

**Figural Art of Central and North-West Europe c. 550–700 AD:
Pagan or Christian?**

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Abstract

The binary of paganism and Christianity is frequently invoked as a basic category constituting our understanding of early medieval visual culture. This dissertation challenges this account, scrutinising figural imagery of central and north-west Europe from *c.* 550 to 700 AD—a period commonly perceived as being transitional: ‘in between’ pre-Christian and Christian belief systems.

The interpretation of figural imagery of this particular time is generally permeated by Old Norse literature, placing it within ‘Germanic’ frames of reference also interrogated by this study. This being the case, the dissertation aims to identify the pattern informing the interpretation oscillating between ‘pagan’ and Christian, just as between ‘Germanic’ and Roman. However, a detailed examination of all figural imagery lies beyond its scope; being a qualitative analysis, it will therefore focus on key pieces commonly referred to in scholarship (such as the Vendel helmets). Also exploring alternative approaches towards early medieval visual culture beyond the mere binary, this dissertation sets out to apply the concept of ‘agency’ associated with ‘invented traditions’ to the imagery under consideration here.

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Author's Declaration

I declare that this dissertation entitled “Figural Art of Central and North-West Europe c. 550–700 AD: Pagan or Christian?” is the result of my own work except where referenced and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of York or any other institution.

INTRODUCTION

In the fourth century, Christians invented the term *paganismus* to collectively define and singularize the beliefs of non-Christians [...]. This of course concealed an incredible diversity of beliefs and practices, and until relative recently, scholars have accepted this polar opposition [...]. But the term ‘pagan’ continues to be useful for understanding processes of religious conversion in northern Europe.¹

As yet, there has been little agreement on what early medieval ‘paganism’ actually is, just as there is little on what ‘pagan’ visual culture might be or represent. However, the point is whether we should even apply the dichotomy of “Christian vs. pagan” to imagery and, in the light of Pluskowski’s observation, the extent to which it is useful to explore early medieval visual art.² For, although the concept of ‘paganism’ is occasionally problematised in art history and archaeology,³ few studies have thoroughly engaged with the pattern lying behind this scheme when applied to imagery. Generally, when considering the material, scholars have tended to debate the impact of Old Norse literature—the Edda above all others—trying to identify ‘Germanic’ myths and legends embodied in early medieval ‘pagan’ visual culture.⁴

This dissertation thus sets out to challenge the binary of ‘pagan’ and Christian by examining late sixth- and seventh-century figural imagery of central and north-west Europe, in very broad terms concentrating on Germany, as well as England and Scandinavia. The motives informing the focus on this particular time period and geographical scope lie within the scholarship itself: depictions of warriors on such well-known objects as the Sutton Hoo and Vendel helmets generally act as key pieces of evidence invoked in support of ‘pagan’ imagery, thus, formulating a worthwhile field of study. Northern France and the Benelux countries are also taken into account in the scholarship, but they are not commonly invoked as significant areas of ‘pagan’ imagery, probably due to a lesser degree of assumed ‘Germanisation’.

The idea of ‘Germanic’ impact will also be considered in this study, since it is intimately entangled with and frequently substituted for ‘paganism’ to the extent that

¹ Aleks Pluskowski, “The Archaeology of Paganism,” in *The Oxford handbook of Anglo-Saxon archaeology*, ed. Helena Hamerow et al. (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 764. On ‘paganism’ in general: Ken Dowden, *European Paganism: The Realities of Cult from Antiquity to the Middle Ages* (London, New York: Routledge, 2000).

² As Neil Christie has recently put it: “[B]ut we need, as scholars, to see things much less in black and white.”; Neil Christie, “Becoming Christian, being Christian in early medieval Europe,” in *The Art, Literature and Material Culture of the Medieval World*, ed. Meg Boulton et al. (Dublin, Four Courts Press, 2015), 79.

³ E.g. recently: Melissa Herman, “Something more than ‘man’: re-examining the human figure in early Anglo-Saxon art,” in Boulton et al., *The Art, Literature and Material Culture of the Medieval World*, 290–92; Sebastian Brather, “Pagan or Christian? Early medieval grave furnishings in central Europe,” in *Rome, Constantinople and newly-converted Europe: archaeological and historical evidence*, ed. Maciej Salamon et al. (Kraków, Leipzig, Warszawa, Rzeszów: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2012), 333–49.

⁴ Lately: Wilhelm Heizmann and Sigmund Oehrl, ed. *Bilddenkmäler zur germanischen Götter- und Heldensage*, Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde 91 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015). For an early criticism of this view see for example: Jane Hawkes, “Symbolic Lives: the Visual Evidence,” in *The Anglo-Saxons from the Migration Period to the Eighth Century: an Ethnographic Perspective*, ed. John Hines, Studies in historical archaeoethnology 2 (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1997), 315.

the two terms are often presented as synonymous. What is more, both are deemed to originate in a past ‘Germanic’ tradition. Hence, before turning to the ‘actual’ matter of this study, the imagery, the first chapter will address general issues regarding the term ‘tradition’ in the humanities, followed by a brief outline of the ideas informing ‘Germanic’, and accordingly ‘Roman’, identity and tradition, allowing for the concept of ‘paganism’. Against this background the second chapter moves on to review the works of art generally thought to be ‘pagan’, predominantly from a sphere of war and ‘struggle’ (armed riders, warriors and the man-and-beast motif); disc brooches depicting the personification of Rome are also briefly reviewed. The third chapter continues the enquiry by addressing imagery deemed to be Christian which is commonly invoked as existing ‘between’ Christian and ‘pagan’ frames of reference; the images, emerging from a number of contexts, are—for the most part—those identified as Christ himself and Christian riders of varying identity.

Overall, it needs to be emphasised that this dissertation is a study in *quality* rather than *quantity*. It seeks to challenge interpretations of the pieces that have become key in the scholarship, being deemed prototypes of ‘pagan’ imagery in continental as well as British scholarship. However, due to the provenance of the works addressed here, this study will engage primarily with past and recent approaches brought forward in the German scholarship, which has traditionally emphasised these issues.

There are further limits to this study: it will not engage with gold bracteates—medallions frequently found in fifth- and early sixth-century Scandinavia and beyond, usually thought to represent ‘pagan’ gods—due to the vast number of the objects (comprising, at present, over 1.000 pieces), which places them beyond the scope of a Masters dissertation.⁵ Nor will it encompass so-called *guldgubbar*, small gold foils featuring human figures, found in Vendel-period Scandinavia (c. 500–700 AD). Again, the huge number of c. 2900 pieces—of which almost 2400 were found at Sorte Muld, Bornholm—aggravates a detailed analysis within the scope of this study. Moreover, *guldgubbar* are not usually invoked as images displaying the transition between Christianity and paganism. Their distribution is limited to Scandinavia, particularly to Denmark and south Sweden, and recent studies have addressed them as being beyond ‘paganism’.⁶

⁵ The same holds true for the literature on bracteates, in particular that by Karl Hauck and his students, e.g.: Karl Hauck et al., ed. *Die Goldbrakteaten der Völkerwanderungszeit*, 7 vols., Münstersche Mittelalter-Schriften 24 (München: Fink, 1985–1989); Morten Axboe, *Die Goldbrakteaten der Völkerwanderungszeit: Herstellungsprobleme und Chronologie*, Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde 38 (Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 2004); Alexandra Pesch, *Die Goldbrakteaten der Völkerwanderungszeit: Thema und Variation*, Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde 36 (Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 2007); Wilhelm Heizmann and Morten Axboe, eds., *Die Goldbrakteaten der Völkerwanderungszeit: Auswertung und Neufunde*, Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde 40 (Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 2011).

⁶ E.g. Ing-Marie Back Danielsson, *Masking moments: The Transitions of Bodies and Beings in Late Iron Age Scandinavia*, Stockholm Studies in Archaeology 40 (Stockholm: University, 2007); Ing-Marie Back Danielsson, “Go Figure! Creating Intertwined Worlds in the Scandinavian Late Iron Age (AD 550–1050),” in *Anthropomorphic and zoomorphic miniature figures in Eurasia, Africa and Meso-America: Morphology, materiality, technology, function and context*, ed. Dragos Gheorghiu, BAR International series 2138 (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2010), 79–90; Michaela Helmbrecht, *Wirkmächtige Kommunikationsmedien: Menschenbilder der Vendel- und Wikingerzeit und ihre Kontexte*, Acta archaeologica Lundensia. Series prima in 4° 30 (Lund: Lunds Universitet, 2011), 258–72; Michaela Helmbrecht, “Figures, foils and faces – fragments of a pictorial world: anthropomorphic images from the Vendel Period and Viking

At the other end of the spectrum, a full and detailed review of the Franks Casket lies beyond the scope of this dissertation (though it will of course be referenced): the well-known eighth-century whalebone box made in Northumbria bearing multifarious imagery has long been subject to debates in early medieval art history and archaeology, resulting in an extensive quantity of literature.⁷ Furthermore, as a matter of definition, early medieval animal art—first and foremost Salin’s Style II—being non-‘figural’, lies beyond the subject of this study; it will, however, play a role, especially in discussion on Christian objects.⁸

With these (regrettably necessary) limitations and restrictions, I would like to implement a methodology through which I aim to develop—or at least put forward—an alternative approach towards ‘pagan’ imagery (set out in the concluding chapter). In a recent paper, Ing-Marie Back Danielsson and others have challenged the common iconographic approach towards imagery in art history and archaeology (the latter discipline being the forum within which most discussion of the images addressed here originates), largely, yet not exclusively based on Erwin Panofsky’s iconography and iconology. They focus rather on ‘encounter’ with imagery:

Since archaeology mainly deals with images of unknown origin, context and intentions, it is perhaps better to resist the urge to recognize, identify and understand and instead ‘encounter’ imagery [...]. The recognition approach thus tends to restrict the creative, imaginary process of interpretation, and reduce it to a process of simply combining and depicting things that already exist in the world. There is little room for discussing difference, change and what images ‘really want’. It is only by encountering imagery that interesting effects can occur, from which we can learn something new about past worlds.⁹

This said, the analysis of style and motif, of potential origins and possible meanings of images—in other words their iconography—still remains a useful and crucial method towards improving understanding of visual culture. Nevertheless, it is not necessary to dwell over long on describing and ‘recognising’, especially when context and origin are not as clear as might be desired. In the sixth and seventh centuries this context could not be more diverse: most of the imagery engaged with here derives from the archaeological record, in areas almost ‘forgotten’ by written sources. Furthermore, from

Age found at Uppåkra,” in *Folk, få och fynd*, ed. Birgitta Hårdh and Lars Larsson, Uppåkrastudier 12 (Lund: Institutionen för Arkeologi och Antikens Historia, 2013), 9–31.

⁷ For recent works listing relevant literature on the Franks casket see: Victoria Symons, “The aesthetics of transition on the Franks Casket,” in Boulton et al., *The Art, Literature and Material Culture of the Medieval World*, 164–78; Victor Millet, “Quid Wielandus cum Christo? Zum Verständnis der Frontplatte von Franks Casket,” in Heizmann and Oehrl, *Bilddenkmäler zur germanischen Götter- und Heldensage*, 295–314. For a brief summary see also: Leslie Webster, *The Franks Casket* (London: British Museum Press, 2012).

⁸ Cp. Egon Wamers, “Behind Animals, Plants and Interlace: Salin’s Style II on Christian Objects,” in *Anglo-Saxon-Irish relations before the Vikings*, ed. James Graham-Campbell and Michael Ryan, Proceedings of the British Academy 157 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 151–204.

⁹ Ing-Marie Back Danielsson, Fredrik Fahlander, and Ylva Sjöstrand, “Imagery beyond representation,” in *Encountering imagery: materialities, perceptions, relations*, ed. Ing-Marie Back Danielsson et al., Stockholm Studies in Archaeology 57 (Stockholm 2012), 3. Concerning iconography and iconology see Erwin Panofsky, *Meaning in the visual arts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955 [1982]).

a Scandinavian perspective, the ‘Early Middle Ages’ trade under the name ‘Iron Age’ and are thus defined and categorised in prehistoric terms. Thus, this study necessarily oscillates between archaeology and art history.

Instead of focussing on iconography as a means towards understanding ‘pagan’ imagery in the light of later Norse literature, this examination seeks to ‘encounter’ them, using the concept of ‘agency’. Borrowed from the social sciences and anthropology, ‘agency’ has been used in archaeology since the 1990s, but it was not until Alfred Gell’s posthumous work “Art and Agency”¹⁰ that it was applied to ‘inanimate’ matter such as artefacts and art—triggering a lively discussion and promptly emerging as a ‘modern classic’ in anthropology as well as in art history and archaeology.¹¹ Though Gell’s concept of art and agency has received critical evaluation and scrutiny, explicit rejection, as well as significant re-shaping,¹² it enfolds significant potential for the interpretation and meaning of art beyond mere aesthetics and iconographic consideration: “So, ‘things’ such as dolls and cars can appear as ‘agents’ in particular social situations; and—so we may argue—can ‘works of art.’”¹³ Thus, the concept of ‘agency’ yields to understanding objects as *actors* within society as social agents. Bearing this in mind, it is possible to turn to considering the idea of ‘tradition’, taking into account an approach first introduced by Eric Hobsbawm, which may prove useful in nexus with the idea of ‘agency’: namely, that of invented tradition.¹⁴

10 Alfred Gell, *Art and agency: an anthropological theory* (Oxford, New York: Clarendon Press, 1998).

11 In particular: Robin Osborne and Jeremy Tanner, ed. *Art’s agency and art history*, New interventions in art history (Malden: Blackwell, 2007). See also: Marcia-Anne Dobres and John E. Robb, ed. *Agency in Archaeology* (London, New York: Routledge, 2000); Andrew Gardner, *Agency uncovered: archaeological perspectives on social agency, power, and being human* (London, Portland: UCL Press, 2004). For an outline of ‘material agency’ see: Andrew M. Jones and Nicole Boivin, “The Malice of Inanimate Objects: Material Agency,” in *The Oxford handbook of material culture studies*, ed. Dan Hicks and Mary C. Beaudry (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 333–51.

12 Cp. Robert H. Layton, “Art and Agency: a reassessment,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 9, no. 3 (2003): 447–64; Ross Bowden, “A Critique of Alfred Gell on „Art and Agency“,” *Oceania* 74, no. 4 (2004): 309–24; Howard Morphy, “Art as a Mode of Action: some Problems with Gell’s Art and Agency,” *Journal of Material Culture* 14, no. 1 (2009): 5–27; Howard Morphy, “Art as Action, Art as Evidence,” in Hicks and Beaudry, *Oxford handbook*, 265–90. See further: John Robb, “Beyond agency,” *World Archaeology* 42, no. 4 (2010): 493–520.

13 Gell, *Art and agency*, 19. A concise introduction into ‘Art and Agency’ is given by Jeremy Tanner and Robin Osborne, “Introduction: Art and Agency and Art History,” in *Art’s agency and art history*, ed. Robin Osborne and Jeremy Tanner (Malden: Blackwell, 2007), 1–27.

14 Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terence O. Ranger, ed. *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

CHAPTER 1:

Tradition, Past and Identity

Tradition is a concept that informs many academic disciplines, although only few seem to have formed specific accounts or theories relating to the idea that might enable focussed discussion about traditions. As the anthropologist Pascal Boyer, for example, has put it: “There is no such thing as a *theory* of tradition in social anthropology. Everyone knows what a tradition is.”¹ This chapter will therefore summarise the most common ideas associated with the term ‘tradition’ current in the humanities, specifically in the areas of philosophy, history, sociology, and anthropology. However, it does not seek to re-define or re-evaluate the term, but instead raise awareness regarding the use of ‘tradition’.

This chapter also engages with Hobsbawm’s account of ‘invented traditions’, which can be defined and used in a relatively precise manner as a means towards creating (assumed) links to the past. The section following the brief outline of ‘invented traditions’ will sketch and challenge ‘Germanic’ and ‘Roman’ identity in nexus with ‘paganism’, since the account of ‘pagan’ visual culture is eventually based upon these terms and—at the same time—invoked to substantiate ‘pagan’ traditions that are deemed to be embedded within the imagery under consideration here.

1.1 Concepts of Tradition in the Humanities

‘Tradition’ derives from the Latin word *traditio* (noun) or *tradere* (verb) meaning to transfer, transmit or handover something. In the broader sense *traditio* can denote the communication of knowledge or information, and even refer to treason. Between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries the word ‘tradition’ (in English, as well as German and French) tended to connote passing down knowledge of the past, a meaning that inheres in the term till this day.² Starting with a (very) brief outline of philosophical approaches to ‘tradition’ in early modern Europe it seems clear that the perception of human tradition was largely related to the study of ‘humankind’ and was inextricably linked to Christianity until the so-called Enlightenment in the eighteenth century. In that period philosophical views on tradition changed, so that the term came to be perceived as the opposite of reason and science, being the ‘self-imposed immaturity’ of humanity (as Immanuel Kant put it).³ In the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, ‘tradition’ underwent further change in meaning, to become a more positive concept.

¹ Pascal Boyer, *Tradition as truth and communication: a cognitive description of traditional discourse*, Cambridge studies in social anthropology 68 (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), vii.

² Till R. Kuhnle, “Tradition – Innovation,” in *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe* 6, ed. Karlheinz Barck (Stuttgart, Weimar: Metzler, 2005), 74–75.

³ Edward Shils, *Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 4–7; Till R. Kuhnle, “Tradition – Innovation,” in Barck, *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe* 6, 90–91.

In the times of spreading ‘Nationalism’⁴ old traditions—or at least those perceived as old—became increasingly crucial in political philosophy and even in everyday life. Friedrich Schlegel’s reference to the ‘tradition of a nation’⁵ in the late-eighteenth century best illustrates the way such thoughts came to permeate the political sphere. In the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century virtually all philosophical writers and thinkers had tended to rely on ‘tradition’ in their work, either rejecting or affirming the concept:⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Satre, for example.

Nevertheless, the first book devoted explicitly to the topic of ‘tradition’ was only published in 1981 by sociologist Edward Shils—a remarkable event considering the history of the term stretching back more than two thousand years. As Shils explained: “There are many books about particular traditions. [...] There is however no book which tries to see the common ground and elements of tradition and which analyses what difference tradition makes in human life.”⁷ He goes on to define tradition in very broad terms, almost literally in the light of its etymology:

Tradition—that which is handed down—includes material objects, beliefs about all sorts of things, images of persons and events, practices and institutions. It includes buildings, monuments, landscapes, sculpture, paintings, books, tools, machines. It includes all that a society of a given time possesses and which already existed when its present possessors came upon it and which is not solely the product of physical processes in the external world or exclusively the result of ecological and physiological necessity.⁸

It is a definition so broad it covers almost all aspects of human life—except of those that are completely and solely new. Nevertheless, even these new objects could become traditional immediately upon completion. Pursuant to Shils, human culture could thus be substituted with the term tradition. With good cause Pascal Boyer notes: “Surely, if that is tradition, then there cannot be a scientific theory of tradition [...]. Understood in that way, the category is useless [...].”⁹ Substituting the question ‘what is tradition’ with ‘what is life’ the anthropologist Nelson Graburn seems to have a similar perception of tradition: as comprehensive.¹⁰ Of particular note in Shils’ rather loose definition are those elements of human culture that *are not* traditions: “An action is not a tradition; it is a movement of the body which has an intention [...]. A prayer is not a tradition: it is a set of words addressed to the deity imploring his favour.”¹¹ This latter

⁴ Cp. Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and nationalism since 1780: programme, myth, reality*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 101–30.

⁵ „Die Tradition eines Volkes – diese nationale Fantasie – kann ein großer Geist wohl fortbilden und idealisieren, aber nicht metamorphosieren oder aus Nichts schaffen.“; Friedrich Schlegel, *Studien des klassischen Altertums*, Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe 1 (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1979), 333.

⁶ Kuhnle, “Tradition – Innovation,” 92–94; Aleida Assmann, *Zeit und Tradition: Kulturelle Strategien der Dauer*, Beiträge zur Geschichtskultur 15 (Köln: Böhlau, 1999), 67–90.

⁷ Shils, *Tradition*, vii.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁹ Boyer, *Tradition*, viii.

¹⁰ Nelson H. H. Graburn, “What is Tradition?,” *Museum Anthropology* 24, 2/3 (2001), 6.

¹¹ Shils, *Tradition*, 31.

observation is of particular interest given that the term tradition was connected to religion, specifically Christianity, for centuries, meaning that prayers, ‘traditionally’ part of religious practice, would have been included in that understanding. According to Shils a prayer book would be a traditional object, but the liturgy of the prayers written down in that very book would not be ‘traditional’. Likewise, rituals or customs would not be traditional, but the building in which these rituals or customs are performed would be, along with the objects needed for the ceremonials. Thus, the chalice and the paten would be considered as part of Christian tradition, but not the practices of the Eucharist. Rather Shils perceives “tradition as the guiding pattern”,¹² as a metaphysical concept or system of belief which can indeed become manifest in material culture, but which is, to a certain extent, detached from the physical actions which are guided by such patterns.¹³

In contrast, the cultural anthropologist Pascal Boyer set great store by the interaction and repetition of tradition and traditions, that is to say: actual and physical performances within societies. He defines “*traditional* cultural phenomena” as “*instances of social interactions[,] they are repeated[,] they are psychologically salient.*”¹⁴ Specific traditions (which are the actual performance of traditional beliefs) are often thought to be reciprocally linked to the cohesiveness of the society within which they are performed. However, Boyer emphasises that the link between tradition and the cohesiveness of a society is not compulsory or necessary but rather facultative. Instead he refers to traditions as a form of cognitive communication system.¹⁵

To summarise, briefly: on the one hand, Shils perceives traditions as being simultaneously immaterial (guiding patterns) and material (past objects); on the other hand Boyer explicitly states that traditions are performative and communicative interactions. Shils’ ‘theory’ (a term he denies) lacks a certain specificity (which is intended), whereas Boyer focusses solely on so-called traditional or oral societies from which the impact of cognitive and communicative interaction seems to derive. Thus, while there is still no all-embracing theory of tradition or traditions, there is a well-known theory of invented traditions which needs to be considered.

1.2 ‘Invented Traditions’ and the Creation of the Past

In 1983 Terence Ranger and Eric Hobsbawm, the well-known Marxist historian and intellectual, edited a volume of seven essays on the topic of ‘invented traditions’, examining phenomena in attempts to establish a distinctive connection to past events by creating new traditions. Hobsbawm defined these phenomena as follows:

‘Invented tradition’ is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically

¹² Ibid., 32–33.

¹³ Edward Shils, “Tradition,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 13, no. 2 (1971): 125–26.

¹⁴ Boyer, *Tradition*, 1.

¹⁵ Ibid., 3–6, 108–110.

implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past.¹⁶

Additionally, he discriminated between three categories or types of ‘invented traditions’:

a) those establishing or symbolizing social cohesion or the membership of groups, real or artificial communities, b) those establishing or legitimizing institutions, status, or relations of authority, and c) those whose main purpose was socialization, the inculcation of beliefs, value systems and conventions of behaviour.¹⁷

These three types of invented traditions were understood to allude to modern societies, especially those after 1789, rather than the ‘traditional’ or ‘rural’ societies of a more ancient past. Nonetheless, certain facets of this theory can be applied to examine the creation of new traditions in those ‘traditional’ societies.¹⁸ First, however, we should consider the questions of what invented traditions are, despite the applicable but rather abstract definition given above: how they differ from older ones and whether they can be distinguished from phenomena such as ritual, custom, convention or routine.

Perhaps one of the best known ‘invented traditions’ is the Scottish kilt, its colour and pattern representing a specific clan, which, combined with the ‘traditional’ music of the bagpipes, has become a distinctive symbol of modern Scottish nationality. But as Hugh Trevor-Roper has shown this is rather recent in its origin: The kilt was established as a symbol after the ‘Act of Union’ in 1707 and can therefore be regarded as an expression of protest.¹⁹ Today, the Scottish kilt combined with bagpipe music *is* an old tradition, but it was invented for a particular purpose in the eighteenth century, under the pretext of being much older. The case of public rituals and ‘pageantry’ of the British Monarchy is analogous: perceived to stretch back to the Middle Ages royal ‘traditions’ and rituals were to a great degree created in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.²⁰ Having said this, where is the line to be drawn between ritualized behaviour and invented traditions?

For instance, not every new tradition is an invented one: the difference is that invented traditions appear to construct an ill-defined link with the past. They therefore differ substantially from both old and new customs, conventions, and routines. According to Hobsbawm customs are rather facts, claims, or even laws, thought to be old that convey a social continuity, whereas traditions are the ritualized manners by which those customs are expressed.²¹ In contrast, conventions and routines are much

¹⁶ Eric J. Hobsbawm, “Introduction: inventing traditions,” in Hobsbawm and Ranger, *Invention of Tradition*, 1; cp. Assmann, *Zeit und Tradition*, 85–86

¹⁷ Hobsbawm, “Introduction,” 9.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁹ Hugh Trevor-Roper, “The Invention of Tradition: the Highland Tradition of Scotland,” in Hobsbawm and Ranger, *Invention of Tradition*, 15.

²⁰ David Cannadine, “The Context, Performance, and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the ‘Invention of Tradition’, c. 1820-1977,” in Hobsbawm and Ranger, *Invention of Tradition*, 101–2, 160–62.

²¹ Hobsbawm, “Introduction,” 2.

easier to distinguish as they have no “significant ritual or symbolic function as such.”²² To summarise, customs need traditions, which in turn need rituals to be formalised in an appropriate way and ought not to be mistaken for routines.

Some questions still remain: particularly those regarding the issue of when and why traditions and their related rituals were, in a manner of speaking, created. Hobsbawm suggests the invention of traditions usually increases at a tearing pace when there are significant changes or breaches to be expected in the fabric of society “for which ‘old’ traditions [...] no longer prove sufficiently adaptable and flexible.”²³ This observation is of particular interest as it relates to the topic of this dissertation, which explores the visual culture of a time when tremendous changes were occurring between the period of imperial late Antiquity in Western Europe, and that when individual rulers controlled various territories, a period known as ‘the early Middle Ages’.

1.3 ‘Germanic’ or ‘Roman’ Identity and Tradition in North-West Europe?

The transformation of the Roman world and the question of what is ‘Roman’ after the fall of the western Empire in 476/80 are of crucial significance to the issue of Christian or ‘pagan’ art and images. This also applies for those regions of north-west Europe, which were not, or no longer, part of the Roman Empire in the fifth and sixth centuries: south Scandinavia, south-west Germany and Britain. The landscapes of modern Denmark, south-west Sweden and south Norway were at no point part of the Roman Empire, but had been, according to the archaeological record, in comparatively close contact ever since the Romans moved north of the Alps into north-west Europe.²⁴ According to written sources and the archaeological record, those living in the *Germania* (between the Rhine and Danube) had regular contact and relations with the Roman provinces *Germania superior* and *inferior* to the west of the Rhine.²⁵ Britain, however, was abandoned by Roman governance as early as in the early decades of the fifth century. By contrast, Gaul remained a ‘regular’ part of the western Empire until the latter ceased to exist, and even after that many late-antique political and economic structures did not vanish as has been presumed for sub-Roman Britain.²⁶

Except for southern Scandinavia, the regions under consideration in this study developed new political structures subsequent to the withdrawal of Roman authority

²² Ibid., 3.

²³ Ibid., 4–5.

²⁴ Lotte Hedeager, *Iron-age Societies: from tribe to state in northern Europe, 500 BC to AD 700*, Social archaeology (Oxford, Cambridge: Blackwell, 1992), 45–54; see also the exhibition catalogue from the national museum in Copenhagen: Lars Jørgensen, Birger Storgaard and Lone Gebauer Thomsen, ed. *The spoils of victory: The North in the shadow of the Roman Empire* (Kopenhagen: Nationalmuseet, 2003).

²⁵ Cp. the exhibition catalogue from the Landesmuseum Bonn: Gabriele Uelsberg, ed., *Krieg und Frieden: Kelten, Römer, Germanen* (Darmstadt: Primus, 2007).

²⁶ Simon Esmonde Cleary, “The Ending(s) of Roman Britain,” in Hamerow et al., *Oxford handbook*, 13–29, who implies the modern scheme of ‘collapsed/failed states’ to sub-Roman Britain.

in the fifth and early-sixth centuries: in Britain the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms; in Gaul and the Rhineland the Frankish-Merovingian kingdom. Amongst others the Anglo-Saxon and Frankish kingdoms, their origins, and their dynasties are assumed to stem from a Germanic-pagan past and tradition, emerging during the course of the so-called ‘Migration period’ or ‘Barbarian invasions’. The German term *Völkerwanderung*, meaning the migration of peoples—in the majority of the cases ‘Germanic’ peoples—points to a particular historical reading of that period, which is to say: the migrating ‘Germanic’ peoples must have had a corporate or shared identity of a joint ‘Germanic’ past stretching back to the ‘Roman Iron Age’ (first through fourth century AD).²⁷ However, as most scholars would agree, today the term ‘Germanic’ is now considered merely an extrinsic attribution made by Roman historians and ethnographers, such as Tacitus.²⁸ Most likely is that ‘Germanic’ peoples had no perception of a ‘Germanic’ identity between the first and third centuries AD.²⁹ With good reason, this raises several questions of which the most pressing certainly is: What is ‘Germanic’ in the Migration period and the early Middle Ages (c. fourth to tenth centuries) if there was possibly no such identity in the previous period? The obvious answer might be: nothing but the language, as numerous scholars have recently argued.³⁰

Accordingly, it is perhaps most advisable to follow Guy Halsall who has suggested that “Germanic [should] only be used to mean the Germanic languages or aspects relating to those languages except, when placed in inverted commas, in discussing previous historical or archaeological views.”³¹ The more neutral alternative to ‘Germanic’ is ‘barbarian’ meaning not Roman, even though it might, nowadays, connote pejoratively.³² However, referring to ‘barbarian art’ is potentially inappropriate, and since the late-nineteenth century discourse, far too pejorative to be acceptable or intelligible, despite the fact that, as soon as the political system of the Roman Empire

²⁷ Hedeager, *Iron-age Societies*, 246–53; concerning the Anglo-Saxons cp. Leslie Webster, *Anglo-Saxon art: a new history* (London: British Museum Press, 2012), 40–41; for the *Alamanni*, Dieter Quast, “Opferplätze und heidnische Götter: vorchristlicher Kult,” in Fuchs, *Die Alamannen*, esp. 433

²⁸ Walter Pohl, *Die Germanen*, 2nd ed., *Enzyklopädie deutscher Geschichte* 57 (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2004), 59–65.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 10, 51–52; Hubert Fehr, *Germanen und Romanen im Merowingerreich: Frühgeschichtliche Archäologie zwischen Wissenschaft und Zeitgeschehen*, *Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde* 68 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 26–29.

³⁰ Jörg Jarnut, “Zum „Germanen“-Begriff der Historiker,” in *Altertumskunde – Altertumswissenschaft – Kulturwissenschaft: Erträge und Perspektiven nach 40 Jahren Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*, ed. Heinrich Beck et al., *Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde* 77 (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2012), 391–400; Fehr, *Germanen und Romanen im Merowingerreich*, 22; Philipp von Rummel, *Habitus barbarus: Kleidung und Repräsentation spätantiker Eliten im 4. und 5. Jahrhundert*, *Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde* 55 (Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 2007), 6; Guy Halsall, *Barbarian migrations and the Roman West, 376-568* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 22–25; Jörg Jarnut, “Germanisch: Plädoyer für die Abschaffung eines obsoleten Zentralbegriffs der Frühmittelalterforschung,” in *Die Suche nach den Ursprüngen: von der Bedeutung des frühen Mittelalters*, ed. Walter Pohl, *Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters* 8 (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2004), 107–13.

³¹ Halsall, *Barbarian migrations*, 24.

³² *Ibid.*, 10–11; Jörg Jarnut, “Germanisch: Plädoyer für die Abschaffung eines obsoleten Zentralbegriffs der Frühmittelalterforschung,” in Pohl, *Die Suche nach den Ursprüngen*, 113.

vanished in the west, the dichotomy of ‘barbarian’ vs. ‘Roman’ continuously began to pass out of use, even if it did not disappear at that moment.³³ As we can neither assume—or at least substantiate—a manifest ‘Germanic’ or barbarian identity in the Merovingian west in the sixth and seventh centuries, nor even a specific Roman one,³⁴ this terminology may be misleading rather than heuristically useful or helpful; the same holds true for sub-Roman Britain.³⁵ Furthermore, this binary scheme cannot apply to southern Scandinavia and northern Germany because those regions were never part of the Roman Empire in the first place, even if the Roman/barbarian dichotomy spread beyond the frontiers of the Western Empire.³⁶

One might be tempted to argue that it does not matter if we name peoples, kingdoms, regions, cemeteries, graves, grave goods, or even specific traditions of imagery ‘Germanic’, as this would not impinge upon interpretation, but would rather emphasise shared characteristics in culture and art; but it does. As Jörg Jarnut has shown, the use of ‘Germanic’ as a descriptive adjective—such as ‘Germanic’ kingdoms (*germanische Nachfolgestaaten*)—implies continuity and constructs links that would not exist without it. Citing as an example, he notes that we do not have that many written sources concerning the Thuringian kingdom of the late-fifth and early-sixth centuries, but if we consider it ‘Germanic’ we are ‘bound’ to compare it to other supposed ‘Germanic’ kingdoms of which we are more aware, like the Langobardic or Frankish ones, or even turn to Tacitus’ *Germania*.³⁷ Thus, ‘Germanic’ can be regarded as the linchpin of these analogies, and the ostensible commonalities may be less pellucid as soon as we stop naming it, along with particular ‘Germanic’ traditions.

To return to the main topic of this dissertation it is necessary to consider the religious aspects of tradition and identity; another dichotomy which needs to be considered here is one that has had a significant impact on the interpretation of early medieval material culture: Christians and pagans. Just as barbarians are non-Roman, pagans are simply non-Christian.³⁸ But closer examination reveals that this issue is far from simple, due to the fact that we tend to lose sight of the question: what exactly does it mean to be Christian? Because the term ‘pagan’ depends complementarily on being, or rather not-being Christian, this question is of considerable significance.

Of course, everyone who was once baptised is and will be a Christian. But what about Christian codes of behaviour or ways of life based on Christian values assumed by the catechumenate? Or does a ‘proper’ Christian need a parish church and a priest,

33 Philipp v. Rummel, “The Fading Power of Images: Romans, Barbarians, and the Uses of a Dichotomy in Early Medieval Archaeology,” in Pohl and Heydemann, *Post-Roman transitions*, 365–406.

34 In detail: Fehr, *Germanen und Romanen im Merowingerreich*, 21–173.

35 Catherine Hills, “Overview: Anglo-Saxon Identity,” in Hamerow et al., *Oxford handbook*, 3–12.

36 Halsall, *Barbarian migrations*, 57–62.

37 Jarnut, “Germanisch,” 111–12; Jarnut, “Zum „Germanen“-Begriff der Historiker,” 398.

38 Dowden, *European Paganism*, 4. See also: David Petts, *Pagan and Christian: religious change in early medieval Europe*, Debates in archaeology (London, UK: Bristol Classical Press, 2011), 73–96; Walter Pohl, “Christian and Barbarian Identities in the Early Medieval West: introduction,” in Pohl and Heydemann, *Post-Roman transitions*, 1–46; Neil Christie, “Becoming Christian, being Christian in early medieval Europe,” in Boulton et al., *Art, Literature and Material Culture*, 59–79.

the institutionalised practice of Christian rituals and traditions?³⁹ The answer, or rather answers, may be vague and, to some extent, unsatisfactory, but nonetheless appropriate: whether someone, be it a person or a group, can be regarded as a ‘real’ Christian depends largely on respective points of view. Contemporary scholars have often assumed that the Frankish aristocracy in Gaul were betwixt and between: Christian ever since Clovis, but still adhering to ‘traditional’ pagan habits, first and foremost of which were furnished burials, even if these were found within churches with Christian items.⁴⁰ It may be the case that these burials hardly occur in the Mediterranean world which was Christianised as early as in the first centuries AD, but this has little to do with the spread of Christianity and, furthermore, it does not affect the conjecture that Frankish rulers perceived themselves as entirely and absolutely Christian.⁴¹ This is due to the fact that Gaul, and the Moselle area, as well as parts of the northern Rhineland looked back to other long-established and prospering Christian communities, enabling the Merovingian aristocracy to draw on existing structures.⁴²

In Britain, as well as southern Germany the responses were different: Roman Britain was to a great extent Christianised as part of the late-antique world, but as soon as the Roman political structures disappeared in the early-fifth century, and even if we concede a few decades of regression, it cannot be assumed that many Christian communities and structures survived in post-imperial Britain, especially in the eastern part of the island where new Anglo-Saxon kingdoms were soon established. Thus, until the ‘complete’ Christianisation of the Anglo-Saxons in the late-seventh century Britain is ‘betwixt and between’ Christianity and paganism, perhaps more than Gaul.

A similar situation can be accepted for south-west Germany: the *Alamannia* conquered by Clovis around the year 500 was, as a result, integrated into the *regna* of a Christian king.⁴³ The *Alamanni* of the sixth and seventh centuries could thus be considered Christian, but there is no evidence that Christianity was institutionally practiced before the eighth century, though several churches were built in the seventh

39 Cp. Arnold Angenendt, “Credo: Die Taufe als Sakrament des Glaubens in der Mission,” in Stiegemann et al, ed. *Credo*, 1: 53–66, who summarises different aspects of baptism in relation to Christian mission in (early) medieval Europe.

40 Brather, “Pagan or Christian?,” *passim*.

41 This view is emphasised by Yitzhak Hen, *Culture and Religion in Merovingian Gaul A.D. 481–751*, Cultures, Beliefs and Traditions 1 (Leiden, New York: Brill, 1995), 154–57; concerning the general matter of Christianisation in Europe cp. Ian Wood, “Christianisation and the dissemination of Christian teaching,” in *The new Cambridge Medieval history 1: c. 500–c. 700*, ed. Paul Fouracre (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Rudolf Schieffer, “Christianisierung Europas,” in Stiegemann et al., *Credo*, 1: 44–52.

42 See Sebastian Ristow, “Frühes Christentum in Gallien und Germanien: Nachhaltige und unterbrochene Christianisierung in Spätantike und Frühmittelalter,” in *Christianisierung Europas: Entstehung, Entwicklung und Konsolidierung im archäologischen Befund; Tagung im Dezember 2010 in Bergisch-Gladbach = Christianisation of Europe*, ed. Orsolya Heinrich-Tamáská, Niklot Krohn and Sebastian Ristow (Regensburg: Schnell+Steiner, 2012), 93–94.

43 Concerning the course of events in the Frankish-Alemannic battles in the late fifth and early sixth century see John F. Drinkwater, *The Alamanni and Rome 213–496 (Caracalla to Clovis)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 344–47, as well as Dieter Guenich, *Geschichte der Alemannen*, 2nd ed., Urban-Taschenbücher 575 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2005), 78–91.

century.⁴⁴ In addition, the archaeological record clearly shows that there were almost certainly persons, or groups, that perceived themselves to be Christian, otherwise, the huge amount of gold foil crosses (*Goldblattkreuze*) cannot be explained in a sufficiently convincing manner;⁴⁵ there was, however, no official parish or diocese at that particular time.

Again, Scandinavia and northern Germany developed along different lines, at least concerning Christianisation. There is no proof or hint, that there was something rudimentarily Christian during the sixth and seventh centuries, the period of interest in this study. Northern Germany was primarily exposed to Christianity in the aftermath of the war of Charlemagne against the Saxons in the last decades of the eighth century;⁴⁶ modern Denmark and Sweden were Christianised even later, in the ninth and tenth centuries.⁴⁷ Thus, we might regard Scandinavia utterly ‘pagan’ in the sixth and seventh century, but this tells us little about the actual religion and its potential rituals and traditions, except that they were not Christian, something that is clearly recognisable.

This being the case, this study concerns quite diverse regions when it comes to religious belief systems: on the one hand Gaul with its Christian communities, established from the very early centuries of the first millennium; and on the other hand Anglo-Saxon Britain and south-west Germany with Christianity evolving during the period. Moreover, there is Scandinavia with no trace of Christianity. Despite the problems associated with the term ‘Germanic’, is it possible to assume that there was an all-embracing identity within these areas that came with distinctive traditions, whether we call it ‘Germanic’ or not? The point is that ‘Germanic’ is often regarded as, or even substituted for ‘pagan’, but this does not credit the fact that the Roman/barbarian binary had long been replaced by a new Christian/pagan dichotomy in the second half of the first millennium. The contrast between that complementary pair is often applied to art and imagery of northern Europe dividing it into Christian and pagan art. That there is (and was) Christian imagery and iconography is beyond question, but what about pagan art? If an image is not Christian, is it automatically pagan? Furthermore, that which can be considered solely Christian in the early Middle Ages is anything but clear.⁴⁸ And at what point does its antithesis, paganism, come to provide (new) conclusions about the meaning and usage of art and imagery in early medieval Europe? These are the issues that will be addressed here.

⁴⁴ Barbara Scholkmann, “Kultbau und Glaube: die frühen Kirchen,” in Fuchs, *Die Alamannen*, 457–59.

⁴⁵ Ellen Riemer, “Im Zeichen des Kreuzes: Goldblattkreuze und andere Funde mit christlichem Symbolgehalt,” in Fuchs, *Die Alamannen*, 447–54.

⁴⁶ Ian Wood, *The missionary life: saints and the evangelisation of Europe, 400-1050*, The Medieval world (Harlow, New York: Longman, 2001), 10–11; Marios Costambeys et al., ed. *The Carolingian world*, Cambridge medieval textbooks (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 104–5.

⁴⁷ Stefan Brink, “Die Christianisierung Skandinaviens,” in Stiegemann et al., *Credo*, 1: 250–60.

⁴⁸ Costambeys et al., *The Carolingian world*, 81–93.

CHAPTER 2:

'Pagan' Figural Imagery of Central and North-West Europe c. 550–700 AD

Having considered the terminology relating to Christian and pagan, tradition and identity, Germanic and Roman, and the scholarly assumptions informing these concepts, it is now possible to turn to address the images produced in the region in the early Middle Ages which are usually referred to as 'pagan'. With few exceptions pagan art is intrinsically regarded as 'Germanic'; hence the definition of 'Germanic' art or 'Germanic' style is of some significance. Unfortunately, most scholars use the terms indiscriminately, without examining the implications embedded in them. Thus, it is essential to consider, briefly, the iconographies articulated by 'Germanic' art and style.

And in brief, it can be said that there are no iconographic characteristics of the figural imagery that distinguish 'Germanic' art from, for example, Roman or Christian art. In 1955 Wilhelm Holmqvist published a book entitled *Germanic art during the first millenium A.D.*, stating that:

Germanic art, however, was by no means uniform and everywhere alike. As is only natural, if one considers the vast geographical area over which it extended and evolved and the historical conditions of time, it assumed altogether different and distinctive features to north, south, east and west.¹

If we refer to Germanic art in the second half of the first millennium AD this could not be more apposite. Those regions commonly referred to as 'Germanic' (the western parts of central Europe, western and northern Europe as well as parts of Italy and Spain) may share some characteristics, but certainly cannot be considered politically or religiously unified. Unlike the Roman Empire, so-called 'Germanic' Europe is far from being a political or cultural entity. Furthermore, in contrast to Christian art 'Germanic' visual culture is not permeated by a single frame of reference: 'Germanic' and pagan art lack a definitive reference point, *contra* the Roman Empire in Roman art and Christianity in Christian art. Although these visual traditions were far from 'uniform and everywhere alike', they at least share the fact of defining subjects that enable understanding of them as Roman and Christian. This does not hold true for either 'Germanic' or 'pagan' art: one reason perhaps why the scholarship has yet failed to yield even rudimentary definitions beyond the ethnic approach of a shared 'Germanic' identity.

With this in mind, the discussion here challenges the explanations of the imagery under consideration, which is frequently invoked to define 'Germanic' art, illustrating its paganism: such as the helmet foils with representations of riders, warriors and the man-and-beast motifs. Representations of Rome will also be addressed as they seem to have emerged in the art in conjunction with invented traditions.

¹ Wilhelm Holmqvist, *Germanic art during the first millenium A.D.*, Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademiens handlingar 90 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1955), 9.

2.1 Riders and Horsemen

Riders and horsemen, such as the *Pressblech*² from Pliezhausen and the Sutton Hoo helmet, are well-known images of the Early Medieval period in northern Europe often regarded as having a ‘pagan’ element both in style and motif. Here, ten images of horsemen from seven archaeological sites in Sweden, Britain, Germany, and Italy (cp. Table 1) will be examined in order to assess the commonly held view that they reflect solely ‘pagan’ beliefs related to a ‘Germanic’ warrior culture.

The best preserved piece is probably the Pliezhausen *Pressblech* (Fig. 1) found in a seventh-century woman’s burial in south-west Germany; the cemetery consisted of thirty to fifty burials of which eleven were excavated, some with Christian artefacts, such as the gold foil crosses.³ The well-known disc from Grave 1 was used as a brooch (*Pressblechfibel*), dated to the second half of the seventh century.⁴ Unfortunately, this tells us little about the actual production of the image as it was probably reworked as a brooch from a piece of horse-gear (*phalerae*).⁵ The brooch has a diameter of approximately 7 cm and is made of thin gold foil; the centre is decorated by a (probable) male rider and his horse. His right hand holds a shield centrally over the body of the horse; his upraised left hand holds a spear or a lance extending the full width of the disc. At the croup of the horse, behind the rider, is a second diminutive figure who grasps the lance. Despite its size, the smaller figure seems, in both appearance and posture, to be a miniature version of the horseman. A third male figure is located beneath the horse and stabs it with his sword held in his left hand while he grasps the reins with his right; this figure is usually referred to as the ‘fallen warrior’. The void above the lance is filled with two antithetic animals that can be regarded as lions, due to their stylised manes.

Schemes composed of these elements are often interpreted as illustrating a mythological ‘Germanic’ hero defeating his enemy by means of numinous aid, with his final ride to Valhalla indicated by the last gasp of the ‘fallen warrior’ stabbing the victor’s horse.⁶ Initially, Karl Hauck suggested that the small figure (in German

² I prefer to use the German term ‘Pressblech’ instead of the equally accurate, but extended term ‘stamp-ornamented bronze-foil’; see Monica Alkemade, “A history of Vendel Period archaeology: observations on the relationship between written sources and archaeological interpretation,” in *Images of the past: studies on ancient societies in northwestern Europe*, ed. Nico Roymans and Frans Theuws, *Studies in pre- en protohistorie* 7 (Amsterdam: IPP, 1991), 268 fn. 3.

³ Cp. Kurt Böhner and Dieter Quast, “Die merowingerzeitlichen Grabfunde aus Pliezhausen, Kreis Reutlingen,” *Fundberichte aus Baden-Württemberg* 19, no. 1 (1994): 383–419.

⁴ Cp. Matthias Friedrich, *Archäologische Chronologie und historische Interpretation: Die Merowingerzeit in Süddeutschland*, *Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde* 96 (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2016 [forthcoming]), fig. 44. However, Quast assumes the burial to date from the first half of the seventh century: Dieter Quast, “Merovingian Period Equestrians in Figural Art,” *Archaeologia Baltica* 11 (2009): 334.

⁵ Gudula Zeller, “Pliezhausen,” *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde* 23 (2003): 208–9; Böhner and Quast, “Grabfunde aus Pliezhausen,” 388.

⁶ E.g. Martin Welch, “Pre-Christian Practices in the Anglo-Saxon World,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of Ritual and Religion*, ed. Timothy Insoll (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 869. Sonja Marzinzik raises the question of whether the ‘fallen warrior’ can indeed be regarded as a defeated enemy, quoting Ammianus Marcellinus who discusses Alemannic riders easily defeated by

	Rider						"Fallen Warrior"			"Sieghelfer"	
	helmet with bird crest	helmet with boar crest	shield	sword	lance horizontal	lance towards the ground	hits horse	sword towards the ground	without headdress	with headdress	
Pliezhausen	no helmet		x		x		x		x		
Sutton Hoo	no helmet		x	x	x		x		x		
Staffordshire Hoard	damaged	damaged	x	(?)	damaged		x		damaged		
Valsgärde 8 right-left	x		x	x	x		x			x	
Valsgärde 8 left-right		x	x		x			x		x	
Valsgärde 7 right-left	damaged	damaged	?	x	x		x			x	
Valsgärde 7 left-right	damaged	damaged	x		x			x		?	
Vendel 1 right-left	x		x			x	snake		no Sieghelfer		
Vendel 1 left-right		x	x	x	x		no enemy		no Sieghelfer		
Cividale	no helmet		x			x	no enemy		no Sieghelfer		

Table 1: 'Pagan' riders and their iconographic elements addressed in this study.



Figure 1: Pliezhausen disc brooch, Germany, seventh century.

usually referred to as *Sieghelfer*) should be thought of as the personification of Odin or Wotan, but later emended this to the embodiment of one of the ‘Germanic’ Dioscuri.⁷ Subsequently, most scholars have assumed the motif derives from the late-antique iconography of Christian ‘military saints’ (*Reiterheilige*)⁸ and argued that it should be regarded as reframing Christian motifs into a ‘pagan-Germanic’ sphere.⁹

This latter interpretation is based on two main assumptions: first, the Nordic (or ‘Germanic’) style of the disc; second, the missing Christian elements of the original *Reiterheilige* motif, indicating its reframing within pagan belief systems. None of these assumptions are ‘completely’ false; rather they miss a certain point: style does not necessarily equate to a certain religion, Christian or pagan, even if it is ‘Nordic’.¹⁰ Furthermore, the ‘proof’ that Norse mythology informs these images seems, at a fundamental level, to be based solely on a perceived lack of explicitly Christian elements. This being the case, focussing on the absence of Christian symbolism may limit our understanding of the scheme rather than broadening it. If this type of image

infantry soldiers; see Sonja Marzinzik, *The Sutton Hoo helmet*, British Museum objects in focus (London: British Museum Press, 2007), 49.

⁷ Karl Hauck, “Alemannische Denkmäler der vorchristlichen Adelskultur,” *Zeitschrift für Württembergische Landesgeschichte* 16 (1957): 5–7; Karl Hauck, “Dioskuren in Bildzeugnissen des Nordens vom 5. bis zum 7. Jh.: Zur Ikonologie der Goldbrakteaten (XXVIII),” *Jahrbuch des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums Mainz* 30 (1983): 435–64; Karl Hauck, “Dioskuren,” *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde* 5 (1984): 482–94.

⁸ Cp. Chapter 3.2.

⁹ Helmbrecht, *Wirkmächtige Kommunikationsmedien*, 77–80.

¹⁰ For ‘Nordic’ animal style in Christian contexts see: Wamers, “Behind Animals, Plants and Interlace,” 151–204; Egon Wamers, “Salins Stil II auf christlichen Gegenständen: zur Ikonographie merowingerzeitlicher Kunst im 7. Jahrhundert,” *Zeitschrift für Archäologie des Mittelalters* 36 (2008): 33–72.



Figure 2: Disc from Cividale, Italy, c. 600.

is genuinely religiously pagan and adopted from a Christian iconographic scheme depictions of similar horsemen across Europe need to be more closely considered.

A related metal disc is found in Cividale in northern Italy (Fig. 2), but its arrangement is slightly different from the Pliezhausen disc and it is less elaborate. It has two circular zones: a horseman in the inner zone; animal ornament of Salin's Style II in the outer one. The most obvious difference with Pliezhausen is the absence of the *Sieghelfer* as well as the 'fallen warrior': only the rider with his shield and lance is included, the lance directed towards the ground. Helmut Roth considered a Christian interpretation of the Cividale disc, but did not elaborate on his identification.¹¹ As there are no distinct Christian symbols—such as crosses or nimbi—we cannot be certain, but it is possible that the disc could have been arranged in an ensemble similar to the three *phalerae* of Hüfingen (Fig. 63).¹² Besides the Pliezhausen and Cividale discs further images from Bräunlingen and Nendingen, both from Baden-Württemberg, feature riders with lances (cp. fig. 63c–d); the piece from Bräunlingen may also exemplify the use of open-worked discs as garment pendants in furnished female graves dating from the late-sixth and early-seventh centuries, which frequently feature representations of riders.¹³

Numerous images of horsemen have been found in Sweden, in furnished graves of the cemeteries of Vendel¹⁴ and Valsgärde and are related to horse-gear (or

¹¹ Helmut Roth, *Kunst und Handwerk im frühen Mittelalter: Archäologische Zeugnisse von Childerich I. bis zu Karl dem Großen* (Stuttgart: Konrad Theiss Verlag, 1986), 272–73.

¹² Cp. Chapter 3.2.

¹³ Cp. Quast, "Merovingian Period Equestrians," 334–37; Dorothee Renner, *Die durchbrochenen Zierscheiben der Merowingerzeit*, Kataloge vor- und frühgeschichtlicher Altertümer 18 (Mainz: Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum, 1970), pls 30–31; Herbert Kühn, "Die Reiterscheiben der Völkerwanderungszeit," *IPEK, Jahrbuch für prähistorische und ethnographische Kunst* 12 (1938): 95–115.

¹⁴ Hjalmar Stolpe, *Graffältet vid Vendel*, Monografieserien, Kungliga Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets

second-use garment brooches) found across Europe. In Scandinavia and Britain the schemes form part of richly decorated helmets (known as ‘Vendel helmets’ or *nordische Kammbelme*) found solely within north-west Europe (Fig. 3).¹⁵ Those of Vendel Grave 1 and Valsgärde Graves 7 and 8 each include several *Pressbleche* with horsemen of which the ones from Valsgärde best match the Pliezhausen disc, although differing in some details (Figs 4–5). Due to the poor preservation of the helmets it is often not possible to determine how many panels were actually used and how they were arranged. Therefore, I will describe two *Pressbleche* per helmet with different images and then try to illustrate the potential arrangement on each helmet.

The best preserved *Pressblech* of the helmet from Valsgärde 8 (Fig. 4b) shows a rider with helmet, shield, sword, and lance riding from the right to the left.¹⁶ The most notable detail is the bird-shaped crest of the helmet as well as the small figure with a headdress consisting of two antithetic bird heads. In addition to the ‘bigger’ lance the *Sieghelfer* is holding, a second but smaller lance is grasped in his left hand. The ‘fallen warrior’ sinks his sword into the stomach of the horse, instead of the front as shown by the Pliezhausen disc. Furthermore, another figure in armour with a lance in its right hand appears in front of the horse grasping its reins. The second panel is less well preserved, but shows the same arrangement of four figures as its counterpart but with significant differences: the image is reversed with the horse moving from left to right. The helmet of the horseman has a boar crest instead of a bird, and the figure under the horse does not stab the horse; rather his sword points towards the ground.

Though poorly preserved the two *Pressbleche* of the helmet from Valsgärde 7 reveal a similar layout.¹⁷ However, one panel (Fig. 5b) differs: the figure in front of the horse does not grasp the rein, but instead kneels and lifts his shield as if in protection from the approaching rider. The two rider images of the *Pressbleche* from Vendel 1 (Fig. 6) are to some extent different from those of Valsgärde, with two riders on each panel, moving from left to right and vice versa. Like Valsgärde 7, however, the horseman riding from left to right wears a helmet with a bird-shaped crest, whereas the helmet of his counterpart is decorated by a boar. The most notable difference is the missing *Sieghelfer*, which has been substituted by two and three birds respectively, as well as the missing ‘fallen warrior’. One rider points his lance towards a snake in front of the horse, whereas the other image shows a person holding the reins in a manner analogous to Valsgärde 8.

The last *Pressblech* depicting a horseman considered in this study is the well-known one from the Sutton Hoo helmet (Fig. 7).¹⁸ As this is heavily damaged only

Akademien 3 (Stockholm: Beckmans, 1912).

¹⁵ Alkemade, “Vendel Period archaeology,” 278–81; Heiko Steuer, “Helm und Ringschwert: Prunkbewaffnung und Rangabzeichen germanischer Krieger: eine Übersicht,” *Studien zur Sachsenforschung* 6 (1987): 199–203.

¹⁶ Greta Arwidsson, *Die Gräberfunde von Valsgärde II: Valsgärde 8*, Acta Musei Antiquitatum Septentrionalium Regiae Universitatis Upsaliensis 4 (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1954), 120 figs 78–79.

¹⁷ Greta Arwidsson, *Die Gräberfunde von Valsgärde III: Valsgärde 7*, Acta Musei Antiquitatum Septentrionalium Regiae Universitatis Upsaliensis 5 (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1977), 118–19.

¹⁸ For a brief, but recent summary on the Sutton Hoo helmet, its history and reconstruction see Marzinzik, *The Sutton Hoo helmet*. Extensive studies can be found at Rupert Bruce-Mitford, *The Sutton Hoo*

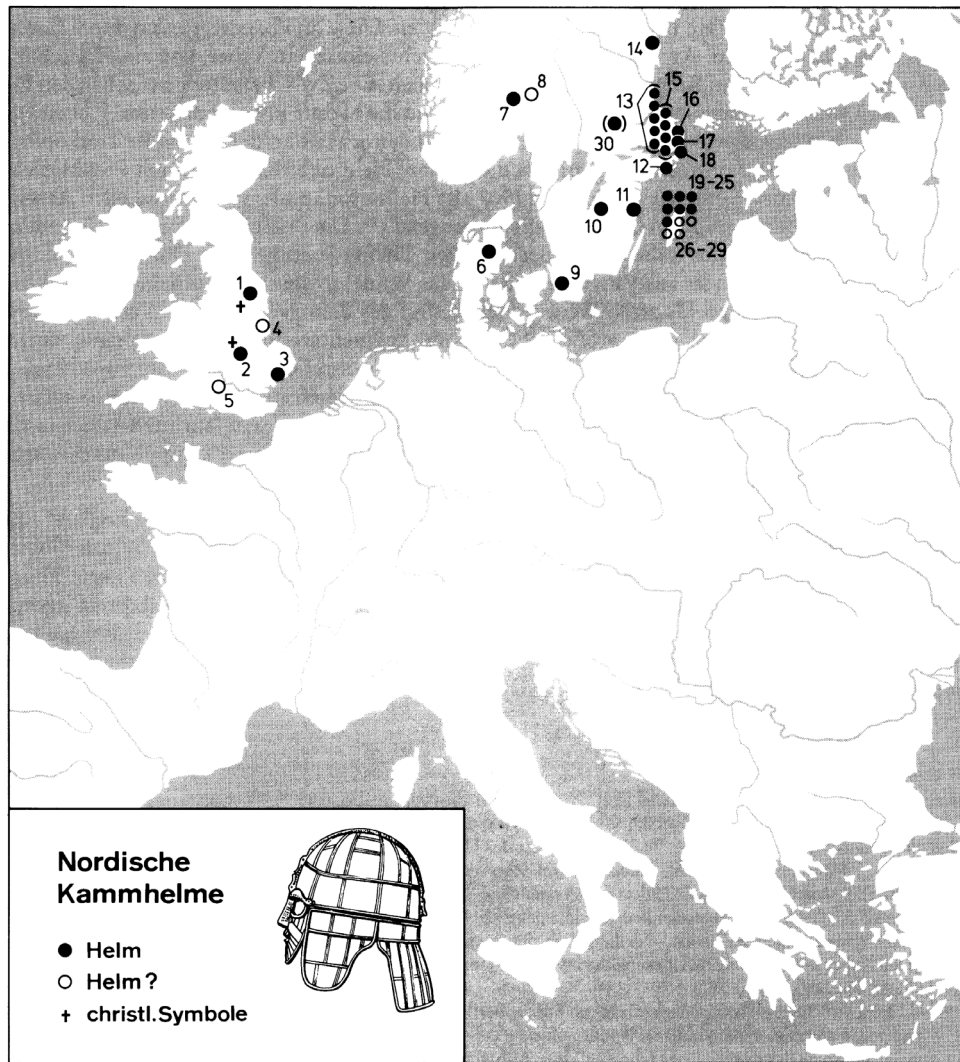


Figure 3: Distribution of Nordic crest helmets.

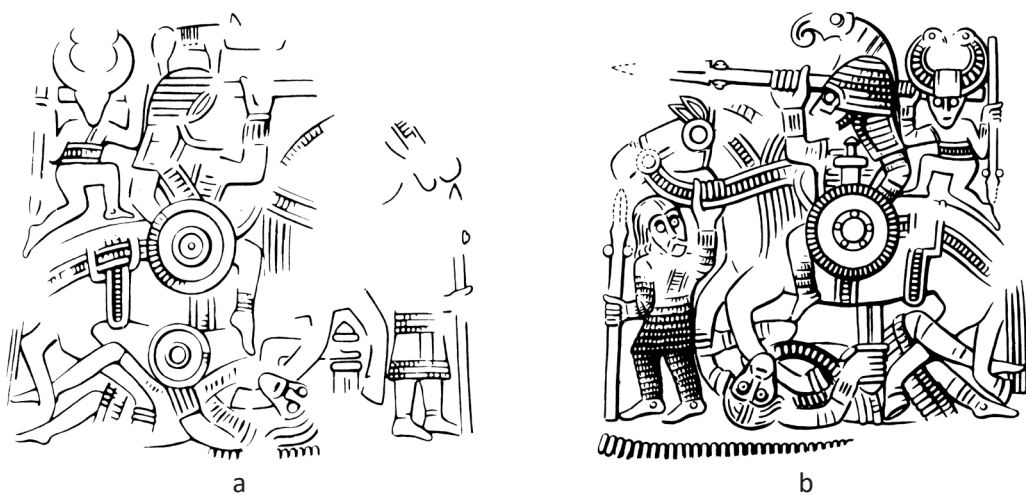


Figure 4: Riders of the helmet from Valsgärde 8, Sweden, late-sixth century.

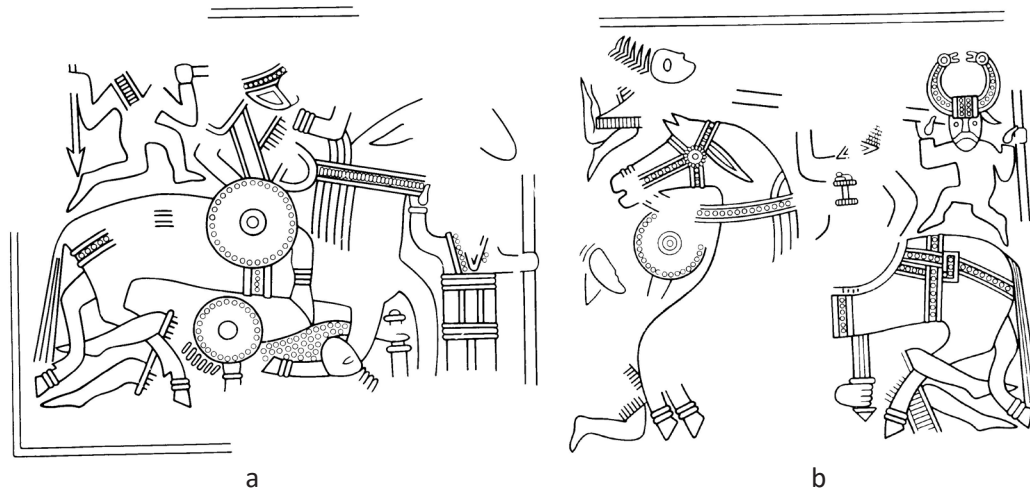


Figure 5: Riders of the helmet from Valsgärde 7, Sweden, seventh century.

small amounts of the original imagery could be preserved. The rider *Pressblech*, though fragmented, is one of the ‘better’ pieces showing strong parallels to the Pliezhausen disc: a horse riding from right to left; the rider armed with sword, shield and lance (held horizontally) supported by a *Sieghelfer*; the trampled figure stabbing the front of the horse. Other similar, but heavily fragmented *Pressbleche* were also recently discovered in the context of the Staffordshire Hoard (Fig. 8); unfortunately, these have yet to be published.¹⁹ What can be discerned from the images is the belly of the trampling horse as well as the ‘fallen warrior’ stabbing the horse, though these elements are arranged slightly different from those preserved on the Sutton Hoo helmet and the Pliezhausen disc.

From this brief survey it is clearly possible to identify several similarities and key elements shared by the horseman images, despite their individual features (cp. Table 1): evidently, the Sutton Hoo panels and the Pliezhausen disc share strong stylistic characteristics, while the combination of motifs is also quite similar: the rider has long hair instead of a helmet, the *Sieghelfer* without the headdress grasps the horizontal lance, and the ‘fallen warrior’ stabs the horse. Unsurprisingly, the Swedish *Pressbleche* are also closely related to each other: the antithetic riders have different crests, the *Sieghelfer* wears a headdress, and the ‘fallen warriors’ differ in their ability to wound the horse. To a certain extent, however, the panels of the Vendel 1 helmet have to be regarded as distinct as they do not show the *Sieghelfer* and they lack the ‘fallen warrior’. The disc found at Cividale also differs, not only geographically, but also in its use of motifs as it alone shows a horseman with a shield and a lance pointed towards the ground.

In addition to the style displayed and motifs included on these panels their arrangement on the helmets can provide a significant indication of the possible meaning of the scheme. As the Sutton Hoo helmet is heavily damaged only a few suggestions can be made regarding a possible layout: Rupert Bruce-Mitford assumed the horsemen

ship-burial 2: arms, armour and regalia (London: British Museum Publications, 1978), 138–225.

¹⁹ As yet, the only available source is online: <http://www.staffordshirehoard.org.uk/the-staffordshire-hoard-horseman-helmet-foil>. See also: Herman, “Something more than ‘man’,” in Boulton et al., *Art, Literature and Material Culture*, 283 (fn. 25).



Figure 6: Riders of the helmet from Vendel 1, Sweden, early-seventh century.

were arranged successively, headed in the same direction.²⁰ By way of comparison, the helmets from Valsgärde are far better preserved, but nonetheless heavily corroded. The helmet of Valsgärde 7 (Fig. 9) has four circular zones of which the second one up probably shows four horseman panels on each side, headed in opposite directions towards two ‘dancing warriors’ (see further below). In contrast, the Vendel 1 helmet has one register with horsemen riding towards two man-and-beast schemes (cp. Fig. 39).²¹

Related to this is the chronology of the helmets, which also informs our understanding of the iconography. Unfortunately, the chronology of Vendel period Scandinavia is not as well established as that of Merovingian period in Germany and France, or that in Anglo-Saxon England. In fact, the chronologies of the cemeteries of Vendel and Valsgärde are usually constructed with reference to their continental counterparts, but without significant precision; as a result, most graves are typically classified within a range of thirty to one hundred years: Valsgärde 8 is dated to the last third of the sixth century, whereas Vendel 1 seems to correlate chronologically with the Sutton Hoo burial in the first third (or quarter) of the seventh century. Valsgärde 7 can only be dated with a range of approximately seventy to eighty years (600–670/80).²² The commonly held view is that the Sutton Hoo helmet undoubtedly reveals a Scandinavian ancestry with the Vendel and Valsgärde helmets regarded as predecessors.²³ Recently, Alex Woolf challenged this view by emphasising close ties between Anglo-Saxon England and the Danish centres of Gudme and Uppåkra rather than with the periphery of East Sweden.²⁴ Thus, we cannot tell with certainty—be it

²⁰ Bruce-Mitford, *Sutton Hoo ship-burial 2*, 190–97.

²¹ Cp. Stolpe, *Graffältet vid Vendel*, 10–18, pls 5–6. Unfortunately, the Valsgärde 8 helmet is only documented in monochrome photographs, making it difficult to reconstruct the original layout of the panels; Arwidsson, *Die Gräberfunde von Valsgärde II*, 27–28, pls 1–6.

²² Cp. Steuer, “Helm und Ringschwert,” 200–203.

²³ Angela Care Evans, *The Sutton Hoo ship burial*, rev. ed. (London: British Museum Press, 1994), 49; Marzinzik, *The Sutton Hoo helmet*, 33–35.

²⁴ Alex Woolf, “Sutton Hoo and Sweden Revisited,” in *The long seventh century: continuity and discontinuity in an age of transition*, ed. Alessandro Gnasso et al. (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2015), 5–17.

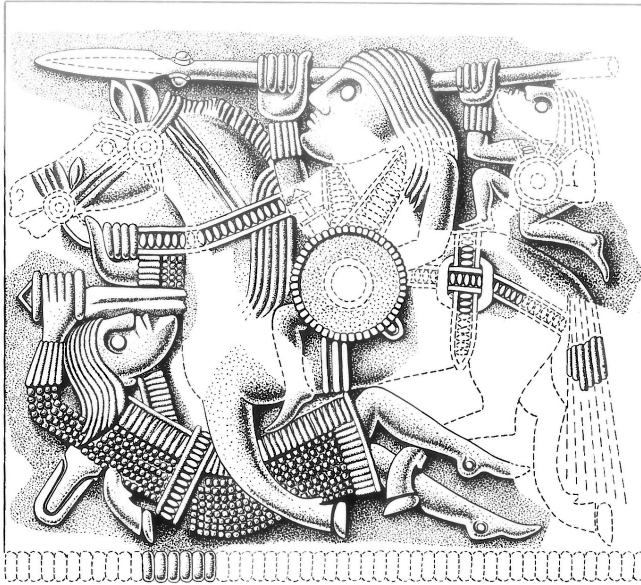


Figure 7: Rider of the Sutton Hoo helmet, United Kingdom, early-seventh century.

typologically, chronologically, or iconographically—which helmets came first: those in England or those in Sweden.

The question of whether these riders derive from Christian iconography transferred into a pagan sphere thus remains open. A lately restored Roman helmet of the first century AD found a decade ago might shed some light on this assumption: the left cheek piece of the so-called “Hallaton helmet” probably buried in first century AD (Fig. 10) is decorated with a hitherto unidentified Roman emperor riding a horse.²⁵ The Roman goddess of victory, *Victoria*, escorts the riding emperor by uplifting him with her left arm while holding a laurel wreath above his head with her right. Furthermore, a third person sits beneath the horse, possibly relating to the ‘fallen warriors’ of the early medieval *Pressbleche*: not trampled, but nonetheless defeated, the bare-chested Barbarian is vanquished by the emperor victorious with divine support. An even more similar image can be found on the fourth-century Belgrade Cameo: a riding emperor holding a lance horizontally above his head, defeated barbarians at his feet (Fig. 11).²⁶

One might argue the Hallaton helmet and the Belgrade Cameo were manufactured hundreds of years prior to the helmets from Sutton Hoo, Vendel, and Valsgärde as well as the Pliezhausen disc, but this does not credit the fact that similar imagery of the victorious rider-emperor is long-lived and continued to be produced throughout the first through sixth centuries: the famous sixth-century Barberini diptych (Fig. 12), for example, shows a Christian emperor riding in triumph alongside a *Victoria* on a globe. Though originating in a pagan belief system the *Victoria* remained a well-established symbol of power and divine support, even in sixth-century Constantinople. This iconography of *adventus* is closely related to the battle scenes of the Hallaton helmet and the Belgrade Cameo, despite the fact that it shows the arrival of an emperor,

²⁵ Maev Kennedy, “The Hallaton Helmet,” *Art Quarterly*, Spring (2012): 62.

²⁶ Erika Zwierlein-Diehl, *Antike Gemmen und ihr Nachleben* (Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 2007), 205; Gerhart Rodenwaldt, *Der Belgrader Kameo* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1922).

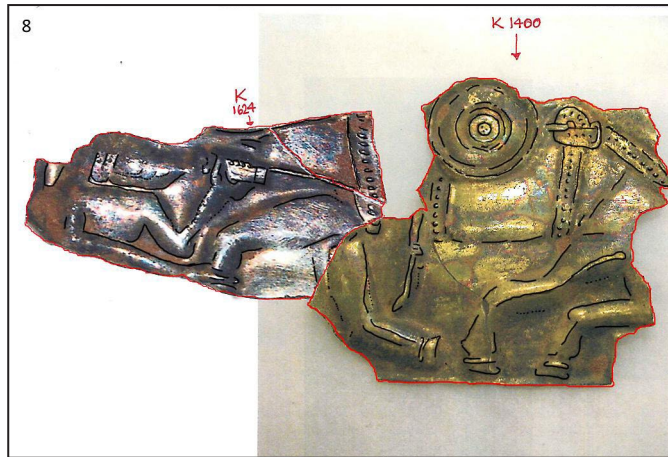


Figure 8: Rider from the Staffordshire Hoard, United Kingdom, seventh century.

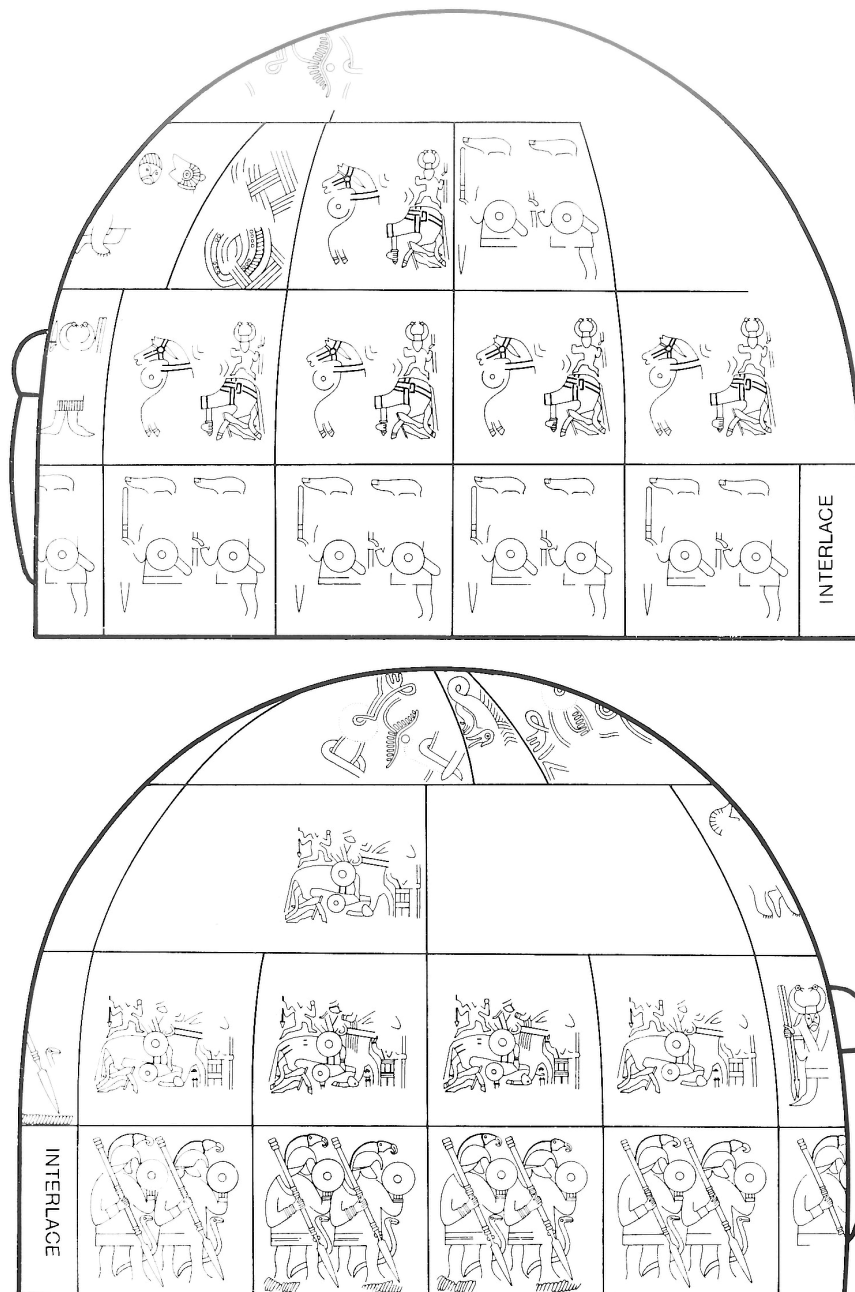


Figure 9: Valsgärde 7 helmet, Sweden, seventh century – layout of the imagery.

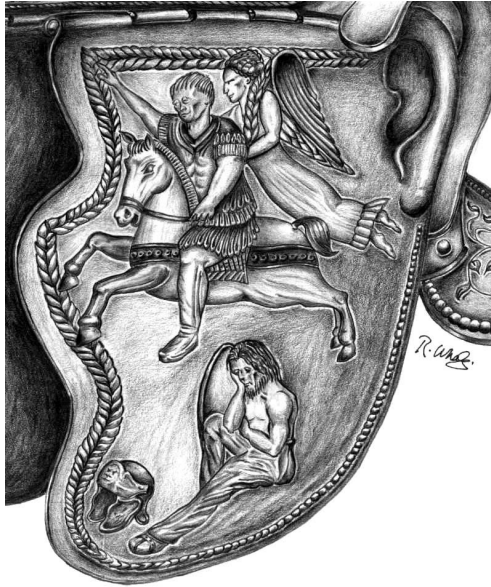


Figure 10: Drawing of the Hallaton Helmet, United Kingdom, first century AD (detail of the cheek piece).

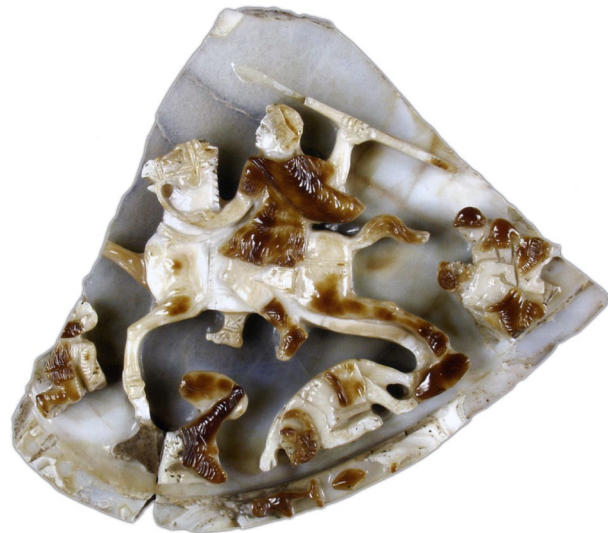


Figure 11: Belgrade Cameo (National Museum of Serbia), fourth century.

usually in a city, which could accompany victories in war, but did not necessarily have to.²⁷ The so-called Arras Medallion (Fig. 13) showing the arrival of Constantine I in London might be understood to illustrate the *adventus* of a lance-bearing emperor in a broad military context.²⁸

Though the horseman and the *Sieghelfer* of the northern helmets do not obviously depend on the Roman *adventus* and *Victoria* as their immediate iconographic prototypes, they clearly relate to the ideas informing that scheme. Notwithstanding that the *Victoria* as well as the *Sieghelfer* represents divine power and support for victorious rulers we cannot distinguish whether this is set in a pagan or Christian context, even if the iconography of both *Victoria* and *Sieghelfer*, might originate in a pagan past. Given that sixth- and seventh-century Scandinavia was thoroughly pagan implying that those buried in the richly furnished graves of Vendel and Valsgärde thought of pagan deities, we cannot be certain whether alternative religious beliefs may have informed the iconography of the *Victoria/Sieghelfer* at Sutton Hoo or Pliezhausen. It might indeed be the case that the *Sieghelfer* could incorporate divine support of the Christian God as well as that of pagan deities.

In terms of iconography, the prototype of the riders depicted on the *Pressbleche* may derive from mounted soldiers depicted on Roman grave slabs across north-west Europe (Fig. 14),²⁹ rather than originating in the iconography of victorious emperors

²⁷ For *adventus* in general see: Sabine MacCormack, “Change and Continuity in Late Antiquity: the Ceremony of Adventus,” *Historia* 21 (1972): 721–52; Sabine MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity*, The Transformation of the classical heritage 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 17–89.

²⁸ For further details see MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony*, 29–31.

²⁹ In 1931 Walter Veeck had already referred to those grave slabs regarding the iconography of the Pliezhausen disc: Walther Veeck, *Die Alamannen in Württemberg*, Germanische Denkmäler der Völkerwanderungszeit (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1931), 45. Cp. Margarete Klein-Pfeuffer, *Merowingerzeitliche Fibeln und Anhänger aus Pressblech*, Marburger Studien zur Vor- und Frühgeschichte 14 (Marburg:



Figure 12: Barberini Diptych (Louvre, Paris), first half of the sixth century.



Figure 13: Arras Medallion (Bibliothèque nationale de France), c. 300 AD.

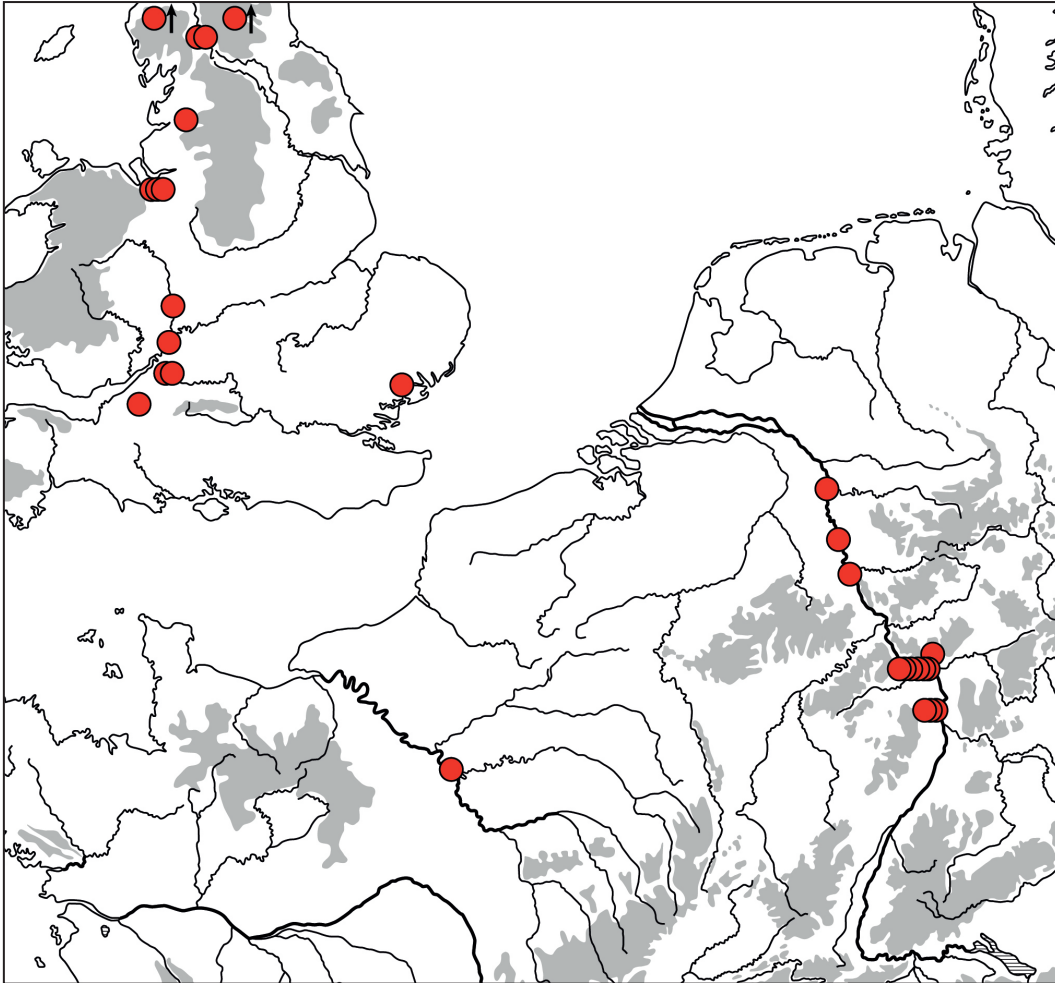


Figure 14: Distribution of Roman tombstones depicting cavalrymen and barbarians.

and *adventus* scenes. The stone carvings shown on those slabs typically comprise cavalrymen with weaponry (armour, helmet, shield, sword, and/or lance) and fallen enemies, a motif common since the classical period in Greece. But as Marjorie Mackintosh has put it:

The motif of the enemy fallen on his back is so common that it seems impossible to trace it to any single source. The supine enemy was part of the vocabulary of battle scenes from classical times.³⁰

The horsemen from the *Pressbleche* as well as later imagery of similar kind, for instance the mounted soldier on the Repton Stone³¹ in Derbyshire clearly reveal this ‘vocabulary’ to be present throughout the early Middle Ages. Five Roman grave slabs are of particular significance, revealing astonishing similarities to the images discussed in this study. The late first-century tombstone of T. Flavius Bassus from Cologne³² (Fig. 15) displays an

Hitzeroth, 1993), 174.

³⁰ Marjorie Mackintosh, “The Sources of the Horseman and Fallen Enemy Motif on the Tombstones of the Western Roman Empire,” *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 139, no. 1 (1986): 9.

³¹ See Martin Biddle and Birthe Kjolbye-Biddle, “The Repton Stone,” *Anglo-Saxon England* 14 (1985): 15 (no. 8).

³² Mackintosh, “Horseman and Fallen Enemy,” 17 (no. 18).



Figure 15: Tombstone of T. Flavius Bassus, Cologne, late-first century AD.

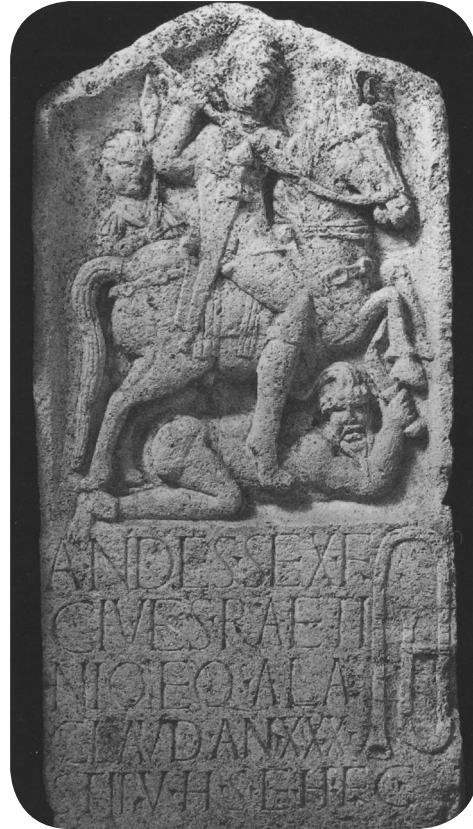


Figure 16: Tombstone of Andes, Zahlbach/Mainz, first century AD.

armoured cavalryman with sword, shield, and lance trampling down a barbarian enemy in an analogue supine posture as depicted at Sutton Hoo and Pliezhausen; a third person (usually referred to as ‘servant’) behind the cavalryman holds two lances in support of his master. Another first-century carving from Zahlbach (near Mainz, tombstone of Andes)³³ reveals a similar arrangement, while the trampled barbarian is in prone position holding a sword (Fig. 16). Unlike most fallen warriors from the *Pressbleche* the prone barbarian from the tombstone of Andes does not stab the horse; in fact the sword seems to be bent by the energy of the galloping horse. Yet another prone barbarian holding a sword is depicted on the tombstone of Flavinus from Corbridge in Northumberland.³⁴ The crouched barbarians from Zahlbach and Corbridge with their swords nearly uplifted can be compellingly linked to the fallen warriors from Valsgårde 7 and 8. Details from the tombstones from Colchester and Wiesbaden may also shed some light on the antithetic lions on the Pliezhausen disc: both have two lions located on the top of the stone above the cavalryman. In Colchester two lions (or sphinxes)³⁵ flank a winged figure (probably an *Eros*), while in Wiesbaden two lion heads are attached on either side of the tombstone.³⁶

Against this wide-ranging visual background, a closer look at the cemetery from

³³ Ibid., 18 (no. 25).

³⁴ Today in Hexham Abbey: *ibid.*, 15 (no. 8).

³⁵ Cp. Bernard Andreae, *Studien zur römischen Grabkunst*, Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts. Römische Abteilung, Ergänzungsheft 9 (Heidelberg: F.H. Kerle, 1963), 75.

³⁶ Cp. Mackintosh, “Horseman and Fallen Enemy,” pl. IIa–b.

which the Pliezhausen disc brooch emerged might well suggest that Christian beliefs were indeed present, as indicated by gold foil crosses.³⁷ Given this Gudula Zeller's conclusion is surprising:

Despite its oriental and Mediterranean archetypes the unique importance of the Pliezhausen disc consists in imaging a Germanic subject visualising a mixture of pagan and Christian elements.³⁸

This demonstrates that 'Germanicness' is unambiguously considered as being entirely pagan, even in the context of specifically Christian associations. The disc is thus regarded as Germanic-pagan as it derives from a furnished 'Germanic' grave within a cemetery of the 'Germanic' *Alamanni*.³⁹ The same can be said of the Sutton Hoo ship burial of the 'Germanic' Anglo-Saxons, albeit, in a slightly different way: Mound 1 is often considered to be the burial of the East Anglian king, Raedwald, who was converted to Christianity, but could not desist from worshipping the old pagan gods, at least according to Bede in the early-eighth century. Thus, the ship burial as well as the grave goods, and especially the imagery, are often regarded as a final 'triumph' of Raedwald's paganism over Christianity.⁴⁰

Nonetheless, it seems reasonable to emphasise that neither grave goods nor imagery are exclusively religious in their frames of reference and hence 'pagan' in and of themselves.⁴¹ Imagery can address social status just as it can allude to religion, and the procession of riders on such items as the Sutton Hoo helmet highlights both. However, as the question of social status has been largely neglected in the scholarship, and the religious nature of the *Sieghelfer*, if there is any, seems arbitrary, it is worthwhile here to consider this (social) aspect of the scheme: the victorious rider struggling with his enemy sets particular value on martial aspects of early medieval society supported by either Christian or pagan god(s). It seems that the iconographies, or rather the ideas of *adventus* and the victorious emperor, and especially that of the victorious cavalryman, had substantial influence on the *Pressbleche* horsemen. Thus, there is no need to consider this type of imagery as entirely 'pagan' as it derives from Roman military and/or imperial iconography, which could be linked to both 'paganism' and Christianity.

37 Böhner and Quast, "Grabfunde aus Pliezhausen," 414–16.

38 'Die einzigartige Bedeutung der Pliezhausener Scheibe besteht darin, daß trotz der vorderasiatischen und mittelmeerisch-christlichen Vorbilder das Thema ihrer Darstellung ein germanisches ist und damit eine Vermischung heidnischer und christlicher Bildelemente vor Augen führt' (Zeller, "Pliezhausen," 209), translation: author.

39 For criticism of this view see Sebastian Brather, *Ethnische Interpretationen in der frühgeschichtlichen Archäologie: Geschichte, Grundlagen und Alternativen*, Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde 42 (Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 2004), and Fehr, *Germanen und Romanen im Merowingerreich*, esp. 681–783.

40 Evans, *Sutton Hoo ship burial*, 107–10. Martin Carver, *Sutton Hoo: burial ground of Kings?* (London: British Museum Press, 2000), 22–24, 134–36; Marzinzik, *The Sutton Hoo helmet*, 54–55; cp. Martin Carver, "Sutton Hoo, the graveyard of Anglo-Saxon pagan kingship," *Minerva* 4, no. 4 (1993): 28–33.

41 Concerning the 'pagan' imperial iconography of Roman emperors cp. MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony*, 121.

2.2 Warriors

On the one hand the imagery of the horsemen *Pressbleche* is closely related to that of the warriors, particularly as they are found on the same helmets; on the other hand warriors appear in more diverse contexts than the horsemen: there are single warriors, fighting warriors, 'dancing' warriors, warriors in procession, and wolf-like warriors.⁴² First, I would like to address the *Pressblech* images of warriors, and then turn to two images in particular, both found in modern-day Germany: the stone carving from Niederdollendorf, North Rhine-Westphalia, and the lyre from Trossingen, Baden-Württemberg.

The helmets from Vendel Graves 11, 12 and 14, as well as Valsgårde Grave 7, feature several types of warrior imagery. Again, it is difficult to determine the oldest helmets, but I would like to suggest that the graves can be treated as contemporaneous as they date approximately to the second half of the sixth and the early-seventh centuries.⁴³ The Vendel 12 helmet features a schematic scene of two 'fighting' warriors (Fig. 17): face to face, both hold a sword and lances crossed between them. The left figure has a shield; the right probably did too, but it was probably cut off by the eyebrow of the helmet. One detail is striking: the lance of the left figure pierces the shield of his counterpart. A similar motif can be found on the helmets from Vendel 11 and 14 (Figs 18–19). Though differently dressed, the scene of the 'fighting' warriors from the Vendel 11 helmet bears remarkable similarities: both figures have a shield, one of which is uplifted; the other shield is again struck by a lance. The same layout is depicted on a *Pressblech* from Vendel 14. Here, on the one hand as shown on the less well preserved *Pressblech* from Vendel 11, the left warrior seems to 'win' the fight as only he points his sword towards the enemy; on the other hand the second lance pierces the garment of the left warrior. Additionally, in all three images the shield of the right warrior is pierced by a lance. Thus, it seems impossible to determine a 'winner' with certainty; unlike the victorious horsemen this was presumably not intended.

Despite their similarities the iconographic layout of the three helmets differs: the sole figural components from the Vendel 12 helmet are two *Pressbleche* of the 'fighting' warriors' scene antithetically placed at the front; the remaining surface is decorated with zones of interlaced Style II animal ornament (Fig. 20). The 'fighting' warriors from Vendel 14, again placed at the front, appear in a more figural context with parading warriors framing the helmet (Fig. 21).⁴⁴

Often discussed as almost comparable are the 'dancing' warriors,⁴⁵ but these

⁴² Cp. Dieter Quast, "Kriegerdarstellungen der Merowingerzeit aus der Alamannia," *Archäologisches Korrespondenzblatt* 32 (2002): 267–80.

⁴³ This corresponds to 'Phase 4' (560/80–610/20) in southern Germany: cp. Friedrich, *Archäologische Chronologie und historische Interpretation*, 136–37.

⁴⁴ Karl Hauck was able to reconstruct the images from the Vendel 11; unfortunately, the layout could not be completed, probably due to poor preservation: Karl Hauck, "Bildforschung als historische Sachforschung: Zur vorchristlichen Ikonographie der figuralen Helmprogramme aus der Vendelzeit," in *Geschichtsschreibung und geistiges Leben im Mittelalter: Festschrift für Heinz Löwe zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Karl Hauck and Hubert Mordek (Köln: Böhlau, 1978), 33–37.

⁴⁵ Sometimes referred to as 'Gods'; Wilhelm Holmqvist, "The Dancing Gods," *Acta Archaeologica* 31 (1960): 101–27.

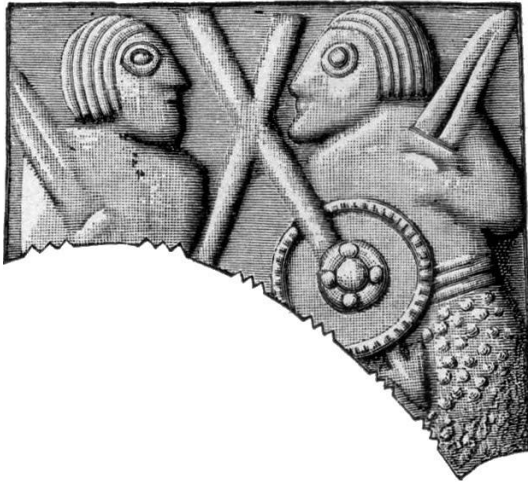


Figure 17: ‘Fighting’ warriors of the helmet from Vendel 12, Sweden, second half of the sixth and early-seventh century.



Figure 18: ‘Fighting’ warriors of the helmet from Vendel 11, Sweden, second half of the sixth and early-seventh century.

appear in much more diverse contexts than the ‘fighting’ figures of the Vendel helmets. In the late-sixth and seventh centuries only a few of these images survive: two ‘dancing’ figures on *Pressbleche* from Valsgärde 7 and Sutton Hoo (Fig. 22), a single one on the golden belt buckle from Finglesham⁴⁶ (Fig. 23), and in combination with a wolf-like figure on a *Pressblech* from Obrigheim⁴⁷ (Fig. 24) as well as on die-plate D from Torslunda (Fig. 25).⁴⁸ All the figures share the following characteristics: they hold two lances and wear a headdress with two antithetic bird-heads, as seen on the horsemen *Pressbleche* from Valsgärde 7 and 8. They are often invoked to confirm a passage of Tacitus’ *Germania*, which elaborates on ‘Germanic’ war dances.⁴⁹ And indeed, the legs of the figures from Finglesham and Torslunda seem to depict movement. However, this movement cannot be identified as a dance of any kind, indicating that the war dance mentioned by Tacitus has informed the interpretation of the warrior figures. In

⁴⁶ Sonia C. Hawkes, Hilda R. E. Davidson and Christopher Hawkes, “The Finglesham Man,” *Antiquity* 39 (1965): 17–32.

⁴⁷ Hauck, “Alemannische Denkmäler der vorchristlichen Adelskultur,” 11–12; Kurt Böhner, “Die frühmittelalterlichen Silberphaleren aus Eschwege (Hessen) und die nördlichen Pressblech-Bilder,” *Jahrbuch des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums Mainz* 38 (1991): 717; Christoph Engels, “Obrigheim,” *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde* 21 (2002): 515–16; Solveig Möllenberg, *Tradition und Transfer in spätgermanischer Zeit: Süddeutsches, englisches und skandinavisches Fundgut des 6. Jahrhunderts*, *Ergänzungsbande zum Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde* 76 (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2011), 71–72.

⁴⁸ On the Torslunda plates in general: Rupert Bruce-Mitford, “Fresh observations on the Torslunda Plates,” *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 2 (1968): 233–36; Heinrich Beck, “Die Stenzen von Torslunda und die literarische Überlieferung,” *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 2 (1968): 237–50; Morten Axboe, “Copying in Antiquity: The Torslunda Plates,” *Studien zur Sachsenforschung* 6 (1987): 13–21; Eva Nyman and Ulf E. Hagberg, “Torslunda,” *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*, no. 2006 (31): 77–81. For similar fragments from Uppsala, see Birgit Arrhenius and Henry Freij, “„Pressbleck“ fragments from the east mound in old Uppsala analyzed with a laser scanner,” *Laborativ Arkeologi* 6 (1994): 76–81.

⁴⁹ See for example: Michael P. Speidel, *Ancient Germanic warriors: warrior styles from Trajan’s column to Icelandic sagas* (London, New York: Routledge, 2004), 114–26; cp. Helmbrecht, *Wirkmächtige Kommunikationsmedien*, 146.



Figure 19: 'Fighting' warriors of the helmet from Vendel 14, Sweden, second half of the sixth and early-seventh century.



Figure 20: Drawing (reconstruction) of the helmet from Vendel 12, Sweden, second half of the sixth and early-seventh century.

addition, the so-called 'dancing' warriors are often interpreted as depicting 'Germanic' heroes or gods, either informed by the iconography of the Roman Dioscuri,⁵⁰ or portraying Odin himself.⁵¹

This brings us to an important detail: the headdresses or helmets with antithetic bird or snake heads which appear throughout the art of the early medieval period in northern Europe; however, no actual prototype lying behind the helmets has yet been found. The two bird heads thought to be the two ravens, Hugin and Munin, have been interpreted as indicating that the figure represents Odin/Wodan.⁵² Furthermore, some figures wearing this particular headdress are (or at least seem to be) one-eyed, apparently supporting the attribution to Odin/Woden. However, only two of these one-eyed figures wear headdresses: the one depicted on Torslunda die-plate D (Fig. 25) and an idol from Uppåkra, of probably eighth- or ninth-century date. As Michaela Helmbrecht has recently argued, these one-eyed figures cannot be understood universally as Odin/Woden.⁵³

To support the argument that there is nothing particularly 'Germanic' or 'pagan' about the headdresses we need to consider the *notitia dignitatum*, which includes

⁵⁰ This view is emphasised by Karl Hauck: cp. Hauck, "Dioskuren in Bildzeugnissen des Nordens vom 5. bis zum 7. Jh.," 435–64 and Hauck, "Bildforschung als historische Sachforschung," 27–70.

⁵¹ Cp. Herman, "Something more than 'man'," 289–90.

⁵² Helmbrecht, *Wirkmächtige Kommunikationsmedien*, 140–46.

⁵³ Ibid., 167–69. Though, she enhances this reading—as Ulfhednar—for some imagery: Michaela Helmbrecht, "Figures with Horned Headgear: a case study of context analysis and social significance of pictures in Vendel and Viking Age Scandinavia," *Lund archaeological review* 13/14 (2007/2008): 43–46; Michaela Helmbrecht, "Der Gebrauch von anthropomorphen Darstellungen im vendel- und wikingerzeitlichen Skandinavien: Das Beispiel der Motivgruppe „Hörnerhelmtträger“," in *Innere Strukturen von Siedlungen und Gräberfeldern als Spiegel gesellschaftlicher Wirklichkeit? Akten des 57. Internationalen Sachsensymposiums vom 26. bis 30. August 2006 in Münster*, ed. Christoph Grünewald and Torsten Capelle, Veröffentlichungen der Altertumskommission für Westfalen 17 (Münster: Aschendorff, 2007), 168.

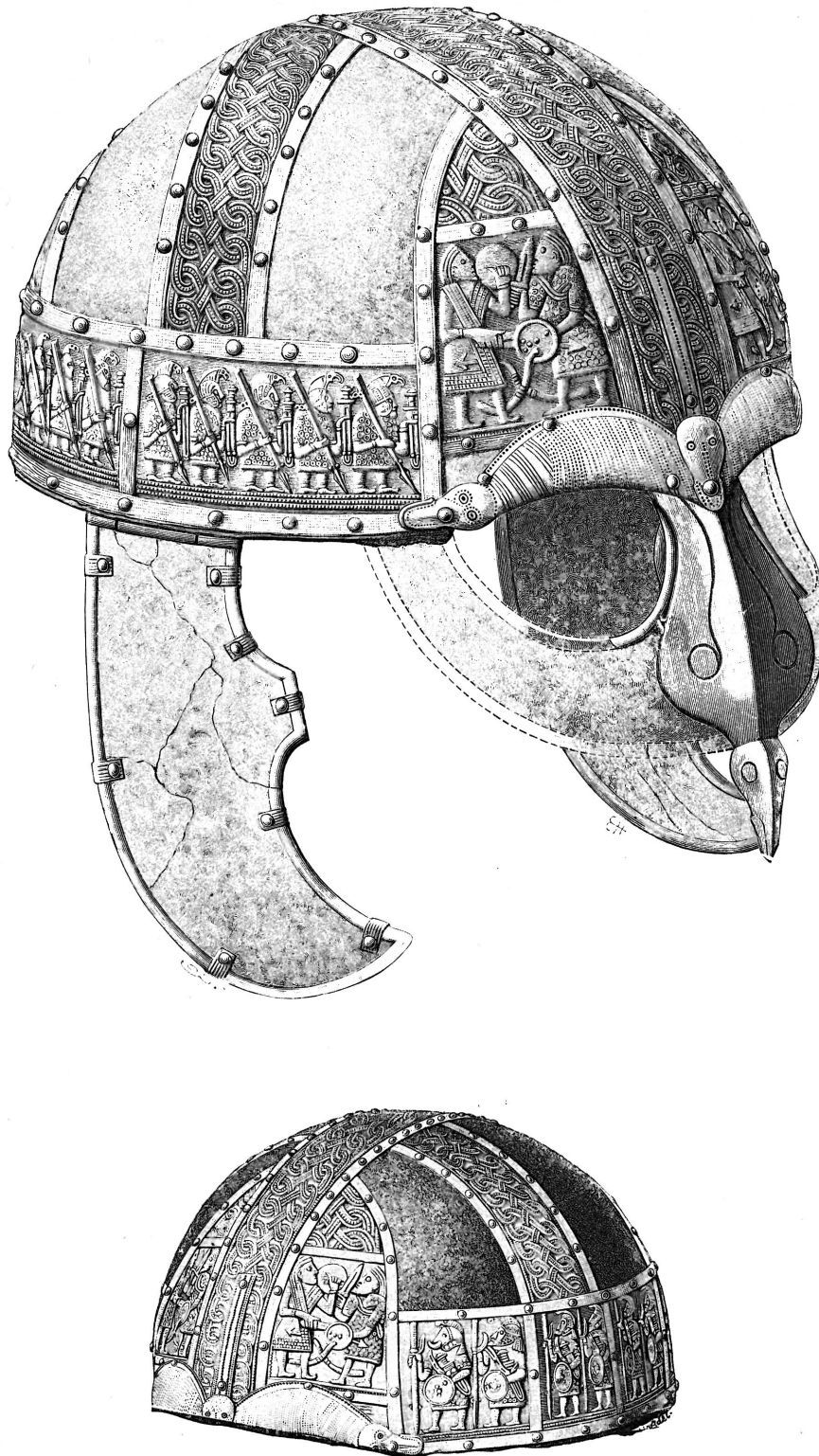


Figure 21: Drawings (reconstruction) of the helmet from Vendel 14, Sweden, second half of the sixth and early-seventh century.

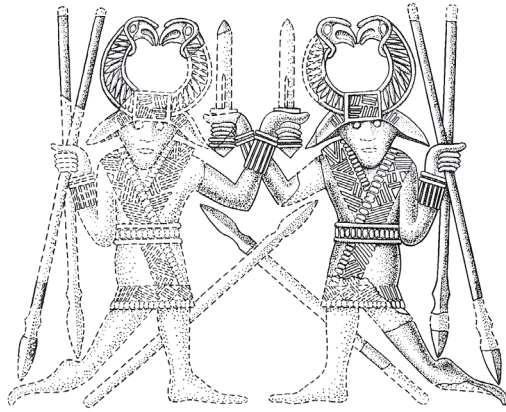


Figure 22: 'Dancing' warriors of the helmet from Sutton Hoo, United Kingdom, early-seventh century.



Figure 23: 'Dancing' warrior on the belt buckle from Finglesham, United Kingdom, c. 600 AD.

depictions of shield emblems of the late-Roman army. Twelve emblems show antithetic horns often with bird heads (Fig. 26), probably depicting a military standard.⁵⁴ One of the units using this emblem were the *cornuti*, the 'horned ones', which Michael P. Speidel assumes is the 'Germanic' unit also depicted on the Arch of Constantine.⁵⁵ Despite the fact that this attribution cannot be ascertained beyond doubt, the shield emblems clearly indicate that the origin of the iconography very likely stems from the late-Roman military, just as the scheme of early medieval victorious horsemen was probably informed by the Roman cavalrymen on tombstones. This indicates that there is nothing inherently 'pagan' about the warriors, their headdresses or helmets.

The same seems to hold true for warriors in the disguise of wolves; the so-called wolf-warriors are usually invoked as prime examples of a particular 'pagan' iconography of Norse berserkers or *Ulfheðnar*.⁵⁶ They are rare within the corpus of

⁵⁴ Inga Hägg, "Textilfunde aus dem Hafen von Haithabu: Aspekte und Interpretation," *Offa* 41 (1984): 177–88. Cp. Andreas Alföldi, "Ein spätrömisches Schildzeichen keltischer oder germanischer Herkunft," *Germania* 19 (1935): 324–28.

⁵⁵ Speidel, *Ancient Germanic warriors*, 47–50.

⁵⁶ E.g. Karl Hauck, "Altuppsalas Polytheismus exemplarisch erhellt mit Bildzeugnissen des 5.-7. Jahrhunderts: (Zur Ikonologie der Goldbrakteaten, LIH)," in *Studien zum Altgermanischen: Festschrift für Heinrich Beck*, ed. Heiko Uecker, Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde 11 (Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 1994), 218; Karen Høilund Nielsen, "The Wolf-Warrior: Animal Symbolism on Weaponry of the 6th and 7th centuries," in *Archäologisches Zellwerk: Beiträge zur Kulturgeschichte in Europa und Asien. Festschrift für Helmut Roth zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Ernst Pohl et al., Internationale Archäologie Studia honoraria 16 (Rahden/Westf.: Leidorf, 2001), 471–81; Speidel, *Ancient Germanic warriors*, 13–38; Vincent Samson, *Les Berserkir: Les guerriers-fauves dans la Scandinavie ancienne, de l'âge de Vendel aux Vikings (VIe-XIe siècle)*, Temps, espace et société (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses universitaires du

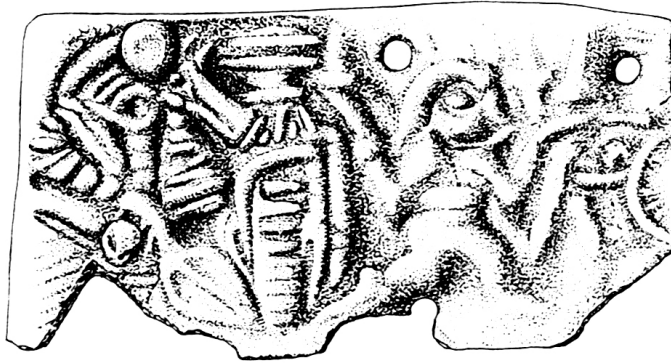


Figure 24: Pressblech from Obrigheim, Germany, seventh century.

images from the fifth and sixth century as they feature on only two *Pressbleche* and one die-plate: the scabbard from Gutenstein (Fig. 27) as well as the *Pressblech* from Obrigheim and the Torslunda die-plate D (Fig. 25);⁵⁷ one further example might be included: the right-hand panel of the Franks Casket shows a seated figure, half animal, half human. While Leslie Webster has explained this figure as “a strange winged creature, half human, half horse”,⁵⁸ Michaela Helmbrecht and Ute Schwab assume that it is half human, half wolf.⁵⁹ Such claims, however, seem rather abstract as the ‘strange figure’ clearly contains aspects of varied animals. Wolf, horse, or bird of prey, the Franks Casket shows explicitly that apparently legendary figures, even half human, half animal, can appear on objects in association with undeniably Christian subjects: here, the Adoration of the Magi.

The main reason why images such as the Gutenstein wolf-warrior are regarded as ‘Germanic-pagan’ is due to presumed links with Norse mythology: first mentioned in the late ninth-century *Haraldskvæði* the berserkers are connected to wolves or even described as wearing wolf skins. Nonetheless, most literary sources regarding the berserker stem from the younger Edda and similar texts of the twelfth through fourteenth centuries.⁶⁰ While images of wolf-like warriors of the sixth and early-seventh centuries may indeed be associated with the ritual thrill of ecstasy imbuing strength and inspiring fear in their enemies, this cannot hide the fact that the written record describing berserkers or *Ulfheðnar* as companions of the ‘pagan’ god Odin are at least two to three hundred years younger than the imagery under discussion. Warriors or soldiers in animal disguise are just as common in (late) Roman army as they are in later Norse literature and not necessarily linked to ‘Germanic’ auxiliary troops as Michael P. Speidel has recently argued in the context of the presumed ‘Germanic’

Septentrion, 2011), 288–318. Cp. Helmbrecht, *Wirkmächtige Kommunikationsmedien*, 146.

⁵⁷ For the Gutenstein scabbard, see: Marion Bertram, “Das Schwert von Gutenstein: Bemerkungen zum Anlass seiner Wiederauffindung,” *Acta praehistorica et archaeologica* 42 (2010): 173–81; Heiko Steuer, “Seit 1945 verschollen, erst jüngst wieder aufgetaucht: Die Schwertscheide von Gutenstein an der oberen Donau,” *Archäologische Nachrichten aus Baden* 76/77 (2008): 74–75.

⁵⁸ Webster, *The Franks Casket*, 28.

⁵⁹ Helmbrecht, *Wirkmächtige Kommunikationsmedien*, 173.

⁶⁰ See Rudolf Simek, *Lexikon der germanischen Mythologie*, 3. Aufl., Kröners Taschenausgabe 368 (Stuttgart: Kröner, 2006), 49–50 and Speidel, *Ancient Germanic warriors*, 74–80.



Figure 25: Die-plate D from Torslunda, Sweden, sixth/seventh century.

soldiers depicted on Trajan's Column.⁶¹ In fact, this comes close to presenting a circular argument: the soldiers on the column are regarded as 'Germanic' due to their "wolf- or bear-hoods",⁶² and the hoods are seemingly 'Germanic' markers as they are worn by 'Germanic' soldiers.

In addition to the combative and 'dancing' figures other 'Germanic' warriors appear as parading figures on the Vendel and Valsgärde helmets and on the recently discovered lyre from Trossingen.⁶³ Two warriors per foil are preserved on the helmet from Valsgärde 7 (Fig. 28) forming a procession of at least nine warriors on each side of the helmet (Fig. 9).⁶⁴ As to the horsemen from Vendel 1 and Valsgärde 8 there are two distinct processions: left to right (Fig. 28a) and right to left (Fig. 28b). A well preserved *Pressblech* (left to right) shows two figures in armour with lances pointing towards the ground held in their right hands; they raise shields in front of their stylised faces and wear helmets with bird-shaped crests. Snakes appear at the end of each lance and a bird of prey seems to hover in front of the first warrior. The reversed version is less well preserved, but several observations can be made: the figures, whose upper part is missing, hold lances, again directed towards the ground. They too have shields centrally attached and traces of a scabbard can be discerned. The most notable detail is the boar crest surviving over the now-missing helmet. As with the horsemen two different groups march towards each other, one with bird-shaped, one with boar crests.

The Valsgärde 7 warriors (Fig. 29) can also be interpreted as parading towards

⁶¹ Speidel, *Ancient Germanic warriors*, 17–21.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 18.

⁶³ Further imagery showing warriors in procession was found within the 'Staffordshire Hoard': Kevin Leahy and Roger Bland, *The Staffordshire Hoard* (London: British Museum Press, 2009), 25. Recently, further fragments were reconstructed as possible helmet foils; cp.: <http://www.staffordshirehoard.org.uk/news/secrets-of-staffordshire-hoard-revealed>, and an article in *The Guardian*: <http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2015/may/26/staffordshire-hoard-warrior-helmet-reconstructed#img-1>.

⁶⁴ See also Torslunda, die-plate C: Axboe, "Copying in Antiquity," 17 fig. 3.

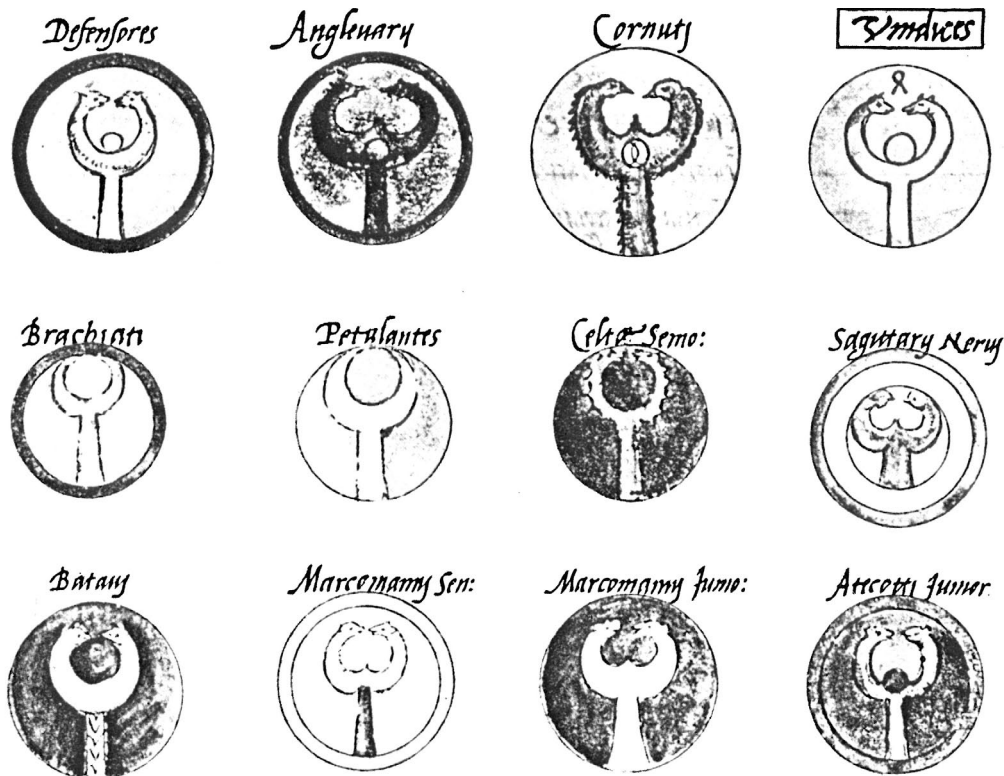


Figure 26: Shield emblems from the *notitia dignitatum*, early-fifth century.

each other as together the *Pressbleche* present them in procession.⁶⁵ The Vendel 14 helmet likewise depicts a procession: five warriors with lances, swords, and helmets with bird-shaped crests seem to advance towards the front of the bearer's head. The opposed procession, however, consists of three *Pressbleche* with two warriors each. Though sporting the same bird-shaped crest the warriors are again characterised as a different party as they hold shields.

Among this corpus of processing warriors the most impressive scheme is that preserved on the lyre from Trossingen recovered in the winter of 2001/2002 (Fig. 30).⁶⁶ This (unique) lyre was found within the furnished male burial no. 58 dated to 580 AD through dendrochronology, amongst other wooden and metal objects such as pieces of furniture and weapons (sword, lance, and shield). The rare preservation of wooden items is due to the soil environment of the Baar region between the Black Forest and Schwäbische Alb of which Oberflacht is one of the most famous find spots for early medieval wooden furniture.⁶⁷ The lyre is about 80 cm long and made of two decorated pieces: the resonating body (Fig. 30b), and the soundboard (Fig. 30a). The

⁶⁵ Arwidsson, *Die Gräberfunde von Valsgärde III*, 21–33, 116–123.

⁶⁶ Barbara Theune-Großkopf, “Die vollständig erhaltene Leier des 6. Jahrhunderts aus Grab 58 von Trossingen, Ldkr. Tuttlingen, Baden-Württemberg: Ein Vorbericht,” *Germania* 81, no. 1 (2006): 93–142; Barbara Theune-Großkopf, *Mit Leier und Schwert: Das frühmittelalterliche „Sängergrab“ von Trossingen* (Friedberg: Likias, 2010).

⁶⁷ Theune-Großkopf, “Grab 58 von Trossingen,” 93–96. For Oberflacht see: Siegwalt Schiek, *Das Gräberfeld der Merowingerzeit bei Oberflacht: (Gemeinde Seitingen-Oberflacht, Lkr. Tuttlingen)*, Forschungen und Berichte zur Vor- und Frühgeschichte in Baden-Württemberg 41/1 (Stuttgart: Theiss, 1992) and Peter Paulsen, *Die Holzfunde aus dem Gräberfeld bei Oberflacht und ihre kulturhistorische Bedeutung*, Forschungen und Berichte zur Vor- und Frühgeschichte in Baden-Württemberg 41/2 (Stuttgart: Theiss, 1992).



Figure 27: Scabbard from Gutenstein, Germany, seventh century.

body bears complex interlacing patterns and animal ornament, while the soundboard is filled with the unique processional scheme placed below a further panel of interlace.

The scheme consists of twelve bearded warriors in armour, six on each side, walking towards a centrally placed lance which is grasped by the warriors at the front. Two pennants hang from the lance breach the upper zone of interlace. Each warrior has two shields and wears an ankle-length garment, indicated by the shaft of the lances held with the point downwards. Though the warriors appear to be alike, each face is individualised. Barbara Theune-Großkopf argues that they have long hair tied with a band, obviating the possibility of helmets,⁶⁸ but this is far from clear. Rather, the unusual height of the warriors' heads may indeed indicate the presence of helmets in addition to the long hair. Another striking detail is the two shields held by each warrior. Theune-Großkopf has assumed that these were intended to indicate readiness for combat, as opposed to the possibility that they were intended to indicate the presence of more than one row of warriors, particularly as they are just two feet per head.⁶⁹ While we cannot be certain why the warriors have two shields given the uniqueness of this particular scheme, it could be argued that readiness for combat is not entirely convincing as the parties march towards each other grasping the lance—seemingly denoting some form of agreement rather than approaching battle.

Though interpreting the procession scene from Trossingen as thoroughly 'Germanic' Theune-Großkopf nevertheless emphasises the influence of late-antique Christian iconography by comparing the procession to imagery on sarcophagi dating to the late-fourth and early-fifth centuries (Fig. 31),⁷⁰ drawing attention to schemes depicting six apostles flanking the central figure of Christ or a cross. This leads her to regard the Trossingen scheme as a 'pagan' reinterpretation of a Christian motif within a 'Germanic' warrior society. Despite the obvious parallels in layout—six figures on

⁶⁸ Theune-Großkopf, "Grab 58 von Trossingen," 117–18; Theune-Großkopf, *Mit Leier und Schwert*, 68.

⁶⁹ Theune-Großkopf, "Grab 58 von Trossingen," 117, 135.

⁷⁰ Theune-Großkopf, "Grab 58 von Trossingen," 135–38; Theune-Großkopf, *Mit Leier und Schwert*, 72–73.

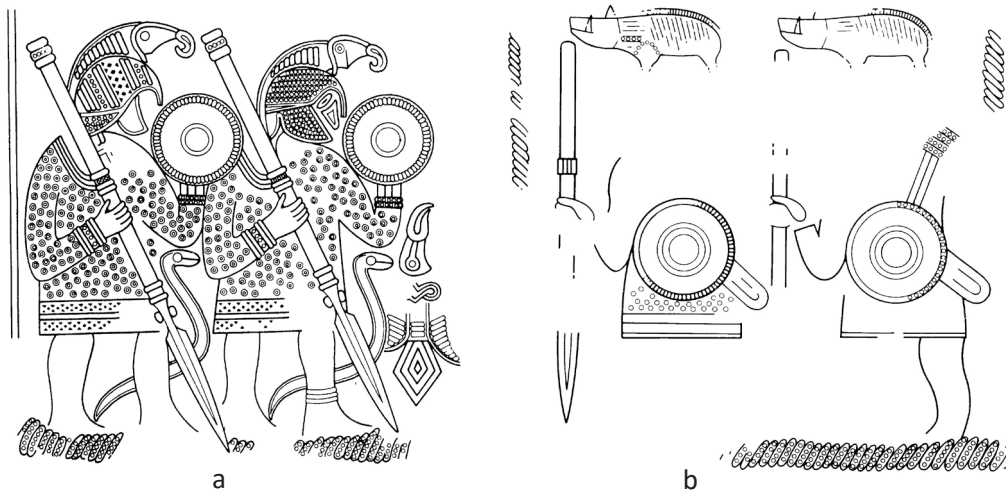


Figure 28: Warriors of the helmet from Valsgärde 7, Sweden, seventh century.

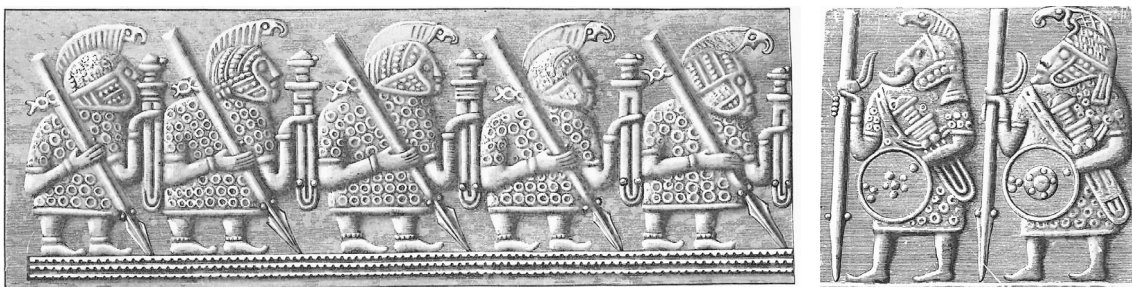


Figure 29: Warriors of the helmet from Vendel 14, Sweden, second half of the sixth and early-seventh century.

each side marching towards a central point—Theune-Großkopf emphasises one detail in particular: the ankle-length garments, which she considers proof that the warriors were inspired by apostles, depicted as *togati*, as ordinary warriors are usually depicted wearing knee-length tunics. This may be so, but such a ‘Germanic’ reinterpretation of Christian imagery substituting warriors for apostles and a lance for Christ is not entirely convincing.

With good cause, Barbara Theune-Großkopf sees the apostles in procession as acclaiming Christ and the cross.⁷¹ But acclamation as such is not limited to the Christian iconography of the apostles acclaiming Christ as preserved on the sarcophagi or the well-known mosaics of the fifth- and sixth-century Orthodox and Arian baptisteries in Ravenna. In fact, all such arrangements were inspired by Roman imperial iconography—in schemes depicting the acclamation of the emperor or other dignitaries. Numerous diptychs and other objects bear witness of the so-called ‘vertical acclamation’ similar to the Trossingen scheme with the object of acclamation being located above the acclaiming figures, usually soldiers or citizens paying tribute to the dignity.⁷² The Probianus diptych (Fig. 32) from *c.* 400 AD, for example, shows Probianus enthroned on each panel above two confronting figures (*togati* and *chlamydati*) pointing up towards him. Further examples are provided by the diptychs of Anastasius dated to the early-

⁷¹ Theune-Großkopf, “Grab 58 von Trossingen,” 135–36.

⁷² Cp. Josef Engemann, *Deutung und Bedeutung frühchristlicher Bildwerke* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1997), 60, 91.

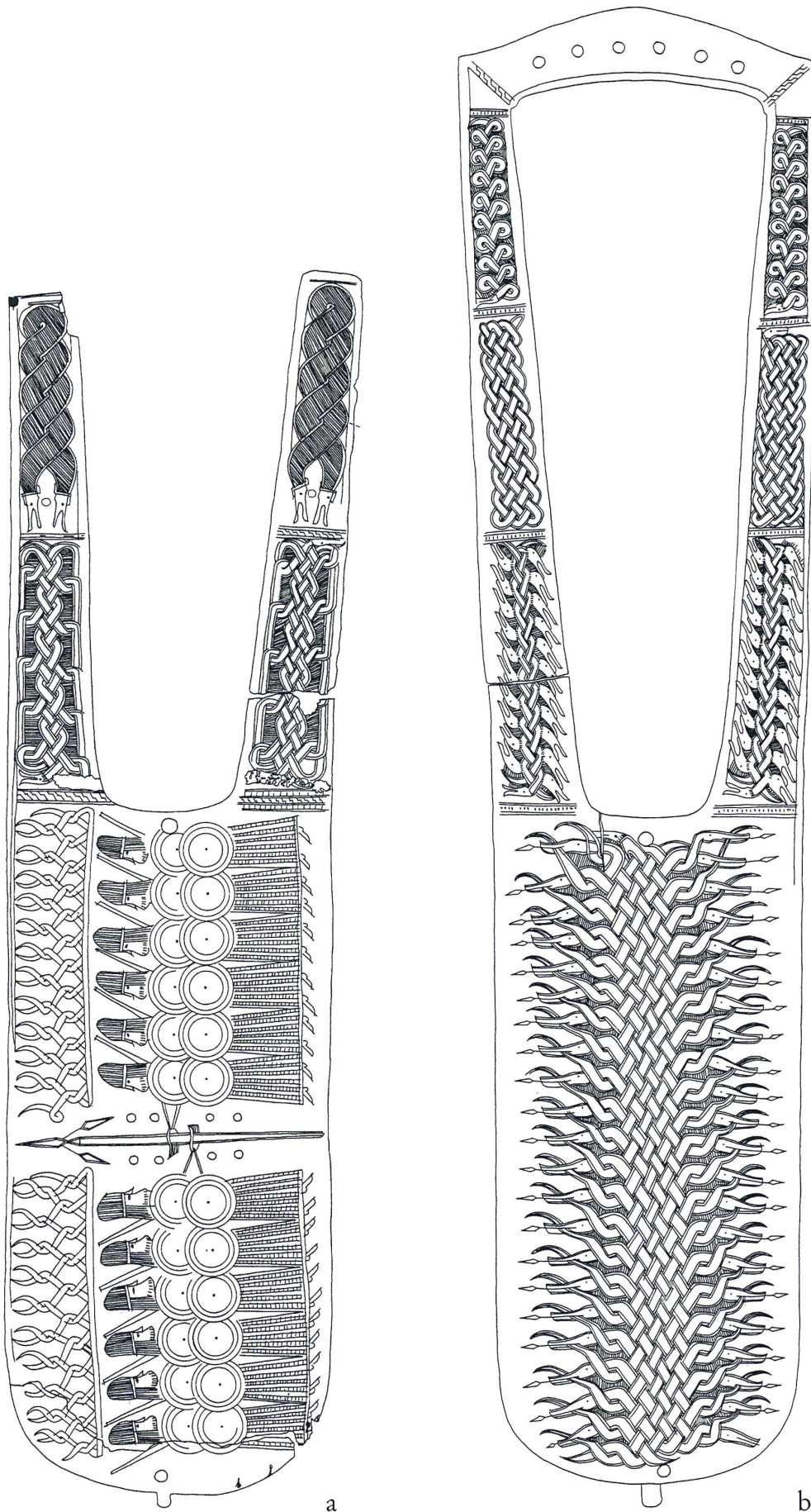


Figure 30: Lyre from Trossingen, Germany, c. 580 AD.

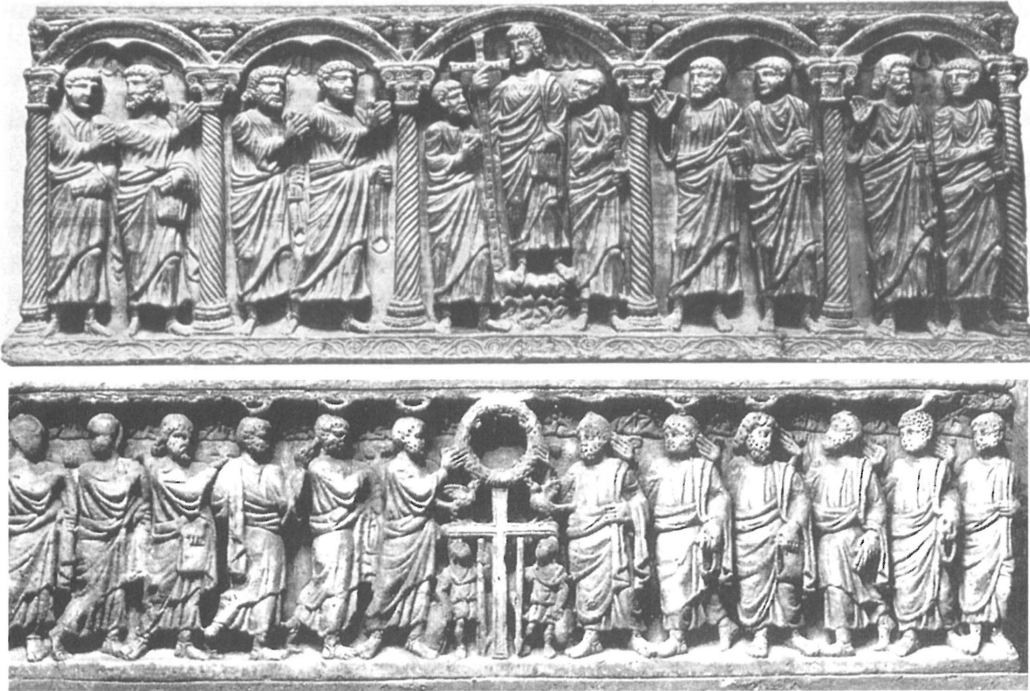


Figure 31: Two late-antique sarcophagi with apostles, late-fourth/early-fifth century (above: Rome; below: Palermo).



Figure 32: The Probianus diptych (Staatsbibliothek, Berlin), c. 400 AD.

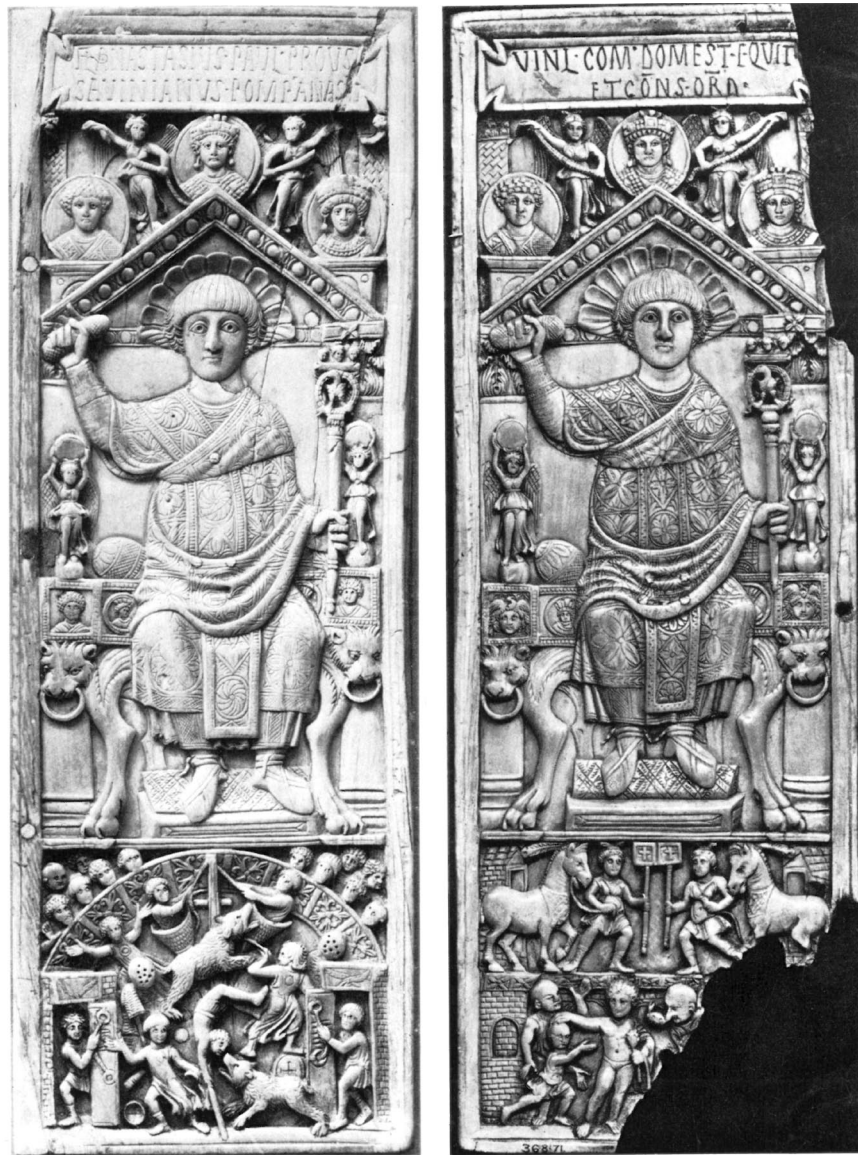


Figure 33: Diptych of Anastasius, (left: Antiquarium, Berlin [lost]; right: Victoria & Albert Museum, London), early-sixth century.



Figure 34: Copper-alloy medallion (Bibliothèque nationale de France), third/fourth century.



Figure 35: Stone carving from Niederdollendorf, Germany (Rheinisches Landesmuseum Bonn), seventh century.

a: front

b: reverse

c: narrow side (left)

sixth century showing two dismounted horsemen with standards immediately beneath the emperor (Fig. 33),⁷³ bearing a striking similarity to the lance depicted on the lyre. The previously mentioned Barberini diptych (Fig. 12) also shows man and beast venerating the mounted emperor. Additionally, a third- or fourth-century copper-alloy medallion shows Roman vexillations from the British legions (fig. 34): five soldiers each in knee-length tunics face each other, with those in the first row holding their standards.⁷⁴ These few examples illustrate that (vertical) acclamation can appear in both religious and imperial contexts. There is thus no need to refer to the lyre imagery as a 'Germanic-pagan' reinterpretation of a Christian precursor.

Rather, I would like to propose that the twelve warriors divided into two groups focussing on the lance are probably better explained as forming a scene of acclamation, but not one in which the lance is acclaimed as a pagan substitute for Christ in the performance of a 'Germanic' vow.⁷⁵ Rather the warriors pay tribute to the man who would have played the lyre as the lance breaching the interlace of the zone above points directly at him. It is a scene of 'secular' acclamation and veneration, a scene of two uniting parties paying tribute to their host.

In closing I would like to address, and briefly introduce discussion of, the well-known seventh-century limestone stele found in a grave at Niederdollendorf near Bonn in North Rhine-Westfalia (this will be considered more fully in Chapter 3). Often regarded as a syncretic object mixing 'pagan' and Christian iconography, the stele is a small object (height: 42.5 cm; width: 22–25 cm; depth: 16–19 cm) decorated in relief carving with two figures—one on the front and one on the back—while the narrow sides are decorated with non-figural ornament including an interlaced serpent (Fig. 35).⁷⁶ The assumed front of the stele is decorated with a male figure holding a sword or scramasax in his left hand and an indeterminate item in his upraised left, possibly a comb. Another item, a flask or canteen, is located by his legs. A double-headed serpent enlaces above his head, while another serpent's head appears between the flask and the handle of the scramasax. This figure is often identified as a Frankish warrior, either 'pagan', half-'pagan' or half-Christian.⁷⁷ On the reverse is a male (?) figure with a lance in his right hand; the hair protrudes like small rays and a circular ornament decorates the chest. The figure stands on an interlaced feature and the background is filled with rectangular lines. Since Kurt Böhner's article from the late 1940s this figure

⁷³ Cp. Paul Williamson, *Medieval ivory carvings: early Christian to Romanesque* (London: V&A Publishing, 2010), 43–45; Wolfgang Fritz Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten der Spätantike und des frühen Mittelalters*, 3., völlig neu bearb. Aufl., Kataloge vor- und frühgeschichtlicher Altertümer 7 (Mainz: von Zabern, 1976), 35–37, pls 8–9.

⁷⁴ M. C. Bishop and J. C. Coulston, *Roman military equipment: from the Punic Wars to the fall of Rome*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxbow, 2006), 310. See also *Das Königreich der Vandalen: Erben des Imperiums in Nordafrika* (Mainz: von Zabern, 2009), 56; Reinhold Kaiser, "War der Ring des Graifarius der Siegelring des *Vaeferius dux Francorum?*," in Keller, *Iconologia sacra*, 272 (fn. 81).

⁷⁵ Theune-Großkopf, "Grab 58 von Trossingen," 134–35.

⁷⁶ Cordula Krause, "Der fränkische Grabstein von Niederdollendorf," in Engemann and Rüger, *Spätantike und frühes Mittelalter*, 140.

⁷⁷ Cp. *inter alia* Clara Redlich, "Der Bildstein von Niederdollendorf," *Die Kunde N.F.* 25 (1974): 157; Helmut Roth, *Kunst der Völkerwanderungszeit*, Propyläen Kunstgeschichte. Supplementband 4 (Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Wien: Propyläen-Verlag, 1979), 279; Roth, *Kunst und Handwerk*, 92.

is commonly identified as Christ (see further Chapter 3),⁷⁸ but here it is the ‘pagan’ or Christian interpretation of the figure on the front that is of interest.

Three different explanations of this figure have been presented in the scholarship: it is a ‘pagan’ warrior;⁷⁹ a Christian warrior;⁸⁰ or a semi-pagan, semi-Christian figure presumed to be common amongst recently evangelised ‘Germanic’ peoples. The first interpretation depends largely on the depicted grave goods, comb and serpents understood to be ‘pagan’ symbols. This was especially the case with the comb after Kurt Böhner discussed the Niederdollendorf figure in the light of Merovingian-Frankish vigour or animal spirits (*Lebenskraft*) symbolised by the long hair of Frankish kings.⁸¹ Unfortunately, most scholars fail to recognise that Frankish kings were Christian following the conversion of Clovis in 496/7. Furthermore, there are reasons to doubt that all Frankish men or warriors had long hair; but even if they did, it is notable that the Niederdollendorf figure is apparently bald. The second explanation depends on the assumption that Christ is figured on the reverse, and the flask, identified as a ‘pilgrim flask’, proves the figure’s commitment to Christianity. The existence of such ‘pilgrim flasks’ is well-known—witness the Monza *ampullae*, for example—but it has been argued that not every *ampullae* has an unambiguously Christian context.⁸²

The third, syncretic, interpretation combines the first two explanations, and so is informed by the weakness of both. All three are based on vague assumptions as there are no explicit signs or symbols of either Christianity or ‘pagan’ religion. Indeed, it is not clear that the imagery on the Niederdollendorf stele was intended, primarily, to reference religious concerns. It may be that the religion of the depicted figure was well-known to his contemporaries, but it was not deemed necessary to depict symbols alluding to it—leaving the identity of the figure and the motives inspiring his depiction unresolved.

⁷⁸ Kurt Böhner, “Der fränkische Grabstein von Niederdollendorf am Rhein,” *Germania* 28 (1944/1950): 63–75.

⁷⁹ Lutz von Padberg, *Die Christianisierung Europas im Mittelalter*, Reclams Universal-Bibliothek 18641 (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2009), 64–65, refers to the figure as „heidnischer Toter“.

⁸⁰ E.g. Roth, *Kunst der Völkerwanderungszeit*, 279.

⁸¹ Böhner, “Grabstein von Niederdollendorf,” 67–78; Cordula Krause, “Der fränkische Grabstein von Niederdollendorf,” in Engemann and Rieger, *Spätantike und frühes Mittelalter*, 146.

⁸² Cp. *ibid.*, 147 for further discussion.

2.3 Man and Beast

The purpose of this section is to review figural images showing men beside or between 'beasts'. Men fighting, struggling, or taming wild animals are rare in the corpus of sixth- and seventh-century figural imagery (Fig. 36). Again, they appear on the Vendel⁸³ and Valsgärde⁸⁴ helmets, on the Toroslunda die-plates A and B, as well as on the purse lid from Sutton Hoo. Yet, other items need to be added: such as the *phalerae* from a chambered grave in Eschwege in northern Hesse, Germany (Fig. 37), dating from the first half of the seventh century.⁸⁵ Generally, *phalerae* were used as decorative discs fixed at the chests of horses, usually comprising three pieces (cp. the Barberini diptych, Fig. 12). Here, two small discs show a man between two beasts, most likely bears, whereas the larger disc depicts a female figure flanked by lions commonly thought to show an oriental 'pagan' deity (usually the Persian goddess *Anahita/Artemis* or *potnia theron*).⁸⁶ Recently, Magarete Klein-Pfeuffer claimed that all three discs depict Christ between animals, failing to provide verifiable evidence supporting her hypothesis.⁸⁷

Lately, a comprehensive study by Egon Wamers has addressed the motif.⁸⁸ Building on his work, it will be suggested here that the scheme is neither 'pagan' nor Christian in itself, but rather a 'traditional' appeal to older Roman motifs.⁸⁹ Generally, there are two distinct iconographic versions of the motif: a man flanked (and threatened) by two creatures (Toroslunda A, Sutton Hoo, Eschwege, Valsgärde 7), and a man with a single animal on a chain (Toroslunda B, Vendel 1, possibly Vendel 11). Wamers has argued convincingly that the first—the man between two beasts—may have been influenced by the death struggle of convicts in the arena, the so-called *damnatio ad bestias* (cp. Fig. 38c).

Less convincing is his explanation that the Colosseum in Rome functioned as a prototype of Valhalla—based on the many gates and portals both in the Colosseum and the hall of the slain—as many 'Germanic' captives of Rome's wars suffered the *damnatio ad bestias* in this arena.⁹⁰ Given the absence of such architectural features from the schemes in question this is, at the very least, debateable. Beyond that, Wamers argues that the second motif—a single man with a single 'beast'—is informed by late-antique imagery showing gladiators in the arena fighting with chained up bears

⁸³ Vendel, Graves 1 and 11: Stolpe, *Graffältet vid Vendel*, 10–18, pl. V; Arwidsson, *Die Gräberfunde von Valsgärde III*, 111 Abb. 148.

⁸⁴ Valsgärde, Grave 7: Arwidsson, *Die Gräberfunde von Valsgärde III*, 120.

⁸⁵ Böhner, "Silberphaleren aus Eschwege," 681–743.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 686–95; Klaus Sippel, "Niederhone," *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde* 21 (2002): 163; Egon Wamers, "Von Bären und Männern: Berserker, Bärenkämpfer und Bärenführer im frühen Mittelalter," *Zeitschrift für Archäologie des Mittelalters* 37 (2009): 31.

⁸⁷ Margarete Klein-Pfeuffer, "Zur Deutung der Pressblechscheiben von Eschwege-Niederhone Gr. 17," in Heizmann and Oehrl, *Bilddenkmäler zur germanischen Götter- und Heldensage*, 282–83.

⁸⁸ Wamers, "Von Bären und Männern," 1–46, esp. 25–42.

⁸⁹ Cp. for example: Arwidsson, *Die Gräberfunde von Valsgärde III*, 120–23; Roth, *Kunst der Völkerwanderungszeit*, 262–63 (B. Arrhenius); Bruce-Mitford, *Sutton Hoo ship-burial 2*: 512–14; Böhner, "Silberphaleren aus Eschwege," 702–5; Wamers, "Von Bären und Männern," 27–32.

⁹⁰ Wamers, "Von Bären und Männern," 40–42.



a



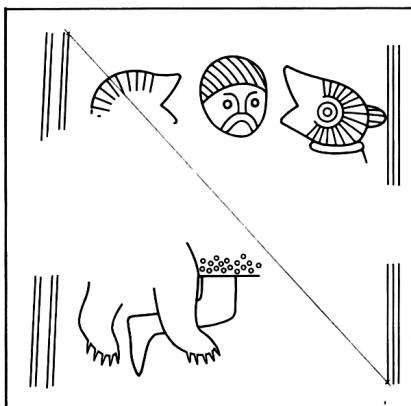
b



c



d



e



f



g

Figure 36: 'Man-and-Beast' images addressed in this study.

a: Torslunda, die-plate A, Sweden, sixth/seventh century

b: Torslunda, die-plate B, Sweden, sixth/seventh century

c: Sutton Hoo, Mound 1, United Kingdom, early-seventh century

d: Niederrohne (Eschwege), Germany (detail of one *phalera*), first half of the seventh century

e: Valsgärde 7, Sweden, seventh century

f: Vendel 1, Sweden, early-seventh century

g: Vendel 11, Sweden, second half of the sixth and early-seventh century



Figure 37: *Phalerae* from Niederhone (Eschwege), Germany, first half of the seventh century.

(*venationes*, Fig. 38a–b). In support of this he pointed out that the ‘tamer’ from Vendel 1 holds a staff in his right hand (*Akrobatenstäbe*) related to similar equipment depicted on late-antique diptychs which were used to leap over attacking bears (cp. Figs 36f, 38d).⁹¹

This is of particular interest if we consider the iconographic context in which the Vendel 1 ‘tamer’ appears (Fig. 39): two ‘parties’ of riders (boar and bird crests) seem to move towards the front of the helmet—which features two scenes of man and beast above the sweeping eyebrows. Thus, both schemes of figural imagery on this helmet are informed by late-antique ‘Roman’ iconographies: the riders inspired by that of the victorious emperor and the mounted soldiers on grave slabs; and the man-and-beast influenced by high-status images showing *venationes* or *damnationes*. The arrangement of these images on the helmet endorses this explanation: the riders encircling the helmet can be regarded as forming a scene of acclamation, as can the men and beasts: on consular diptychs, *venationes* are used to enhance and pay tribute to the host and sponsor of the games, the enthroned consul commonly surmounting these scenes.⁹² The craftsmen of the helmet thus drew on old and ‘traditional’ imagery of imperial and high-status frames of reference—in doing so they created a new, yet ‘traditional’ imagery alluding to the prestige and character of the person wearing the helmet.

Similar ideas seem to be evoked by the Eschwege *phalerae* (Fig. 37), but do so in a quite different way: the central motif showing the *potnia theron* is unique in extant early

⁹¹ Ibid., 33–40.

⁹² See for example: Williamson, *Medieval ivory carvings*, 42–53; Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten*, pls 4–5, 7–11.



a



b



c



d

Figure 38: Bears in Roman arenas, after Wamers.

a: mosaic, Tripolis, *c.* 200 AD

b: terra sigillata (fragment), unknown provenance, *c.* fourth century

c: terra sigillata, north-African, *c.* fourth/fifth century

d: diptych of Areobindus (detail), 506 AD

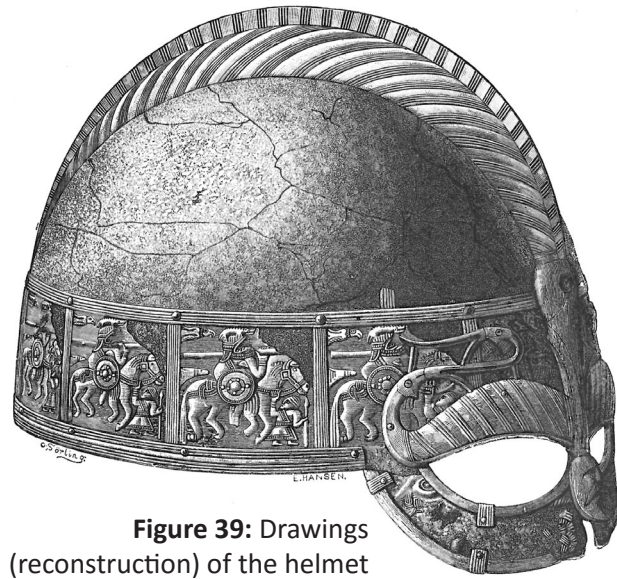


Figure 39: Drawings (reconstruction) of the helmet from Vendel 1, Sweden, early-seventh century.

medieval European imagery, but nonetheless seems to draw on earlier visual traditions, which, in this instance, emerge from rather distant origins. It is, however, flanked by the more common motif of the man between two beasts. Again, the craftsman seems to allude to 'traditional' visual vocabularies with powerful agency: that of an ancient goddess and the struggle with wild animals. In Eschwege, these subjects were removed from their original contexts and transferred to something 'new', still resonating with their original frames of reference while being used in a completely different context: as prestigious horse gear, in a furnished grave.

In closing, I would like to address the occasionally invoked view that the man-between-beasts motif is a 'Germanic' reframing of Daniel in the Lion's Den, substituting the 'unfamiliar' lions with bears more familiar to the 'Germanic' peoples north of the Alps.⁹³ This view is primarily based on buckles featuring Daniel flanked by two lions 'licking' his feet.⁹⁴ In clear contrast to these buckles, none of the images under scrutiny here (Figs 36–37) emerged from a distinct Christian context, all lack symbols or inscriptions alluding to Christianity, and none show the beasts 'venerating' the man; rather they appear threaten him. Of course, this does not exclude a Christian reading, but neither does it substantiate or enhances it. Thus, interpreting the motif as a 'Germanic' ('pagan'), rendition of Daniel in the Lion's Den remains speculative, based upon vague assumptions regarding the 'Germanicness' of this particular iconography. If anything, the Christian, semi-pagan/semi-Germanic interpretation

⁹³ E.g. Böhner, "Silberphalaren aus Eschwege," 697, 727; Sippel, "Niederhone," 163. Cp. Egon Wamers, "Löwe und Löwendarstellungen: § 1. Archäologisches," *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde* 18 (2001): 558 and Wamers, "Von Bären und Männern," 31.

⁹⁴ Amongst others: Herbert Kühn, "Die Danielschnallen der Völkerwanderungszeit," *IPEK, Jahrbuch für prähistorische und ethnographische Kunst* 15/16 (1941/42): 140–69; Joachim Werner, "Zu den Knochenschnallen und Reliquiarschnallen des 6. Jahrhunderts," in *Die Ausgrabungen in St. Ulrich und Afra in Augsburg, 1961–1968*, ed. Joachim Werner, *Münchner Beiträge zur Vor- und Frühgeschichte* 23 (München: Beck, 1977), 275–351. Cp. Max Martin and Chr. Jörg, "Danielschnallen," *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde* 5 (1984): 244–46.

suffers from the same methodological deficiencies as the ‘purely’ pagan explanation: both are based on the absence of Christian iconographies or signifiers. Furthermore, they assume a religious purpose, one applicable to Christian and/or non-Christian frames of reference, rather than alluding to secular concerns, such as social prestige.

2.4 Roma enthroned

With this in mind it is useful to turn to consideration of the small number of images showing the personification of invincible Rome (Fig. 40): ‘Invicta Roma’. Again, this imagery is found in furnished graves in southern and western Germany, as well as occasionally in France. But in contrast to most of the imagery addressed here, the ‘Roma Invicta’ scheme is—at least in those cases we know of—exclusively found in female burials of the second half of the seventh century, used as disc brooches.⁹⁵ However, few previous studies have focussed on this particular group of artefacts, stressing instead the iconographic resemblances to Roman coinage and medallions.⁹⁶

Though differing in detail many brooches are closely related in terms of iconography. One of the best preserved pieces was found in Wiesbaden-Dotzheim, Hesse (Fig. 40c), unfortunately without any documented archaeological context.⁹⁷ Here, an enthroned figure wearing an ‘unusual’ headdress holds a staff in the left hand, while the outstretched right hand holds a small figure. The headdress is possibly a simplified version of a helmet or diadem, while the small figure can be understood as *Victoria* on the globe, as depicted on late-antique medallions (Fig. 40h–j). Framing this scene is a barely legible inscription, which can nevertheless be read as INVICTA ROMA/UTERE FELIX (Invincible Rome, use/wear it with luck/fortune)—on other brooches (Fig. 40d–e) the inscription is even less legible, and greatly simplified. On Roman coinage, the phrase *invicta Roma* is usually followed by the attribution *aeterna*.⁹⁸

This particular imagery has not received much attention, yet there are views proposed in the scholarship that need to be addressed: both Margarete Klein-Pfeuffer and Barbara Sasse favour a Christian reading, though differing in their identification of the enthroned figure. While Klein-Pfeuffer identifies Roma as the Virgin enthroned and *Victoria* on the globe as the Christ Child,⁹⁹ Sasse, rejecting this view, regards the seated figure as Christ identified by the ‘x’ of the encircling inscription on the

⁹⁵ Concerning the chronology—phase 7 (c. 650/60–700 AD)—see Friedrich, *Archäologische Chronologie und historische Interpretation*, 140–41.

⁹⁶ E.g. Gustav Behrens, “Merowingische Pressblech-Scheibenfibeln,” *Mainzer Zeitschrift* 39/40 (1944/45): 17; Roth, *Kunst und Handwerk*, 272 (no. 39d); Klein-Pfeuffer, *Merowingerzeitliche Fibeln und Anhänger*, 198–201; Barbara Sasse, *Ein frühmittelalterliches Reibengräberfeld bei Eichstetten am Kaiserstuhl*, *Forschungen und Berichte zur Vor- und Frühgeschichte in Baden-Württemberg* 75 (Stuttgart: Theiss, 2001), 53–56.

⁹⁷ Cp. Klein-Pfeuffer, *Merowingerzeitliche Fibeln und Anhänger*, 466 (no. 330).

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 199.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 201. Based on Günther Haseloff, *Kunststile des frühen Mittelalters: Völkerwanderungs- und Merowingerzeit; dargestellt an Funden des Württembergischen Landesmuseums Stuttgart* (Stuttgart: Württembergisches Landesmuseum, 1979), 93.

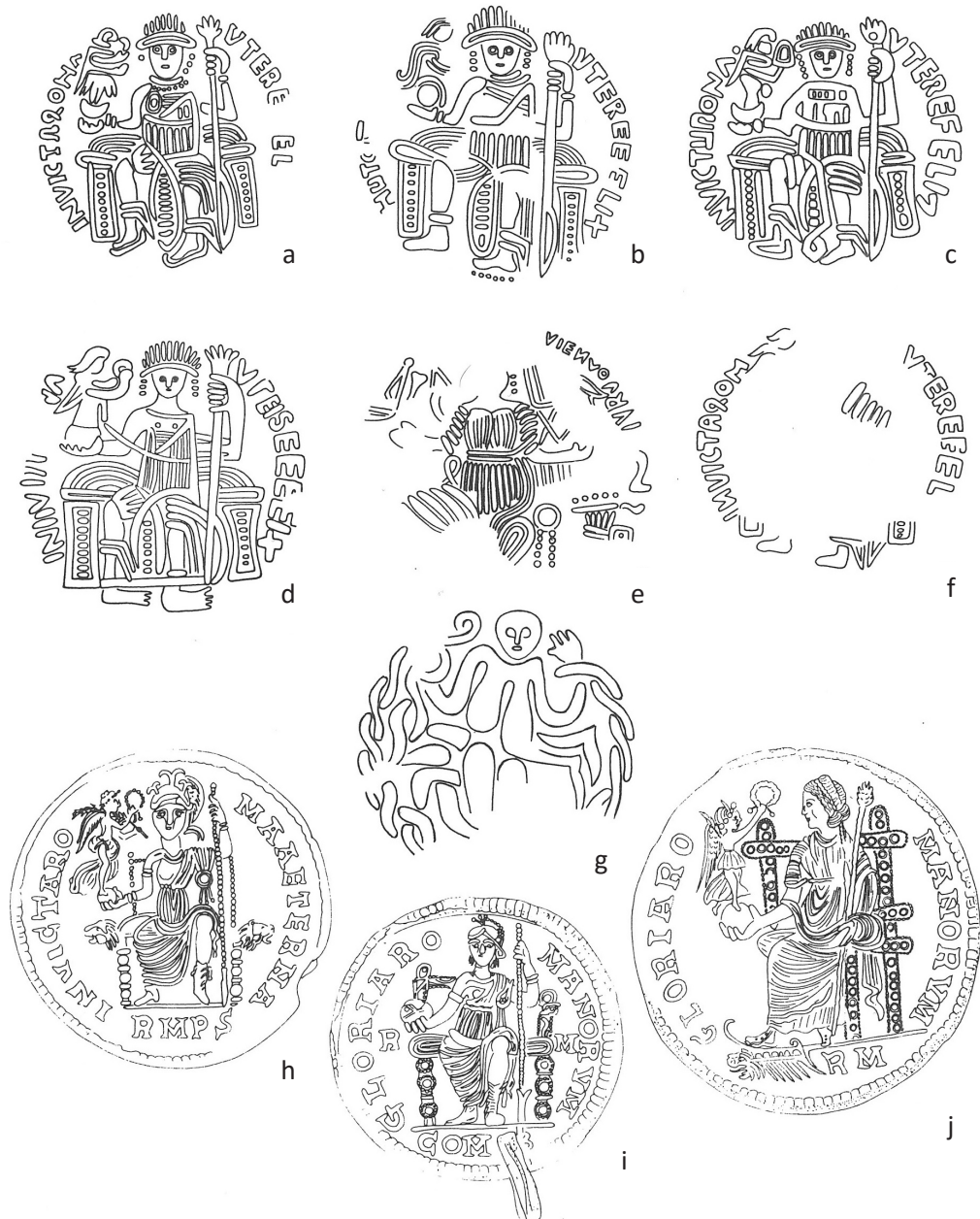


Figure 40: Roma enthroned – disc brooches from Germany (a–g, second half of the seventh century) and Roman coinage (h–j).

- a: Andernach
- b: Stuttgart-Feuerbach
- c: Wiesbaden-Dotzheim
- d: Eichstetten
- e: Kirchheim/Neckar
- f: Waiblingen
- g: Ditzingen
- h: medallion of Priscus Attalus, 409–10 AD
- i: medallion (mint: Rome), c. 395–423 AD
- j: medallion of Constantius II, 350–61 AD

Eichstetten brooch (Fig. 40d).¹⁰⁰ As will be discussed further in Chapter 3 such symbols are ambiguous at the very least. Here it is relevant to note that the ‘x’ of FELIX on the brooch can neither be invoked to identify all the enthroned figures, nor can it be interpreted as the Chi of Christos; it is an alphabetic character, not a cross.

Regardless of such considerations, the burial context from which the ‘Roma’ brooches emerge, suggests another explanation. At Eichstetten, Graves 81 and 190 contain only a few grave goods other than the brooches: Grave 190 is fitted out with an unpretentious buckle and two small iron rings, probably used as pendants or appliquéés; the 40- to 45-year-old female buried in Grave 81, was further accompanied by a necklace made of 42 beads, a bronze needle, and, most notably, a small disc made of bone alongside a late second-century Roman coin used as pendants or appliquéés immediately below the brooch (maybe even attached to it).¹⁰¹

From the last decades of the sixth century single disc brooches were commonly used as fasteners for cloaks, with the brooch ostentatiously placed at the centre of the chest.¹⁰² In Eichstetten Grave 81, the dead woman wore a brooch decorated with a ‘traditional’ motif—invincible Rome—combined with an ancient coin. Whether the people in Eichstetten were aware of the iconography of Roma enthroned is perhaps unverifiable, although the largely illegible ‘inscriptions’ of some of the brooches suggest that they were not. What does seem to have mattered was the fact that they deemed it appropriate to adorn their dead with objects featuring ancient imagery and old items, such as coins. In doing this, they invoked a new, but yet old ‘tradition’. This effective and effecting agency embedded within the artefacts themselves perhaps did matter to a greater extent than a ‘pagan’ or Christian notion based on a faithful reproduction of the iconography of Roma enthroned, and was in part, perhaps, associated with their social, secular, status.

¹⁰⁰ Sasse, *Eichstetten*, 55; Heiko Steuer, “Thron,” *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde* 35 (2007): 141.

¹⁰¹ Cp. Sasse, *Eichstetten*, 177–78, 207; pls 29, 80.

¹⁰² In general: Max Martin, “Tradition und Wandel der fibelgeschmückten frühmittelalterlichen Frauenkleidung,” *Jahrbuch des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums Mainz* 38 (1991): 629–80.

CHAPTER 3:

Christian Figural Imagery of Central and North-West Europe c. 550–700 AD

Before turning to consider the Christian iconography of the early medieval art in north-west and central Europe it is important to review the general methodological issues regarding the potential means of identifying the Christian frames of reference in the material. In this respect the approach of Sebastian Ristow, who has developed a classification regarding the means of identifying ‘Christianity’ in late-antique art, is useful. Distinguishing between three categories his approach enables the evaluation of the likelihood of a certain work having been made or used in a Christian context:¹

1. Positively identifiable as Christian:

- a. Imagery with identifiable biblical, theological or ecclesiastical backgrounds
- b. Unambiguous Christian symbols (e.g. Christograms, ambivalent animal or human figures with unambiguous explanations)
- c. Inscriptions with Christian frames of references (e.g. naming God, Christ, martyrs, saints, Christian/ecclesiastical offices or tasks)

2. Potentially identifiable as Christian:

- d. Imagery with ambiguous motifs that can be interpreted as Christian depending on the context (e.g. fish or shepherd appearing several times with further evidence of a Christian context)
- e. Seemingly Christian symbols, which can appear in other contexts (e.g. radial stars as Christogram, or combinations of cruciform and fish-shaped motifs)
- f. Inscriptions, which were used by Christians, but also by other religions (e.g. *in pace, vivas*)

3. Findings, which can be interpreted as Christian by modern scholarship, but could also be used otherwise in their contemporary context:

- g. Imagery in traditional antique iconography without Christian symbols or inscriptions (e.g. miracle workers, faces/masks, riders with lances, doves with olive branches, or animals flanking a *cantharus*)
- h. Single symbols of ambiguous or ornamental background (e.g. equal-armed crosses without any further information, animal-style ornaments)

Most of these categories apply in the period of late Antiquity, a period of various religions (e.g. Roman ‘paganism’, Judaism, Christianity, Mithraic mysteries) and with

¹ The following listing is a loose translation from Sebastian Ristow, “Christliches im archäologischen Befund: Terminologie, Erkennbarkeit, Diskussionswürdigkeit,” in *Wechsel der Religionen – Religion des Wechsels: Tagungsbeiträge der Arbeitsgemeinschaft Spätantike und Frühmittelalter: 5. Religion im archäologischen Befund (Nürnberg, 27.-28. Mai 2010)*, ed. Niklot Krohn, Studien zu Spätantike und Frühmittelalter 4 (Hamburg: Kovač, 2012), 21–22.



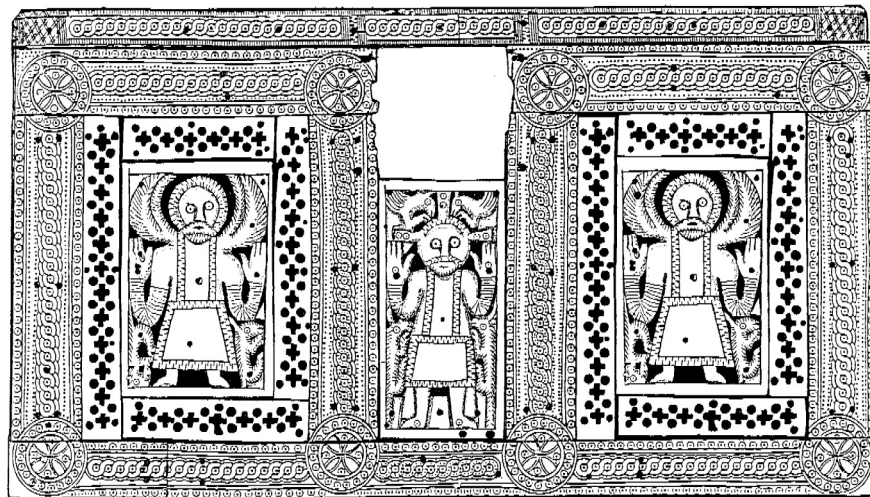
Figure 41: Casket from Essen-Werden, Germany, seventh or eighth century.

a large corpus of ‘secular’ art objects (consular diptychs, vessels of precious metal, frescoes and mosaics in villas). However, in the (later) early Middle Ages some of the critical aspects regarding an unquestionable Christian interpretation of art and artefacts matter to a lesser degree as Christianity was possibly the only religion in western Europe to produce specific artwork for ecclesiastical and secular purposes. Yet, some doubts still remain, especially regarding images beyond ecclesiastical contexts. Furthermore, Ristow’s approach makes allowances for primarily ‘either/or’ explanations; it does not take account of situations where greater complexity might have operated, and indeed where ambiguity may have been deliberately intended in a ‘both-and’ possibility. This is particularly applicable to works of the later sixth and seventh centuries that will be addressed here.

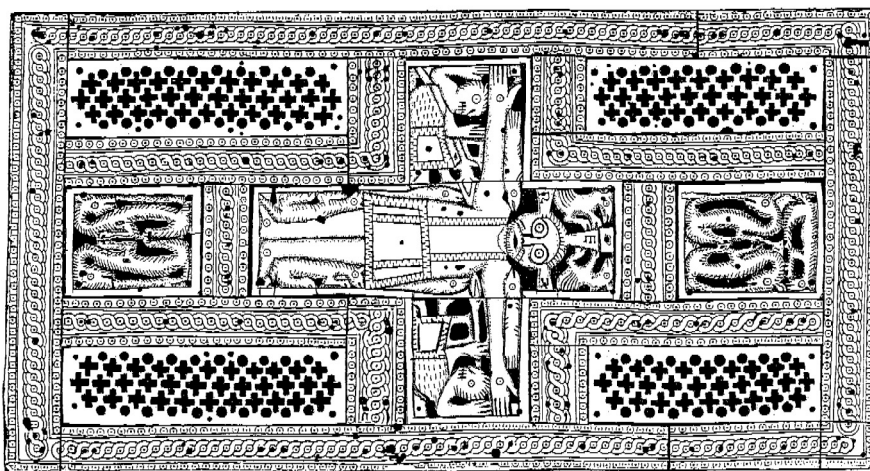
3.1 Images of Christ

Indeed, in the early Christian art of north-west Europe it is often the case, perhaps not surprisingly, that portrait-type images of Christ are not clearly identifiable as such. In contrast to other (narrative) images, such as the Adoration of the Magi or Daniel in the Lion’s Den, this lack of clear identification may be a result of the fact that Christ is often shown in isolation, and without specific and established identifiers, usually a cruciferous halo, an aureole, or a mandorla, it is not easy to identify the image as depicting Christ.² It is, however, possible to suggest that certain depictions of a single male figure surviving from the slightly later period of the seventh- and eighth-centuries

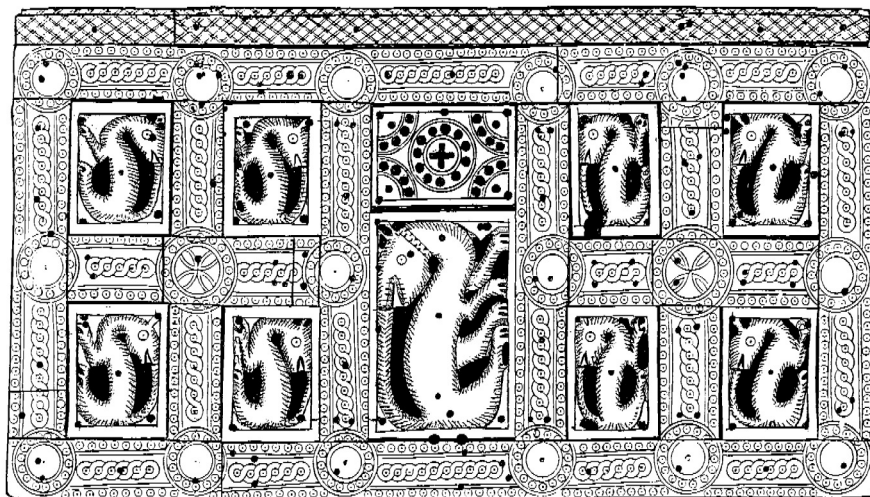
² Cp. Johannes Kollwitz, “Christus, Christusbild I.,” *Lexikon der Christlichen Ikonographie* 1 (1968): 355–71 and Rainer Warland, “Nimbus,” *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* 25 (2013): 924–34. For the portraits see Rainer Warland, *Das Brustbild Christi: Studien zur spätantiken und frühbyzantinischen Bildgeschichte*, *Römische Quartalschrift für christliche Altertumskunde und Kirchengeschichte Supplementheft* 41 (Rome: Herder, 1986).



a



b



c

Figure 42: Casket from Essen-Werden, Germany, seventh or eighth century: drawing after the reconstruction from H. Staudé 1982 (a: front - b: cover - c: back).



Figure 43: „Genoels-Elderen“ ivories (book covers, Musée royaux d’art et d’histoire, Brussels), eighth century.

in north-west Europe do depict the Son of God.

To illustrate this, to set the earlier material in context, it is worth turning to consider some of the later images clearly depicting Christ exemplified by several works from central and north-west Europe, in particular the ivories from Essen-Werden and Genoels-Elderen as well as the Lorsch book covers and the miniatures preserved in the Durham Cassiodorus, before examining in detail the Niederdollendorf figure shown on the reverse of the stele (cp. Fig. 35)—which, as noted, is interpreted as a ‘Germanic’ embodiment of Christ—and, more briefly, the ambiguous faces and masks also presumed to portray Christ (such as the disc from Limons).

Looking first at the seventh- and eighth-century material, the reliquary casket from Essen-Werden, North Rhine-Westphalia presents two images of Christ (Fig. 41). The scholarship disagrees about the chronology of the casket, proposing dates between the seventh and eleventh centuries. Most recently Mechthild Schulze-Dörrlamm has suggested a specific date of the (late) eight century, objecting to opinions that consider the casket to be a Merovingian piece of seventh-century date;³ most generally, however, it is accepted as dating between the late-seventh and eighth centuries. Following the reconstruction of Hilmar Staude (Fig. 42), the front panel is decorated with three figures

³ Mechthild Schulze-Dörrlamm, “Der rekonstruierte Beinkasten von Essen-Werden: Reliquiar und mutmaßlicher Tragaltar des hl. Liudger aus dem späten 8. Jahrhundert,” *Jahrbuch des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums Mainz* 49 (2002): 350.

in the orans posture flanked by animals.⁴ The figures on the left and right are winged and therefore can be regarded as angels; the head of that in the middle is surrounded by three arms of a cross and so can be securely identified as Christ (Fig. 42a). The lid shows the crucifixion featuring Christ, his arms outstretched and the letters REX set in the three arms of cross surrounding his head (Fig. 42b); circles are set in the hands and feet, indicating the nails—and possibly the wounds. Two awkwardly posed figures with upraised arms set horizontally below Christ's arms, one bearing a spear and the other a shaft, their points positioned by his torso, can be identified as Longinus and Stephaton, the spear- and sponge-bearers.⁵ Overall, there is no doubt that these figures can be accepted as depicting Christ in different aspects.

Equally clear is the identity of the figure surviving on the front of the later, eighth-century Genoels-Elderen ivory (Fig. 43).⁶ Like the Essen-Werden casket the exact date of the diptych has been subject to considerable debate—generally based on opinions concerning its provenance: Francia or Anglo-Saxon Northumbria—opinions determined stylistically. Carol Neuman de Vegvar has thus suggested Bavaria as the place of manufacture;⁷ Leslie Webster, on the other hand has argued for a Northumbrian provenance.⁸ Regardless of the exact place of production in central or north-west Europe, the ivory panel shows Christ (identified by a cruciferous halo, the staff cross held over his shoulder and the surrounding inscription) flanked by angels and standing on a lion and a snake above two other creatures. It thus illustrates Christ in Triumph.

Consisting of these elements the image exists within a long-established iconography which can be seen in the mosaic from the c. 500 AD episcopal chapel in Ravenna (Fig. 44b), which shows Christ dressed as an emperor in military garb standing on the lion and the snake holding a book and the cross-staff over his shoulder. The cross-staff is also included in the mid fifth-century mosaic of Christ the Good Shepherd in the so-called Mausoleum of Galla Placidia in Ravenna (Fig. 44a).⁹ In each instance the cross-staff is understood to denote the resurrection into eternal life made possible through the sacrifice of the Crucifixion. A scheme with a similar frame of reference can also be found on the Ruthwell Cross, Dumfriesshire, Scotland, dated to the mid-eighth century, although here Christ, standing over two beasts, does not hold the staff-cross of the resurrection.¹⁰ In the slightly earlier Durham Cassiodorus,

⁴ Cp. *ibid.*, 289–92.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 331.

⁶ The back panel of the Genoels-Elderen diptych shows the Annunciation to the Virgin and the Visitation. Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten*, 129–30; cp. Roth, *Kunst der Völkervanderungszeit*, 219.

⁷ Carol L. Neuman de Vegvar, “The Origin of the Genoels-Elderen Ivories,” *Gesta* 29, no. 1 (1990): 8–24.

⁸ Webster, *Anglo-Saxon art*, 167–68; cp. Jacqueline Lafontaine-Dosogne, “Two panels from a book cover,” in *The Making of England: Anglo-Saxon art and culture AD 600-900*, ed. Leslie Webster and Janet Backhouse (London: British Museum Press, 1991), 180. A similar piece is the Carolingian-period ivory from Meaux, France (today in Oxford, Bodleian Library): Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten*, 131, pl. 103.

⁹ Clementina Rizzardi and Patrizia Angiolini Martinelli, *Il mausoleo di Galla Placidia a Ravenna*, *Mirabilia Italiae* 4 (Modena: F.C. Panini, 1996), 50, 158–160.

¹⁰ See Jane Hawkes, “Ruthwell Cross: § 1. Cross,” *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde* 25 (2003):

the Old Testament figure David stands over a double-headed serpent holding a lance (Fig. 45a). Although depicting David, it has long been accepted that the iconography has been adapted to reference, simultaneously, Christ triumphant.¹¹ David holds a circular frame (sometimes identified as a crown or wreath) in his right hand bearing the inscription DAVID which Richard Bailey has argued was used to avoid mistakenly identifying the figure as Christ.¹² The Durham Cassiodorus, however, includes another figure in miniature, featuring David as a musician (Fig. 45b), rendering this explanation at least debatable: David playing the harp is still labelled as DAVID REX even though images of a male figure with a harp in a Christian context cannot be mistaken for Christ. And yet, David as a musician in the Durham manuscript references Christ as his halo is cruciferous. Thus, David triumphant standing over a serpent references Christ theologically and iconographically, but (significantly for this discussion) does so in a manner that allows the scheme to denote both David and Christ, not exclusively Christ.

Overall, these few images indicate how, even in very stylised contexts (such as the Essen-Weden reliquary), Christ could be depicted and identified as such through the use of specific motifs in the art of the seventh and eighth centuries in north-west Europe. Nevertheless, there are images that have been perceived as depicting Christ, but which bear none of the usual Christological signifiers making identification more challenging. Probably the best known such image was found on the back of the Niederdollendorf stele already briefly discussed in Chapter 2 (Fig. 35). The original purpose and context of the seventh-century stone is unfortunately unknown since it was most likely re-used in an eight-century cist grave (thus, it is not necessarily a gravestone as repeatedly assumed).¹³

Here the figure with a lance held out to his side is thought to represent Christ victorious in a manner analogous to the iconography of the Genoels-Elderen ivory. The rays radiating around the head—which initially seem to resemble ‘spiky’ hair—are considered to depict a halo, possibly rendered as concave, while the band of interlace below the figure’s feet is perceived to be a serpent representing death overcome by Christ at the Crucifixion.¹⁴ There are several problems concerning this particular interpretation that need to be addressed: first and foremost is the lack of clear identifiers of Christ; due to the extreme linearity and lightly incised nature of the stone carving we cannot identify the ‘spiky’ hair to be a radiant halo with certainty. The identity of

622–25 for a brief and concise summary. For a recent and extensive study see: Éamonn Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the rood: Liturgical images and the Old English poems of the Dream of the rood tradition*, The British Library studies in medieval culture (London, Toronto, New York: British Library; University of Toronto Press, 2005).

11 Durham: Cathedral Library, MS B. II. 30: Jonathan J. G. Alexander, *Insular manuscripts, 6th to the 9th century*, A Survey of manuscripts illuminated in the British Isles 1 (London: Harvey Miller, 1978), 46 (no. 17).

12 Richard N. Bailey, *The Durham Cassiodorus*, Jarrow lecture 1978 (Jarrow: Rector of Jarrow, 1978), 11.

13 Sebastian Ristow, “Persönliche Glaubenshaltungen in der Archäologie: Problemfälle aus Spätantike und Frühmittelalter,” in *Persönliche Frömmigkeit: Funktion und Bedeutung individueller Gotteskontakte im interdisziplinären Dialog*, ed. Wiebke Friese and Inge Nielsen, Hephastos 28 (Münster: Lit, 2011), 172–73.

14 See Ulrike Giesler, “Landelinvs Ficit Nvmen: Zur Interpretation der Stele von Niederdollendorf (2),” *Bericht aus dem Rheinischen LandesMuseum Bonn*, no. 1 (2007): 1–13.



a



b

Figure 44: Christ with a cross staff.

a: mosaic from the so called Mausoleum of Galla Placidia in Ravenna, Italy, fifth century

b: mosaic from the Archbishop's Chapel in Ravenna, Italy, c. 500 AD



a



b

Figure 45: Durham Cassiodorus (Cathedral Library MS. B. II 30), c. 730 AD.

a: David triumphant (fol. 172v)

b: David enthroned (fol. 81v)

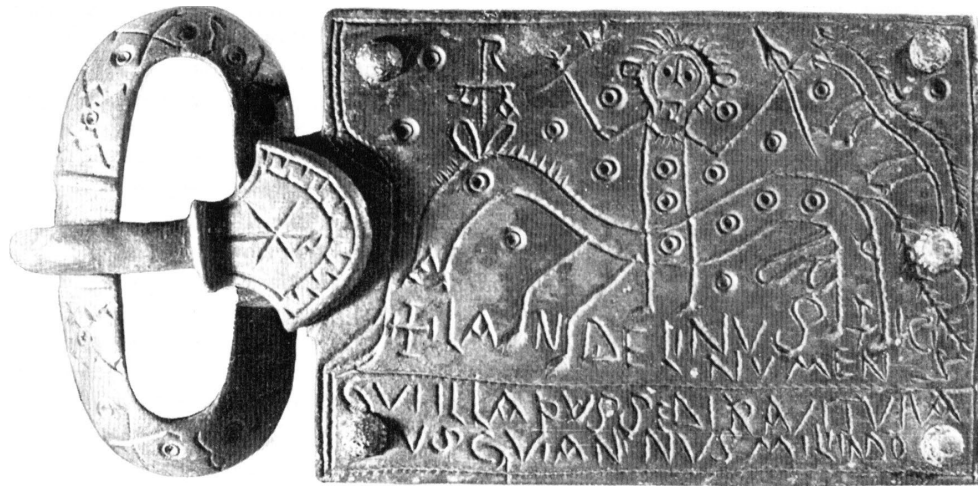


Figure 46: Belt buckle from Ladoix-Serrigny, France, early-seventh century.

the circular motif set over the figure's upper torso is also unclear, as are incised lines extending out from him which appear to frame his head and feet in lozenge shapes, and V-shaped rays extending from his shoulders. Kurt Böhner suggested that these shapes form a stylised aureole with radiating rays of light sustaining the interpretation as Christ,¹⁵ in a manner analogous to that used in the sixth-century mosaic of the Transfigured Christ at Sinai;¹⁶ this interpretation, however, has been criticised by later scholars,¹⁷ and the nature of the incised lines thus remain unclear.

Other figures with similarly 'spiky' hair are frequently invoked to substantiate the interpretation of the radiant halo of the Niederdollendorf figure. An early seventh-century belt buckle from a burial ground in Ladoix-Serrigny, France, is usually cited as the key piece of evidence (Fig. 46): the bronze metal fitting is decorated with a simplistically rendered horseman lightly incised on the surface. The face, surrounded by a double outline, features deeply punched eyes, a vertical linear nose and a horizontally linear mouth; the hair and beard are articulated as a series of short curved lines extended around the face—interrupted by 'lugs' extending from either side, likely denoting ears. Both arms are raised and he holds a lance or spear in his left—the object held in his right is unclear. To his left there is a small animal; to his right is a chi rho with alpha and omega suspended above the horse's head (though the 'rho' is rendered more like an 'R' than a 'P'), and a Greek cross is placed below its snout. A Latin inscription running beneath the horse (LANDELINVS FICIT NVMEN) has been taken to underline the Christian frame of reference, the phrase usually being translated as "Landelinus made

¹⁵ Böhner, "Grabstein von Niederdollendorf," 69; Kurt Böhner, "Niederdollendorf," *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde* 21 (2002): 158.

¹⁶ George H. Forsyth and Kurt Weitzmann, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai: the church and fortress of Justinian* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1973), pl. CIII; see also: Jaś Elsner and Gerhard Wolf, "The Transfigured Mountain: Icons and Transformations of Pilgrimage at the Monastery of St Catherine at Mount Sinai," in *Approaching the Holy Mountain: art and liturgy at St. Catherine's Monastery in the Sinai*, ed. Sharon E. J. Gerstel and Robert S. Nelson, *Cursor mundi* 11 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 37–71.

¹⁷ Giesler, "Landelinvs Ficit Nvmen," 5; Ristow, "Persönliche Glaubenshaltungen in der Archäologie," 174–75.



Figure 47: Belt fitting (Römisch-Germanisches Museum Köln), c. 600 AD.



Figure 48: Stone carving from Köln-Meschenich, seventh (?) century.

this deity”, apparently identifying the horseman as Christ.¹⁸ With good cause, however, Rainer Warland has emphasised that *numen* (divine will, divine presence, deity) cannot be translated as ‘deity’, while the use of *ficit* (fecit: made) prohibits identification with Christ or God. He suggests rather, that *numen* should be understood to mean “divine guardian spirit”.¹⁹ Thus, the identification of the figure with Christ is not as clear as it was thought to be, and the ‘spiky’ hair of the horseman does not function as unquestionable proof of a radiant halo enabling us to recognise Christ.

In addition, Ulrike Giesler has compared the hair/halo of the figures from Niederdollendorf and Ladoix-Serrigny with small belt fittings from Cologne, again showing (‘matchstick’) men with ‘spiky’ hair in the orans pose. One of these fittings bears the letters alpha and omega (Fig. 47) leading her to assume that the orans figure is Christ.²⁰ Nonetheless, this view can be challenged as the figure can also be regarded as representing a general Christian orans.²¹ Another figure with nine short lines radiating

¹⁸ The inscription continues: “QUI ILLA PVSSDIRAVIT VIVA[T] USQUI ANNVS MILI IN D[O] O or D[OMIN]O”. Gerhard Fingerlin, “Die ältesten christlichen Bilder der Alamannia: Zu Herkunft und Ikonographie der drei silbernen Phalerae aus dem Kammergrab von der „Gierhalde“ in Hüfingen, dem Hauptort der frühmittelalterlichen Baar,” *Schriften des Vereins für Geschichte und Naturgeschichte der Baar* 55 (2012): 21. Based on: Werner, “Knochenschnallen und Reliquiarschnallen,” 333.

¹⁹ Rainer Warland, “Byzanz und die Alemannia: Zu den frühbyzantinischen Vorlagen der Hüfingen Scheiben,” *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 55 (2012): 134 translating the inscription as „Landelinus hat den göttlichen Schutzgeist dargestellt.“

²⁰ Giesler, “Landelinvs Ficit Nymen,” 6–7.

²¹ On a fourth-century sarcophagus in Rome, for example, an orans figure is shown beside a Christogram; Friedrich Wilhelm Deichmann et al., *Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage 1: Rom und*

out from the head decorates an apparently seventh-century stone from Cologne-Meschenich (Fig. 48).²² In contrast to the other commonly invoked figures, however, the nature of these lines (being straight rather than curved), bears a more convincing likeness to an ‘actual’ radiant halo of late-antique style. Thus, it might show a saint or another holy person.

The motif of the radiant halo derives from classical and late-antique art, initially signifying the solar deity Helios/Sol or characterising the mythical phoenix. In late Antiquity the use of such halos of light increased: besides Sol and the phoenix it was most commonly used to mark out Mithras, the emperor or other dignitaries (though, in late Antiquity the radiant halos characterising emperors, common since Augustus, slowly fell out of use), Christ and the Hand of God. In other words, the radiant halo was not limited to Christ (unlike the cruciferous halo) or even solely Christian; it was used to denote exalted persons or deities generally. Furthermore, the usual number of rays in such halos comprised seven or nine.²³

However, there are several early medieval images, which include similar halos. An early ninth-century ivory fragment, today in Leipzig, shows the archangel Michael with a shield and a lance pointed towards a serpent beneath his feet (Fig. 49). The halo consists of concave incised rays radiating around his head. Two ninth-century ivories

originally used as book covers for the Lorsch Gospels (one held in the Museo sacro, in the Vatican, the other in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London) show similar halos. Each ivory consists of five parts: three vertical panels in the centre, and two horizontal panels, one at the top and one at the bottom. The central panel of the Vatican ivory shows Christ triumphant flanked by panels depicting two angels (Fig.



Figure 49: Ivory fragment showing St Michael (Museum des Kunsthandels, Leipzig), first half of the ninth century.

Ostia (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1967), 154, pl. 58 (no. 293).

²² Winfried Schmitz, “Figürlich verzierter fränkischer Grabstein,” in Engemann and Rieger, *Spätantike und frühes Mittelalter*, 164.

²³ Concerning (radiant) halos and their iconography in late antiquity see Warland, “Nimbus,” 917–20, esp. 926–29 and Warland, *Das Brustbild Christi*, 44.

50a).²⁴ All three figures feature halos with concave rays, but Christ's halo is further supplemented with the Cross. The counterpart in London shows the Virgin Mary with the Infant Jesus flanked by two male figures, presumably Zacharias and John the Baptist (Fig. 50b). The upper panel shows a *clipeus* of Christ in portrait held by two angels; the lower panel is decorated with the birth of Christ and the Annunciation to the shepherds.²⁵ Only two figures, Mary enthroned and Christ in the *clipeus*, feature halos with concave rays. Again, Christ is signified by a cruciferous halo. It has long been accepted that the Lorsch ivories (and others of similar Carolingian date) depend on late-antique imperial iconography reframing it in Christian contexts.²⁶

Here a further object is worth mentioning: the triumphal arch-shaped reliquary of Einhard originally surmounted by a cross. Einhard, the biographer of Charlemagne, donated it to the monastery of Saint Servatius at Maastricht in the Netherlands. Although, the reliquary was destroyed in the course of the French Revolution, a seventeenth-century drawing discovered in the 1950s is generally accepted as presenting an 'accurate' representation of it.²⁷ Architecturally, the reliquary has three horizontal panels, the lowest of which is relevant here (Fig. 51): it features two haloed soldiers wearing armour and carrying shields and lances. The drawing indicates that the halos consisted of concave rays similar to those preserved on the Lorsch ivories. Hans Belting stressed the similarity of the soldiers' iconography to late-antique and early medieval ivories, such as the late fourth-/early fifth-century so-called diptych of Stilicho and panels incorporated into the early eleventh-century Ambon of Henry II at Aachen. He thus identifies the soldiers as military saints whose iconography is informed by Byzantine prototypes.²⁸ In Christian art it is clear that other figures could also be depicted with radiant halos. An early ninth-century ivory fragment from Darmstadt, Hessisches Landesmuseum, for instance originally part of an Ascension scene, shows the Virgin accompanied by the Apostles (Fig. 52):²⁹ all the figures have haloes though one Apostle (St Peter?) is set apart by a radiant halo of concave rays. The Evangelists were also occasionally distinguished in this way as the illuminations of the Lorsch Gospels indicate: John (Fig. 53) as well as Luke have haloes with two-coloured rays.

Furthermore and in contrast to radiant halos of seven or nine rays of light, those with concave bands may well stem from a different iconographic background

²⁴ Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten*, 132–33 (no. 223); Adolph Goldschmidt, *Die Elfenbeinskulpturen: aus der Zeit der Karolingischen und Sächsischen Kaiser VIII.–XI. Jahrhundert*, Denkmäler der deutschen Kunst 1 (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag, 1914), 13–14.

²⁵ Williamson, *Medieval ivory carvings*, 168–72; Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten*, 133 (no. 224); Goldschmidt, *Die Elfenbeinskulpturen*, 14.

²⁶ Bruno Reudenbach, "Die Lorsch' Elfenbeintafeln: Zur Aufnahme spätantiker Herrscherikonographie in karolingischer Kunst," in Keller, *Iconologia sacra*, 403–16.

²⁷ Hans Belting, "Der Einhardsbogen," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 36 (1973): 93–121. Karl Hauck, ed., *Das Einhardkreuz: Vorträge und Studien der Münsteraner Diskussion zum arcus Einhardi*, Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen. Philologisch-Historische Klasse Folge 3, Nr. 87 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1974).

²⁸ Belting, "Der Einhardsbogen," 108–9. Cp. Kurt Weitzmann, "Der Aufbau und die unteren Felder des Einhard-Reliquiers," in Hauck, *Das Einhardkreuz*, 35–46.

²⁹ Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten*, 134 (no. 227); Goldschmidt, *Die Elfenbeinskulpturen*, 16.



a

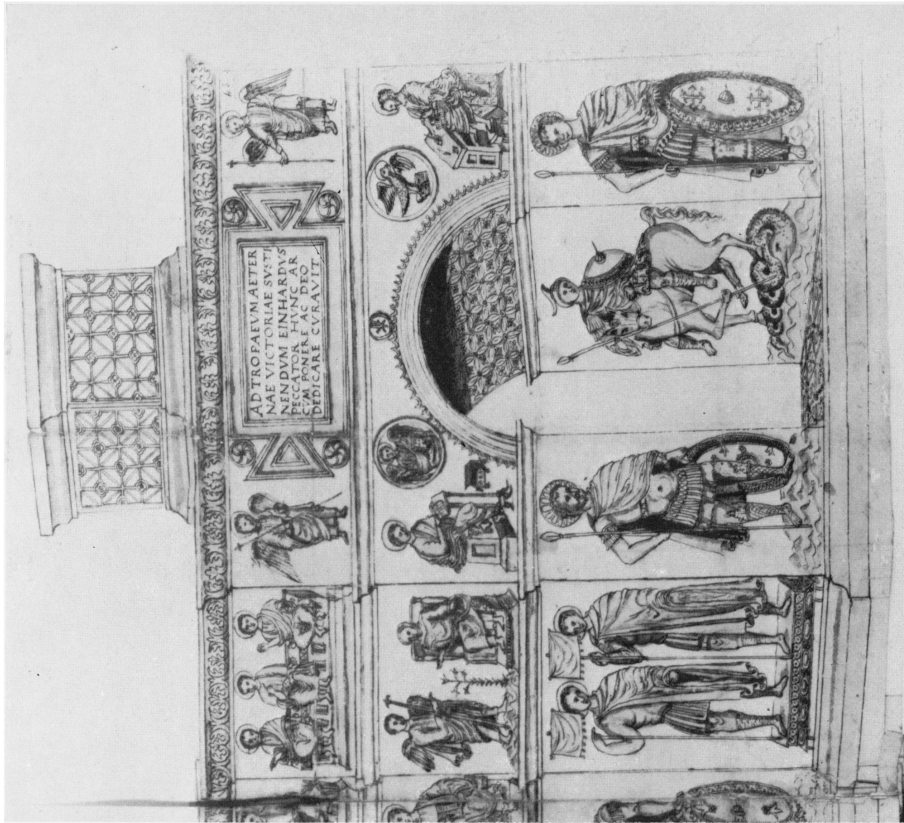


b

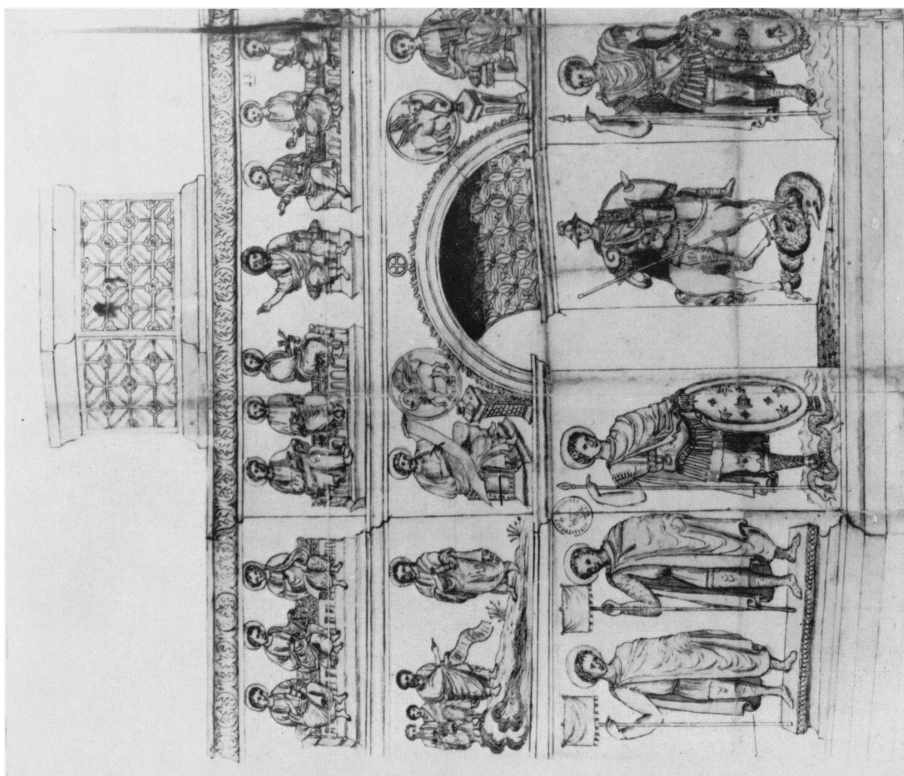
Figure 50: Book covers of the Lorsch Gospels, first half of the ninth century.

a: ivory from the Vatican (Museo sacro)

b: ivory from London (Victoria & Albert Museum)



a



b

Figure 51: Drawing of the reliquary of Einhard, seventeenth century (Paris, Bibl. Nat. ms. fr. 10 440).

a: right side and front

b: left side and back



Figure 52: Ivory fragment (Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt), early-ninth century.



Figure 53: St John, Lorsch Gospels, Vatican (Rom, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Pal. lat. 50, fol.

indicated by the decoration of late-antique ivories and sarcophagi. An early fourth-century sarcophagus from Arles, France (Fig. 54), for instance, illustrates the fashion in funerary art to depict the deceased within a shell-shaped aureole,³⁰ a motif which bears a remarkable resemblance to the concave radiant halos of the early ninth-century ivories. More striking are several consular diptychs of Anastasius, dated to 517 AD:³¹ the enthroned emperor and consul are haloed by a shell-shaped structure identifiable as a tympanum or the vault of an apse (Fig. 33). This iconography is distinct from the radiant haloes comprising clear-cut rays of light which can be traced back to Helios/Sol. These haloes of light continued to feature in a Christian context as they appear on many Christian ivories showing the Crucifixion: Luna and Sol as personifications of night and day signified by a crescent moon and a crown of light commonly flank the crucified Christ (Fig. 55).³²

Whatever the specific iconographic source of the motif, radiant halos cannot be regarded as a distinct symbol of Christ since numerous figures are signified by it:

³⁰ Brigitte Christern-Briesenick, *Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage 3: Frankreich, Algerien, Tunesien* (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2003), 23–25 (no. 38). For further examples see: Deichmann, Bovini and Brandenburg, *Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage 1*, pls 11, 13, 14, 15, 25, 33, 45; Christern-Briesenick, *Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage 3*, pl. 14.

³¹ Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten*, 35–37 (no. 16–21), pls 8–9.

³² E.g. Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten*, pl. 102 (no. 219), pl. 106 (nos 229–30); Goldschmidt, *Die Elfenbeinskulpturen*, pls XV (no. 31), XX (no. 41), XXI (no. 44), XXXII (no. 78), L (no. 114), LVI (no. 130).

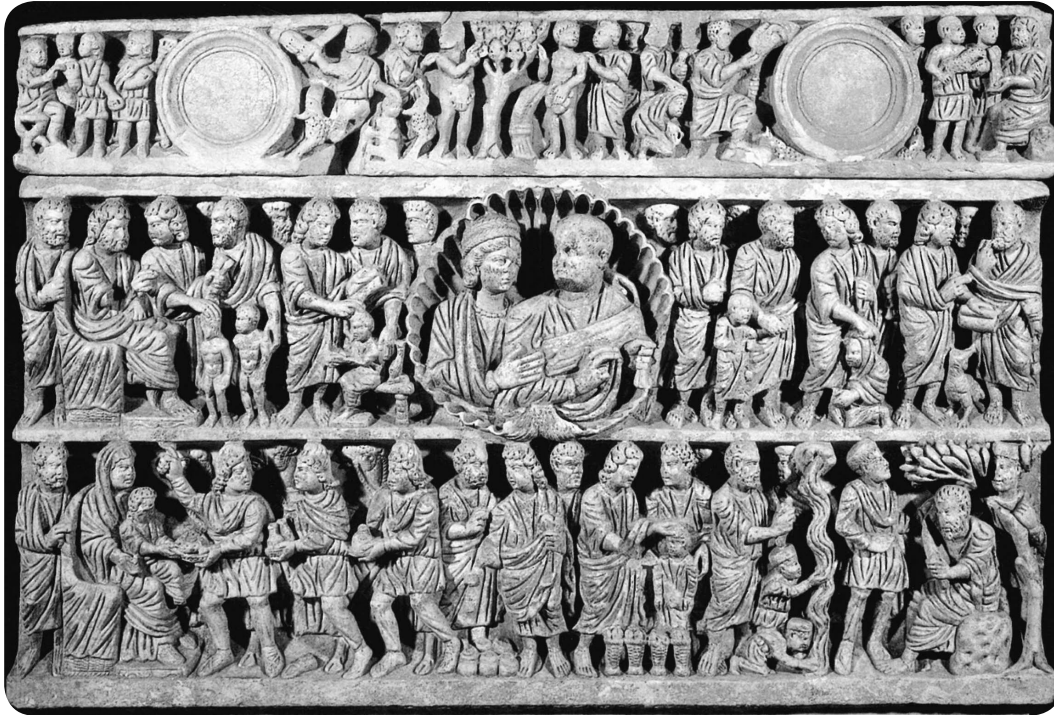


Figure 54: Late-antique sarcophagus from Arles, France, early-fourth century.

military saints, angels, apostles, the Evangelists, and the Virgin Mary. Thus, it clearly emerged as a distinct Christian symbol, at least from the eighth or early ninth centuries. More important is the fact that when Christ is featured with rays of light the halo regularly incorporates a cruciferous detail as a means of distinguishing him from the other saintly figures.³³ That said, the ‘halo’ of the figure from Niederdollendorf can only be regarded as an ambiguous symbol of Christ at best.

Furthermore, the lance held by Niederdollendorf figure casts serious doubts on his identification as Christ. German scholars³⁴ commonly regard the weapon as a ‘Germanic’ iconographic motif reframing Christ within a ‘Germanic’ warrior culture: “The back [of the stele] shows Christ in ‘Germanic’ aspect as a victorious king with a spear.”³⁵ However, the iconography of Christ with a lance appears only at a much later date, as in the early ninth-century Stuttgart Psalter (Fig. 56).³⁶ The issue is further problematised by the fact that the interlaced ornament below the figure cannot be clearly identified as a snake or serpent. On the front and narrow sides of the stele such

³³ Though, a miniature from the late-sixth century Gospels of St Augustine (Cambridge: Corpus Christi College, MS 286), shows Christ haloed solely with rays: Francis Wormald, *The miniatures in the Gospels of St Augustine, Corpus Christi College MS. 286*, The Sanders Lectures in Bibliography 1948 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954), pl. VI. Here, Christ is undoubtedly recognisable as such as the miniature is set within scenes of the Passion of Christ.

³⁴ Based on Böhner, “Grabstein von Niederdollendorf,” 70–71. Cp. Jochen Giesler, “Der Griff nach der Ewigkeit: Zur Interpretation der Stele von Niederdollendorf (1),” *Bericht aus dem Rheinischen LandesMuseum Bonn*, no. 4 (2006): 82; Giesler, “Landelinvs Ficit Nymen,” 7.

³⁵ ‘Auf der Rückseite ist Christus dargestellt in der germanischen Auffassung als siegender König mit dem Speer.’ (Jean Hubert et al., *Frühzeit des Mittelalters: Von der Völkerwanderung bis an die Schwelle der Karolingerzeit*, Universum der Kunst 12 (München: Beck, 1968), 159); translation: author.

³⁶ Württembergische Landesbibliothek Stuttgart, Bibl. fol. 23; cp. Peter Bloch, “Christus, Christusbild III.,” *Lexikon der Christlichen Ikonographie* 1 (1968): 403.

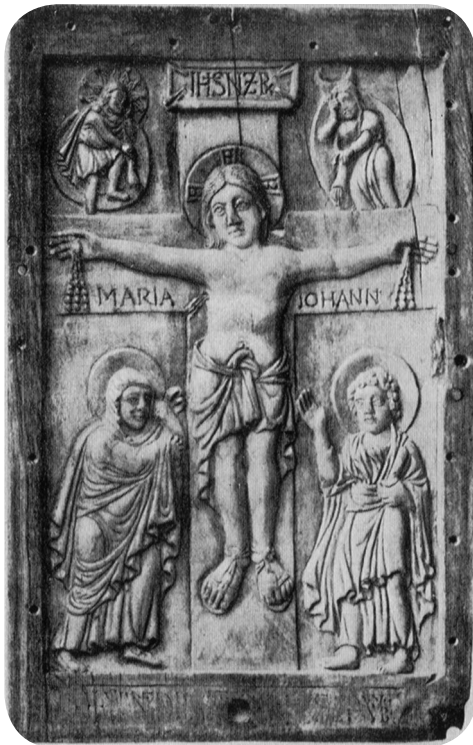


Figure 55: Ivory from Berlin (Kaiser Friedrich Museum, today lost), early-ninth century.



Figure 56: Stuttgart Psalter (Cod. bibl. fol. 23, Württembergische Landesbibliothek Stuttgart) fol. 107v, c. 820/30 AD.

creatures are, by contrast, clearly depicted. In such discussions the David-Christ figure of the Durham Cassiodorus (Fig. 45a) is invoked as an analogy. Yet, the iconographic scheme of victorious soldiers piercing serpents is not exclusively Christian, nor is it exclusively linked to Christ—at least in late Antiquity. As the same motif appears on the ninth-century reliquary of Einhard showing military saints (Fig. 51), it can be presumed that such iconographies were not used solely to depict Christ throughout the early Middle Ages.

To summarise: the figure shown on the back of the Niederdollendorf stele does not bear any *distinct* symbol or signifier that might enable us to clearly identify Christ or even presume a Christian frame of reference.³⁷ That said, there are indicators that *might* denote Christian frames of reference, but which remain vague and perhaps deliberately so, enabling the carving to be understood within Ristow's third category. Furthermore, it is unlikely that the Niederdollendorf figure was intended to denote Christ explicitly as all sides of the stele (as well as the figure itself) lack Christological signifiers. I would rather suggest that the Niederdollendorf figure is apparently informed by late-antique imperial iconography in almost the same manner as David from the Durham Cassiodorus and the soldiers from Einhard's reliquary. Given the date of the Niederdollendorf stele—it was produced up to two centuries earlier—it seems plausible that the figure might represent a victorious soldier or person (not necessarily a specific individual) whose religious affiliation was left deliberately ambiguous. Due

³⁷ Cp. Sebastian Ristow, *Frühes Christentum im Rheinland: Die Zeugnisse der archäologischen und historischen Quellen an Rhein, Maas und Mosel*, Jahrbuch des Rheinischen Vereins für Denkmalpflege und Landschaftsschutz 2006 (Münster, Köln: Aschendorff, 2007), 382–83.



Figure 57: Stone carving from Moselkern, Germany, seventh/eighth century.

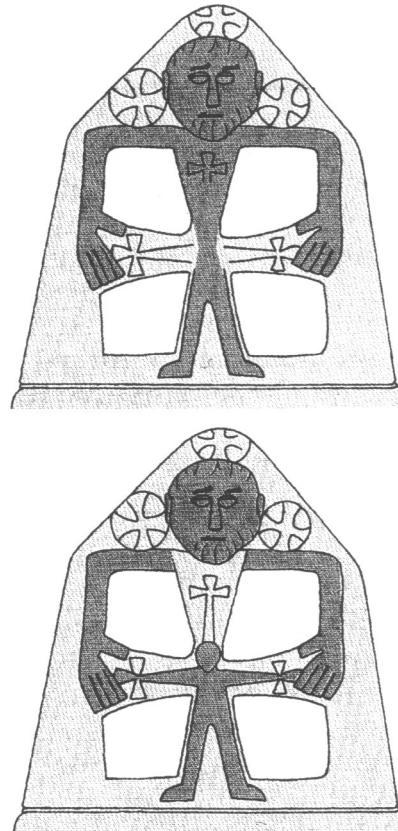


Figure 58: Drawing of the stone carving from Moselkern, Germany, seventh/eighth century.

to the lack of knowledge regarding the context of the stele and its intended purpose we probably cannot get any closer to an iconological interpretation. Providing that the ‘halo’ can be accepted as such and the interlace can be regarded as a stylised serpent this interpretation is applicable to a Christian as well as a non-Christian frame of reference. Seemingly, a clear articulation of Christianity or ‘paganism’ was not intended.

Another stone carving that ought to be mentioned here as it likely shows Christ, but is generally deemed to be religiously ambiguous, is the stele from Moselkern, Rhineland-Palatinate (Figs 57–58).³⁸ This is decorated with an open-work ‘X’ and a cross in addition to a face in the upper register enclosed by three smaller crosses. There is more to note about the piece: the open-work cross serves as a body with arms outstretched that can be related to the face. There is, in addition, a smaller figure contained within the cross, as well as three further crosses. This unique scheme can be understood to show the crucifixion of Christ in different ways. The larger figure can be seen as Christ, while the three crosses around the head can be regarded as a cruciferous ‘halo’. This indicates that Merovingian-period stone carvings could indeed present Christ with distinctive Christian symbols. Consequently, we do not need to argue for a specific ‘Germanic’ notion or even iconography to identify Christ.

With this in mind it is worth turning to consider the masks and faces interpreted as depicting Christ. It is common in the scholarship to interpret single faces shown

³⁸ Ibid., 176–77; cp. Angela Bormann, “Die Stele von Moselkern,” in Engemann and Rieger, *Spätantike und frühes Mittelalter*, 52–57.



Figure 59: Disc from Limons, France, seventh century.



Figure 60: Disc brooch from Kobern-Gondorf, Germany, seventh century.



Figure 61: Belt thorn from Frouard, France, late-sixth/seventh century.



Figure 62: Sample of seventh-century disc brooches showing portraits of Roman emperors.

- a: Niederbreisig, Germany
- b: Sarreguemines (Saargemünd), France
- c: Mölsheim, Germany

on objects such as brooches or gold foil crosses as apotropaically portraying Christ.³⁹ This reading may hold true for several of these images, especially in the framework of crosses, but cannot be applied to faces and masks decorating every type of artefact. Again, we need distinctive signifiers.

The well-known disc from Limons (Fig. 59), a brooch from Cologne (Fig. 60) and a buckle thorn from Frouard (Fig. 61) may serve as examples through which to consider such Christian interpretations. All three pieces, though differing in style and quality, show a face in the midst of a cross or—in the case of the Limons disc—in the midst of an aureole containing six rays. The face of this latter piece is also associated with a cruciferous halo flanked by an alpha and an omega as well as a ‘R’ which may be a Latinised rho or stand for REX. Ristow stressed the unambiguous Christian iconography of the Limons disc, but did not identify the face in the centre as Christ.⁴⁰ Given the presence of the cruciferous halo it seems uncontroversial that in this case the faces can be accepted as portraying Christ. The masks on the brooch from Cologne and the buckle thorn from Frouard, however, do not include such a halo. Nevertheless, as they are well-placed in the centre of a cross, it does not seem to be too far-fetched to suggest that these, too, were intended to depict Christ. By contrast, other images lacking these characteristics—such as seventh-century disc brooches with portraits, such as those showing stylised Roman emperors (fig. 62)⁴¹—are less likely (or even unlikely) to have been intended to portray Christ, being single faces without Christian symbols or signifiers distinctively related to Christ.

3.2 Christian Riders: ‘Milites Christi’ and ‘Military Saints’

While images understood to depict Christ are the most prevalent of the ambiguous figures found in northern European art of the sixth and seventh centuries, another figural subject deserves consideration here: the mounted ‘Miles Christi’ (soldier of/for Christ) or ‘Military Saints’.⁴² For the purpose of this discussion three works from Germany, all of which derive from very diverse contexts and backgrounds will serve to illustrate the issues surrounding the nature of their Christian frames of reference: the late sixth-/early seventh-century *phalerae* from Hüfingen (Figs 63–64),⁴³ and the seventh-

³⁹ In particular: Klein-Pfeuffer, *Merowingerzeitliche Fibeln und Anhänger*, 206–17; see also Margarete Klein-Pfeuffer, “Zur Deutung der Pressblechscheiben von Eschwege-Niederhone Gr. 17,” in Heizmann and Oehrl, *Bilddenkmäler zur germanischen Götter- und Heldensage*, 261–93.

⁴⁰ Ristow, *Frühes Christentum im Rheinland*, 281–82.

⁴¹ Klein-Pfeuffer, *Merowingerzeitliche Fibeln und Anhänger*, 208–11.

⁴² In general: Christopher Walter, *The Warrior Saints in Byzantine Art and Tradition* (Aldershot, Burlington: Ashgate, 2003).

⁴³ Gerhard Fingerlin, “Die ältesten christlichen Bilder in der Alamannia: Zu Herkunft und Ikonographie der drei silbernen Phalerae aus dem Kammergrab von der „Gierhalde“ in Hüfingen, dem Hauptort der frühmittelalterlichen Baar,” in *Die Baar als Königslandschaft: Tagung des Alemannischen Instituts vom 6.–8. März 2008 in Donaueschingen*, ed. Volkhard Huth and Johanna Regnath, Veröffentlichung des Alemannischen Instituts Freiburg i. Br. 77 (Ostfildern: Thorbecke, 2010), 25–46; this paper was later published with the exact wording: cp. Fingerlin, “Die ältesten christlichen Bilder der Alamannia (2012),” 7–26.

century reliquary from Ennabeuren (Fig. 65),⁴⁴ both from Baden-Württemberg, as well as the seventh-century stone carvings from Hornhausen (Fig. 66) and Morsleben, Thuringia.⁴⁵ These three case studies exemplify the use of the motif in various media (metal and stone) as well as various archaeological contexts: while the reliquary from Ennabeuren was found beneath the altar of a church and the *phalerae* from Hüfingen in a lavishly furnished grave, the stones from Hornhausen and Morsleben were not found *in situ* associated with distinct archaeological features.

The three silver discs used as horse gear from Hüfingen Grave 1 are the oldest pieces considered here since the burial is dated to 606 AD through dendrochronology.⁴⁶ Apart from the *phalerae* the chambered grave included fragments of a late sixth-/early seventh-century belt buckle inlaid with silver and gold ornaments, a spatha, a scramasax, a lance, a spur, a bronze bowl and several wooden objects and furnishings.⁴⁷ Commonly, it is counted among the most elite burials of Merovingian-period southern Germany. Prior to an adequate documentation of the grave in 1966 several findings were looted from the site, including “silver discs with imagery” (*Silberscheiben mit Bildern*).⁴⁸ Fortunately, two discs were returned anonymously the same day; the third disc, however, was not returned until 2008, again anonymously, with the result that the full iconographic programme has only become available for further study relatively recently.⁴⁹

The *Pressbleche* from Hüfingen have a diameter from approximately 11 cm, two of which show haloed horsemen (Figs 63a,c); the third disc depicts the enthroned Virgin and Child (Fig. 63). Originally, this was probably the central disc as the horsemen turn in opposite directions and can thus be reconstructed as riding towards the central disc.⁵⁰ Overall, given the presence of the Virgin and Child, there is no doubt about a Christian frame of reference (Ristow’s first category).

The Virgin enthroned is set within an aureole-like shape comprising three

44 Dieter Quast, *Das merowingerzeitliche Reliquienkästchen aus Ennabeuren: Eine Studie zu den frühmittelalterlichen Reisereliquiaren und Chrismalia*, Kataloge vor- und frühgeschichtlicher Altertümer 43 (Mainz: Verlag des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums, 2012).

45 Romina Schiavone, “Die Reliefsteine von Hornhausen und Morsleben: Kulturhistorischer Kontext und Deutung,” in *Iona und Hornhausen: Studien zur frühmittelalterlichen Steinplastik in Europa*, ed. Petra Hanauska and Romina Schiavone, Studien zur Archäologie Europas 15 (Bonn: Habelt, 2011), 143–281; Kurt Böhner, “Die Reliefplatten von Hornhausen,” *Jahrbuch des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums Mainz* 23/24 (1976/77): 89–138.

46 André Billambow and Bernd Becker, “Die frühmittelalterlichen Grabkammern von Lauchheim im dendrochronologischen Datennetz Südwestdeutschlands,” *Fundberichte aus Baden-Württemberg* 25 (2001): 848.

47 Gerhard Fingerlin, “Ein alamannisches Reitergrab aus Hüfingen,” in *Studien zur vor- und frühgeschichtlichen Archäologie: Festschrift für Joachim Werner zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Georg Kossack and Günter Ulbert, 2 vols., Münchner Beiträge zur Vor- und Frühgeschichte, Ergänzungsband 1/II (München: Beck, 1974), 600–607. For chronology see Friedrich, *Archäologische Chronologie und historische Interpretation*, 146.

48 Fingerlin, “Die ältesten christlichen Bilder in der Alamannia (2010),” 25; translation: author.

49 Gerhard Fingerlin, “„Er soll Dir den Kopf zertreten“ – Endlich komplett: Das frühchristliche Bildprogramm aus dem Kammergrab von Hüfingen „Gierhalde“,” *Archäologische Nachrichten aus Baden* 76/77 (2008): 68.

50 Fingerlin, “Die ältesten christlichen Bilder in der Alamannia (2010),” 39; Warland, “Byzanz und die Alemannia,” 132.



Figure 63: *Phalerae* from Hüfingen Grave 1, Germany, 606 AD.



Figure 64: Hüfingen, drawing of the disc handed back in 2008.

circular bands of hemispheric knobs, concave shell-shapes, and a dashed line. Haloed, and wearing a full-length garment, the Virgin sits on an elaborate, high-backed throne, denoted by an outline around her body, with the haloed Infant on her lap. To the left and right of the throne, two plants extend from the ground bending in towards her head. The two riders are well-placed in the same aureole-like shape. That moving from right to left (Fig. 63a) is dressed in a knee-length tunic, his *paludamentum* seeming to float in the wind. His lance is pointed towards the ground, aimed directly at the (human?) head of a stylised serpent beneath the hooves. The rider moving from right to left is similarly dressed, tramples a serpentine creature with a seemingly human head, and also carries a lance;⁵¹ Fingerlin mistakenly assumed that this rider raised his right hand in a gesture well-known from Roman imperial iconography rather than carrying a lance (cp. Figs 63c, 64).⁵²

While the dating of the discs has not been subject to a debate due to the associated dendrochronology, the provenance and interpretation of their iconography have been: Böhner, for instance, presumed the *phalerae* to be a local ‘Alemannic’ work due to the lack of naturalism he deemed to be characteristic of late-antique art.⁵³ Fingerlin, on the other hand, argued that they were Byzantine pieces that reached Hüfingen via northern Italy.⁵⁴ Warland, partly objecting to Fingerlin’s view, has recently suggested that the discs were ‘local derivatives’, presumably from northern Italy.⁵⁵ Whatever the specifics of the proposed provenance, it is universally accepted that the imagery of the discs is heavily informed by late-antique iconography, be it a product of local (‘Germanic?’)

⁵¹ Warland, “Byzanz und die Alemannia,” 133.

⁵² Fingerlin, “Die ältesten christlichen Bilder in der Alamannia (2010),” 39.

⁵³ Böhner, “Die Reliefplatten von Hornhausen,” 106–7.

⁵⁴ Fingerlin, “„Er soll Dir den Kopf zertreten“,” 68; Fingerlin, “Die ältesten christlichen Bilder in der Alamannia (2010),” 32–34.

⁵⁵ Warland, “Byzanz und die Alemannia,” 138.

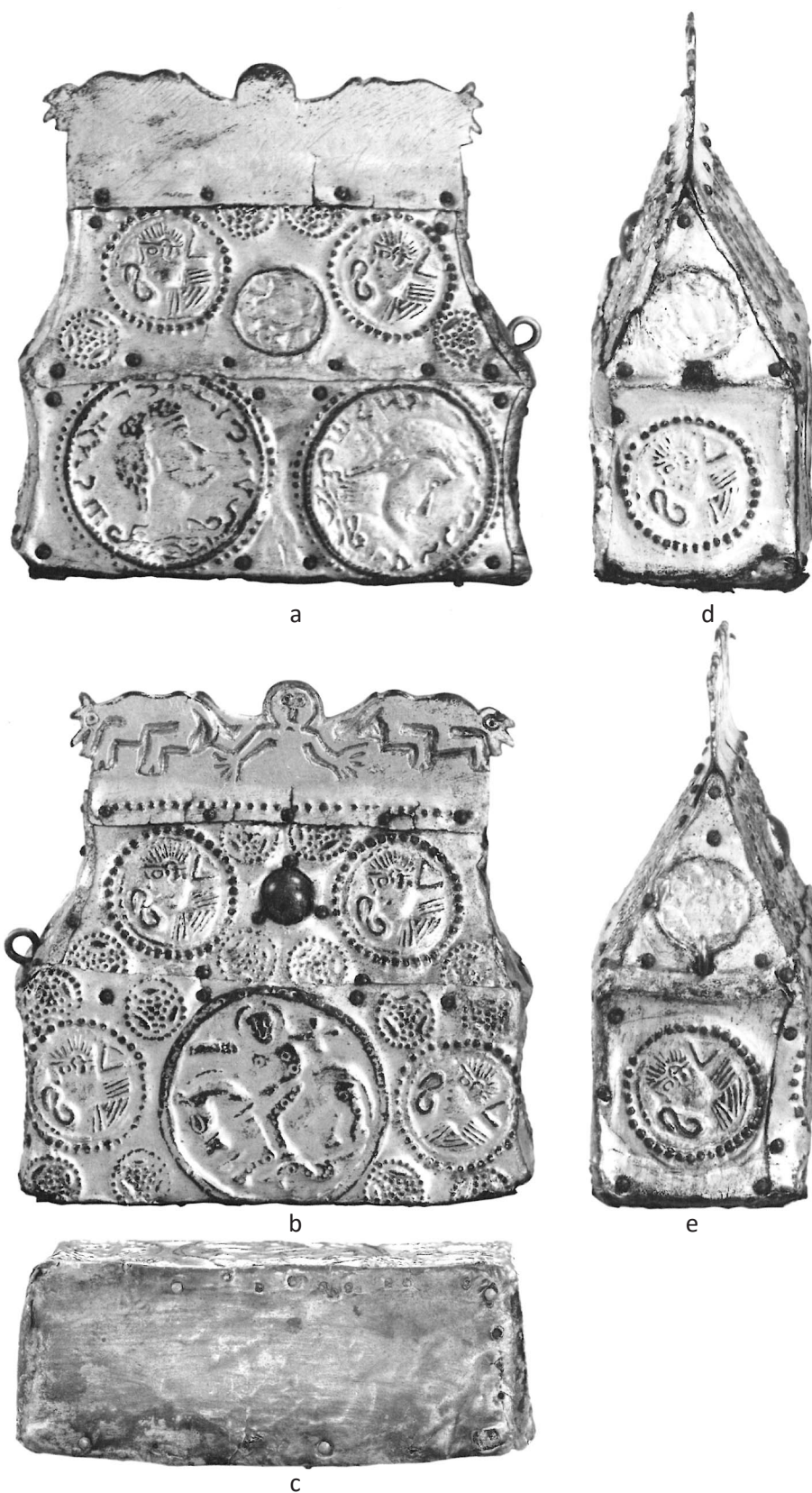


Figure 65: Reliquary from Ennabeuren, Germany, seventh century.

a: back

b: front

c: bottom side

d, e: narrow sides

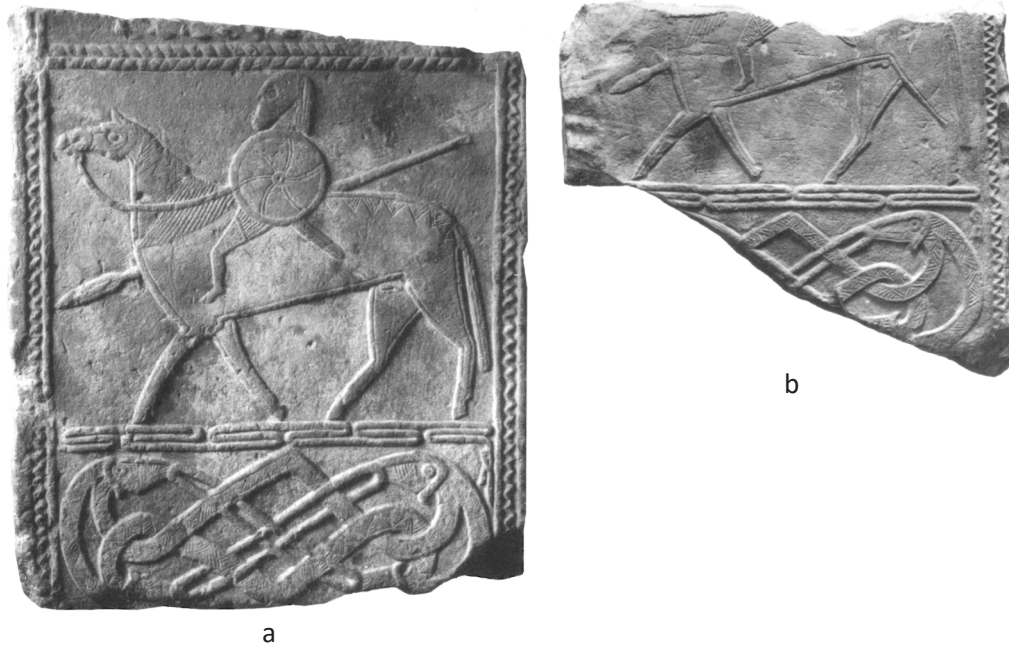


Figure 66: Stone carvings from Hornhausen, Germany, seventh century.

a: Stone 1

b: Stone 2

or Byzantine work.

Interpretation of the riders oscillates between identifying them as military saints, effectively ‘*Milites Christi*’, and Christ himself. This debate, however, is not essential to the questions addressed here since the Christian frame of reference is fairly evident. That said, their Christian identity has not been derived from the iconography of the riders themselves (they are not provided with a cross staff or similar symbols); rather it is due to their association with the Virgin and Child. Furthermore, most arguments brought to bear in favour of their identity as Christ correspond to those invoked to substantiate the identification of the Niederdollendorf figure as Christ. Holding this view, Fingerlin, for instance, linked the Hüfingen discs to the Landelinus belt buckle (Fig. 46).⁵⁶ Bearing in mind that it is extremely unlikely to have two figures of Christ flanking the Virgin—with a third depiction of Christ, as the Child incarnate—in any Christian iconographic scheme, Warland’s analysis seems more convincing with its demonstration that both late-antique and later Byzantine art entirely lack iconographic prototypes of Christ as an armed horseman. Overall, Warland prefers a reading of the riders as ‘*Milites Christi*’ (*Christuskrieger*).⁵⁷

The reason the Hüfingen discs are addressed here is their placement in a furnished burial—of a type frequently deemed to derive from pre-Christian ‘pagan’ funerary rituals. Indeed, regarding the man buried in Grave 1 Fingerlin has asked: “Was he—despite his seemingly pagan burial furnishing with grave goods—a Christian?”⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Fingerlin, “Die ältesten christlichen Bilder in der Alamannia (2010),” 44–46.

⁵⁷ Warland, “Byzanz und die Alemannia,” 134.

⁵⁸ ‘War er also, trotz seiner für unsere Begriffe durchaus heidnisch anmutenden Ausstattung mit Beigaben, ein Christ?’ (Fingerlin, “Die ältesten christlichen Bilder in der Alamannia (2010),” 41); loose translation: author.

As furnished burials do not necessarily have to be considered ‘pagan’ or syncretic,⁵⁹ however, this view seems to anticipate a pagan-Christian dichotomy rather than substantiating it. Generally, the furnishing of graves may act as an agent in various aspects of early medieval societies as a means of coping with the death of a person in terms of both social status and religious observation.⁶⁰

In relation to the man buried in Hüfingen Grave 1, as much as those burying him, it is difficult to determine whether the *phalerae* signified personal (Christian) religious beliefs, or simply the ability to deposit precious silver discs and thereby demonstrate, in a manner of speaking, economic power. And, of course, both could have been intended. However, if the discs were produced in the local area, this might indeed suggest the man or his community were Christians. At the very least the riders and the Virgin indicate that the people were conscious of Christian iconography and may even have been aware of its associated meanings. Further imagery from furnished graves substantiates this hypothesis, like a disc from Strasbourg that depicts a haloed rider with a cross staff piercing a serpent (Fig. 67a), as does a golden disc from Oron, Switzerland (Fig. 67b).⁶¹

Unlike the identifiable contexts of these metalwork images, which clearly identifies their Christian frames of reference, the iconography and style of the Hornhausen and Morsleben stone carvings are commonly considered to depict Christian motifs but only through ‘pagan’ iconographic frames of reference as they lack clear archaeological contexts that might prove otherwise. The first (well-known) carving from Hornhausen (henceforth Stone 1; Fig. 66a) showing a rider was found in 1874 and was afterwards set in the floor of a cowshed for several decades before it was purchased by the Landesmuseum Halle in 1912, along with another fragment showing a rider (Stone 2; fig. 66b); a third stone fragment preserving a doe and a stag was also donated to the museum (Fig. 68a). Subsequently, excavations at the presumed find spot of Stone 1 revealed a double burial and, beyond the burial itself, further small stone fragments (Stones 4–6; Fig. 68b–d).⁶² Significant here is Stone 4 as only this fragment bears a Christian symbol: a flag with three pennants and a cross; Stones 5 and 6, perhaps both part of the same slab, depict the head of a stag and a Style II animal. Three further stone fragments were also found (Stones 7–9), all of which have been lost.⁶³ The find

⁵⁹ E.g. Brather, “Pagan or Christian?,” 333–49. See also Howard Williams, “Mortuary Practices in early Anglo-Saxon England,” in Hamerow et al., *Oxford handbook*, *passim*.

⁶⁰ For ‘Anglo-Saxon’ England e.g., Howard Williams, *Death and memory in early medieval Britain*, Cambridge studies in archaeology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 36–77. See also: Howard Williams, “Death Warmed up: the Agency of Bodies and Bones in Early Anglo-Saxon Cremation Rites,” *Journal of Material Culture* 9, no. 3 (2004): 263–91.

⁶¹ Julius Baum, *Frühmittelalterliche Denkmäler der Schweiz und ihrer Nachbarländer* (Bern: Wyss, 1943), 18–28, pl. III (8), pl. V (14). See also Quast, “Merovingian Period Equestrians,” 330–42.

⁶² Böhner, “Die Reliefplatten von Hornhausen,” 95–98; misleadingly, Karen Høilund Nielsen assumed the fragments to be part of the stone frame enclosing the double burial, which she deemed to be eighth-century: Karen Høilund Nielsen, “Lundeborg – Gispersleben: Connexions between Southern Scandinavia and Thuringia in the post-Roman Period,” in *Die Frühzeit der Thüringer: Archäologie, Sprache, Geschichte*, ed. Helmut Castritius, *Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde* 63 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 27.

⁶³ Böhner, “Die Reliefplatten von Hornhausen,” 100.



a



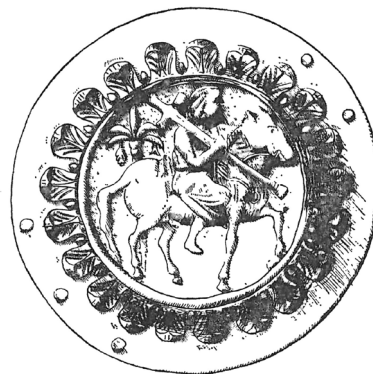
b



c



d



e

Figure 67: Further discs imaging riders, sixth/seventh century.

a: Strasbourg, France

b: Oron, Switzerland

c: Bräunlingen, Germany

d: Nendingen, Germany

e: Güttingen, Germany



Figure 68: Further stone carvings from Hornhausen, Germany, seventh century.

- a: Stone 3
- b: Stone 4
- c: Stone 5
- d: Stone 6

context might suggest that Hornhausen Stones 1 and 2 originally emerged from a site associated with (Christian) burials. In Morsleben, about 20 km from Hornhausen, at least two fragments (Stones 1 and 2: fig. 69) used as *spolia* in a church were discovered in 1934; the whereabouts of a third and a potential fourth stone, however, are unknown. Stone 1 from Morsleben probably features a Christian motif: the Lamb carrying the Cross; yet, the ‘Cross’ has been reduced to a mere line above the lamb. Stone 2 depicts a simple cross with slightly incised straight lines.⁶⁴ Although used as *spolia*, the reuse of these stones in an ecclesiastical contexts suggests they too may have originated in a Christian context, possibly ecclesiastical, as stone monuments (unlike more easily portable artefacts) tend not to ‘move’ too far from their original setting.

Turning to consider Stone 1 from Hornhausen in more detail (Fig. 66a; *c.* 78 x 66 x 13–15 cm), its decoration is arranged in three registers: the lowest shows interlaced

⁶⁴ The carvings from Morsleben were first published in 1936 by Paul Grimm, “Ein neuer „Reiterstein“ von Morsleben, Kr. Neuahaldensleben,” *Jahresschrift für die Vorgeschichte der sächsisch-thüringischen Länder* 24 (1936): 247–59. Cp. Böhner, “Die Reliefplatten von Hornhausen,” 121–23 and Schiavone, “Hornhausen und Morsleben,” 171–73.

Style II animals in a double S-shape; the central and largest register depicts the rider; the upper panel, of which only six right-facing feet are identifiable, is not preserved in its entirety. Disproportionate in scale, the rider is armed with shield and sword as well as a large lance set behind the horse. Traditionally, it has been argued that the stone carving was made in the first half or even the second quarter of the seventh century—mainly based on the Style II ornament.⁶⁵ Prior to the work of Böhner, a great deal of research into the Hornhausen stone proceeded on the assumption that the carving was indeed a grave stone showing either Odin, a warrior fighting for Odin, the deceased himself, or a Christian rider.⁶⁶ However, the first detailed analysis, conducted by Böhner during the 1970s, proposed that the stones were not used as funerary markers but as parts of a chancel screen in a church located at the site known from later written sources.⁶⁷ Though lacking verifiable archaeological evidence, this view has generally been accepted in scholarship,⁶⁸ while agreeing with Böhner, Schiavone has recently revised his reconstruction of the screens (Figs 70–71).⁶⁹ Böhner and Schiavone have both assumed that the upper register was originally decorated with praying saints,⁷⁰ whereas Høilund Nielsen suggested a row of “warriors like the motives [sic] on the Vendel helmet foils” in the Scandinavian tradition.⁷¹ Furthermore, Böhner assumed that the fragment showing the flag with the cross was part of a shaft or lance originally held by another rider. He thus postulated four screens with riders—two depicted riders holding a lance and two portrayed riders holding a flag staff—and two screens with stags and does. Overall, Böhner as well as Schiavone suggested the chancel screens to comprise at least eight panels (though Böhner was not able to reconstruct the seventh and eighth).⁷²

Despite such a clear ecclesiastical context, the scholarship on the Hornhausen stones has, as noted, tended to focus on an (assumed) dichotomy or ambiguity of Stone 1 and 2 incorporating Christian and pagan as well as Roman and ‘Germanic-Scandinavian’ iconography. This is mostly due to the Style II ornament and the late-antique iconographic rider scheme as a means of juxtaposing Roman Christianity with Germanic ‘paganism’. Likewise, the style of the rider is commonly thought to stem

⁶⁵ E.g. Böhner, “Die Reliefplatten von Hornhausen,” 101–17, 130–36; Hermann Ament, “Hornhausen,” *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde* 15 (2000): 130; Høilund Nielsen, “Lundeberg – Gispersleben,” 10 Fig. 1; Schiavone, “Hornhausen und Morsleben,” 220. Previously, Helmut Roth suggested a date in the late-seventh or early-eighth century: Helmut Roth, “Bilddenkmäler: § 5. Bildsteine der MZ und KaZ auf dem Kontinent,” *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde* 2 (1975): 558.

⁶⁶ For the historiography of Stone 1 see Böhner, “Die Reliefplatten von Hornhausen,” 89–91 and Schiavone, “Hornhausen und Morsleben,” 152–54. See Schiavone, “Die Reliefsteine von Hornhausen und Morsleben,” 164–206 for a detailed description and iconographic analysis.

⁶⁷ Böhner, “Die Reliefplatten von Hornhausen,” 123–26.

⁶⁸ E.g. Roth, “Bilddenkmäler,” 557; Ament, “Hornhausen,” 130; Brather, *Ethnische Interpretationen*, 368–69; Wamers, “Salins Stil II,” 60; Høilund Nielsen, “Lundeberg – Gispersleben,” 26.

⁶⁹ Schiavone, “Hornhausen und Morsleben,” 207–9.

⁷⁰ Böhner, “Die Reliefplatten von Hornhausen,” 101–2; Schiavone, “Hornhausen und Morsleben,” 174.

⁷¹ Høilund Nielsen, “Lundeberg – Gispersleben,” 26.

⁷² Böhner, “Die Reliefplatten von Hornhausen,” 119–20, 123–24; Schiavone, “Hornhausen und Morsleben,” 207.

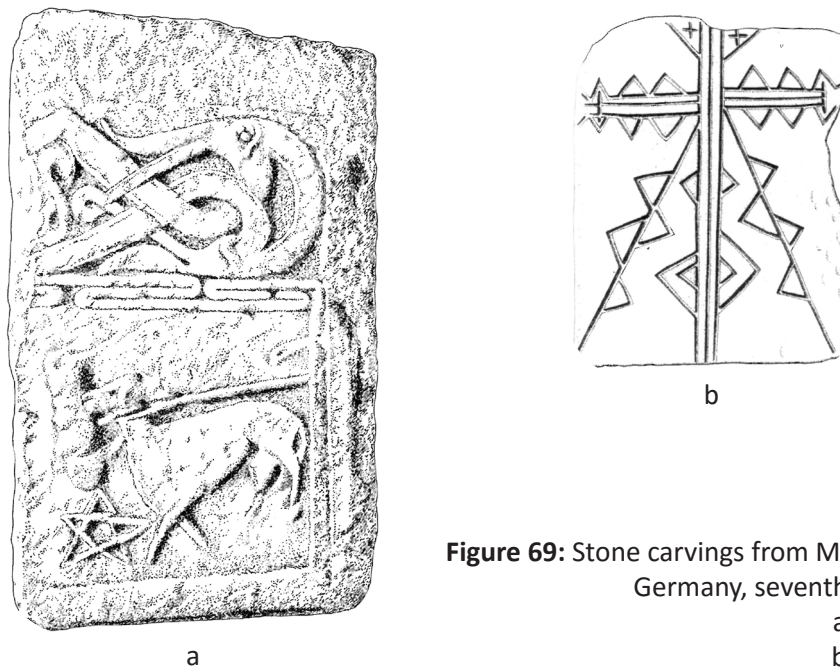


Figure 69: Stone carvings from Morsleben, Germany, seventh century.

a: Stone 1

b: Stone 2

from Scandinavian traditions as horses of similar form are found on Scandinavian stones (Fig. 72).⁷³

This led Böhner to argue that the sculptor was in fact a Scandinavian and Roth that he had an Anglo-Saxon background.⁷⁴ The double S-shaped interlace certainly corresponds to that decorating oval brooches and other items found in southern Scandinavia, including the scabbard from Valsgärde 7 (Fig. 73).⁷⁵ However, Schiavone's detailed examination of the animal art has demonstrated that similar motifs occur throughout western Europe: from northern Italy to Scandinavia, on gold foil crosses, reliquaries, chancel screens, dress accessories and in manuscripts.⁷⁶ As a result, she has argued that the sculptor was drawing on well-established 'Frankish-Mediterranean' prototypes in both motif and style.⁷⁷ Her work has thus raised important issues revealing weaknesses of the previous research on the Hornhausen and Morsleben stones: first, the focus on Scandinavian ornament with the resulting neglect of similar motifs in the rest of Europe; second, the assumption that animal art is 'pagan', almost by definition.

Taken together, the presumed dichotomy of the Hornhausen 'Miles Christi' trampling a 'pagan-style' serpent cannot be substantiated. If, as is likely, the stones can be accepted as having been part of a chancel screen and that the animal art can be regarded as part of a local and widespread repertoire commonly used in Christian contexts, it seems not unreasonable to conclude that the stones from Hornhausen (and Morsleben) were ecclesiastical in function and Christian in their frames of reference,

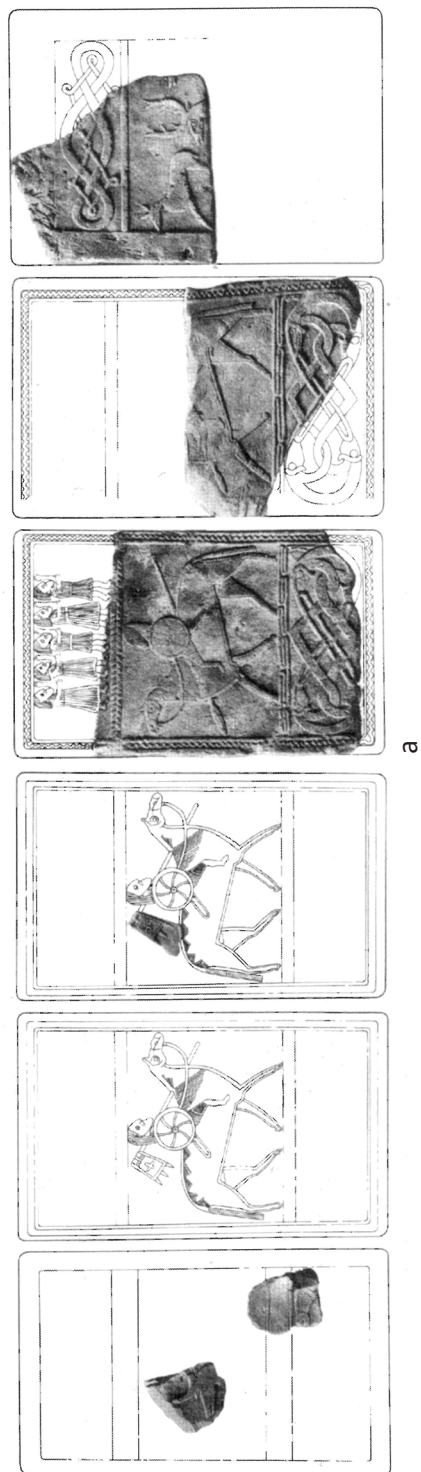
⁷³ Böhner, "Die Reliefplatten von Hornhausen," 102.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 113–16; Roth, "Bildendenkmäler," 558.

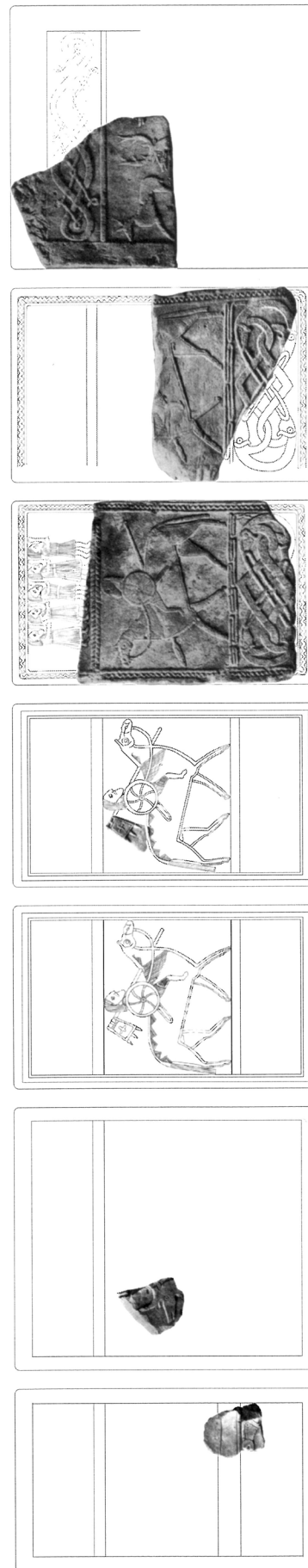
⁷⁵ Böhner, "Die Reliefplatten von Hornhausen," 110–13.

⁷⁶ *Cp.* Schiavone, "Hornhausen und Morsleben," figs 59–75.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 183–96; *cp.* Wamers, "Salins Stil II," 33–72 and Wamers, "Behind Animals, Plants and Interlace," 151–204 for a detailed analysis of Style II ornament on Christian items.



a



b

Figure 70: Reconstruction of the Hornhausen stones after Böhner (a) and Schiavone (b).

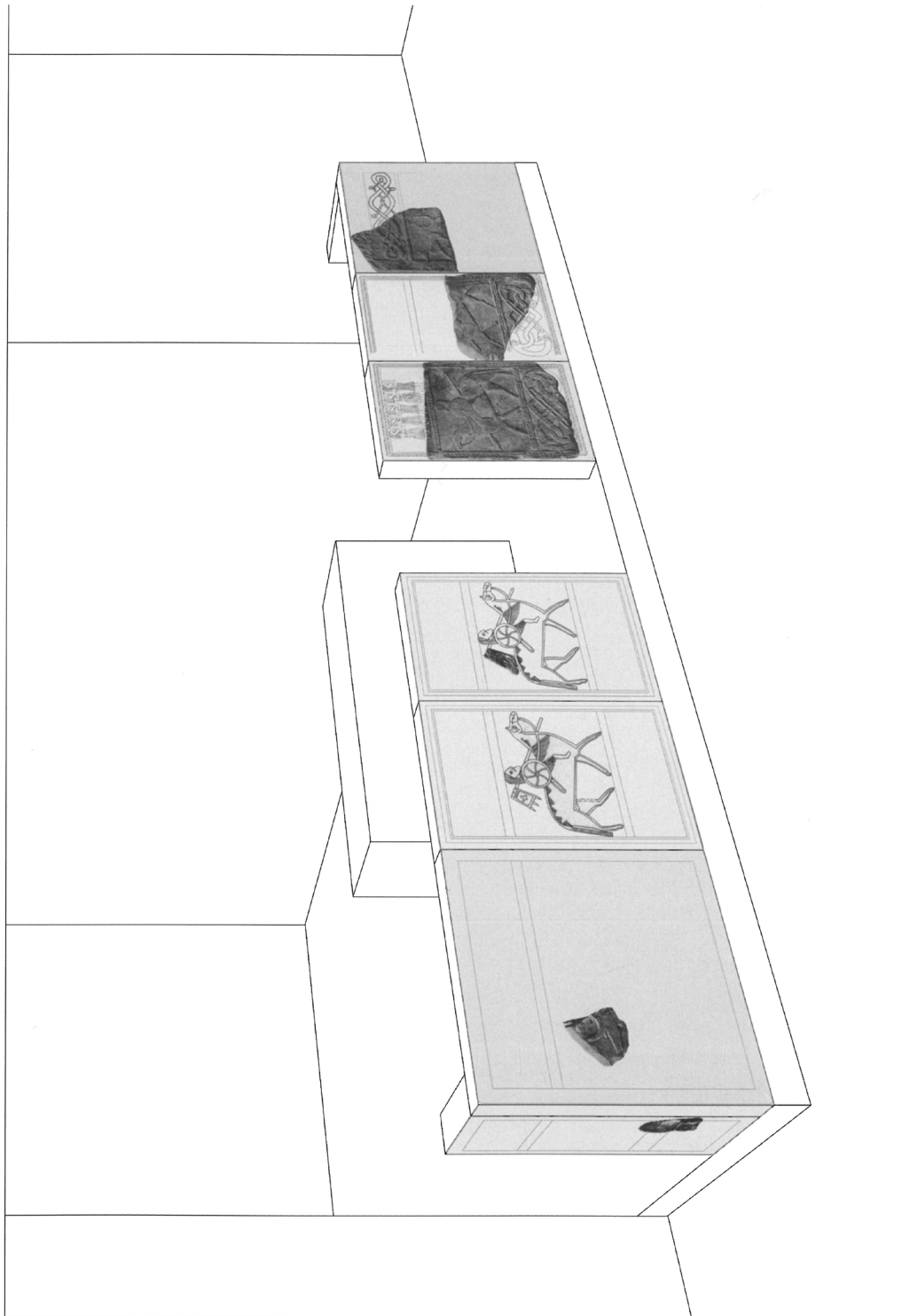


Figure 71: Reconstruction of the Hornhausen chancel screens after Schiavone.



Figure 72: Picture stone from Tängelgårda (Lärbro, Stone I, detail), Sweden, c. eighth century.

and articulated in a style, neither ‘Roman’ nor ‘Germanic’, that was widespread across northern Europe. This being the case, Høilund Nielsen’s conclusion seems rather surprising: “There may be a much more Scandinavian world-view embodied in the designs of these two plates than accepted by Böhner, who saw the images as Christian with a Scandinavian touch.”⁷⁸ As Schiavone has observed, there is a much more ‘Mediterranean’ world-view embodied than that proposed by Høilund Nielsen.

With this in mind the rider motifs on the Ennabeuren reliquary (Fig. 65) can now be considered. An explicitly Christian object buried within the altar of the local church, this particular reliquary has generated considerable interest due to the commonly held assumption that its Christian imagery incorporates ‘pagan’ motifs. The limewood, house-shaped reliquary, is mounted with gilded copper foils (*Pressbleche*) and generally thought to date from the mid-seventh through early-eighth centuries, made in the local ‘Alemannic’ area.⁷⁹

Quast has recently suggested a date in the mid-seventh century, and a ‘Burgundian’ provenance, comparing the *Pressbleche* on the reliquary with scramasax rivets also decorated with interlaced animal ornament he considered contemporary (Figs 74–75),⁸⁰ failing to acknowledge that similar rivets are frequently found among early medieval burials in south-west Germany throughout the course of the seventh century.⁸¹ Previous conjectures concerning the seventh-/ early eighth-century dating

⁷⁸ Høilund Nielsen, “Lundeborg – Gispersleben,” 27.

⁷⁹ Quast, *Das merowingerzeitliche Reliquienkästchen aus Ennabeuren*, 118–19 (for an English summary). See also Roth, *Kunst und Handwerk*, 262; Wamers, “Löwe und Löwendarstellungen,” 558.

⁸⁰ Quast, *Das merowingerzeitliche Reliquienkästchen aus Ennabeuren*, 36–45, 118.

⁸¹ Phases 6 and 7 (c. 610/20–700 AD) after Friedrich, *Archäologische Chronologie und historische Interpretation*, 276 (type „Saxniet3“). Cp. Frank Siegmund, *Merowingerzeit am Niederrhein: Die frühmittelalterlichen Funde aus*



Figure 73: Scabbard from Vålsgarde 7, Sweden, seventh century.

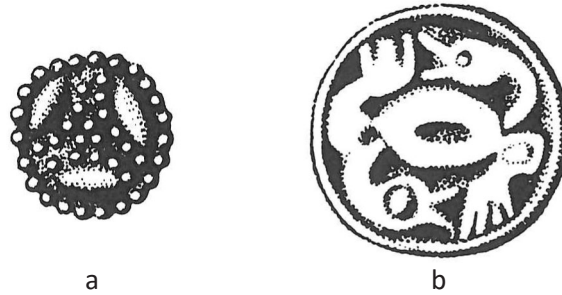


Figure 74: Stamps from the Ennabeuren reliquary.
a: trefoil ornament
b: two interlaced animals

of the Ennabeuren reliquary are thus probably more likely.

The decoration of the reliquary is composed of multiple medallions, five each on the front and back, and two each on the sides. Those on the front feature the rider and four stylised portraits (Fig. 65b). Those on the back features four portraits, two large and two smaller—the latter resembling those on the front (Fig. 65a); the larger portraits are encircled with pseudo-inscriptions, imitating coinage. The fifth, and smallest, medallion features an interlaced ornament similar to the scramasax rivets mentioned above. Other small medallions whose ornament repeats that of the contemporary rivets (Figs 74, 76) fill the spaces between the five larger medallions on both front and back. The ‘roof’ of the reliquary is surmounted by a human bust flanked by two quadrupeds, a scheme usually interpreted as Daniel in the Lion’s Den.⁸² In his discussion of the reliquary Quast has identified three significant factors he deems to be embodied in its iconography:

- Christian Mediterranean motifs (which however bear reference to a pre-Christian [sic] association),
- Emperor image or portrait,

dem Regierungsbezirk Düsseldorf und dem Kreis Heinsberg, Rheinische Ausgrabungen 34 (Köln: Rheinland-Verl., 1998), 94–95 and Ulrike Müssemeier et al., *Chronologie der merowingerzeitlichen Grabfunde vom linken Niederrhein bis zur nördlichen Eifel*, Materialien zur Bodendenkmalpflege im Rheinland 15 (Bonn: Habelt, 2003), 46–47, 107 fig. 9; for an English synopsis see Elke Nieveler and Frank Siegmund, “The Merovingian chronology of the Lower Rhine Area: results and problems,” in *The pace of change: studies in early-medieval chronology*, ed. John Hines et al., Cardiff studies in archaeology (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1999), 3–22.

⁸² Quast, *Das merowingerzeitliche Reliquienkästchen aus Ennabeuren*, 30.



Figure 75: Scramasax rivets related to the Ennabeuren reliquary (cp. fig. 74b).

- “Pagan” images for sacred purposes or as apotropaic symbol.⁸³

The first clearly involves the ‘Miles Christi’: like the disc from Strasbourg and another from Güttingen (Fig. 67a, e), the haloed rider with a cross staff over his shoulders tramples a serpent. Overall, there is little doubt about the Christian frames of reference denoted by this imagery. This is not the case, however, with the portraits (Quast’s second category). As Quast notes, those with inscriptions are related to Scandinavian bracteates, both in style and motif, whose iconography was in turn comprehensively informed by that of imperial Roman coinage. Hence, he argues that the portraits, lacking distinct Christian symbolism evoked by ‘Germanic’ paganism, indicate a *Überschneidungsbereich* (“overlap/intersection”) of Christian and pagan motifs when set alongside the riders.⁸⁴

Here, however, Quast does not take into account the fact that portraits, particularly imperial portraits, are not religious—Christian or ‘pagan’—in and of themselves. And, while their articulation on the bracteates found in Scandinavia may indeed be understood with a ‘pagan’ frame of reference, from a methodological point of view this reading cannot then be assigned to all similar portraits, regardless of the context in which they appear. In the case of the Ennabeuren reliquary (recovered in a church) the context could not be more Christian. Moreover, Quast has stressed that the small portraits on the reliquary (Fig. 77) can be traced back to Merovingian coins, which are, after all, the coins of Christian kings.⁸⁵

Quast’s third factor (‘pagan’ images) involves the animal ornament which can be associated with the rivets found in furnished burials. Though referencing a large body of Christian material displaying similar motifs, Quast nevertheless argues that this imagery is inherently ‘pagan’ and when found in Christian contexts, is used as a means of apotropaic magic.⁸⁶ This is, to say the least, a debatable proposition.

In general, the rider can be regarded as having been informed by ‘Mediterranean’ prototypes, as are the larger portraits, while the smaller ones are related to Merovingian

⁸³ Ibid., 118.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 25–28; concerning the iconography of Nordic bracteates: Pesch, *Die Goldbrakteaten der Völkerwanderungszeit*, 9–43, esp. 24 fn. 34.

⁸⁵ Quast, *Das merowingerzeitliche Reliquienkästchen aus Ennabeuren*, 30.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 32–34; cp. Wamers, “Salins Stil II,” *passim*.



Figure 76: Scramasax rivets with trefoil and animal ornaments from Marktoberdorf Grave 209, Bavaria, Germany, second half of the seventh century.

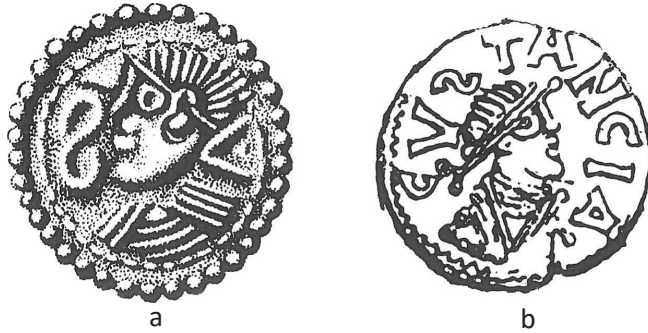


Figure 77: Comparison of the smaller portrait from the Ennabeuren reliquary (a) and a Merovingian coin (b).

coinage. The origins of these motifs clearly lie in a ‘pagan’ past—but a Roman one. Furthermore, this past is a *distant past*—so distant it does not seem reasonable to assume that those responsible for the production of the reliquary were intimately aware of the original symbolic references of motifs that had been used in Christian contexts for centuries. Thus, it can be argued that there are no ‘pagan’ motifs on the Ennabeuren reliquary. Rather, some of the ideas (victorious rider and especially the portraits) draw on ‘traditional’ iconography known long before the seventh century, which was considered applicable to Christian (as well as non-Christian) contexts. The animal art and stamps related to rivets are, on the contrary, contemporary features, and while they may have been used apotropaically, it does not follow that this was ‘pagan’ in meaning.

Overall, from the imagery considered here, it would seem reasonable to conclude that various motifs (individual standing figures, human masks and riders) could be used in diverse contexts with different purposes. In the case of the riders from Hüfingen and Hornhausen, it can perhaps be said that they were intended to represent Christianity victorious, a conclusion based on their contexts rather than the origins of the iconographic motif. And, while the portraits and animal ornament might render unclear the frames of reference of the decorative scheme of the Ennabeuren reliquary, the fact that they were used widely in Christian contexts, and here feature on an ecclesiastical, liturgical item, alongside a rider bearing a cross staff strongly suggest they were considered primarily ‘Christian’ in this instance.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation set out to determine the impacts of a (presumed) dichotomy of ‘paganism’ and Christianity on our understanding of early medieval figural imagery; in doing so, it has raised substantial issues relating to heuristic categories frequently invoked as the basis for interpreting late sixth- and seventh-century visual culture. Beside paganism and Christianity, one of these categories is labelled ‘Germanic’—commonly interchangeable with ‘pagan’—presuming shared identities and traditions among those people credited with these identities (Chapter 1). The review of artworks from central and north-west Europe throughout the late-sixth and seventh centuries presented here supports the conclusion that the interpretation of ‘pagan’ and Christian imagery is often caught *in between*: either informed by Roman/Christian iconography, yet still ‘completely’ pagan (Chapter 2), or by semi-pagan, semi-Christian frames of reference (Chapter 3). Both are deemed to be evoked by an apparently ‘Germanic’ past and tradition.

Rather than dwelling on the terminology, this study has elaborated on the iconography informing imagery on such items as the Sutton Hoo, Vendel, and Valsgärde helmets. Instead of tracing their decoration back to a ‘pagan-Germanic’ past embodied in the images, it has argued that they were, to a great extent, deliberately permeated by older Roman iconographies, indicating that the ‘pagan’ imagery was probably not thought of as such in and of itself, but was rather conceived as religiously ‘arbitrary’: applicable to Christian as well as non-Christian—‘pagan’—frames of reference, being ‘both-and’. Here, I will summarise the significant findings of this study and substantiate an alternative approach towards the images under scrutiny based on Gell’s ‘Art and Agency’ and Hobsbawm’s ‘invented tradition’.¹

Chapter 2 addressed imagery commonly regarded as ‘pagan’, mostly metalwork (*Pressbleche* from Nordic crest helmets), as well as stone and wood carvings, such as the Niederdollendorf stele and the Trossingen lyre. Looking more closely at the helmets sporting figural imagery whose layout can be plausibly reconstructed (Valsgärde 7, Vendel 1, 12, 14, and Sutton Hoo), it can be said that most of the motifs were likely informed by earlier Roman iconographies. The Valsgärde 7 helmet (Fig. 9), for instance, is framed by several registers: two groups of warriors distinguished by different crests, set over two groups of victorious horsemen riding towards two pairs of ‘dancing warriors’, surmounted in turn by alternating warriors and riders facing a central man-and-beast scheme. The symbolic significances of the horsemen, the parading warriors and the man-and-beast imagery continues that articulated on Roman coinage and consular diptychs, as well as grave slabs commemorating high-ranking military officials.

Moreover, the idea of ‘vertical acclamation’ is also articulated by these helmets: Vendel 14 (Fig. 21) depicts parading warriors marching towards two pairs of combatants, as does the Vendel 1 helmet with horsemen riding towards men and beasts (Fig. 40). Thus far, only the Sutton Hoo helmet seems to vary as the riders do not career towards each other, but rather face the same direction, encircling the

¹ Gell, *Art and agency*; Hobsbawm and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*. See Chapter 1.

helmet. Vertical acclamation also impacts on the parading warriors on the Trossingen lyre (Fig. 39), and maybe even the Pliezhausen disc (Fig. 1) if we assume a back-to-front counterpart since it was probably designed as a *phalera* prior to its reuse as a disc brooch (though, this remains speculative). Thus, not only the motifs but also the ideas informing the layout seem to be heavily influenced by imperial prototypes. Nonetheless, the objects as well as the imagery and its arrangement have their own distinctive features: though the victorious rider is known from Roman helmets (such as the Hallaton helmet, Fig. 10), no comparable layout is found on them. Rather, the early medieval helmets draw on various iconographies and notions ‘of old’, rearticulating them as something ‘new’: acclaiming soldiers along with man and beast venerating the person wearing the helmet, or—in case of Trossingen—playing the lyre.

Taking into account the fact that most of the imagery emerges from furnished graves, this reading can be taken further: the *phalerae* from Eschwege (Fig. 37), for example, feature rather unfamiliar, yet locally produced iconographies showing an oriental goddess (*potnia theron*) alongside men and beasts. This implies that the actual iconography and its meaning was perhaps less significant than has been assumed by previous scholars; rather, the visual appeal of the scheme, recognised as originating in a (presumably old) ‘tradition’ was what mattered. It was this that provided agency in establishing an ‘invented tradition’ in the context of burial. The grave in which the discs from Eschwege were found measured approximately 3 by 4 m, indicating an ‘elite’ burial (though lacking further grave goods due to previous robbing). The same holds true—to an even greater extent—for Vendel, Valsgårde, and Sutton Hoo being counted among most elite burials of the period in north-west Europe. These, and the accompanying rituals and furnishing may be seen as an attempt to establish authority and power in ‘peripheral’ regions of Europe. For this purpose, the imagery may have played a significant role in making visible the claims to power expressed in these monumental graves.

Thus, I suggest that these helmets, along with the other imagery addressed here, can be understood as ‘invented’ or ‘newly created’ tradition, one that was to all intents and purposes, new, but which was thought to be much older. This ‘tradition’ to which the imagery bears witness seems to be embodied in the objects themselves—helmets, *phalerae*, brooches—and can thus be perceived as ‘agents’ in a funerary context strengthening and affirming the fabric of local societies. Adopting Hobsbawm’s types of ‘invented traditions’ the imagery can be seen as “establishing or symbolizing social cohesion” as well as “establishing or legitimizing institutions, status or relations of authority”.² Significant is the fact that this *establishing* and *legitimising* is generally applicable to Christian and non-Christian societies, as well as those in between. In the broader sense, this can be seen in the context of the ‘vanishing’ Roman Empire in the West, which ‘officially’ ceased to exist in the aftermath of Justinian’s Gothic Wars in the later sixth century,³ with the ‘invented traditions’ attempting to restore the lost fabric of society.

² Hobsbawm, “Introduction,” 9.

³ See Halsall, *Barbarian migrations*, 499–518 and Henning Börm, *Westrom: Von Honorius bis Justinian*, Urban-Taschenbücher 735 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2013), 135–39.

From a more local, and later, perspective, the 'Invicta Roma' brooches (Fig. 40) substantiate this view. Found in furnished female burials dating from the second half of the seventh century, they indicate that 'old' imagery still inherited some kind of virtue, though its primary iconography and meaning was probably no longer fully understood. Though this may not be an 'invented tradition' *per se*, it seems clear that these images also drew on old and traditional prototypes to convey a certain message using the 'powerful' scheme of unconquered Rome.

As far as the Christian imagery is concerned, the scholarship has frequently deemed it to be informed by 'paganism', or be Christian despite the absence of distinct symbols and signifiers, and so rearticulating Christian iconographies in the light of assumed 'Germanic-pagan' frames of reference. As set out in Chapter 3, the Niederdollendorf figure (Fig. 35) on the reverse of the stele may be regarded as a prime example on this tendency, especially in German scholarship. It is commonly thought to portray Christ as a warrior befitting 'Germanic' societies usually considered to be significantly fierce and martial. However, a detailed analysis of the iconography does not support this interpretation:

First, the stele depicts neither unambiguous nor established Christian (or Christological), signifiers and motifs, thus, precluding a clear identification within a Christian frame of reference (though not excluding it). Second, the victorious warrior with the 'radiant halo' standing on a 'serpent' on the reverse cannot be understood as an all-Christian motif, nor can it be exclusively linked to images of Christ in late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages. Rather, the scheme draws on the imperial imagery of victorious military officials and emperors which were also used in Christian contexts to denote the triumph of Christ and Christianity in general. In fact, the Niederdollendorf carvings may deliberately lack definitive symbols, be they 'pagan' or Christian, as a means of enabling the deployment of embedded 'agency' and meaning. Further analyses of related imagery—such as the belt buckle from Ladoix (Fig. 46), the stove carving from Moselkern (Fig. 57), and the disc from Limons (Fig. 59)—show that Christian imagery as well as Christ himself (in the cases of Moselkern and Limons) could be consciously presented with established identifiers, despite the limited nature of the corpus of images with distinct local provenance in seventh-century central and north-west Europe.

Further key aspects of this study were the Christian riders (military saints or 'Milites Christi'), considered in the nexus of their 'pagan' counterparts. It was argued that the Christian interpretation is supported by the art historical and archaeological contexts in which they appear. The riders from Hüfingen (Fig. 63) and Hornhausen (Fig. 66) are commonly regarded as soldiers fighting for Christ since they emerged from well-defined Christian contexts: in Hüfingen in conjunction with the Virgin and Child; in case of Hornhausen—chancel screens. The rider on the Ennabeuren reliquary (Fig. 65), also undoubtedly expresses Christian allegiance by carrying the cross. Further discs from Strasbourg and Güttingen (Fig. 67) indicate the cross-carrying rider to be a common iconography at the time.

Concerning the Hornhausen carving, it was furthermore suggested that neither its style (figural and ornamental), nor its motifs can be convincingly described as

‘pagan’—or as ‘Germanic’ for that matter. If the carvings were indeed used as chancel screens in a church, they can be seen only as Christian objects, with no need to claim ‘pagan’ attributions. Overall, it seems reasonable to assume that if not indicated by the iconography itself—for instance, signified by cruciferous haloes, cross staffs, and Christograms—Christian meaning is disclosed by the context rather than the art itself, given that the belief systems informing the production of the images were clearly Christian.

Generally, the findings of this study provide insights into the ways art functioned in early medieval religious and funerary contexts as a means of affirming social cohesion and stability. The most significant methodological implication of this study is that we should not carelessly jump to conclusions about imagery being ‘pagan’ or Christian—or even transitional—but accept that in many cases it can, and perhaps was intended to be multivalent, yet not in a syncretic way, instead enabling understanding of art for both ‘pagans’ and Christians.

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