

The Ragnarok Stone



In the vestry behind a small wooden panel at very low level is the curious Ragnarok stone, of Viking origin. It is thought to date from the first half of the 10th century. Major research on this stone seems to have been undertaken by Jim Lang ⁽¹⁾.

It is thought to be a representation of the apocalypse, Ragnarok being the battle to end all battles in Norse mythology. In this battle all the gods are killed- in the image Odin is being killed by a mythical wolf named Fenrir, who is then according to the myth also later killed. Whilst Pevsner ⁽²⁾ reports that it was probably carved in situ, other researchers think that this is doubtful and that it was reinstalled in its current position from a previous building, not necessarily from the current church site. Indeed Bailey⁽³⁾ thinks that it is a fragment of a much larger original work. Whether other stones in the work are part of the church structure somewhere, and their carvings hidden, is of course unknown.

Bailey says in one of his articles:- “.....There are at least two other known monuments of the same period in Northumberland, and this has been linked with the others by Scandinavian Myth on Viking-period Stone in his “Sculpture in England” by Richard N. Bailey.... Scholarly interest in the range of mythological depictions on English sculpture has focussed mainly on the story of Ragnarok at Gosforth ⁽⁴⁾. In 1980 I attempted to draw two other carvings into this discussion, a graffito from Skipwith in Yorkshire ⁽⁵⁾ and a panel on a cross shaft from Ovingham in the Tyne valley with Heimdallr and the sunswallowing wolf ⁽⁶⁾.

I noted earlier that placing Skipwith and Ovingham alongside Gosforth emphasises the apparent lack of a consistent Ragnarok iconography. **There is, perhaps one exception to this statement for, as**

Lang⁽⁷⁾ has noted, the position of the foot of the Odin figure at Skipwith in relation to the beast attacking him is exactly matched at Kirk Andreas in the Isle of Man, though the Yorkshire graffito has none of the symbolism which accompanies the Manx figure⁽⁸⁾. This element apart, however, what distinguishes the three thematically-linked carvings is their lack of iconographic identity. At Ovingham and Skipwith we cannot see how the selected pieces of the narrative are exploited **because we lack the complete monument.**

Note A recent high quality photograph of the stone has revealed other figures and also enhances an image of probably the serpent Jormungandr



Part of Thorwald's Cross Kirk Andreas Isle of Man

- (1) Lang, J. T. "1991 Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Sculpture, III: York and Eastern Yorkshire, Oxford".
- (2) Pevsner :-"The Buildings of England, Yorkshire: York and the East Riding- Nikolaus Pevsner and David Neave . Yale University Press."
- (3) Scandinavian Myth on Viking period Stone sculpture in England by Richard N Bailey- Bailey 1980, pl. 35, 134; Lang 1991, 214-5
- (4) Bailey 1980, 125-31; Bailey and Cramp 1988, 100-104; Bailey 1996, 85-90).
- (5) Bailey 1980, pl. 35, 134; Lang 1991, 214-5) as above.
- (6) Cramp 1984, ill. 1199; Bailey 1980, 133-4; Dronke 1996, VI,
- (7) Lang (1991, 214) I assume this to be his Corpus of Anglo Saxon Sculpture III in York and Eastern Yorkshire
- (8) Graham-Campbell 1980, fig. 534a.