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Ship or ducks? : comment on the picture-stone found at Grobin, Latvia

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tet Priediens II (f. d. Pastorat) (Fig. 1 A–C). Fyndkombination (Fig. 2) och horisontell stratigrafi tillåter en datering av densamma till 600-talets senare del. Stenen är huggen i kalksten. Den har en kraftig rot, konkava sidor med kraftig utsvängning uppåt och konvex överdel. Stenen, som är 70 cm hög, är 4,5–5,8 cm tjock och 26 cm bred vid midjan (Fig. 3 a–b). Bildstenens framsida har dekor i låg relief. Inom en kantföljande bård med trappstegsmönster finns en av två parallella linjer inramad yta med samma ytterkontur som stenen själv ovan roten. Mittpå delas denna yta av en dubbel tvärbård med trappstegsmönster och en liknande bård finns

längst ned. I det övre fältet finns en bildframställning, av mig tolkad som en skeppsbild med bågformigt kölparti. Den synes ha rätvinkligt segel, mast och troligen en överbyggnad. I det nedre fältet har funnits en nu nästan helt utplånad komposition.

Såväl då det gäller framställningsteknik som form och proportioner liksom kompositionselementens detaljer är anknytningen till Gotland uppenbar. Utan tvivel kan fyndet förknippas med skandinavisk kulturtradition och de av Sune Lindkvist till 500–600-talet daterade s. k. dvärgstenarna (grupp B enl. den av honom skapade klassificeringen).

Ship or ducks? Comment on the picture-stone found at Grobin, Latvia

In the preceding paper V. P. Petrenko reported on the remarkable find of a Gotland type picture-stone in a burial mound at the Priediens II cemetery east of the town Grobin in 1987. It is interesting but not wholly surprising that a probably Gotlandic picture-stone surfaced in Latvia. There are other examples of such stones once exported from Gotland (Fig. 1). Two of them were found on neighbouring Öland and a third is known from literary sources to have stood in Norrala churchyard in Uppland (Nylén & Lamm 1988, pp. 144–145). This stone sheds light on the question of whether stones really were exported from Gotland. Its damaged runic inscription says "they brought this stone from Gotland and ... after ... his brother. He owned this ...". We may hope that more Gotlandic picture-stones will come to light around the Baltic in the future. They could be seen as forerunners to the medieval export of dressed limestone and baptismal fonts from Gotland.

Dr Petrenko is to be congratulated on his important find and the Editors of *Forvännen* are happy that he so quickly answered our invitation to publish the stone in our Journal.

To give an entirely reliable analysis of the features on a picture-stone as worn as that

from Grobin is a very delicate matter, and still more difficult for a person with little experience of this type of monument. Therefore it is no great wonder that I, who have done much work on them may have some objections to Petrenko's interpretation. These pertain to what he has identified as a sailing ship in the upper pictorial field. Already when I first saw



Fig. 1. Distribution of Gotlandic picture-stones. (After Nylén & Lamm 1988.)

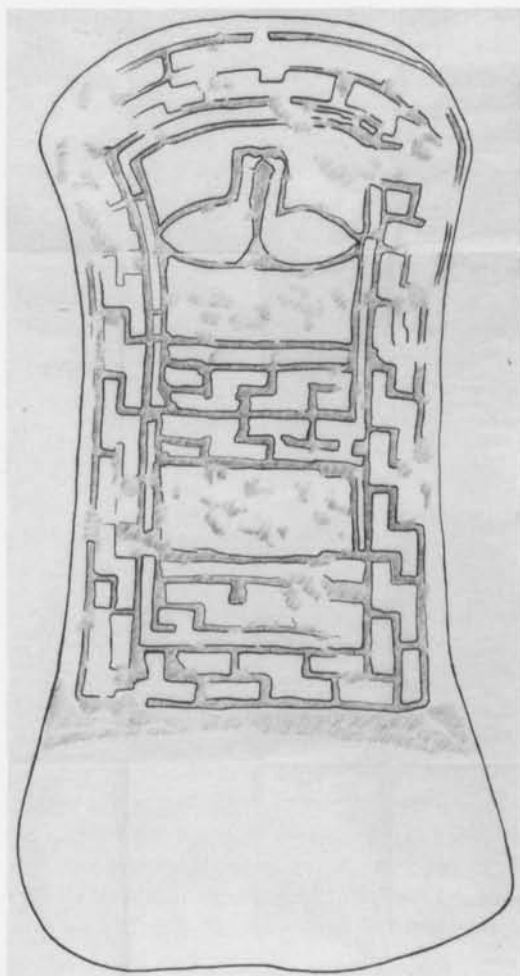


Fig. 2. Rubbing of the picture-stone from Priediens II, Grobin, Latvia.

a good photograph of the stone I was convinced that the motif comprised two antithetically standing big birds, probably ducks or swans. Such opposed animals are shown on a

stone from Rikvide, När parish (Nylén & Lamm 1988, No. 202; Lindqvist 1942, Fig. 466) and single birds of the same type are seen on stones from Broa, Halla parish (Nylén & Lamm 1988, No. 107, p. 43), Smiss, Garda parish (Nylén & Lamm 1988, No. 69, p. 45) and Bringes, Norrlanda parish (Nylén & Lamm, No. 198; Lindqvist 1942, Fig. 479).

Last summer (1990) I had the opportunity to discuss the iconography of the stone with Dr Petrenko and it was agreed that he should not make any changes in his manuscript, I however should give my interpretation in an addendum to his paper.

My ideas about the nature of the figures in the pictorial field have recently been confirmed. Through the mediation of Karl-Gustaf Eliasson from our Department of Stone Conservation (Riks) we gained access to a rubbing of the stone (Fig. 2) which is housed in the Liepaja Historical and Arts Museum.

The rubbing gives proof, the birds are clearly discernable, it has turned fiction into fact.

References

- Lindqvist, S. 1942. *Gotlands Bildsteine I-II*. KVHAA. Stockholm.
 Nylén, E. & Lamm, J. P. 1988. *Stones, ships and symbols. The picture stones of Gotland from the Viking Age and before*. Stockholm.
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