

I.

THE DRAGONESQUE FIGURE IN MAESHOWE, ORKNEY.

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Nowadays there is a very proper prejudice against the inscribing by visitors of their names or sentiments upon ancient monuments. Becoming as this restriction may be, archæologists at least have reason to be glad that it did not prevail at an earlier age. It adds to the interest of the great chambered tumulus of Maeshowe that there should be found on the inner face of its walls no fewer than twenty-four separate Runic inscriptions by Norse intruders of the twelfth century A.D. Half the inscriptions give little more than individual names; two record that Crusaders, "Jerusalem-farers," had broken into the howe; and two celebrate the beauty of certain ladies.¹

The Crusaders in question have been taken to be those who, after passing in Orkney the winter of 1150-51, sailed with Earl Rognvald to the Holy Land; but we know also that two years later (1152-53) Earl Harald and his company sheltered and caroused here at "Yule";² and others probably from time to time made their way to the place—all, however, it is indicated by the language and the lettering, within the same twelfth century. But one traveller outdid his fellows by incising on the face of an upright slab the figure of a mythical monster, usually referred to as a dragon (fig. 1), a vigorous and delicately executed drawing, no more than $3\frac{1}{4}$ inches high by $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches broad, but the work of an accomplished artist.

The inscriptions have received their meed of attention, but, apart from manifold reproductions, little or no account has been made of the dragon. In Farrar's volume of facsimiles of the inscriptions (1862), Prof. Rafn is quoted to the effect that "there is a similar one on a stone at Hunstead in Scania"—the district in the extreme south of Sweden. That stone has since been lost.³ Dr Joseph Anderson repeated this reference, adding that the dragon was "similar in style to that on the tomb of King Gorm the Old at Jellinge in Denmark," further as "bearing also some resemblance to one sculptured on the Runic stone dug up

¹ On the complete set see Prof. Bruce Dickins in *Proceedings of the Orkney Antiquarian Society*, vol. viii. (1929-30) pp. 27-30.

² *Orkneyinga Saga*, c. 101; Anderson's edition, chapter xci.

³ Brøndsted, *Early English Ornament*, p. 285.

in St Paul's Churchyard, London." ¹ These will come up for consideration in the course of what follows. But for a detailed discussion of the figure we must go to what appeared in the *Proceedings of the Orkney Antiquarian Society* for 1932-33 from the pen of Mr J. Storer Clouston, who has done so much admirable work on the history of the islands.

According to him the animal "is really modelled on the conventional



Fig. 1. The Maeshowe "dragon" (from Farrar's *Maeshowe*).

lion of the period; as one can see very well from the lions on the borders of the Bayeux Tapestry, where the same beast in the same attitude—raised forepaw, head looking backwards, and tail between the legs, emerging over (though not through) the back appears again and again." Not, he continues, "that our Maeshowe beast is actually intended for a lion. . . . He is in fact simply an amphibious monster (partly a sea beast as shown by the scales), given the general form of a conventional lion because that was the artistic type in fashion at the time, familiar to the draughtsman."

But for the idea of the animal, its form, and "attitude," we need not

¹ Edition of *Orkneyinga Saga* (1873), p. cv; cf. here pp. 164, 167.

turn aside to the Bayeux Tapestry—so called—which is usually dated about the end of the eleventh century. We shall find that both the model and its elements are of much greater age and wider significance. In particular the “head looking backwards” is already a feature of sixth-century art; its beginning is as old as that of the head looking forwards.¹

Attention is next drawn to what is certainly a startling feature of the dragon as here shown. “His tail,” it is pointed out, “passes between his legs and reappears *through* his back, to end at last in a maze of leafy flourishes. This strange fancy of the artist,” continues Mr Clouston, “is very exceptional—if not unique, and,” he says, “it has seemed to others before me that the tail has surely been made into a weapon which is transfixing the monster.” The weapon he suggests is a sword, since “the flourishes have the general form of the hilt and guards of a sword handle.” A further suggestion is that the apparently otherwise “meaningless leafy flourishes may make a play upon some word for a sword or a hilt,” so that, “looking to the wide-spread knowledge of this hero and his legendary story, and to the howe associations of the sword Leaf,” Mr Clouston feels “strongly inclined to interpret the leafy flourishes as an allusion to the name of that famed blade of Bodvar Bjarki.” It seems to him clear that “this idea of converting the tail into a sword was an afterthought,” since “the line of the back crosses the blade, and thus was obviously cut before the fancy occurred to the artist. It was evidently an addition and embellishment to the beast and fish motive.” The fish alluded to is what “the scaly, formidable monster” is “purposely grasping in its mouth.” There are further developments of these propositions in an historic and heraldic direction, but these it is not necessary to consider.

This analysis makes no account of Prof. Rafn’s remark that there was a similar figure on a Swedish stone, or the comparisons of Dr Anderson. And, indeed, it would be strange if, even in Orkney, a skilled draughtsman should produce a design unrelated to contemporary northern art, or at least related no more closely than in setting out to depict an “amphibious monster” in lion’s clothing and clearly not succeeding.

What we have to realise is that all northern art from the days of the “great invasions” down to its submergence by the Romanesque school—a period of some five hundred years—was in essence zoomorphic—

¹ “Gehen wir nun über zu der Gruppe mit nach hinten gedrehtem Kopf. Diese Gruppe hat in der Germanischen Thierornamentik ebenso alte Ahnen, wie die vorige” (“We now pass to the group with the head turned to the back. This group has in German animal-ornament an ancestry as ancient as the former,” *i.e.* the group with head looking forwards.), *Der Altgermanische Thierornamentik*, Bernhard Salin, p. 237. See also pp. 214, 247.

that is, based upon animal forms fancifully treated and strongly stylised,¹ the only variations and combinations being ribbon patterns and interlacements.² Not till the latest stages did plant ornament find a place. The technique of this northern art oscillated, so to speak, between representation in relief and in flat linear designs, the latter being, here as in Ireland, the more spontaneous, purely native manner.³ From this characteristic and a close study of details the Swedish archæologist, Bernhard Salin, was able to mark off three great periods or styles prior to the opening of the Viking Age.⁴ Style I. shows little animals, birds, fishes, and even human figures modelled in relief, and covers the late fifth and the sixth century, the age of the invasions, whence it has been named by Brögger the North Sea Style,⁵ having its fullest development in the three Scandinavian countries and in England. The origin of the motifs in this style, like that of each succeeding phase, has been the subject of much controversy—whether it is to be found in the industrial arts of the late Roman Empire of the west or in elements transmitted from Scythian ornament in southern Russia. The issue here and in subsequent cases it is not necessary, for our purpose, to discuss.

With the appearance of Style II., starting from the seventh century, comes a complete transformation. All subjects except the animal disappear, though the bird returns at a later date, and the treatment is no more in relief but flat and linear.⁶ In the first stage the bodies of the animals are composed into interlacements, no fewer than six, and even more, being in particular cases combined to form a single design. These general features are continued into the eighth century, but now in a freer, less geometric form. Fantasy, according to Salin, is the special mark of this later epoch,⁷ when, however, as he says, animal-ornament in the north reached its highest pitch in elegance and refinement.⁸

On a review of the whole material, however, it is clear that, apart from minor details of execution and feeling, Style III. is but a

¹ *Préhistoire de la Norvège*, Haakon Shetelig, p. 235; *Early English Ornament*, J. Brøndsted, p. 161.

² "The favourite decoration of the Northmen was an intricate arrangement of animal-forms, knots, and worm-twists." *A History of the Vikings*, T. D. Kendrick, p. 28.

³ Interesting in this connection is the following comment from a recently published book (1935): "The whole tradition of English painting is linear and not plastic. The English love of line has continually asserted itself, despite the imposition of plastic standards from the Continent," *A Background to Chinese Painting*, Soame Jenyns, p. 129.

⁴ *Die Altgermanische Thierornamentik*.

⁵ Shetelig, *Préhistoire de la Norvège*, pp. 237-38, citing A. W. Brögger, *Histoire de l'art Norvégien*, p. 52.

⁶ Salin, *Die Altgermanische Thierornamentik*, p. 214; Shetelig, as cited, p. 241.

⁷ As cited, p. 274.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 270-71.

prolongation of Style II., and Shetelig has therefore included both in his Vendel Style, so named from the typical examples found in the boat-burials at Vendel in North Uppland, Sweden, the two stages being distinguished as Early and Late.¹ And there is this further distinction, that Late Vendel is peculiar to the Scandinavian countries, while the preceding styles are common to the whole Teutonic area.²

The interlacing animal ornament thus classed as Vendel has been associated with the interlaced work ultimately derived from Byzantium, but then common in western Europe.³ It covers the seventh and eighth centuries, but extends into the ninth, when it becomes old-fashioned, and towards the close of which it has ceased to be a living style, though certain of its elements continue in later work. A notable example is the carving of Late Vendel character on the bow and stern of the ship (fig. 2) unearthed at Oseberg,⁴ on the Vestfold side of the Oslo fjord, in 1904, which, with its richly decorated accompaniments, formed the tomb of Queen Asa, who died about 850, and was grandmother of the great Harald Harfagri. This, with some other things, is the production of a conservative artist, whom Shetelig calls "the Academist,"⁵ carrying on the traditional Vendel art in the flat rhythmical pattern or chain of interlocking animal shapes. It is important to note that the Oseberg collection provides excellent specimens of artistry in wood, all earlier examples surviving only on metal objects.

We have now passed into the Viking Age, which may be taken to begin just before A.D. 800, and find this period of stirring activity and contact with lands south, east, and west reflected in a recurrence of plastic art, as in the period of the folk-wandering of the fifth and sixth centuries. Accordingly this departure also is illustrated in the Oseberg

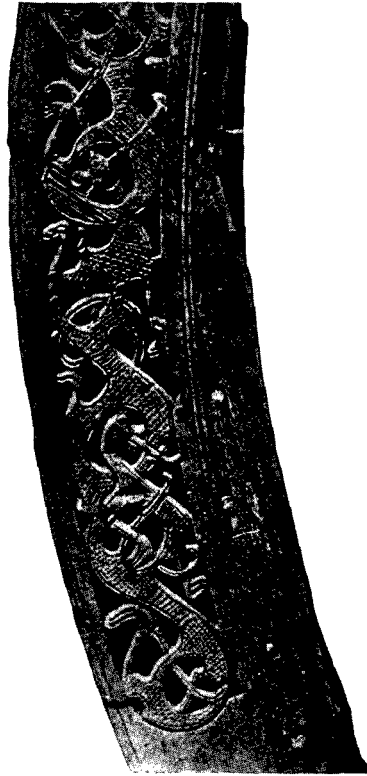


Fig. 2. Late Vendel decoration on Oseberg Ship.

¹ *Préhistoire, etc.*, p. 243.

² Brøndsted, as cited, p. 163.

³ Shetelig, as cited, p. 242.

⁴ See *Osebergfundet*, III., planches i, ii, iii.

⁵ *Saga-Book of the Viking Society*, vol. x. part 1 (1928), pp. 19, 21; Brøndsted, p. 173.

material in the somewhat clumsy modelling of figures on certain articles. It is common in the round and oval brooches of the time. Its character



Fig. 3. Viking Brooch found in Barra. Degenerate "Gripping Beast" style.

is that of animal heads seen from above and stumpy rounded bodies with limbs grasping each other or their strapwork frames, whence its Swedish name of the "Gripping Beast" Style, while, because of its inferred origin in the lion ornament of the Carolingian Empire, it is known to Danish-Norwegian archæologists as the style of the "Carolingian Beast."¹ We

¹ Shetelig, *Préhistoire, etc.*, pp. 246-47, and *Saga-Book*, as cited, pp. 29-30; Brøndsted, p. 162 ff.

see it in a much weakened, and therefore late, form in a brooch in the British Museum (fig. 3) from the island of Barra.¹ This brooch may be attributed to the late ninth or early tenth century, by which time the "Gripping Beast" was no longer a living force.²

But while these fashions were being worked out the traditional art-motif was being revived in a new animal figure not modelled but once more drawn as a flat body in outline with interlacements. This was the "Jellinge Beast," so-called because of its appearance on articles found in the royal barrows at Jellinge, near Veile, in Jutland. On this ground the style can be dated to A.D. 930-40,³ but Brøndsted identifies it with the animal found on bronze mounts from the burials at Borre, north of Oseberg in Norway,⁴ which are of the second half of the preceding century. There is also a difference of opinion as to its origin,



Fig. 4. "Jellinge"-style animal. Detail of harness-trapping from Mammen, Denmark.

whether it has developed independently or is a borrow from Ireland, where the Vikings had formed the Kingdom of Dublin. It is agreed, however, that it has been profoundly influenced by Irish details, such as double contour lines, joint-spirals, and lappets on the head.⁵ Another important novelty is a plant-ornament, now seen in this field for the first time, which has been traced to the acanthus and is apparently a contribution from Carolingian, that is, ultimately, classical art.⁶ This "Jellinge Beast" is an imaginary, purely ornamental, ribbon-shaped creature, which can be found also on the stones of northern England, to which it had been brought in the time of the Norse-Danish Kingdom of York, A.D. 867-948. An example on a harness-mount from Mammen, Denmark (fig. 4), shows its general characteristics, its shape resembling an elongated dachshund (fig. 4). It can thus be recognised on a broken slab at Levisham, Yorkshire⁷ (fig. 5). It was from northern England, indeed, that the Scandinavian folk learned to ornament the stone monuments to their dead. As a further instance of the mutual culture-influences of the two peoples, it may be mentioned that in 942 Odo,

¹ See *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. xlviii. (1913-14) p. 309.

² Brøndsted, p. 185.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 162, 270.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

⁵ Shetelig, *Préhistoire, etc.*, p. 251; Brøndsted, p. 238; Reginald Smith in *Archæologia*, vol. xxiv. (1923-24) p. 252.

⁶ Brøndsted, pp. 275-76; Shetelig, as cited, pp. 251-52.

⁷ Brøndsted, p. 202; Collingwood, *Northumbrian Crosses*, p. 18.

a pure Dane, was made Archbishop of Canterbury. The Viking invaders must be credited with other interests than mere plunder and conquest.

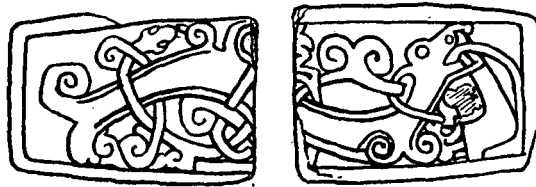


Fig. 5. Levisham Slab (from Collingwood's *Northumbrian Crosses, etc.*).

The fact of the fundamental place occupied by animal ornament in northern art, and various other details noted in connection with it, all have a bearing upon the Maeshowe figure. But no configuration so far



Fig. 6. Stone of Harald Gormsson, "Bluetooth."

encountered will serve as a model. Now, however, with dramatic suddenness we are confronted, again at Jellinge, with a new animal, different in feeling from all that have gone before, vigorous and aggressive, carved upon a gravestone (fig. 6). This ornamented stone, a lengthy inscription

informs us, was erected by King Harald Gormsson—familiarily known as Harald Bluetooth—to the memory of his father and mother. He had continued their work of consolidating the Danish Kingdom, and the inscription credits him with having conquered “all Denmark and Norway,” the runes shown on this face giving ALA (“All”), after Denmark, with the other two words AUK NURUIAK (“and Norway”). Harald reigned from A.D. 940 to 986, and the date of the monument is taken to be about 980.¹

But though placed in the immediate vicinity of the earlier burial-mounds which have yielded examples of the ribbon-shaped, highly conventionalised “Jellinge-Beast,” it is clear that in this creature we have to do with a different conception, a creature not indeed zoologically recognisable, yet built up on naturalistic lines, free and life-like in action. It has therefore been differentiated as the “Great Beast,” and derived by Brøndsted from the “Anglian Beast” of late Northumbrian monuments, a conclusion in which Mr Collingwood believes he is right,² and which is accepted by Reginald Smith.³

Nevertheless the “Great Beast” does continue certain characteristics of the “Jellinge Beast” proper—the double contour lines, joint spirals, and the crest or lappet on the head, all accounted for above. The tongue protrudes from the open jaws and the forepaw is raised, but these two are ancient features. On the neck is the suggestion of a mane, which may point to the Carolingian lion as the prototype. Round neck, body, and tail twists a band, recalling the old favourite ribbon ornament, and here, too, as so often in the case of the ribbon, terminating in a snake head, apparently a device to liven things up. The most prominent feature, however, is the foliaceous finish of lappet and tail.

On the source of this plant element, new to northern art, there is diversity of opinion. Shetelig finds its model in contemporary English leaf ornament with, in time, an infusion of “palmette” leaves from the East, silver objects in Arab style having been found both in Sweden and Norway.⁴ On the other hand, Brøndsted sees it as based on the acanthus, which Dr Sophus Müller had already identified in the preceding Jellinge Style, the narrow curled leaf being taken as the outcome of a highly conventionalised treatment.⁵ By the beginning of the

¹ V. Wimmer, *De danske Runemindesmærker*, vol. i. pp. 28–29; cf. Reginald Smith in *Proc. Soc. Ant. London*, 2nd Series, vol. xxiii. (1909–11) p. 401.

² *Year Book of the Viking Society*, 1931, p. 15; cf. also T. D. Kendrick, *A History of the Vikings*, p. 30.

³ *Archæologia*, vol. lxxiv. (1923–24) p. 252.

⁴ *Préhistoire, etc.*, pp. 251, 252–53; cf. Reginald Smith, as cited.

⁵ Brøndsted, pp. 275, 293.

eleventh century this plant ornament has developed independently of any associated animal in what is known as the "Ringerike Style," so called from its appearance on runestones of reddish sandstone quarried



Fig. 7. Ringerike ornament, Vang, Norway.

at Ringerike, a district of Norway immediately north-west of Oslo (fig. 7). Here we have the slim curling leaf bristling around the edges of the design, features which Brøndsted claims have been borrowed from the MS. illuminations of the Winchester School in southern England, in which the whole drawing is an application of the Continental acanthus (fig. 8). This school came into existence early in the second half of the tenth century, and from 1014 to 1042 England, with Winchester as its

capital, formed part of the great northern kingdom of Sveind (Sweyn) Forkbeard and his son Knut (Canute). The latter, it may be observed, was a patron of culture and favoured England more than Denmark, to which he sent Englishmen both as bishops and as royal officers. Many instances of the Ringerike Style have been found in England,¹ but more significant in the present connection is its occurrence on the runestone from St Paul's Churchyard, London, now in the Guildhall

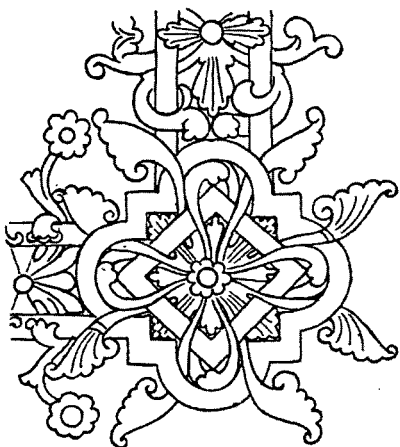


Fig. 8. Corner-piece of "Winchester" illumination. Gospel-book, Cambridge (after Brøndsted).



Fig. 9. London Stone.

Museum (fig. 9), which from the runes is dated by Wimmer to about 1030.²

In this creature we have joint-spirals but not the double outlines. The place of the raised foreleg is taken by a whimsical piece of ornament terminating in an animal head. The head of the animal itself is reverted, and the tongue protrudes between two opposed fangs. But the head lappet, the ribbon-like tail, even the clawed feet—every possible extension in fact is prolonged into the curling palmette of the Ringerike Style; a playing with the subject rather than a coherent design. A less confused example comes from Tullstorp, in the south of Sweden, a district rich in these runestones (fig. 10). Here we have the usual

¹ Brøndsted, pp. 293-95; Reginald Smith in *Proc. Soc. Ant. London*, vol. xxvi. (1913-14) p. 68. According to Reginald Smith, however, following Shetelig, it originated elsewhere and "took root here."

² *De danske Runemindesmærker*, vol. iii. p. 91.

features, but the head-lappet looks like an exaggerated ear, while the termination of the tail resembles the serrated acanthus leaf folded.

The runic inscription has the interest of containing the word **KUML**, so familiar in Shetland for a tumulus or cairn. Wimmer gives its Danish equivalent as *Mindesmaerke*, "memorial." The whole inscription reads:

**KLIBIR AUK ÅSA RISHU KUML
HUSI UFTIR ULF;** giving the usual formula: "Klibir and Åsa raised this memorial to Wulf." In this case the persons concerned cannot be identified,¹ but from the runes and the Christian crosses the stone can be attributed to the eleventh century.

It can now be claimed that we are directly on the trail of the Maeshowe monster. Indeed, the lost stone at Hunnestad in south Sweden, which Prof. Rafn noted as having on it a figure resembling that at Maeshowe, is said to have been "quite like" the one just illustrated from Tullstorp.² But examples of this single dominating "Great Beast" are numerous throughout the eleventh century in the three Scandinavian countries,³ not only on stone but also on wood and metal. And it is on one of a small class of relics in metal that we find the closest, as it is also the



Fig. 10. Tullstorp Stone.

most skilfully executed, approximation to the Maeshowe beast.

These relics are the weather-vanes, of which the example shown (fig. 11) came from Heggen in Norway, and is now in the University's Museum of Antiquities at Oslo.⁴ It consists of a richly gilded plate of copper or bronze of triangular shape, with the longest side made in a convex curve. The straight sides are framed in plates bent over thin iron rods, but in this case the mounting has been at some time broken off the curved side and replaced by a narrower plain strip of bronze

¹ Wimmer, as cited, iii. p. 91.

² Brøndsted, p. 285.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 284, 289.

⁴ *Acta Archaeologica*, vol. ii. (1931), Copenhagen, p. 162.

or copper laths, riveted to the plate and encroaching slightly upon the design. Of these vanes, all of similar construction, four have been discovered in Norway, one on the mainland of Sweden, and one on the island of Gothland, while the edge-mounting of another was dug up when work was being done on the foundations of Winchester Cathedral, giving, like the London stone already described, an almost certain link with the empire of Canute. In that case its date would fall somewhere

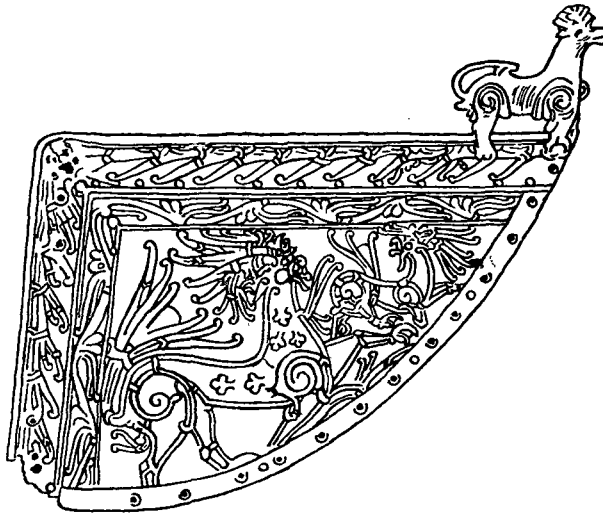


Fig. 11. Weather-vane, Heggen.

within the first third of the eleventh century; about the year 1000 has been suggested.¹

Four of the vanes once hung on church spires, while the remaining two, including that from Heggen, can be inferred also to have come from churches.² Whether this was their original destination, however, is open to doubt. If the Heggen example and the one from Sweden are to be dated about A.D. 1000, then they are earlier than the introduction of Christianity to these quarters. The dating, of course, may be too early, but, even so, there does not seem to be any independent evidence that vanes existed on Scandinavian churches in the eleventh century.³ This limitation, however, would not apply to an example which is assumed to have been "made in the second half of the 13th century, but on models nearer to the first half of that century or its middle."⁴ At the same time there are other details which seem to

¹ *Acta Archæologica*, vol. ii. (1931), Copenhagen, p. 165.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 181-82.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 162, 181.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

indicate a prior use for the vanes—it is suggested on ships, whence they might be transferred to the buildings, just as the dragon heads on the prows were imitated on the churches of wood.¹

On this particular issue all we need note here is the range in time covered by the vanes, extending from the beginning of the eleventh to the second half of the thirteenth century. This inquiry is confined to the character of the ornamentation, which has been “etched in by means of a graver working zigzag fashion,”² is in delicate lines and “sometimes quite minute.”³ The designs differ, one having what is very probably a Christian subject, while another is executed in open work. But our special interest is in the subject of the Heggen example.

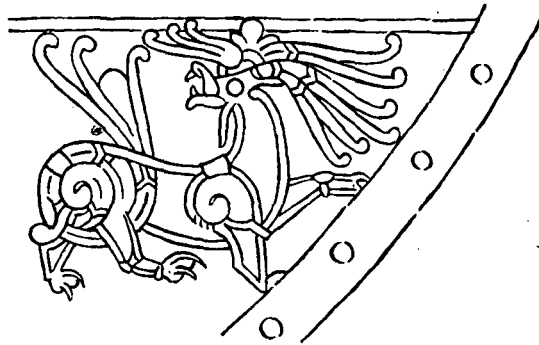


Fig. 12. Heggen Vane. Smaller beast enlarged.

On one side we have a following pair of the Great Beasts with their appendages of palmettes, representing acanthus (as is held), on head and tail, and used as an independent adornment on the two original margins. The animals have the double outlines and exaggerated jointspirals, while the larger one shows on its body a trefoil ornament, which can be claimed to be a Carolingian detail. It is the smaller beast, however, to which I invite closer attention (fig. 12). All the leading features have already been noted in previous cases, including the reverted head, the projecting tongue, and the raised forepaw. What I would emphasise is the treatment of the tail, which is not carried, as in other examples, over the back but between the hind legs and then upwards through the body, as it were, crossing the lower lines but emerging behind those of the back. Thus we have here a parallel to the most startling detail of the Maeshowe beast, except in so far as the places of entry and emer-

¹ *Acta Archaeologica*, vol. ii. (1931), Copenhagen, p. 182.

² *Ibid.*, p. 159.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

gence, as it were, are reversed. But we see that this odd departure at Maeshowe is not something "unique," calling for a correspondingly unique explanation, but purely a piece of artistic variation, a fantasy of design, appealing to craftsmen far remote in time and space, to a Norseman gravings on metal in Norway in the early eleventh century, and to another incising on stone in Orkney a hundred years later.¹ Nor are the "flourishes" in which the tail ends "meaningless" in any relevant sense; they are the foliaceous ornament of which we have seen examples,

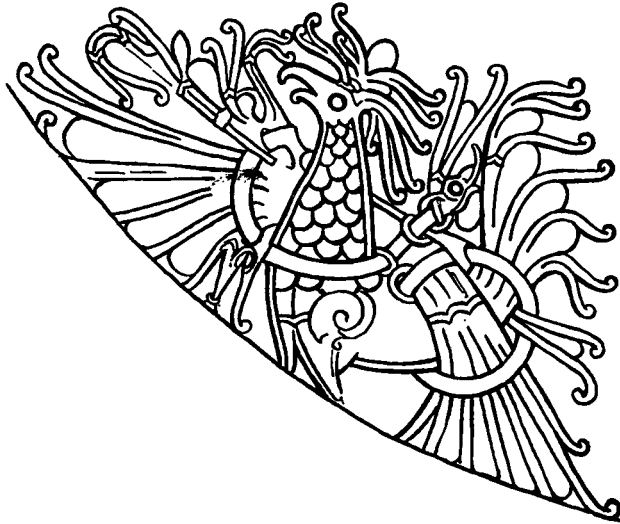


Fig. 13. Heggen Vane; other side.

with, on the Maeshowe figure, perhaps more of the acanthus in feeling. What has been spoken of as a fish in the mouth is, as already observed, the tongue.

One other detail remains for notice, the pattern of scales which have been interpreted as indicating "an amphibious monster (partly a sea beast . . .)," but which also are plainly no more than an artistic embellishment, since we find the same filling-in a feature of the figure on the other side of the Heggen vane (fig. 13). This is an even more fantastically handled version of the Great Beast motif, bird-like in character, and apparently influenced by the favourite peacock of Byzantine and Carolingian art. It is almost lost in the abundance of palmette-like foliage, the greater part of which has been left out of the drawing

¹ Mr Kendrick (see p. 160, n.) has been good enough to express his agreement: "I have no doubt that the Maeshowe figure belongs, as you say, to the early mediæval art represented by the Scandinavian weather-vanes."

in order to show up the creature more clearly. On the band encircling the neck; with a head and cresting that can scarcely be called serpentine, are the loose circles or "ring-knots" characteristic of and carried on from tenth-century art in Scandinavia, northern England, and the Isle of Man. A similar ring on a large scale passes through the body below, a freakish device comparable to the penetration of the tail in the beast on the other side and at Maeshowe.

The range of the scale ornament also can be extended. It is to be seen on a Carolingian silver cup of the early ninth century discovered



Fig. 14. Silver Cup from Ribe (from Brøndsted's *Early English Ornament*).

at Ribe in south-west Jutland,¹ and now in the National Museum at Copenhagen (fig. 14). Its origin is possibly to be found in the feather treatment on a bird, as shown on a Carolingian ivory in the Vatican Museum at Rome² (fig. 15). A similar decoration appears on South Frankish sarcophagi,³ as also on some of our twelfth-century coped stones or "hog-backs," though in these cases it is generally held to represent roof tiles. But clearly the scale pattern carries no "amphibian" suggestion.

From this investigation emerges the important fact that the Maeshowe figure is no capricious product of a stray artist, but a significant example of northern decoration in its final phase before it is supplanted by the

¹ Brøndsted, pp. 329-30.

² Illustration from *Antiquity*, March 1936, p. 64, plate vi., A.

³ Brøndsted, p. 329, note 2.

Romanesque art of the south. Fundamentally it is still Scandinavian, clinging to the age-old animal subject in a familiar pose and preserving several of the traditional details, including the foliage ornament that first appeared with the Jellinge animal. The double outline has disappeared, as also the joint-spiral, though, as Dr Brøndsted has emphasised



Fig. 15. Carolingian Ivory, Vatican Museum.

in a personal letter, its place on the foreleg has been taken by an "acanthus" decoration. Instead of head-lappets we have ears, and the eye is not circular, as in all the figures already shown, but ovoid, a form, however, which appears in the Late Vendel Style¹ at least. The figure as a whole has received, within its convention, a more realistic handling.

Romanesque influence, in fact, has made its impress, a conclusion with which Brøndsted has expressed agreement, and which at the time of execution was to be expected. The Maeshowe dragon illustrates the last dying gesture of native northern art.

I have to thank Mr C. T. S. Calder for his kindness in preparing some of the drawings.

¹ Salin, as cited, p. 272.