

THE EPIPHANY IN RUNIC ART
THE DYNNA AND SIKA STONES

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WE HAVE LITTLE CONTEMPORARY EVIDENCE OF what was chiefly stressed in the Christian message by those priests active in the missions to Norway, Iceland, and Sweden in the period from about 1000 to 1050. A few remarks in scaldic poetry and some reminiscences in later Icelandic writings suggest that the preachers, as was natural, made much of the universal power of the Christian God and of the mighty influence of his angels. Other remarkable sources, runic monuments from the early Christian period, particularly in Sweden, show in their invocations that the figure of St Michael was regarded as of great importance, but they also demonstrate that the unique position of Mary, God's Mother, was fully appreciated.¹ These monuments also give us ample evidence of the teaching that gifts and good works were required of Christians.² The Virgin Birth was a great sign of God's power, but with the Nativity there was associated the miracle of the star which led the Wise Men from the East to worship Mary's son. This Epiphany must have seemed a good theme to the missionary preachers, for they themselves were continuing the manifestation of God to the Gentiles which had begun with the visit of the Magi to Bethlehem. The Three Kings had also brought Jesus symbolic gifts, and Christians were to be inspired by their example to make their offerings to the Lord, 'a broken spirit' and 'a contrite heart', but also alms and pious works to help their fellow-men. Other themes connected with the Feast of the Epiphany were the baptism of Jesus in Jordan and the first miracle at Cena, both marvellous matters which demanded exposition, not least in times when Christianity altogether was still a novelty. I may be forgiven by my audience today for making special mention of the fact that many of the missionary bishops and first priests in Norway and Sweden came from England; and it is not unlikely that some

¹ See e.g. Sven B. F. Jansson, *The Runes of Sweden* (1962), pp. 94-7.

² *ibid.*, pp. 85-91.

of them had heard or read the two English homilies for Epiphany composed about 990 by the great Abbot Ælfric of Eynsham, in which some of the themes I have referred to are eloquently expounded.¹ As it is, my lecture today concerns evidence of the same subject in early Christian Scandinavia, revealed not in words but in pictures.

The narrative in chapter two of St Matthew's Gospel concerning the Magi, the Wise Men from the East, led by a star to Bethlehem, was from the second century onwards the subject of explanation and commentary by learned and pious authors, who wanted to deepen and expand the Gospel's very clear but still very brief and bare description of this episode.² Attention was especially focused on the star which guided the Magi to the Infant Saviour in Bethlehem, and it is evident that current astrological ideas in the Near East influenced this part of the story and gave it added significance.

At the same time as the body of learned commentary grew, so there was a parallel increase in the desire to give the story pictorial form, evident in motives and scenes connected with the Adoration of the Magi extant from the third and fourth centuries onward. As Hugo Kehrer has shown,³ the Magi in this early art are depicted as Mithraic priests in a scene which has the Blessed Virgin and the Child Jesus in the centre. By degrees a more elaborate composite representation was developed, so that we find, for instance, the Holy Infant on one side in the manger and on the other side in the lap of his mother. The overwhelmingly rich material from the Middle Ages illustrating this scene has been classified by Kehrer into many types, representative of Hellenistic, Oriental, Byzantine, and many other schools of art, but there is no need for me to go further into this. The Northern material is not included in Kehrer's investigation, except for some examples belonging to the south of Denmark, but his classification of the European material is naturally

¹ Ælfric, *The Catholic Homilies*, ed. B. Thorpe (1843-6), I, 104-20, II, 36-53.

² The *Protevangelium Jacobi* from c. A.D. 150 already contains a lengthy description of the Nativity, King Herod, the Magi and the star. See e.g. M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (1924), pp. 38-49. For further references to early Christian literature on the Magi and for general discussion see H. Kehrer, *Die heiligen drei Könige in Literatur und Kunst* (1908-9), I; and H. Leclercq's article, 'Mages', in *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, X (1931), 980-1067.

³ *op. cit.*, II, I ff.

of fundamental importance in any study of the Magi in Scandinavian art.

I shall not offer any survey of the Northern material beyond saying that we meet the Magi in many medieval works of art in our churches, in sculptures, paintings, and textiles. The earliest representations are sculptured figures on some baptismal fonts from Gotland carved at the end of the twelfth century, and on an antemensale from the church of Broddetorp in Västergötland, also from the twelfth century. In these earliest representations of the Magi in our church-art they appear as kings wearing crowns, approaching the Virgin Mary and paying tribute to the Holy Child on her lap. An early embroidery depicting the theme comes from the church at Hølandet in Norway.¹

But in Norway and Sweden we also have two pictures of the Magi carved in stone in quite another style, pictures a good deal older than the figures in ecclesiastical art I have just mentioned. But these older representations have never been discussed with reference to their characteristic iconographic features and their possible connections with European material.

My lecture will be largely concerned with the pictures that appear on the Dynna stone in Norway, where we have an illustration of the Magi's visit to the Saviour, but I shall add some words on a Swedish picture carved with a runic inscription on a rock in the parish of Frötuna in Uppland. This is called the Sika rock, U529 in our corpus of Swedish runic inscriptions, and I shall offer a new interpretation of its picture, which I believe can also be connected with the Adoration of the Magi.

The Dynna stone comes from the farm Nordre Dynna in the parish of Gran in Hadeland, Norway, about 45 miles north of Oslo. It has been in the University's *Oldsaksamling* in Oslo since 1879, and it is described and interpreted in Magnus Olsen's excellent *Norges innskrifter med de yngre runer*.² On the front of the stone there are fascinating pictures (pls. 1-3), one showing the Magi on horseback

¹ F. Wallem, *La broderie de l'église de Hølandet en Norvège* (1911). The Magi figure in an early thirteenth-century carving from Hemsedal stave-church and in a late thirteenth-century painting from Ål stave-church; see Anders Bugge, *Norske stavkirker* (1953), pls. 84-5, 80.

² *Norges innskrifter med de yngre runer* (NIyR hereafter), I (1941), 198-202.

and one showing them at the stable in Bethlehem.¹ But before I begin a closer analysis of these illustrations, I must say a few words about the runic inscription which covers one of the stone's vertical edges. According to Sophus Bugge and Magnus Olsen it is to be read as follows:

**kunnuur × kirþi × bru × þryrikstutir² × iftirǫsriþi ×
tutur × sina × suuasmarhanarst × ǫhapalanti**

That is to say in normalised Old Norse: *Gunnvor gerði brú, Þryð-riks dóttir, eptir Ástríði, dóttur sína. Sú vas mæc hönnumst á Haðalandi.*

In English it would be: Gunnvor Thrydrik's daughter made a 'bridge' in memory of Astrid, her daughter. She was the 'handiest' girl in Hadeland.

I shall say a little more about the 'bridge' and the adjective 'handiest' in a moment.

Magnus Olsen maintains that the inscription was carved about 1050, and more probably before that date than after it.

I shall not discuss linguistic details in the inscription, largely because the main problems seem to me to have been solved by Sophus Bugge's interpretations, made as usual with his almost uncanny linguistic intuition. But I do wish to add some words in amplification of one or two points in Magnus Olsen's wide-ranging discussion of the stone.

My remarks will first concern Gunnvor Thrydrik's daughter, Astrid's mother. She was obviously a Christian, perhaps of the first or second generation, if the inscription is to be dated not later than the middle of the eleventh century. It was as a Christian that she had a bridge or causeway made for the benefit of her daughter's soul. To build a bridge across a river or to lay a path of logs or gravel through swampy ground is mentioned very often in runic inscriptions of Christian character, and such a good work must have been considered an effective means of easing the soul's way through purgatory. Even before the conversion of Scandinavia, however, there was—as Ragnar Kinander has shown³—active in-

¹ Cf. also Nils Lid, *Jolesveinar og græderikdomsgudar* (Skrifter utg. av Det Norske Videnskaps-Akademi i Oslo. II. Hist.-filos. Klasse. (1932). No. 5), p. 24.

² C. Marstrand has shown that the first *i*-rune is to be read as a *γ*-rune, and Magnus Olsen has accepted this correction. Cf. *NIyR*, v (1960), 255, with references.

³ *Kronobergs läns runinskrifter* (1935), pp. 8-10.

terest taken by the Church in the building of roads and bridges in order to facilitate the spread of Christianity and to make church attendance easy, and in time such undertakings came to be encouraged by promises of requiem masses and even absolution. Both the Church and the community benefited from good works of this kind.

Magnus Olsen acknowledges the importance of the more practical reasons of Christian mission which lay behind bridge-building, but he also stresses, in my view rightly, the importance of the belief—generally held and with ecclesiastical sanction—that after death the soul had to make a terrible journey over all sorts of obstacles: thorny moorland, bottomless bogs, rushing streams, and worst of all, a perilous bridge over a black, ghastly river. In the vision-literature of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries these terrifying stages to be traversed in the other world are often mentioned, and in the famous Norwegian poem *Draumkvædet*—composed perhaps towards the end of the Middle Ages—it is explicitly said that the person who gives shoes to the poor does not need ‘to walk barefoot on the sharp and thorny moor’, and the man who gives a cow to the poor is saved from dizziness on the ‘lofty Gjallarbridge’. There is thus a correspondence between certain good deeds in this world and a painless passage through certain obstacles in the next.

I should like to add another instance which helps to elucidate this matter. It has special reference to the building of bridges and comes from the *Visio Godeschalchi*, a late twelfth-century description of the experiences of a certain farmer in Holstein when his soul went wandering while his body slept. We are told that he arrived at a great river, filled with sharp iron points (*ferreis aciebus*), and in the Latin text it is explained that the man who built ‘dams and bridges’ in his lifetime would be able to cross this river on special planks floating in it, while other people have to wade across and suffer the lacerating spikes of iron.¹

This parallel seems to me to support Magnus Olsen’s insistence on this element among the motives that led to bridge-building as a pious Christian work. He wrote a special paper on this, ‘Gjøre bro

¹ R. Usinger, *Visio Godeschalchi* (1875); cf. Moltke Moe, *Samlede Skrifter* (1925-7), III, 235-8; Knut Liestøl, *Draumkvæde* (*Studia Norvegica* 3, 1946), pp. 91-6.

for ens sjel',¹ before the publication of the first volume of *Norges innskrifter med de yngre runer*; and for further discussion of this and related topics (such as *Gjallarbrú* and the rivers *Slíðr* and *Geirvimul* named in poems of the *Edda*) I may also refer to my own paper on *Draumkvædet* and its sources.²

There is another detail in the inscription's wording that I should like to comment on—the attractive rhythmic ending: *sú vas mær hõnnurst á Haðalandi*.

I believe Sophus Bugge gave the right interpretation of the difficult word *han[n]arst* as long ago as 1865.³ He explained it as the superlative of *hannarr*, in normalized form in the feminine nominative singular, *hõnnurst*. According to Bugge, *hannarr* means 'handy, dexterous', and on the basis of this interpretation it seems justifiable to conclude that the picture on the front of the stone may have had something to do with the young girl's activities. Astrid was 'nimble-fingered', clever at weaving or embroidery. Magnus Olsen gave us a hint in the same direction when he said that the decoration on the stone might have been prompted by an embroidered or woven picture that Astrid had made of the Magi.⁴

It is also tempting to approach the problem by another word. Etymologically *hannarr* is very obscure. Its sense is clear but its formal relationship to other words is very problematic, and I see no likelihood of the difficulties being resolved.⁵ There is, however, another Norse word that is applicable to a girl's work with needle and thread or work at the loom. That is *hannyrð*, which means 'dexterity, especially in embroidering or weaving; handiwork both in the sense of occupation and of its results'; Fritzner also records an adjective *hannyrðr* from a manuscript of *Pétrs saga postola*.⁶ The noun *hannyrð* appears in the poem called The Second Lay of Gud-

¹ *Maal og Minne*, 1936, pp. 210-12.

² *Arv*, 2 (1946), 35-70.

³ *Tidskrift for Philologi og Pædagogik*, vi (1865), 89-92.

⁴ *NlyR*, I, 201.

⁵ In his penetrating etymological study of the word *ärende* in *Meijerbergs Arkiv för svensk ordforskning*, 4 (1941), p. 16, Ture Johannisson supports Sophus Bugge's interpretation of *hannarr* (*hannr?*).

⁶ *Postola sögur*, ed. C. R. Unger (1874), p. 61¹⁹. The main manuscript (Codex Scardensis) has (normalized): þú ert . . . hannyrð á þllum gjörðum þínum. Variant readings (see notes *ad loc.*) use the substantive *hannyrð*: er ok mikil hannyrð; hefir ok hannyrð mikla [á þllum gjörðum þínum].

run (*Guðrúnarkviða* II) in the *Poetic Edda*, in a passage which is the *locus classicus* in Old Norse literature for the occupation of women with elaborate handiwork. The poem tells that after Sigurd's death Gudrun came to Denmark to a lady called Thora Hakon's daughter. This Thora, says Gudrun in stanza 14, 'embroidered in gold southern halls and Danish swans for my pleasure'; and in stanza 15 she continues: 'We had men's battles in our pictures and the prince's warriors in our dexterous embroidery (*á hannyrðum*)'.¹

I am not able to explain the precise relationship between *hannarr* on the Dynna stone and the *hannyrð* of the Old Norse texts—but that does not perturb me very much, because I do not think that any one else can either.² What is of most moment is that in the scene described in the Lay of Gudrun we have positive evidence of creative handiwork in textiles done by women in Scandinavia in the early period. It is very likely that the Second Lay of Gudrun, although its setting is a remote pagan past, was composed about the same time as the Dynna stone was carved.

Similar work with textiles is also documented from the late eleventh and early twelfth century, but here subject-matter and milieu have little to do with battles between heroes and the hall of a pagan Danish lady. Saxo gives an account of the Swedish wife of King Sven Estridsson of Denmark (died 1074 or 1076) who, when her marriage was annulled on grounds of consanguinity, returned to Sweden and there lived as a chaste widow, busily occupied along with her handmaidens in making *exquisita sacrariorum ornamenta*, including a magnificent chasuble donated by her to the cathedral of Roskilde.³

At the cathedral-school at Hólar in the north of Iceland in the

¹ *Norræn fornkvæði*, ed. Sophus Bugge (1867), pp. 267-8. Cf. *Vǫlsunga saga*, ed. Magnus Olsen (1908), p. 86.

² Jan de Vries, *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* (2. Aufl., 1962), p. 209, suggests a connection between *hannarr* and *hannyrð* (<*hanþaripō), but this is hardly convincing. On *hannyrð* cf. H. Falk, *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, III (1886), 89-90 (<*hand-gørð) and O. F. Hultman, *Hälsingelagen* (1908), p. 66 note (<*hand-yrkþ).

³ *Gesta Danorum*, ed. A. Holder (1886), p. 372³²⁻³⁹: Sed nec inerti ocio [tempus] effluere passa, cotidiana consuetudine exquisita sacrariorum ornamenta fingebat, inque eandem operam continuam ancillarum curam cogebat. Inter que chlamydem sacerdotalem su[b]tilibus sigillis excultam precioseque materie impensa ac mirifici operis arte elaboratam Roskyldensi sacrario doni nomine largita est. Alia quoque complura diuini cultus insignia sacrorum usibus operata est. Cf. *Gesta Danorum*, ed. J. Olrik and

time of its first bishop, Jón Qgmundarson (1106-21), there was a remarkable girl called Ingunn. She was very good at Latin, and what she had learnt herself, she gladly taught others. The saga of Bishop Jón, written about 1200, tells us that Ingunn corrected the Latin books copied there by having them read aloud to her. She meanwhile was busy with her handiwork: 'she sewed, did tablet-weaving or did other embroidery or weaving, depicting legends of the saints' (*vann aðrar hannyrðir með heilagra manna sögum*). 'In this way', says the saga, 'she made God's glory known to men not only by the words of oral instruction but also by the work of her hands.'¹

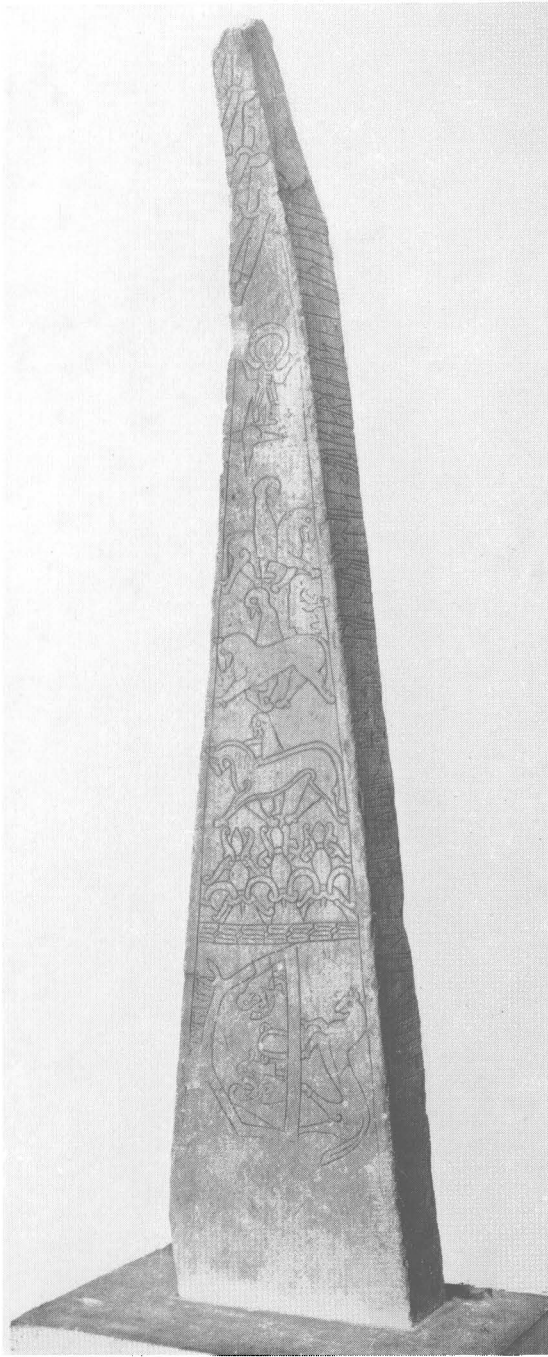
Like Astrid in Hadeland this girl Ingunn was *mær hönmurst*, very nimble with her fingers, and she chose her patterns from the stories of Christian saints. Why should not Astrid, living perhaps sixty years earlier and brought up by a Christian mother, also have been the creator of an embroidery or weaving of the same kind, depicting the Three Wise Men on their way to Bethlehem and in adoration of the Infant Saviour?

If we now look at the pictures and decoration on the front of the Dynna stone we find that the face of the stone is divided into two fields. At the top of the upper field we see a haloed figure, full-face, with his arms stretched out; he is placed so close to a big four-pointed star that his right leg merges with the upper point of the star. Below the star there are three riding figures with bird-like heads and a rather mysterious look. The top figure has his horse turned to the right, the two others have their horses turned to the left. We can discern a 'Ringerike spiral' on the rear hip of the top horse, a charming and sprightly animal; and there is something similar on the front hip of the third horse, which is engraved with double contour lines.

The lower field of the carving is separated from the upper one by a palmette-like pattern and a border of geometric type. Considerations of space have made the carver site the picture here vertically

H. Raeder, 1 (1931), 310⁶⁻¹¹. On the confusion over the precise identity of the lady see e.g. Adam af Bremen, *De Hamburgske Ærkebispers Historie* . . . oversat af Carsten L. Henrichsen (1930), p. 163, note 7.

¹ *Biskupa sögur* (1858-78), 1, 241. Cf. F. Paasche, *Kristendom og kvad* (1914), p. 62, on continental parallels to Ingunn; and further S. Larsen, 'Kvindeligt Haandarbejde i Middelalderen med særligt Hensyn til Folkeviserne', *Aarbøger for nordisk Oldkyndighed og Historie*, 1915, especially pp. 1-20.



Pl. 1 The Dynna stone
Copyright: Universitetets Oldsaksamling, Oslo

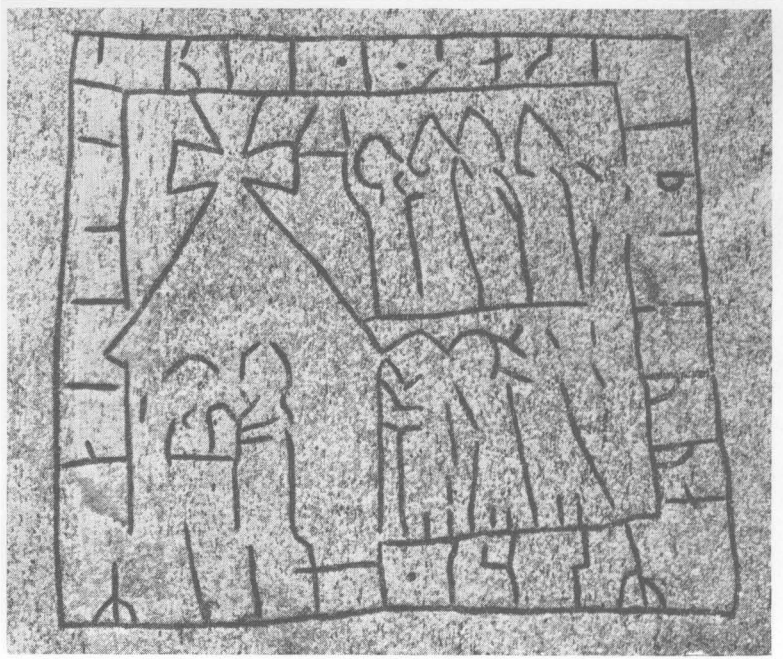


Pl. 2 The Dynna stone: detail

Copyright: Universitetets Oldsaksamling, Oslo



Pl. 3 The Dynna stone: detail
Copyright: Universitetets Oldsaksamling, Oslo



Pl. 4 The
Sika stone
Copyright: ATA,
Stockholm



Pl. 5 The
Drävle stone
Copyright: ATA,
Stockholm

not horizontally. We see there a kneeling horse whose rider is in the cavern-like house. In the house we can make out a female figure at the left side, apparently the Virgin Mary, and facing her a smaller figure, while at the far right a man is bowing with a horn in his hand. In parenthesis I may remind you that one of the Magi on the Franks Casket, from the late seventh century, also carries a horn. Nobody hitherto has realised that the horse is supposed to be kneeling, and I should think that this feature is to be compared with the kneeling ox and ass found in the old legends and illustrations of the birth of Christ.

All these engravings on the Dynna stone illustrate the story of the Magi. This has been common knowledge since at least 1879, but despite the fact that this is the oldest and rarest picture we have of the Magi in Scandinavia, the details of the carving have not been studied in relation to the legendary narratives about the famous Wise Men. Before going further I should like to draw your attention to the hollow over the left part of the roof, somewhere above the head of the Virgin. I am inclined to think that the Bethlehem star was carved at that place, but is not now visible because the stone has been damaged there, either by a blow or by crumbling away. A star in that position, close to the cave or manger, belongs to the iconography of the Nativity.

In a number of early representations of the travelling Magi, the first of them is shown turning backwards to face his companions, apparently to encourage them on their way. In later medieval times it was regularly the second of them who turned back as he pointed out the star, and we know that stories were made up to explain why he was portrayed in this way.¹ It seems to me possible that here we have the reason for the opposite direction taken by the first of the Wise Men on the Dynna stone, and the fact that it is the first who turns back may be a sign of the old-fashioned iconographic tradition from which the picture springs. If this was the reason, it had a happy effect on the composition, for the contrast in direction adds interest and gives balance to the illustration.

I cannot on the other hand offer any explanation of the figure,

¹ Cf. e.g. figs. 7472, 7476, 7480-1 in *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, x (1930). For a story made up to explain the backward-looking king, see e.g. *Mirk's Festial*, ed. T. Erbe (1905), p. 49⁶⁻¹⁰.

rather hard to decipher, above the rump of the second horse. The characters who are missing from the story are King Herod and an angel, but whether this little human figure represents one or the other of them I must leave to someone else to decide.

I should like to spend most time on the figure at the top, the one involved with the four-pointed star, because this has never been explained in relation to the rest of the illustration. As I said, it was as far back as 1879 that Professor Oluf Rygh identified the contents of the upper half of the picture as the Magi, the Christ Child and the star;¹ and in 1941 Professor Bjørn Hougen described the topmost figure as a clumsily carved full-face Christ-figure with a marked halo.² But neither of these scholars nor anyone else has commented on the reason for placing the figure in just that position, actually combined with the star.

Many years ago I was reading some texts in the 'Old Swedish Legendary' and I came across a paragraph there which immediately reminded me of the unique picture on the Dynna stone. There is in that book a chapter dealing with the miracles at Christ's birth, and it contains this passage: 'At the nativity of our Lord a new star rose and became visible—as Chrysostomus writes—to the Holy Three Kings, who were together on a mountain in their district: a star with the image of a beautiful boy-child, who spoke to them and said they should make haste to go to the country of Judah. There they would find the child whom the new star stood for and the star would be their guide.'³

The section containing this interesting passage is found in a rather late manuscript, Holmiensis A3, but this source is without doubt closely related to the group of manuscripts which together constitute the large collection of legends known under the general title of *Ett fornsvenskt legendarium*. Professor Valter Jansson, who knows these manuscripts better than anyone else, puts their origin at the end of the thirteenth or beginning of the fourteenth century.⁴ The main part of this vernacular collection of legends is translated from

¹ *Foreningen til norske Fortidsmindesmærkers Bevaring. Aarsberetning for 1879*, p. 202.

² *NlyR*, I, 162; cf. also Anders Hagen, *Forhistorisk tid og vikingtid* (Vårt folks historie, I, 1962), p. 284.

³ *Ett forn-svenskt legendarium*, ed. G. Stephens, I (1847), 67-8.

⁴ V. Jansson, *Fornsvenska legendariet* (1934), pp. 4, 42-3.

the *Legenda aurea*, that enormous storehouse of legends and homilies from early Christian times down to the thirteenth century which the learned Dominican, Jacobus de Voragine, compiled and edited in the 1260s and 70s. The passage I quoted just now is also found in the *Legenda aurea*; it even occurs twice there, in separate chapters, and in both cases there is a reference to a narrative by Chrysostomus.¹

When I first noticed this reference to Johannes Chrysostomus I went to his commentary on St Matthew's Gospel, to find that he has there a lengthy discussion of the nature of the star and concludes that it was able to guide the Magi by a special divine power, just as the pillar of cloud guided the children of Israel through the desert.² But he has nothing about the Holy Infant being in the star. I then turned to my learned friend, Albert Wifstrand, who died in 1964, professor of Greek in the University of Lund, and he directed me to Pseudo-Chrysostomus, whose work called *Opus imperfectum in Matthæum* was regarded throughout the Middle Ages as the genuine work of Johannes Chrysostomus. And the *Opus imperfectum*, probably written in the sixth century, has just this narrative about the star which is given in the *Legenda aurea* and translated into Old Swedish in our manuscript of the *Legendary*.³ The Magi are on a mountain somewhere in the East called Mons Victorialis; they are watching the sky and suddenly they catch sight of a star descending above the mountains—it has the shape of a little boy (*habens formam pueri parvuli*) with a cross over his head. This living star talks to them and tells them to hurry to the land of Judah. When the Magi are ready to depart, the star goes before them and guides them on their way.

It is definitely this old legend that is reflected in the picture carved on the Dynna stone. The figure partly inserted in the star

¹ *Legenda aurea*, ed. Th. Graesse (1846), pp. 43-4, 89. A West Norse version of the story, apparently based on an imperfect recollection of the latter text in *Legenda aurea*, is found in a fourteenth-century hand in Gml. kgl. sml. 1812 4to, printed in *Alfræði íslenszk*, III, ed. Kr. Kálund (1917-8), 73.

² Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, LVII, col. 64.

³ Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, LVI, cols. 637-8. On the origin and transmission of the *Opus imperfectum* see e.g. the article by F. Wotke in Pauly's *Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*. Neue Bearbeitung . . . Fünfunddreissigster Halbband (1939), 824-6.

and with a halo round his head is the Christ Child. The Magi have seen the star and now hasten on horseback to the land of Judah, and in the lower section of the stone we find them, or at least one or two of them, arrived at the birthplace of Jesus in Bethlehem. As I said, the illustration must once have contained the star close to the roof of the house there, but it has been lost through damage or weathering.

Now, this is an old carving made about 1050, in the first Christian period in the interior of Norway, where the conversion to Christianity is generally supposed to have been effected by King Olaf Haraldsson about 1020.¹ Since reliable literary sources from that age are so scarce, we must allow our imagination to lead us for a moment, as we meditate on a young girl in Hadeland, who had heard from a priest or from her mother a marvellous story of the Magi who had been led by a Holy Boy in the shape of a star. The girl was quick and neat with her fingers and she saw that she could make pictures in her tapestry that would show this Epiphany, this manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles. Or perhaps she had seen other pictures that inspired her, church textiles, tapestries, or paintings, that had come to Norway from England or Germany.

If we consider the possibility of influence from preaching or teaching, we must admit that the oldest Norwegian and Icelandic homilies, from the twelfth century, have in their references to the Magi nothing about the Christ Child in the star. But the absence of this point from this very limited literary material does not, of course, mean that we can exclude the possibility that this special version of the legend was found in an earlier homiliary or was used in missionary preaching.² If we look at the second possibility, that of influence from other pictorial art, it must be similarly said that, astonishingly enough, no other early instances seem to be known which have this motif of the 'star-child', which is so strikingly characteristic of the old legend and of the Dynna stone. I say this, of

¹ Sigvatr Þórðarson, *Erfidrápa Óláfs helga*, v. 2 (only in *Flateyjarbók*); cf. *Den store saga om Olav den hellige*, ed. O. A. Johnsen and Jón Helgason (1941), II, 768, and I, chs. 56, 101; *Óláfs saga hins helga*, ed. O. A. Johnsen (1922), chs. 30, 37; *Heimskringla*, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (Íslensk fornrit XXVI-XXVIII, 1941-51), II, chs. 73, 114.

² On the *austrvegskonungar* see *Gamla norsk homilieboek*, ed. Gustav Indrebø (1931), pp. 61-3; *Homilíu-bók*, ed. Th. Wisén (1872), pp. 9, 26, 56-9, 79, 183; *Mariu saga*, ed. C. R. Unger (1871), 30-2, 369-71.

course, with much reservation, for the artistic material is enormously rich and by no means exhaustively studied. In earlier pictorial art, however, we find a related theme, that of 'the angel in the star' or 'the guiding angel', which is attested in literature as early as the sixth century, in the *Evangelium Infantiae Arabicum*, and in art, according to Hugo Kehrer,¹ as early as the fourth or fifth century.

As an iconographic element the 'star-child' seems to belong chiefly to the late medieval world. Professor Henrik Cornell of Stockholm has considered the question in his book, *The Iconography of the Nativity of Christ* (1924), but he was not aware of the problem posed by the Dynna stone. He gives us many interesting examples of the Infant Saviour in the star from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, including ones from the chancel of Cologne Cathedral and from Roger van der Wayden's painting in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum in Berlin. Professor Cornell has also found examples in late medieval church paintings in Sweden, in the church at Härkeberga in Uppland, for example, and in Holy Trinity Church in Uppsala. Professor Cornell thought that the ultimate inspiration of these paintings lay in the *Speculum humanae salvationis*, the fourteenth-century 'Mirror of man's salvation', because in illuminated manuscripts of this work we find both a picture of the Christ Child in the star and the text of the *Legenda aurea* telling of the Magi's vision on Mons Victoralis.²

There is thus, from the fourteenth century onwards, increasing use of the 'star-child' motif in church art, chiefly perhaps because of the popularity of the version of the Magi story in the *Legenda aurea*. But since this version is much older than the thirteenth century and goes back to Pseudo-Chrysostomus, we must assume that it had some earlier influence on both literature and art in the Christian world, even though we cannot at present document this influence elsewhere than on the Dynna stone. From the point of view of art history and Christian iconography the illustration on the

¹ *op. cit.*, II, 58 ff. In a lecture posthumously published Professor Nils Gösta Sandblad (who died in 1963) suggests, quite implausibly, that the figure by the star at the top of the Dynna stone is a 'star-bearing angel'. See *Uppsala universitets konsthistoriska institution femtio år* (Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis C: 16, 1968), p. 54.

² See the illustration in Kehrer, *op. cit.*, II, 213.

Dynna stone of the mysterious Magi riding under the 'star-child' is thus of great, indeed at present unique, importance.

The Dynna stone and its problems have been in my mind for many years, but quite recently I have come upon another rune stone which may also be connected with the Magi. This is at Sika, a farm in the parish of Frötuna in the east of Uppland (pl. 4). The runic inscription and the picture are carved on an upright rock some 450 yards from the farm, just off an old main road, now disused, that joined two villages. The carving covers an almost square field on the rock, only just over two foot square (62×68 centimetres). The runes are inscribed in a frame around the picture, but nobody has been able to make intelligible sense of them. They are rather shallow and worn away. The illustration in the centre is also weathered and hard to make out, but certain things are still visible: a church-like building with a cross at the top, four figures in the upper right section, three figures in the lower right section, and probably two figures in the lower left section.

Some scholars have described this as the oldest representation we have of divine service in Sweden. The people in the picture have been identified as priests or monks walking in procession to a church. The lines to the left inside the building have been interpreted as an altar. The whole carving—including the runes—has been dated to the latter part of the eleventh century.

The latest account of this enigmatic monument is by Elias Wessén and Sven B. F. Jansson, who refrain from interpreting either runes or illustration.¹ They give a survey of the views of previous scholars, but add that they find it very hard to believe that the carving could belong to the greatest period of runic art in Uppland, that is, to the late eleventh century. They think it might very well be later.

Let it go then for the twelfth century! In any case it gives us an interesting picture if we interpret it, as we plausibly may, as a representation of the Magi. In the upper right-hand section we see three figures with pointed caps and one with uncovered head, who may have an arm stretched upwards or be carrying something of a

¹ *Upplands runinskrifter*, II (1943-6), 399-403.

triangular shape. I should like to interpret this as the Magi on their way to Bethlehem, guided by an angel who is pointing at the star or showing part of his wings. As I said just now, the guiding angel is an old and very common motif in the story of the Magi, and this angel finds illustration as early as the late fifth century on the relief of the sarcophagus of St Ambrose in Milan.¹ In the following centuries the angel often appears in reliefs, miniatures, paintings and so on, in the company of the Magi, and is most often furnished with wings. The angel guides them on their journey, but is also often seen standing close to the Magi or the Christ Child in the scene of the Adoration itself. I may, for example, remind you of an early specimen of Eastern art in the British Museum, a sixth-century ivory panel showing the Adoration, where the winged angel stands between one of the Magi and the Virgin Mary.² Kehrer's book *Die heiligen drei Könige* provides examples of the guiding angel drawn from a period of more than 800 years.

In the lower right-hand section of the Sika carving I imagine we have the Magi outside the house in Bethlehem. The figures are very obscure, but if we count the legs, we seem to arrive at a total of three people. Here, just before entering the sacred room, they have, as far as I can see, bared heads.

Then comes the most difficult part: the scene inside the house. I think the lines to the left are fragments of a sitting Virgin. The figure in front of her, marked by a head, could be one of the Magi offering his gift, but alternatively it might be the head of the Holy Infant, enlarged by the addition of a halo which has now mostly disappeared. I may mention that in more primitive art the Christ Child on the Virgin's lap is very often portrayed much larger than life (compare, for example, the Virgin and Child of the Franks Casket). If this alternative interpretation is adopted, then the vertical lines to the left and right ought to make part of the figure of Mary, her lap and legs.

The Virgin is sitting in a church-like building with a cross at the top, a cross that could also serve as a star. A church is not unusual in Magi iconography. I could mention the Adoration in the *Codex aureus Epternacensis*, made in the tenth century, where in an

¹ Kehrer, *op. cit.*, II, 58-9.

² E. Kitzinger, *Early medieval art in the British Museum* (1963), p. 27, pl. 9.

illustration of the Epiphany scene the Virgin sits in a church. And in the twelfth-century *Hortus deliciarum* Mary appears under a domed church-roof.¹

If we should now try to sum up the results of this study of the Magi in the runic art of Scandinavia, we might begin by observing that this art seems to have gone its own individual way. There is nothing of royal splendour in the appearance of the Magi on the Dynna and Sika stones, nothing of the grandeur that the Three Kings have on the sculptured baptismal fonts of late twelfth-century Sweden. On the rune stones they appear as mysterious men, astrologers, men of visionary powers. We might indeed describe them as *mjök framvísir*, 'deeply prophetic', as an Old Norwegian sermon from the twelfth century puts it, or as astrologers who have read in their secret scriptures what the prophet Balaam had said about the shining star that would come out of Jacob.² In runic art they have no crowns, although this feature in their representation was otherwise common from the tenth century onwards.³ On the Sika stone they seem to have conical caps, which perhaps ultimately reflect the ancient mode which represented them as wearing Phrygian caps.

The Magi on the Dynna stone are portrayed with strange, bird-like heads, that appear to be typical of rune-stone illustration from the middle part of the eleventh century. Similar heads, with round eyes and beak-like profiles, are found, for example, on the Böksta stone (U855), the Sko stone, carved about 1050 by the famous rune-master Fótr, and the Drävle stone (U1163), where Sigurðr Fáfnisbani, Sigurd the dragon-slayer, is shown piercing the dragon with his sword (pl. 5). His head is very like the head of the second of the Magi on the Dynna stone.

The Magi on these rune stones thus represent a very interesting primitive form of representational art, and perhaps reveal a more conservative and popular conception of the Three Wise Men than is found in the conventional ecclesiastical art of Scandinavia. And finally, I must say once more how surprising and how welcome it

¹ Illustrations in Kehrer, *op. cit.*, II, 109, 147.

² *Gamal norsk homiliebok* (1931), p. 62²⁷⁻²⁹: En konungar láso í bocum sinum þat at Baláám spamaðr sagðe sva ok spaðe umm hingat-qvamo drotens várs. Vpp man rinna biort stiarna or kyni Iacóbs. Cf. *Numbers*, 24:17.

³ Cf. Kehrer, *op. cit.*, II, 32-3, 80.

THE DYNNA AND SIKÁ STONES

is to have this iconographic evidence from as early as the eleventh century of the old legend of the *Opus imperfectum* which told of the Christ Child in the star guiding the Magi to their destination in the stable at Bethlehem.

Gunnvor built a bridge for the sake of the soul of her dear daughter, Astrid; but she also built a bridge for us, so that we can cross the gap that divides the *Legenda aurea* and the *Opus imperfectum*; and on our journey we are given a fresh view of the ways in which the Christian message came to the yeomen of Norway and their ladies in the first Christian age, that age that must have seen a great missionary effort, not least by English clergy, to build on the foundation laid in the reigns of Olaf Tryggvason and St Olaf Haraldsson.

NOTE

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