
Lilla Kopár. *Gods and Settlers: The Iconography of Norse Mythology in Anglo-Scandinavian Sculpture.* Studies in the Early Middle Ages 25. Turnhout: Brepols, 2012, xl + 242 pp., 54 figures, 1 table, 1 map, € 75.00.

The book is divided into six chapters and concluding remarks plus bibliography and index. By analyzing the crucifixion image on the Gosforth Cross (Cumbria, 10th cent.) in her introduction, Lilla Kopár vividly demonstrates the “cultural exchange and integration that took place in the Anglo-Scandinavian communities” and its manifestation in stone carvings (xxi). While the focus of this book is on “the intercultural dialogue in the art of stone sculpture” (xxvii), the aim of the study is to extend the “line of scholarship by a new perspective”; accordingly Kopár examines a particular group of carvings as “cultural documents of an intellectual, rather than historical or social process” (23). According to her, “these sculptures bear witness to the process of religious and cultural adaptation and assimilation that was initiated by the settlement of the Scandinavians” (xxiv). In her introduction she deals with methodological concerns such as the relationship between image and text, which is often not a one-to-one relationship but a constant interplay of two or more ‘texts’; this is true even more in the Anglo-Scandinavian context, where the dialogue is between two different cultural traditions brought together in the Scandinavian settlement areas of northern England.

One of Kopár’s objectives is to discuss and evaluate the carvings with mythological and heroic iconography of Scandinavian origin as evidence of a religious and cultural integration process. She also compares the carvings with written sources. The relevant carvings are distributed in the northern and north-western parts of the Danelaw, to which monuments of the culturally, socially and politically related Isle of Man serve as comparative material. More importantly, the time frame for the carvings in question is the period between the late 9th and the mid-11th century, as the period of the Scandinavian invasion and subsequent settlement. Besides presenting the monuments in question as one

corpus, Kopár examines sculptures as “cultural documents of the conversion and assimilation of the Vikings in England, to define the cultural context of sculptural production, and to explore the intellectual framework of figurative thinking that enabled the process of religious accommodation documented in stone sculpture” (xl).

Chapter 1 is devoted to the iconography of Wayland and Sigurd. By defining the constitutive elements of the myths (e.g., Wayland’s flying contrivance), Kopár is able to follow the myths in literature and sculpture in time and space. With the Franks Casket (early 8th cent.)¹ as the oldest piece of evidence for the Wayland myth in Anglo-Saxon England as the point of departure, she compares Pre-Viking insular sources to Viking-Age stone monuments and visual comparanda outside the British Isles, in this case from Sweden. This method not only makes it possible to unearth the layers of, for example, the Anglo-Saxon version of the Wayland myth but also reveals the changes of the original myth, namely its appearance in a Christian setting side by side with the adoration of the Magi on the Franks Casket.

In Chapter 2 Kopár deals with the conflicts and adversaries of mythical dimensions. She points out that, in contrast to Christianity, Germanic mythology did not operate with the concepts of absolute good and absolute evil. In Norse mythology the adversaries of the gods are the giants. At Ragnarök the clash between the giants and the gods constitutes the final battle. For non-specialists in Scandinavian mythology, Kopár gives an introduction and characterization of the other adversaries of the gods, e.g., the Midgard serpent, Fenrir the wolf, and the goddess Hel, and also points out parallels to Christianity. She stresses the fact that one of the very important questions is, whether or not the Anglo-Saxons and the invading Scandinavians possessed an eschatological tradition of similar extent and coherence. As there are no written narrative sources from the British Isles, Kopár has to rely on Scandinavian texts of later date in order to understand and reconstruct the eschatological story. Although dated centuries earlier than the Norse written sources, the selection of the episodes on the Gosforth Cross indicates, if not the original status of these stories, at least their popularity and significance long before the earliest written narrative sources from Scandinavia.

In Chapter 3 Kopár investigates “figural carvings of uncertain or mixed pictorial and cultural origins” (105). She explores the potential associations of uncertain iconography with the Norse mythological tradition (Odin and his warriors; Yggdrasil, the cosmic tree; a group of female mythological figures) and

¹ See Gaby Waxenberger. (forthcoming). “Date and Provenance of the Auzon/Franks Casket”. In: *Life on the Edge: Social, Political and Religious Frontiers in Early Medieval Europe*. 63rd International Sachsensymposium. Durham.

singles out three subgroups: 1. Ragnarök events, 2. Warriors and other figures with attributes associated with Odin, and 3. Odin's self-sacrifice on Yggdrasil. Subgroup 2 is extremely interesting as depictions of warriors and horsemen may represent a continuation and development of a pre-Viking interest in secular portraits in northern England sculpture. Kopár also mentions "the secular aristocratic portrait" (111) on the Bewcastle Cross, which bears a runic inscription in Old English. She considers these secular images exceptional in the context of pre-Viking monastic and ecclesiastical sculpture in England, regarding them as "early indicators of a shift of patronage and interest in secular themes even before the arrival of the Vikings" (111). As Viking-Age warrior portraits show diversity in design, Kopár assumes that regional distribution of certain types may indicate local fashions and, more importantly, "the influence of individual carvers and workshops" (111). Additionally, the warrior-horsemen with spears appear on a number of monuments, among them the Chester-le-Street stone with an Old English personal name in Latin characters and two runes (EADmUND *Ēadmund*).² In her section "Old and New Traditions" (121–128), Kopár filters out the major parallels between Odin and Christ (e.g., supreme gods, their self-sacrifices on the world-tree and on the cross), and she concludes that the association of Odin's self-sacrifice with Christ's crucifixion is largely dependent on the symbolic location of these two acts: the depiction of the world tree shows similarities with the Christian cross. After discussing these (e.g., living vine scrolls), the author assumes that in the Anglo-Scandinavian communities aspects of the two trees, Yggdrasil and the cross, might have been mingled and that the concept of the living cross as the world tree may have been strengthened. Compared to the variety of images of men, the presence of female figures is rather limited; the only identifiable female deity is Loki's wife Sigrn. Besides this figure, Kopár also discusses the Valkyries in greater detail (128–133).

Kopár rightly considers these carvings as cultural-historical documents in their historical, social, and intellectual context and she sees their special significance in the fact that they bear witness to the meeting of the insular Christian culture of the Anglo-Saxons and the traditional Germanic (Norse) culture of the settling Scandinavians. Moreover, they reflect the intellectual and social processes taking place in the Anglo-Scandinavian communities, which finally resulted in the "religious conversion and social integration of the new settlers" (137f.). She claims that conversion is a political and social phenomenon that may be attested in historical sources, and it is also an intellectual change on the level of the individuals involved.

2 Runes are transliterated in lower case and bold letters.

Encounters of religions in the Scandinavian settlement areas are dealt with in chapter 4. One of the very important points in this chapter is the exact definition of technical terms (e.g., ‘acculturation’, ‘adaptation’, ‘accommodation’, 152f.) taken from, for example, missionary theology and anthropology. According to Kopár, the mixed communities of Anglo-Saxons and Scandinavians can be seen as a fertile place for the conversion, but the converts often retained aspects of their own traditional culture. The author also analyzes the encounter with the Vikings and their culture from the Christian perspective of the Anglo-Saxons. This encounter launched a “second phase of ‘Germanization’ of Christianity” (159). Kopár argues that most stories, gods and heroes must have been well-known to the Christian Anglo-Saxons from their own native tradition, although some of the imported cultural material might have been new and unfamiliar. She claims that the import of Scandinavian narrative material and its iconography must have enriched the Anglo-Saxon communities with both new narrative elements (e.g. the Ragnarök story) and new poetic styles, imagery, and iconography. More importantly, some stories of gods and heroes already known in pre-Viking England underwent a shift of emphasis (e.g. the element of flight in the Wayland legend). Additionally, in art, Christian and non-Christian elements from the Celtic tradition were distributed by the Hiberno-Norse settlers of the western areas of northern England (e.g., the hart-and-hound motif). As the monuments in Kopár’s corpus are primarily Christian and most of them are associated with ecclesiastical sites, she defines the accommodation process as “an integration of the pagan gods and heroes into the Christian system” (164). As a prerequisite for this to happen, she assumes a conceptual, ethical and temporal readjustment for the final “reconciliation of the Germanic and Christian concepts of time and history” (164). To explain the Viking-Age monuments, however, the medieval Christian approach of typology (i.e. biblical exegesis) cannot be applied directly according to Kopár. For this reason, she explores the similarities and differences between typology and the intellectual background during the accommodation process in the Anglo-Scandinavian communities in chapter 5.

In search of a more appropriate model than Ohly’s much debated ‘semi-biblical’ typology, Kopár uses the concept of ‘Figurative Thinking’, which differs in decisive elements from Auerbach’s understanding of ‘figural’ interpretation. Auerbach’s approach is based on strict biblical typology which operates in type – anti-type relations and therefore in the fulfilment of the earlier type in the later anti-type. Kopár’s method, however, is characterized by highlighting the connections between biblical and non-biblical events and characters but, contrary to Auerbach, there is neither emphasis on their temporal sequence nor the fulfilment of a prophesy in the typological sense. However, her own and Auerbach’s model share, for example, the idea of certain patterns being repeated in history, thereby

creating a coherence of history and connections between events and people separated in time.

Observers, possible patrons of the sculptures and the functions of the monuments themselves are in the focus of chapter 6. In order to understand the circumstances of and the motivation behind sculptural production, a look at the nature and extent of the Scandinavian settlement, questions of ethnicity and identity, and the state of the Church and ecclesiastical organization is necessary. In the following (182–184), Kopár gives a concise historical overview of the situation in Northern England; she also discusses the term ‘ethnicity’ and the problems it poses as a clear ethnic distinction between the native Anglo-Saxons on the one hand and the Danish and Hiberno-Norse settlers on the other is difficult. Moreover, such a distinction requires an understanding of ethnicity based on cultural and religious terms. Kopár describes the ethnic situation of the area in question as “unusually colourful and complicated due to generations of interaction between the Irish, Scots, Welsh, English, and Scandinavians in the Irish Sea region” (185) and holds the view that the division Danish versus Hiberno-Norse is rather regional and cultural than ethnic.

Kopár compares her results against the backdrop of both the latest research on place-name elements and on the state of the Church in the Viking period; both are in line with her own research results. Kopár discusses the outstanding cross shaft of Crowle in the context of commemoration: She takes the pre-Viking “*becun* formula’ (from Old English *becun æfter*, ‘monument in memory of’)” on “the most purely Scandinavian sculpture that survives in Lincolnshire” (198) as an indication that this tradition was either continued or adopted in the Viking period. She stresses the fact that the inscription, although carved in Old English runes, is inscribed in a “Norse manner on a curving rune band” (198). Although only a small part of the runic inscription can be read – [...]cbæcun[...]³ according to my own examination because the lower part of the cross shaft with the runic band is completely scratched –, the inscription may have shown a complete memorial formula.⁴ Kopár’s study provides extremely valuable tools for putting such monuments as the Crowle cross shaft in their appropriate context, namely as a link “between the local tradition of commemoration (through its Old English inscription) and a new secular Scandinavian context of production (through its iconography and style)” (198).

³ Uncertain runes are transliterated in italics.

⁴ See Gaby Waxenberger. 2013. “Text Types and Formulas on Display: The Old English Rune Stone Monuments in England”. In: Monika Schulz (ed.). *vindærinne wunderbærer mære: Gedenkschrift für Ute Schwab*. Studia Mediaevalia Septentrionalia 24. Wien: Fassbaender. 495–518.

This book offers not only new insights to the runologist of Old English who increasingly has to deal with 'hybrid' objects because of new finds. This study also provides a refined toolkit for the analysis of monuments which have, until now, only been seen as Scandinavian-influenced (e.g., the Crowle cross shaft).

Lilla Kopár's detailed and multi-faceted study brings not only linguistics and history of art closer together but also shows what archaeology, theology and anthropology can contribute to the overall important question of the Scandinavian influence on art and language in the North of England during the Viking-Age period. Her study is an eye-opener for the philologist as it vividly demonstrates and proves that art in general and iconography in particular must be analyzed, understood and compared to our concept of language contact. Only then can we fathom the complex processes of both language and cultural contacts and arrive at reliable conclusions on language and cultural change in regional and temporal varieties.

One of the most important research results, in my opinion, is Kopár's analysis of the constitutive elements of Viking-Age sculpture and the consistent search for these elements in the sculptures of the British Isles. This is a solid basis for finding the differences and establishing the criteria of an Insular 'tradition'. Her work also shows very clearly that some sculptures can neither be unambiguously assigned to the pagan nor to the Christian nor to a syncretistic phase and therefore every interpretation of such sculptures is uncertain. Another imponderable when analyzing the sculptures is the fact that these monuments are often weathered and/or fragmentary, which makes interpretations also uncertain (see, e.g., p. 80). Additionally, in her analysis it becomes clear that a number of individual steps are absolutely necessary in order to arrive at comprehensive and reliable results: sources on different media must be meticulously compared first; literary and biblical sources as well as exact descriptions of the monuments in Scandinavia serve as backdrops for the monuments in the British Isles. Only then the results show the depth in time and space necessary to uncover dependencies on the homeland versus parallels or even new developments in the colonies.

Kopár not only helps the reader who is not at home in Scandinavian studies by giving an overview of the myths in question; another of her merits is that she clearly states when an analysis is uncertain or not possible. This book is thus a differentiated study of a hitherto little understood phase of English cultural history through a meticulous and insightful interpretation of the corpus of sculpture produced in this period.

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