition. In comparison with Upplandic runestones, representing the Central Scandinavian style, he finds the rhythm of those much softer and sweeping, having a dislike of cut-off lines. When it comes to chronology, he is of the opinion that the dating on runo-

logical, historical, genealogical, ornamental and archaeological grounds is very weak and far from exact. Nor is a relative dating, based on ornamental grounds, possible in his view, as the ornamentation is partly too general, partly too individual to permit fine distinctions. He argues that the Southern Scandinavian style occurs simultaneously with Central Scandinavian style and that the difference is regional. However, as the Southern Scandinavian style largely corresponds to the Mammen and Ringerike styles and the Central Scandinavian style corresponds to the Urnes style, I cannot accept his conclusion. Artefacts decorated in Mammen, Ringerike and Urnes style clearly demonstrate through their archaeological find contexts that we have to consider a chronological sequence.

Dating on stylistic grounds

My own interest in runestones is of an old date, but during the first half of the 1990s, when I took part in an interdisciplinary research project on the Christianization of Sweden, I found it necessary to work with their chronology. The runestones are extremely important as source material for research on the course of the mission, and I strongly felt a need for a closer dating than merely to the 11th century, which was the traditional opinion. I regarded a chronological stratification as an indispensable basis for the historical interpretation.

Previously, the inscriptions were mainly dated on linguistic grounds. However, the results of Henrik Williams’ research on the *ås*-rune and Svante Lagman’s on the dotted runes, both presented as doctoral theses in 1990, showed that these elements are not suitable for dating purposes, as there are regional rather than chronological factors behind the variations in their use (Lagman 1990; Williams 1990). Subsequently, many pessimistic

voices were heard on the prospect of closer dating of the runestones than generally to the 11th century. There was an atmosphere of total resignation concerning such possibilities.

In my opinion, in such a problematic situation, the solution might be to turn to the ornamentation. Comparisons with well-dated archaeological material with corresponding ornamentation provide the best opportunity for establishing a chronology. It is of course possible to discuss why a runestone has a specific ornamentation – does it owe to the carver, to the person who ordered it or to the fashion of the period? Certainly, the rune carvers had their personal way of modelling the ornamentation, but I am convinced that in this case, as in the case of all art and handicrafts, different periods have different stylistic ideals. This can be followed from artefacts and rock carvings typical of the various periods of the Bronze Age (Almgren 1987) up to the present time, in the design of, for example, household utensils or cars. With the aid of the so-called curvature method, a study of the curves of the lines and the rhythm introduced by Bertil Almgren (1955), Hans Christiansson, as already mentioned, distinguished a Southern Scandinavian style and a Central Scandinavian style in the Swedish runestones (Christiansson 1959). The two styles correspond largely to the Mammen-Ringerike style and the Urnes style respectively. The former is characterized by close, hard lines and additive elements, the latter by softly sweeping, continuous lines. Christiansson interpreted this difference between the styles as a regional, not a chronological, one. His work is very important regarding how to analyse the ornamentation, but I do not agree with his conclusion. Instead, I am convinced that the difference is chronological.

Already in 1913, the grand old man of Swedish runology, Otto von Friesen, made a classification of the ornamentation of the runestones of Uppland based on his lingu-

istic knowledge and the information obtained from the so-called historical inscriptions (for example the inscriptions about Ingvar's expedition to Serkland and the inscriptions about the expeditions to England and the *Danegelds*). In his opinion, the unornamented stones (i.e. the stones without zoomorphic ornamentation) were the oldest, followed by the zoomorphic stones, carved by various rune carvers: Åsmund Kåresson *c.* 1025–1050, the Ingvar stones *c.* 1040, the Fot-Balle group *c.* 1050–1070, the carvings of Visäte and of the Frisian guilds *c.* 1060–1075 and the carvings of Öpir *c.* 1070–1100. On the whole, this chronology was accepted until the above-mentioned deep pessimism during the 1980s.

In this connection, mention should also be made of the British archaeologist David Wilson and the Norwegian art historian Signe Horn Fuglesang, both working with the problems of dating by stylistic means (Wilson 1978, 135 ff.; Fuglesang 1978, 205 ff.). The American runologist Claiborne Thompson has studied the Åsmund stones of Uppland and used many variables, some of them from the field of ornamentation, such as the layout, the shape of the crosses as well as the heads and tails of the rune animals (Thompson 1975).

Convinced that the ornamentation is the key to a chronology of the rune carvings, I began to analyse all the zoomorphic runestones of Uppland published in the corpus *Upplands runinskrifter* according to the following elements: the overall impression, the design of the rune animal's head, feet and tail, the loops of the snake(s), the layout of the pattern. A rough sorting resulted in six distinct groups as to type – and, of course many overlaps. Through comparisons between these groups and archaeologically well-dated material and by checking against the genealogically connected runestones, the chronological order of the groups was established (Gräslund 1991b; 1992; 1994; 1998; 2006).

One of the stylistic groups is characterized

by the rune animal's head seen from above and is therefore called "Bird's-eye-view", B-e-v. The other five groups show the rune animal's head seen in profile and are called Profile 1–5 (Pr 1–5).

These five groups can, very briefly and only regarding their overall impression, be characterized in the following way:

Pr 1: a very compact, close and blunted overall impression. The curves of the rune animal are often angular and the bow line pressed together.

Pr 2: a compact and rigid impression with angular curves for the rune animal.

Pr 3: a firmly rounded overall impression with moderately sweeping bow lines.

Pr 4: an elegant overall impression with elongated sweeping bow lines.

Pr 5: a characteristic overall impression of a chequer pattern, formed by parallel lines crossing each other at right angles, made up of parts of loops of the rune animal and a serpent.

The most common variants of the criteria head, tail, feet and union knot (common in B-e-v, Pr 1, 2 and 3) of each group are presented in Fig. 1. Examples of the layout of both non-zoomorphic and zoomorphic carvings are presented in Fig. 2.

The following approximate dates may be suggested, each period corresponding to one generation: non-zoomorphic/unornamented stones: *c.* 970?–1020, Bird's-eye-view: *c.* 1010–1050, Pr 1: *c.* 1010–1040, Pr 2: *c.* 1020–1050, Pr 3: *c.* 1045–1075, Pr 4: *c.* 1070–1100, Pr 5: *c.* 1100–1130. The group B-e-v seems to be contemporary with Pr 1 and Pr 2, as there are carvings where rune animal heads typical of these stylistic groups occur together. If this chronology is accepted, it enables us to see a chronological pattern in the production of the runestones, and it implies that the time of production of some known rune carvers has to be redefined, for example Livsten, Vigmund and Tidkume as well as

the carvings about the Frisian guild (Gräslund 2006, 128 f.). Of course, the stylistic groups should not be seen as a strictly chronological sequence; instead, large overlaps should be expected. Conscious imitations of earlier stones are also possible. However, the general tendency is clear, and the order of the groups is distinct, based on both the stylistic analysis and the examination of the genealogically related stones. An examination of the genealogically connected runestones with reference to style shows that the inscriptions that may be regarded as approximately contemporaneous, i.e. raised by the same persons, have the same style throughout, while combinations in which two or more generations are involved give clear indications about the order in time between different styles (Gräslund 1992, 192 ff.). There are examples of combinations where two, three or four generations of the same family are mentioned.

Clearly, it may be argued that I place too much weight on details in my analysis. However, it is obvious that a certain shape of tail or feet is always connected to a certain shape of head and that the shape of heads, feet and tails in their turn is connected to a certain line play of the rune animal's body. Thus, the details are not arbitrarily formed but instead modelled in a certain style, in turn making up the totality. This is of great importance for the practical use of this chronological method, as many runestones are only preserved as fragments. If, with a reasonable degree of certainty, we are able to classify a fragment with just a tail in one of the stylistic groups, for example in Pr 4 owing to the unsymmetrical roll and thereby to the last quarter of the 11th century, I think that we have a very useful chronological tool, which was my aim when I began this work.

However, a question that has to be discussed in this connection is the archaeological material used as base for the dating. As Pr 1–2 and B-e-v ornamentation corresponds largely with Mammen and Ringerike style it should

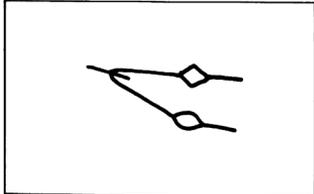
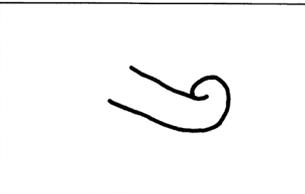
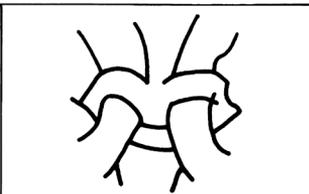
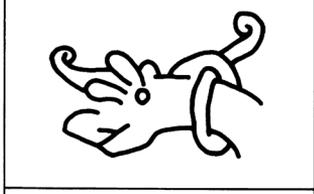
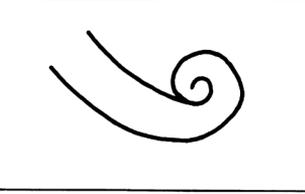
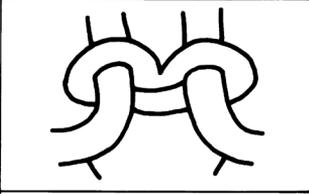
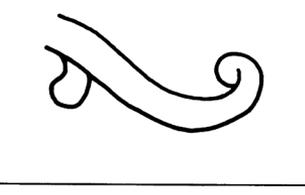
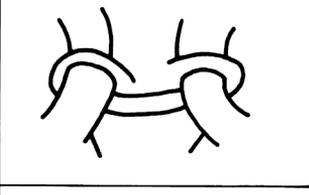
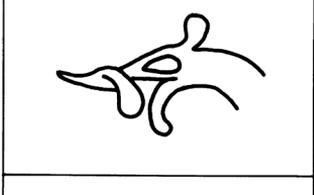
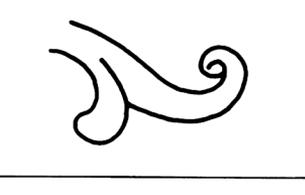
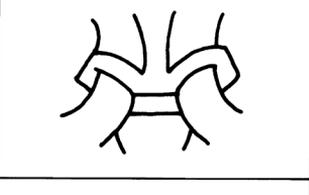
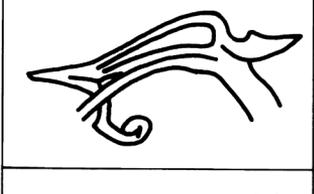
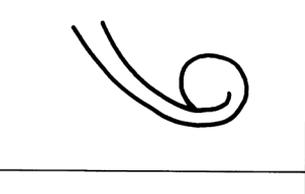
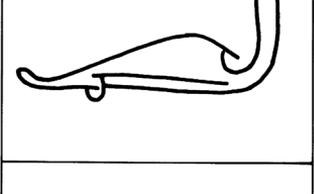
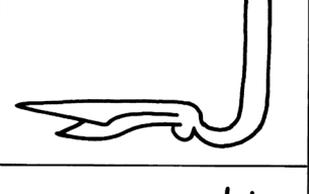
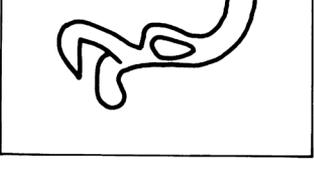
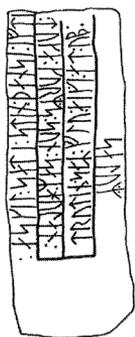
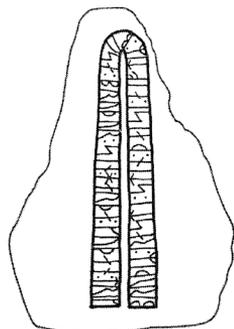
B-e-v			
Pr 1			
Pr 2			
Pr 3			
Pr 4			
Pr 5a			
Pr 5b			

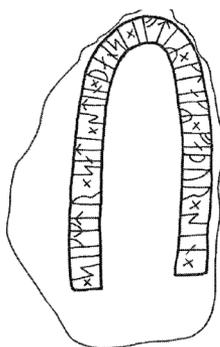
Fig. 1. Typical details of zoomorphic carving, stylistic groups B-e-v and Pr 1–Pr 5. B-e-v U 1172, Pr 1 U 328, Pr 2 U 686, Pr 3 U 329, Pr 4 U 1006, Pr 5a U 541, Pr 5b U 914. Drawing by Alicia Grenberger.



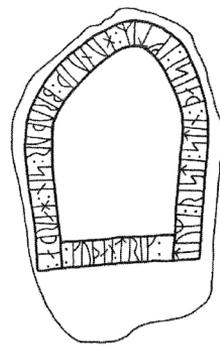
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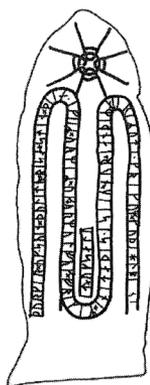
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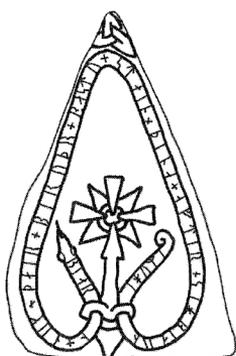
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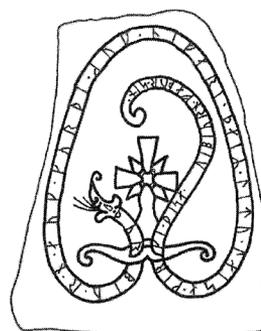
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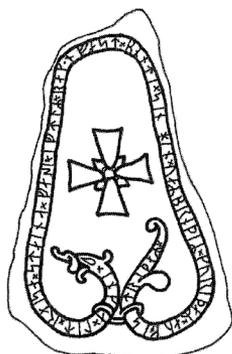
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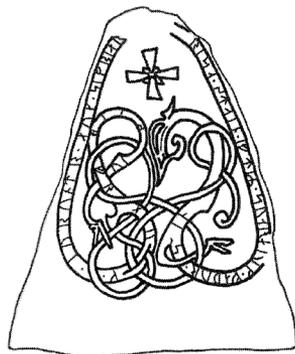
U 328



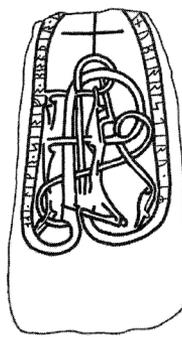
U 686



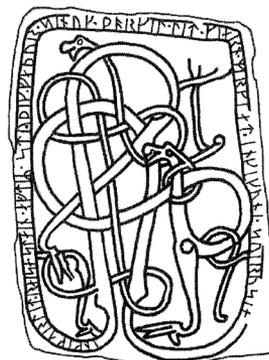
U 329



U 1006



U 541



U 914

Fig. 2. Examples of the layout of both non-zoomorphic and zoomorphic Swedish runestones. Row system DR 295, Central loop DR 268, Edge-following loop DR 325, Portal loop DR 276, Edge-following loop, succession of S-pattern U 518, B-e-v U 1172, Pr 1 U 328, Pr 2 U 686, Pr 3 U 329, Pr 4 U 1006, Pr 5a U 541, Pr 5b U 914. Drawing by Alicia Grenberger.

be stressed that most Viking Age scholars agree that they may be dated to the end of the 10th and the first half of the 11th centuries respectively. The Urnes style is usually dated to the second half of the 11th century, continuing into the 12th century.

Grave goods have always been the best material for archaeological dating. The problem is that, during the conversion, burial customs had changed and very little if any grave goods were deposited. Far fewer personal objects survived than in previous periods. Most of the artefacts decorated in Mammen, Ringerike and Urnes styles are from hoards, settlements or even stray finds, categories difficult to give a close dating. It seems that the art styles were popular and universal in the Scandinavian homelands as well as over the whole “Viking world”, and nothing speaks against that they should be dated as is said above.

Good counterparts to the rune animals of Pr 2 are found in Scania (silver brooch in the hoard from Espinge, Hurva parish, Fuglesang 1980, pl. 18 D), Blekinge (silver brooch from the hoard at Johannishus, Hjortsberga parish, Fuglesang 1980, pl. 18 B) and Gotland (endings of silver arm rings from the hoards at Bryungs, Vall parish, at Lilla Rone, Lye parish and at Hejslunds, Havdhem parish, Stenberger 1947, fig. 242, 247 & 250), and also in England (silver brooch from a hoard at Sutton, Isle of Ely, Klindt-Jensen & Wilson 1966, pl. LXVI). Unfortunately, most of these hoards are not possible to date closer than to the 11th century with the exception of the Espinge hoard which has a numismatic date to 1048 and also some other hoards that might be dated to the middle of the 11th century (Klindt-Jensen & Wilson 1966, 145 footnote 5).

From Norway the Heggen weather vane could be mentioned, together with the weather vane from Källunge, Gotland (Fuglesang 1980, pls 22 & 24) both rather with Pr 1 heads, and from Denmark an animal head

terminal from Dueholme Mark, Nykøbing with a Pr 2 head (Fuglesang 1980, pl. 79 B)

My system of classification has been favourably received and used with good results by runologists, linguists, archaeologists, art historians and historians (M. G. Larsson 1996, Stroh-Wohlin 1997, T. Zachrisson 1998, Stille 1999, Källström 2007, S. Zachrisson 2007 and others). However, it has also been criticized for merely being a local system, only applicable to the runestones of the Mälars provinces (P. Larsson 2002, 25). In a previous article, I investigated its applicability to the province of Småland (Gräslund 2002) with only 10% zoomorphic runestones, and I found the system useful for this province as well with regard to ornamental elements.

Examples from Västergötland

Let us now test the method on the runestones of Västergötland in order to find out if it works outside the Mälars valley. Some 25% of the runestones of the province have a zoomorphic ornamentation, i.e. the rune band is formed as a rune animal's body. That is the same proportion as in the adjoining province of Östergötland, but obviously much lower than in the Mälars provinces.

Beginning with the “unornamented” or non-zoomorphic carvings, there are good examples of the layout called the row system, as Vg 2 from Torstenstorp, Ullervad parish (now Säby, Berga parish) or Vg 18 from Gösslunda church or Vg 160, Väby, Hällstad parish. I have not found any examples of the central loop layout, but many of the edge-following loop layout. In some cases, the stone is so narrow that the loop can almost pass as a central loop, such as Vg 150 from Veland, Väne-Åsaka parish. A special kind of the edge-following loop layout is a carving where a horizontal bar at the bottom forms a sort of threshold. This layout, fairly common in Västergötland but

also in other provinces, looks like a gateway and is called a portal layout. Good examples of this are Vg 32, Kållands-Åsaka churchyard, Vg 117, Levene churchyard, and Vg 152, Håkansgården, Eggvena parish. As Christiansson points out, the disturbance of symmetry typical for the South Scandinavian style can often be seen on the portal carvings, as they are slightly warped (Christiansson 1959, 87). Another striking example of such disturbance of symmetry can be found on Vg 40, Råda church, where a little extra piece of a rune band runs diagonally over the lower part of the inner surface framed by the edge-following loop.

The zoomorphic carvings are completely dominated by the stylistic group Bird's-eye-

view, present on at least 20 carvings, in fact with various appearances. The head is sometimes not organically connected to the rune animal's body but is more like a loose adornment, as on Vg 115, Stora Västölet, Grästorp parish, Fig. 3, an interesting carving with a B-e-v head at the top and a Pr 1 head at the bottom. In most cases, however, the head is, so to speak, the natural beginning of the rune animal's body. The B-e-v head could be straight and stiff (as on Vg 15, Fig. 4 or Vg 182) or softly bent (as on Vg 8 or Vg 186, Fig. 5). The carving Vg 102, Ödekyrkogården, Håle parish, represents a strange variant, a clear Bird's-eye-view head with two eyes connected by a ribbon, placed on top of an edge-following loop and surrounded by two



Fig. 3. The runestone Vg 115, Stora Västölet, Grästorp parish, with a B-e-v head at the top and a Pr 1 head at the bottom. After *Västergötlands runinskrifter*.



Fig. 4. The B-e-v runestone Vg 15, Sunnevad, Mariestad. After *Västergötlands runinskrifter*.



Fig. 5. The B-e-v runestone Vg 186, Timmele churchyard, with an union knot. After *Västergötlands runinskrifter*.



Fig. 6. The Pr 1 runestone Vg 181, Frugården, Norra Åsarp parish. After *Västergötlands runinskrifter*.

tendrils, a composition that is reminiscent of an acanthus. The acanthus ornament at the bottom of the loop on Vg 169, Svedjorna, Södra Ving parish, gives a similar impression, although without the distinct eyes.

A very common element on the zoomorphic carvings of the stylistic groups B-e-v, Pr 1, 2 and 3 in the Mälars provinces is the union knot, connecting the head-end and the tail-end of the rune animal. It also occurs in Västergötland, as for example on Vg 66 Postgården, Norra Vånga parish, where it is attached to a simple edge-following loop or on the B-e-v stone Vg 186, Timmele churchyard, Fig. 5. The union knot occurs very seldom, however, so seldom in fact that Wideen used it as proof that the runestones of Västergötland with such knots were contemporaneous with the runestones of Uppland and influenced by

them (Wideen 1955, 146).

There are nine or possibly ten zoomorphic carvings belonging to the stylistic groups Pr 1, 2 and 3, with Pr 1 as the predominant group. The questionable stone is Vg 78, now lost and only documented in a rather bad drawing by E. Brenner in 1670, published by Peringskiöld (VgR 3, 134). It is probably a rune animal with a profile head, but it cannot be determined as to style group. Similar to the B-e-v group, some profile heads are not completely connected to the rune animal's body, such as Vg 104, Sal churchyard, where the head is only connected to one of the lines of the rune animal's body. Normally, the Pr 1 heads have a snub nose with a thick upper lip and a strong steeply cut-off lip lappet, a round eye, high-set erect ears, while the mouth has a rather short lower lip, often a neck tendril. The ears and



Fig. 7. The Pr 2 runestone Vg 50, Husaby churchyard. After *Västergötlands runinskrifter*.

one or more scrolls often form a “crown” (as on Vg 178). The impressive carving Vg 181, Frugården, Norra Åsarp parish, Fig. 6, has a very strong Pr 1 head with Ringerike tendrils.

Pr 2, where the head is characterized by a concave line from ear to nose tip, round or slightly drop-formed eye, high-set erect ears and an open mouth with the nose tip bent upwards and the lower lip bent downwards, is represented once. Vg 50, Husaby church, is an excellent example of Pr 2, Fig. 7. This stone is special, made by three sons for their

mother. The inscription says that they laid the stone over her and it ends with the prayer *May God help her soul and God's mother and all God's angels*. This stone was obviously used as a gravestone in a time when the churchyard in all probability was established. This also seems to be true for the stone Vg 75, Västra Gerum church, where the text goes: *Alle laid this stone after Öda, his wife... very good*. The ornamentation consists of a simple, angular edge-following loop and a cross. The cross-decorated B-e-v stone Vg 105 Särestad church is another example: *Häming laid this stone after Stenbjörn, his son. May God help his spirit and the holy Saint Mary*. It is thought-provoking to see these stones, obviously representing a transition phase when it was still appropriate to make traditional runestones, two of them with zoomorphic ornamentation, and place them as gravestones on the churchyard, before the introduction of the early Christian box-tombs. In Uppland there are two examples, U 541, Husby-Lyhundra parish and U 559, Malsta parish, of very late runestones with ornamentation in Pr 5 on churchyards, where the inscription starts *Here lies ...*, i.e. a direct translation of the medieval Latin inscription *Hic iacet ...*

Pr 3, where the head is characterized by a convex line from ear to nose tip, almond-shaped eye, low-set ear, slightly bent backwards, open mouth and sometimes a neck crest, lengthened to a tendril, is represented on slabs of early Christian box-tombs, such as Vg 52 and 53 (Fig. 8), both Husaby churchyard. If the suggested chronology is accepted, those slabs were produced within one generation, c. 1045–1075.

Nevertheless, concerning Pr 3 it should be mentioned that the runestone Vg 51, Husaby church, has a picture of a ship with a dragon head at the stem. Only the tendrils from the head are preserved, but they seem to be related to the stylistic group Pr 3. Such a dating is well in accordance with the smooth curva-



Fig. 8. The Pr 2 and Pr 3 slab of an early Christian box-tomb Vg 53, Husaby churchyard. After *Västergötlands runinskrifter*.

ture of the rune band. The general curvature of Vg 190, Månstad parish, indicates a similar dating.

There are no examples of the stylistic groups Pr 4 or Pr 5 on runestones in Västergötland. Apparently, at this time, *c.* 1070–1130, the fashion of raising runestones was over.

The distribution map of the runestones of Västergötland (VgR 5, in the back cover) shows that the northern part of the province has most of the Viking Age runestones, especially the north-western part. Wideen distinguishes four clear concentrations, around the river Tidan, on Källandsö, around the rivers Nossan-Lidan-Flian and around the upper reaches of the rivers Viskan-Ätran. He stresses their connection to rivers and water systems, *i.e.* communication routes (Wideen 1955, 171). I would rather speak of three clusters, as Wideen's number two and three are very close to each other: (A) around the river Tidan and the district of Vadsbro, (B) Källandsö and the areas around the rivers Nossan, Lidan and Flian, (C) the area round the upper reaches of the rivers Viskan and Ätran (see Fig. 9).

A comparison between the stones from the three areas shows that they have roughly the same kind of ornamentation, with small differences. Around the outlet of Tidan and in the district of Vadsbro there are many B-e-v carvings, some of them genealogically related. They were apparently commissioned by wealthy families, mentioning their estates. On Källandsö there are several stones with a portal design and slabs from box-tombs. Around the rivers Nossan-Lidan-Flian there are several stones with B-e-v design as well as rune animals with profile heads. This is also true for the area round the upper reaches of Viskan-Ätran, where one of the most beautiful runestones is Vg 181, Frugården, Norra Åsarp parish (Fig. 6).

Some decorative elements typical of the Ringerike style occasionally occur on non-zoomorphic carvings, thus providing an indication of a dating to *c.* 990–1050 (Wilson 1995, 182 *f.*). Spirals, facing each other or turning away, are relatively common, for example on Vg 104, 153 and 156 (for typical examples in the Ringerike style, see Fuglesang 1980, pl. 34 B, 48, 51 and 106). Acanthus

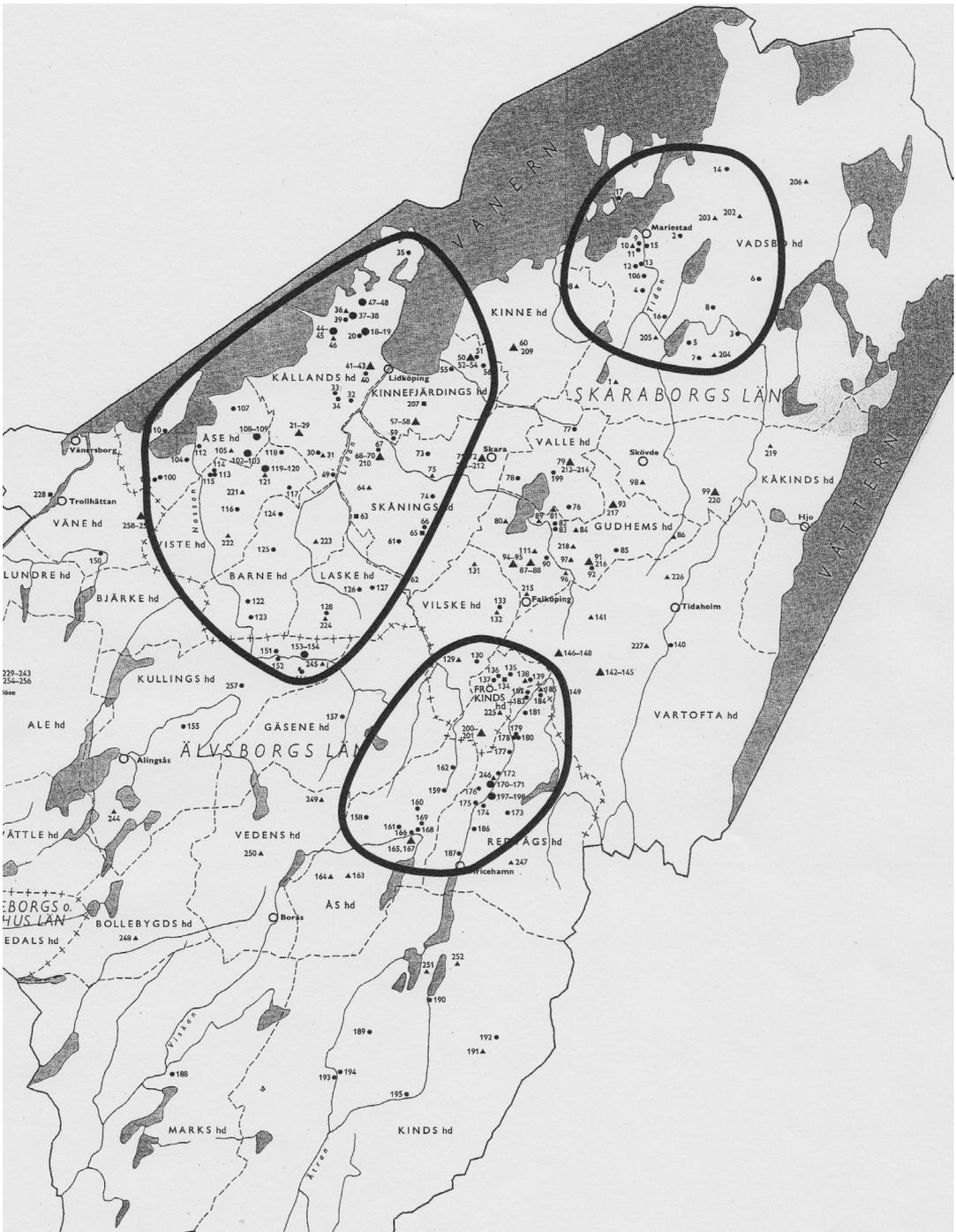


Fig. 9. Distribution map of the runestones, early Christian box-tombs and medieval inscriptions of Västergötland with the three discussed clusters of Viking Age runestones marked. Note that Svärdröm has marked the box-tombs as medieval inscriptions (black triangles). Viking Age runestones are marked with black circles. Inscriptions in the older futhark are marked with black squares. Based on the map in *Västergötlands runinskrifter*.

leaves and buds occur for example on Vg 114, 127, 157, 169 and 177 (for typical examples in the Ringerike style, see Fuglesang 1980, pl. 66, 67). The common pear-shaped motifs, for example seen at the corners of the St Paul's slab in London, are in fact only the central lobe of the acanthus leaf. Elements indicating a relationship to zoomorphic carvings are rolled-up ends, as on Vg 170 and 195.

Conclusion

There are several runestones with design and ornamentation that permit an approximate dating. The design and certain specific elements of the ornamentation indicate that the runestones of Västergötland were generally erected before the middle of the 11th century. Some slabs of early Christian box-tombs from Husaby churchyard seem to have been produced in the third quarter of the century, perhaps also the runestones Vg 51 and 190. An interesting point is the richness of runestones in the north-western part of the province, where we also find the earliest indications of Christianity, the Husaby monuments, the early Christian burial ground at Sântorp and further to the north, the excavated Karleby chapel (Vretemark 1998). Recent excavations at Varnhem indicate that in the middle of the 10th century pagan cemeteries were abandoned in favour of Christian burial grounds (Vretemark 2009). However, in the same area we also find indications that the old faith was not completely relinquished. The runestone Vg 113 has a clear Thor's hammer placed where the cross usually is, at the top of the stone, and, in a bog in Lugnås, a Thor's-hammer pendant of silver was found, decorated on one side with Thor's hammers, on the other side with crosses (Gräslund 1984). That gives an impression that the owner wished to keep in with the old faith as well as the new. The conversion was in fact not a sudden event

but a gradual process. In all probability, it took a long time before Christianity was well established, and during the period of mission from the middle of the 10th to the middle of the 11th century, the fashion of raising memorial runestones flourished.

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