A SUGGESTED INTERPRETATION OF THE SCENE DEPICTED ON THE RIGHT-HAND SIDE OF THE FRANKS CASKET (PL. XII)

The right-hand side of the Franks casket has engaged the attention of a number of scholars, but its meaning still remains something of an enigma. The most common explanation is that it depicts some of the episodes in the story of Sigurd, and that the large wistful horse in the central field represents Grani who, together with Gudrun, is mourning over the dead hero's grave-mound.¹ The two scenes on the left and right are variously interpreted; the identity of the two figures on the left is the point of this note.

As long ago as 1930 Baldwin Brown called attention to the Gotland picture-stones, and suggested that they might give some help in interpreting the panels of the Franks casket.² He thought that they might be especially relevant to those panels of the casket which presented subjects not obviously Christian. Since 1930 Lindqvist has published his study of the Gotland stelae,³ and later scholars such as Arrhenius and Holmqvist have developed the idea of a connexion between these largely pagan Scandinavian monuments and the early Christian art of western Europe.⁴ Before the work of these four scholars, the Gotland picture-stones seemed isolated phenomena, but now one can see how these specimens of Germanic art were in fact influenced by the traditions of Christian pictorial art, and especially those of Christian funerary art. The influence of Christian iconography on the Franks casket is self-evident in such scenes as the Adoration of the Magi (front panel), and the analogy of the Gotland stones suggests that it may have also extended to even apparently non-Christian subjects. It therefore seems worthwhile to investigate the right-hand side of the Franks casket in the double context of Christian iconography in general and Germanic adaptation of it as seen on the Gotland stones. Although the parallels adduced below are not complete and do not establish for certain the identity of the figures of the panel, they help to show how it may be interpreted.

When one looks at the right-hand panel of the Franks casket the attention is first focused on the large and very expressive figure of the horse; near it are three words in runes, two above and one below. Both the horse and another figure, usually thought to be a woman, are gazing at something. The object they are looking at is often interpreted as a burial-mound, with a small cramped figure of a dead man inside it. Further, the woman carries a cup or chalice in one hand and a kind of staff in the other. The central focus of this scene, the size of the horse, the three words, and the woman opposite the horse, all prevent us from reading the whole panel from left to right.

Even without any overt parallel most commentators have interpreted this central part as a scene of mourning over a dead warrior by his horse and a woman, perhaps his wife. Such a combination of dead hero, woman with an offering and large horses appears on some of the Gotland picture-stones, although the horses do not mourn the hero's death. Nevertheless, they are riderless, very often standing directly over the body

of a fallen warrior. Warriors, horses drawing carts and figures of women are also found in combination on the tapestry fragments recovered from the Oseberg ship-burial. It is not certain that the fragment showing a procession of people, carts and horses depicts a funeral scene, but the possibility is strengthened by the fact that another fragment of tapestry found in the same ship-burial shows a gallows-tree with men hanging on it, perhaps in accordance with the belief that men who died by hanging were dedicated to Oōinn.\(^5\) These motifs, from Scandinavian pictorial art of a slightly later period than the Franks casket, seem always to be associated with the death of a hero. A similar conjunction of motifs on the casket is therefore likely to represent a parallel subject, the death and burial of a warrior. As the figure of a horse is found in so many funeral scenes, it is unnecessary to assume that the hero whose death is depicted is Sigurd. The three runic words, \(risci,\) \(bita,\) and \(wudu,\) are not suggestive of any of the Sigurd stories we know, and this seems the chief ground for doubting whether the panel really does represent his death.\(^6\)

The main inscription on the panel, which surrounds the area containing figures, has been variously interpreted,\(^7\) but the version offered by C. J. E. Ball which involves giving the \(r\) rune the value of \(a\) and the \(a\) rune the value of \(a\) seems to give the best sense with the least necessity for emendation. He proposes the following transcription and translation:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Her hos sita} & \text{p on harmberga;} \\
\text{ægl(æ) dirig} & \text{i swa hir tacægis gref} \\
\text{sarden sorga ænd sefa torna.}
\end{align*}
\]

'Here a group are situated on a hill of grief: affliction is active, as . . . grave, a wretched den of sorrows and of grief of mind.'

If, following Ball, \(hos\) is not emended to \(hors\) and the plural verb, \(sita\), 'are situated', follows a collective singular noun, \(hos,\) 'a crowd or group', the need for awkward emendation in the first line is eliminated and a horse is not mentioned. By eliminating one difficulty, however, others are created. Ball admits that it is difficult to connect the inscription convincingly with any of the scenes on the panel. The only coherent human group is the group of three on the right, though they are not obviously on a mound, and there are two mounds on the panel, on one of which a creature is sitting. On the other hand, the mound is said to be a 'mound of sorrow' and the section on the left does not obviously represent a scene of grief, though those in the middle and on the right probably do. Perhaps, then, the inscription describes these sections and omits that on the left. Although the horse, the animal-headed figure and the armed warrior engage our attention, it may not have been thought necessary to mention such obvious features of what must have been a familiar story. It is likely that the words, \(risci,\) \(bita\) and \(wudu,\) refer to other well-known aspects of the story, particularly as they are placed in close proximity to the horse, but their significance is still mysterious. Whoever the dead warrior is, one can be reasonably sure of the subject of the central episode. The horses on the Gotland stones and the women with offerings have often been interpreted in the light of Oōinn and Valhalla myths,\(^8\) as, for example, Oōinn's eight-legged horse Sleipnir and valkyries welcoming the dead hero to Valhalla, but there is no certainty about this view and some features of the Gotland stones argue against


\(^5\) The figure of the mourning horse is not only associated with non-Christian heroes. A white horse approaches St. Columba as the time of his death draws near, and, placing its head in his lap, begins to mourn and weep, for it perceives that the saint is about to die: *Adomnan's Life of Columba* (ed. A. O. and M. O. Anderson, London, 1961), pp. 522–5. I owe this reference to Professor B. K. Martin of the University of Sydney. Compare also Homer, *Iliad*, xix, l. 407.


The fifth panel on stone no. I in the Bunge Museum from Larbro Stora Hammars (Sweden) shows warriors brandishing swords about a centrally-placed, riderless horse which is set above the supine figure of a warrior. Over the horse hovers a bird. Here are a dead warrior, his horse and perhaps his soul in the form of a bird.9

The two groups to the left and right of the central figures of the right-hand panel of the Franks casket are both turned away from the centre and towards each other and are obviously separate from the central scene. On the left two figures, seen in profile, confront one another: a curious creature, with the head and hooves of an animal and a pair of wings sits on a mound-like seat and holds what appear to be two leafy boughs, one in each hand, and opposite this creature stands a warrior, holding a spear and shield. The relation this scene bears to the central one has been much debated and hinges on what one makes of the monster. Some scholars have taken it for Fáfnir facing Sigurd or Högni,10 or for Horsa 'sitting on the mound allotted to him by Fate, nibbling at the leaves of a branch ... he is holding in his hands'.11

Baldwin Brown, in his description of the Franks casket,12 drew attention to its stylistic parallels with carved sarcophagi of stone or marble. The tradition of the disposition of figures on two registers and the horror vacui which both the casket and the sarcophagi display was imitated in Gaul and elsewhere in Europe from the funeral stelae of Coptic Egypt and the sarcophagi of the classical world.13 Baldwin Brown also suggested that the animals on the casket and the stylized foliage (pointed leaves or berries carried on stiff stems) were examples of Coptic influence. The half-human, half-monster figure on the extreme left shows some very interesting features which link it with a group of figures in the art of the British Isles whose posture and function have been ultimately related to the funerary art of Egypt.14 This group comprises the Christ of the tower cross at Kells, the figure of Christ in the lower part of the temptation miniature in the Book of Kells, and the portrait of St. Luke in the Lichfield Gospels. A comparable example from English art of the 9th century is the Sandbach cross in Cheshire, on which the Christ figure appears to be holding two flowers.15 The Christ of the tower cross is carved in the centre of its W. side in the attitude usual to him in Irish representations of the Last Judgment: 'He is standing squarely, feet wide apart holding the cross in one hand and in the other a sprouting bough, symbol of the resurrection. The position of the staffs is strongly reminiscent of those held by the Osiris-Judge in Egyptian funerary carvings and in the illustrations of the Egyptian Book of the Dead'.16

The similarity of posture between such figures and the figure holding the two sprouting boughs on the Franks casket suggests that the latter is at the very least a figure of authority, if not of justice. A seated figure in classical and early Christian art

9 This point cannot be pressed. A simpler view is that the birds of the Gotland picture-stones are birds of prey hovering over the dead, but the positioning of some of them directly over the riderless horses which themselves surmount fallen warriors may allow of my interpretation. For this method of depicting the soul leaving the body in early Christian art and its prototypes see F. Cabrol, Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie (Paris, 1907), I, cols. 1470-1554, sub Âme. A bird in the bottom left corner in the central field of the right-hand side of the casket may be an inhabitant of the stylized foliage but may possibly represent the soul of the dead man in the howe.

10 This is the view of Elliott, op. cit. in note 1, p. 104.
11 d'Ardenne, op. cit. in note 1, p. 236.
15 There exist two other figures holding flowering sprays from Anglo-Saxon art of the 9th century, though of these at least one is closely defined by its context as representing a different subject, namely the faculty of sight. This is the central figure of the Fuller brooch: R. L. Bruce-Mitford, 'Late Saxon disc-brooches', in Dark-Age Britain, Studies presented to E. T. Leeds (ed. D. B. Harden, London, 1956), pp. 171–201. A similar interpretation has been given to the human figure on the Alfred Jewel by Egil Bakka, 'The Alfred Jewel and sight', Antiq. J., XLVI (1966), 297–82. 'These two figures are stylistically very different from the group discussed above: they are not full-length and the eyes are much exaggerated, as befits symbolic representations of sight.
is nearly always in a superior position to the figures he encounters. Examples are numerous, but one might mention scenes from the life of Joseph carved on the ivory throne of Archbishop Maximianus at Ravenna.\textsuperscript{17} Joseph receives his brethren seated in half-profile on a throne and he superintends the measuring of the corn from a seated position. Perhaps the commonest exemplars are ivories of Christ in majesty and coins of kings and emperors. An example of the former, a seated Christ among saints and apostles, is to be found on the central panel of an ivory diptych of the early 6th century in the National Museum; Ravenna.\textsuperscript{18} An ivory diptych of the Emperor Anastasius I, also of the 6th century, shows him sitting in majesty holding the insignia of his office.\textsuperscript{19} The prototypes of these figures go back to the early centuries of the Christian era\textsuperscript{20} and it is feasible that the carver of the Franks casket, who plainly demonstrates his familiarity with early ivories in other panels, took similar scenes of this type as his models when he wanted to represent the encounter between a figure of the other world and the dead hero, clad in full armour.

The most compelling detail about the monster figure of the Franks casket is without doubt the two leafy boughs he holds in either hand. These cross near the base and have a particularly striking similarity to the two flowering rods held by the figure of Christ in the Book of Kells and to the insignia carried by the figures on the Sandbach and tower crosses. The fact that the artist of the Franks casket has chosen to depict the judicial figure as half-human and half-monster may be related to the panel’s presumably non-Christian subject matter. Though he is using a Christian iconographic form for the judgment or reception of the dead warrior in the other world, the artist wishes to convey also that the figure of the judge was not that of the Christian deity. The image of a monster would have been very likely to suggest itself to an Anglo-Saxon craftsman of the early 8th century.\textsuperscript{21}

It is difficult to assemble satisfactory evidence about the forms that Anglo-Saxons of the early 8th century imagined for heathen deities. Clearly, Christian artists and writers had some difficulty in finding the right medium to express what they thought pre-Christian concepts of the other world were. It is probable that they tended to draw parallels with Christian beliefs where none may have existed. Thus it is not certain that the pagan Anglo-Saxons believed in a judge-figure such as is being argued for the Franks casket, but the artist may have used one nonetheless in an attempt to represent the warrior’s life after death.\textsuperscript{22} If, as seems likely, the right-hand side of the Franks casket depicts a series of episodes connected with the death of a hero not associated with the Christian world, the artist would have been forced to blend the traditional conventions of pre-Christian Germanic art with those he knew from Christian art. Therefore the animal-figure has striking affinities with the figure of Christ the judge in early Irish and Anglo-Saxon art, but the details of the central part of the panel suggest associations with the traditional iconography of the death of a warrior as it is found on the Gotland picture-stones.

The belief in, and depiction of, gods with animal parts was widespread in both pre-Christian Germanic and Celtic art and not absent from Christian monuments. On the market cross at Kells there is a horned, upright figure, who is grasping two

\begin{footnote}
\textsuperscript{17} See W. F. Volbach, \textit{Early Christian Art} (London, 1961), fig. 234.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., fig. 223.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., fig. 220.
\textsuperscript{20} See, for example, \textit{ibid.}, figs. 15, 33, 42 and 45.
\textsuperscript{21} There is evidence, particularly from the contents of the \textit{Beowulf} manuscript (British Museum, Cotton Vitellius A xv), that demons were thought of by the Anglo-Saxons as having deformed human or part-animal bodies. St. Christopher is depicted as a dog-headed figure. The idea that the old gods were demons is based upon the statement of Psalm 96, verse 5 (Vulgate version): ‘All the gods of the heathen are demons.’
\textsuperscript{22} Examples of such parallelisms from Old Icelandic literature have been discussed by M. Olsen, \textit{Acta Philologica Scandinavica}, vi (1951–2), 155 ff., and O. Olsen, \textit{Hæg, Hof og Kirke} (Aarbøger for nordisk Oldkyndighed og Historie, Copenhagen, 1965).
\end{footnote}
wolves and apparently represents an essentially pagan figure, symbolic perhaps of Satan or Antichrist, and does not indicate an overt effort to perpetuate a still-potent cult. If the right-hand side of the Franks casket tells the story of an ancient hero, it seems fitting that the carver of the panel wished to represent the judge-figure as belonging to the ideology of a past age in much the same way as the author of Beowulf dissociated himself from the religious lapses of the 6th-century Danes (lines 175a–188b). Thus the monstrous qualities of the figure, his animal head, wings and hooves would place him firmly in the category of a non-Christian deity, while his posture and the two sprouting boughs in his hands suggest that Christian and ultimately Coptic models formed the iconographic prototypes for the scene of the reception of the dead warrior. If this analysis of the mysterious animal-figure is acceptable, he becomes part of that collection of partly anthropomorphic, partly zoomorphic, figures of early European art whose prototypes reach back to the bronze age, and which, in their turn, derive stylistically from the animal art and religious symbolism of the ancient Near East.

MARGARET CLUNIES ROSS

AN ANGLO-SAXON ORNAMENTED SILVER STRIP FROM THE CUERDALE HOARD (FIG. 57)

The immense hoard found at Cuerdale, near Preston (Lancs.), in 1840, consisted of a leaden chest containing some 40 kilos of silver. The weight of the Cuerdale hoard is thus far in excess of that of any other Viking hoard found in the British Isles or in Scandinavia; hoards of this size, and larger, are known only from Russia. The hoard was discovered by workmen engaged in repairing the S. embankment of the R. Ribble, some 40 yd. (37 m.) from the stone wall built to retain its reclaimed bank. The contents of the chest included about 7,000 coins which are generally agreed to date its deposition c. 903. A provisional survey has shown that, in addition to these coins, the hoard must have contained over 1,300 individual pieces of silver. Of this total only 4% consists of complete ornaments, one of which is a well-known Anglo-Saxon strap-end. This 9th-century strap-end, which displays many features of the Trehwiddle style, was first illustrated by Hawkins in his selective account of the hoard. Shetelig referred to the existence of ‘two small fragments of similar strap-ends’ but this is a mistake which appears to derive from a misunderstanding of Hawkins whose account he was using. At the time of the publication of Wilson’s catalogue of Anglo-Saxon ornamental metalwork it was thought that this strap-end was the only Anglo-Saxon piece in that part of the hoard in the possession of the British Museum. Recent re-examination of the hack-silver in that collection has brought to light a second piece with ornamentation in the Trehwiddle style (FIG. 57). It is the purpose of this note to publish this fragment as an addition to Wilson’s catalogue.

Silver strip. The terminal is plain with rounded corners and has a rivet-hole in the middle. The main ornamental field contains a contorted animal within plain lateral borders. The strip is broken along the contours of the animal’s head. The head has a square snout with a domed forehead above a circular bored eye, and an amorphous ear. The elongated neck crosses the field diagonally and from its base is produced a leg with a three-toed paw which lies along the side of the field. From a fully-formed rear

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24 See the study of the figures on the Gundestrup cauldron by O. Klindt-Jensen, Gundestrupkedelen (Copenhagen, 1961).
26 H. Shetelig (ed.), Viking Antiquities in Great Britain and Ireland (Oslo, 1940), iv, 43 w.
28 I am grateful to Mrs. Leslie Webster of the Department of Medieval and Later Antiquities, British Museum, for her assistance, and to Mr. David M. Wilson for discussing this piece with me.