



FORN VÄNNEN

JOURNAL OF
SWEDISH ANTIQUARIAN
RESEARCH

The Viking weathervanes were not navigation instruments!

Christensen, Arne Emil

Fornvännen 1998(93), s. 202-203

http://kulturarvsdata.se/raa/fornvannen/html/1998_202

Ingår i: samla.raa.se

Why translate *baz* with *laug*, when *bad* already existed in their own language? Another example of the researcher's struggle to explain the translation of *dies Saturni* consists in Müllenhoff's (1900, p. 644) mention of the difficulties in finding a Germanic god corresponding to Saturnus. Seip (1954 p. 303) expresses this by saying (translated from Norwegian): "Only when naming one weekday did the Teutons not have a god, who could be used instead of the Roman god Saturnus ..." This strange supposition is repeated without objections by Bæksted (1990 p. 17).

Hermodsson considers Loke to be the principal name of the god and Lódurr, if indeed an alternate, to be a second name. Most experts, who believe they are names of the same god (de Vries 1933, p. 49), nevertheless regard Lódurr as being earlier and Loke of later date. It is even suggested that Loke is an abbreviation of Lódurr. So which is the principal name? Is the Christian Snorre to be the judge?

The names of the heathen gods differed from one district to another in the Germanic world. The Rhine valley names Ziu, Wuotan, Thunar and Vrie were translated to Tyr, Odinn, Thor and Frigg in the Northern regions. Thus if the name Sater or Sætere was translated to a Nordic Lódurr or Loke, it would not be too remarkable, or ...?

My research into these questions, of which Gad Rausing was informed in 1994, has continued. Today many pieces in the puzzle fit in well, some of course still lack cohesion. Perhaps it is time to publish the structure of my hypothesis, which could at least add some new and refreshing ideas to the problem of the *lögardag*. Even if it only introduces new approaches to an old problem!

References

- Bæksted, A. 1990. *Nordiska gudar och hjältar*. Oslo
 De Vries, J. 1933. The problem of Loki. *FF Communications No 110*. Helsinki.
 Heinrich, K. 1835. *Tyskt och svenskt handlexikon*. Volume I. Örebro.
 Kluge, F. 1967. *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der Deutschen Sprache*. Berlin.
 Maass, E. 1902. *Die Tagesgötter in Rom und den Provinzen*. Berlin.
 Moberg, L. 1953. *Lördag*. *Nysvenska studier, Tidskrift för stil- och språkforskning*. Uppsala
 Müllenhoff, K. 1900. *Die Germania des Tacitus*. Berlin.
Pears Cyclopaedia, 1971-72.
 Rausing, G. 1995. The days of the week and Dark Age politics. *Fornvännen 90*.
 Seip, D. A. 1954. *Lördag i norsk og islandsk*. *Svenska landsmål 1953-54*.
 Seznec, J. 1953. *The Survival of the Pagan Gods*.
 Sweet, H. 1991. *The Students Dictionary of Anglo-Saxon*. Oxford.

Jan Ekermann

Nordengatan 11, 603 80 Norrköping

The Viking weathervanes were not navigation instruments!

In *Fornvännen* 1996, pp. 137 ff., Jan Engström and Panu Nykänen presented "New interpretations of Viking Age Weathervanes". In short, they suggest that the two miniature vanes with Borre style ornament from Saltvik and Birka were used as quadrants for measuring the heights of stars above the horizon, while the full-sized vanes from Söderala, Källunge, Heggen, Høyjord, and Tingelstad enabled the measurement of the height of the sun above the horizon. The vane from Norderhov is not

mentioned, nor are the miniature vanes on the candlesticks from Dale and Urnes, nor a similar miniature vane found in Lund. Little attention is paid to chronology, for the Romanesque vanes from Høyjord and Tingelstad are most definitely not "from the Viking Age".

In my opinion this new interpretation is not convincing. The main reason is that we have no proof whatsoever that the practice of measuring the height of the sun or stars in degrees above the horizon was followed by, or even

known to, Viking navigators. Moreover, there is no evidence that a knowledge of the quadrant had reached Scandinavia in the Viking Age. The contemporary illustrations of ships on Gotland picture-stones show vanes of the Saltvik or Birka type at the masthead, while the well-known medieval graffiti from Bryggen depicts vanes of the Heggen type on ships' stems. The Saltvik and Birka vanes are clearly miniatures, probably intended for model ships. A full-size vane at the masthead or stemtop would be somewhat inaccessible as a navigation instrument.

The authors do not explain why the division is about 4.8 degrees. This divides the full circle into 75 sections, which is a curious division for navigational purposes. The authors suppose that: "The inaccuracies between the instruments can be explained by the manufacturing techniques and the usage of the instruments." When circumstances so required, the Vikings were capable of great precision, as can be seen for instance in the layout of Trelleborg and the other Danish circular forts. If it is desirable to mark a piece of sheet metal in order to measure degrees, any craftsman with a pair of di-

viders can do better than "about 4.8 degrees". "The usage of the instruments" would not benefit from so inaccurate a layout.

A navigational tool intended for use as a quadrant would hardly have sides of unequal length, which were out of square. Moreover, none of the vanes show any traces of a mount for fastening a shadow pin or plumb-bob. On page 140 the authors claim that "moreover at least some of the existing weathervanes are copies, in which case the significance of their markings had been forgotten". No source for this statement is given, and it would be interesting to know why the authors so reasoned. It has been shown by Blindheim, that the "markings" along the rim of the vanes are for hanging decorations; they can be clearly seen on Fig. 3 in the paper under discussion.

As a result of this survey, I am of the opinion that the new interpretations must be rejected as pure imagination, the vanes were not made or used as navigation instruments.

Arne Emil Christensen

Vikingskipshuset
Fredriksgt. 3, NO-0164 Oslo

Mästermyrfunnets datering

I *Fornvännen* 1996 har Bjarne Lønborg et debattinnlegg der han argumenterer for at Mästermyrfunnet må dateres til middelalder.

Å datere verktøy er vanskelig, de fleste formene er i bruk over lange tidsrum, men Lønborgs argumenter for en omdatering holder ikke. Lønborg hevder at funnet inneholder typer som er ukjente i vikingtidskontekst, og trekker frem at endel av det verktøyet som er tilstede i Mästermyrfunnet nevnes av Theophilus. For det første har vi ikke noen garanti for at vi kjenner alle typer verktøy som var i bruk i vikingtid, for det andre kan det verktøyet Theophilus beskriver, ha vært i bruk i hundrevis av år før han beskrev det.

Så til en del av Lønborgs konkrete eksem-

pler på gjenstander som ikke skulle være kjent i vikingtidskontekst. Klokker i jernplate finnes i det norske materialet, kfr. Jan Petersen: *Vikingtidens redskaper* s. 56 f. «Hammer hvis skaft-hull er anbragt meget langt tilbake», sammesteds s. 80. «Et næbformet spærhorn» er kjent alt i Vimosefunnet, Engelhardt 1864 pl.18. «En meget bred tværøkse», her er det en god parallell i et norsk merovingertidsfunn, C. 26524 c, derimot kjenner jeg ikke til middelalderparalleller. De store kroknøklene og den smale øksa har gode paralleller i vikingtidsmaterialet fra Gotland. Lønborg hevder at «fundet må oppfattes som inneholdende værktøy med basis i eftervikingtidige, fastlandseuropæiske håndverkstradisjoner, der er baseret på senromer-