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## Expressions of cosmology at the central place of Uppåkra, southern Sweden

Larsson, Lars

*Published in:*  
Dying Gods

2015

*Document Version:*  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Larsson, L. (2015). Expressions of cosmology at the central place of Uppåkra, southern Sweden. In C. Ruhmann, & V. Brieske (Eds.), *Dying Gods: Religious beliefs in northern and eastern Europe in the time of Christianisation* (pp. 145). (Internationales Sachsensymposium; No. 2013). Niedersächsisches Landesmuseum Hannover.

*Total number of authors:*  
1

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# Dying Gods – Religious beliefs in northern and eastern Europe in the time of Christianisation

herausgegeben von

Christiane Ruhmann und Vera Brieske

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# Neue Studien zur Sachsenforschung Band 5

herausgegeben vom  
Niedersächsischen Landesmuseum Hannover

in Verbindung mit dem  
Internationalen Sachsensymposium

durch  
Babette Ludowici

Umschlaggestaltung: Karl-Heinz Perschall, Werner Pollak  
Satz und Layout: Deborah Zarnke

Redaktion: Beverley Hirschel, Deborah Zarnke, Vera Brieske,  
Christiane Ruhmann

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek:  
Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese  
Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie;  
detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über  
<http://dnb.d-nb.de>  
abrufbar.

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In Kommission bei Konrad Theiss Verlag GmbH, Stuttgart

Abbildungsnachweise  
liegen in der Verantwortung der Autoren

Druck:  
BWH GmbH – Die Publishing Company, D-30457 Hannover

ISBN 978-3-8062-3260-8

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## Vorwort

Der vorliegende fünfte Band der Reihe „Neue Studien zur Sachsenforschung“ umfasst 26 Beiträge des 64. Internationalen Sachsensymposiums, das vom 7.–11. September 2013 in Paderborn stattfand. Er setzt die gemeinsam vom Niedersächsischen Landesmuseum Hannover und dem Internationalen Sachsensymposium herausgegebene Reihe „Neue Studien zur Sachsenforschung“ fort.

Das Thema des Symposiums, „Dying Gods – Religious beliefs in northern and eastern Europe in the time of Christianisation“, behandelte räumlich spezifische wie auch chronologisch divergierende Phänomene des Übergangs von den gentilen Religionen zum Christentum in Nord- und Osteuropa.

Die Beiträge gingen der Frage nach, welche Aussagen zu den vorchristlichen Religionen getroffen werden können, zumal viele Quellenzeugnisse – zumindest diejenigen schriftlicher Art – die Ereignisse aus christlicher Sicht und oft auch aus großem zeitlichen Abstand in den Blick nehmen. In- bzw. Akkulturation stand im Mittelpunkt der Betrachtung, besaßen doch viele der gentilen Verbände zu Beginn ihrer Missionierungsgeschichte bereits Kontakt zur antiken, auch christlich geprägten Kultur, was wiederum nicht ohne Einfluss auf die paganen Glaubensvorstellungen blieb. Einen guten Ansatz zur Klärung dieser Fragen bieten die archäologischen Quellen zu den weitreichenden Kontakten und Verbindungen der Eliten und paganen Verbände.

Die Vorträge des Symposiums widmeten sich auch der Frage, in welchem Umfang sich für die paganen Religionen – denen sowohl jegliche festgefügte Doktrin fremd als auch eine starke regionale Variationsbreite zu eigen war – übergreifende festgeschriebene Glaubensvorstellungen konstatieren lassen. Einen weiteren Schwerpunkt der Betrachtung bildete die Frage, inwieweit das sich ausdehnende Christentum nicht nur auf die Bildwelt der paganen Religionen, sondern möglicherweise auch auf die ihnen innewohnenden religiösen Überzeugungen Einfluss nahm. Wurden durch den zunehmenden Kontakt von paganer auf der einen und mediterran westlicher bzw. östlicher Sphäre auf der anderen Seite nicht nur Bilder, sondern auch Ideen transferiert und transponiert? Sind die in der älteren Forschung konstatierten deutlichen Unterschiede zwischen paganer und christlicher Welt eher der einseitigen Betrachtung der Schriftquellen geschuldet und zeigt sich in der materiellen Überlieferung möglicherweise ein anderes Bild, nämlich dasjenige einer größeren Annäherung bzw. Beeinflussung religiöser Vorstellungen auf beiden Seiten?

Die Exkursion führte die Teilnehmer des Sachsensymposiums zu archäologisch und historisch bedeutsamen Zen-

tralorten Ostwestfalens und Nordhessens. Zu nennen ist hier das Kloster Helmarshausen, das durch seine mittelalterliche Handschriftenproduktion tief in das neu christianisierte Skandinavien ausstrahlte, oder das karolingische Reichskloster Corvey, Ort der Antikenrezeption und im Hohen Mittelalter einer der Ausgangspunkte der Missionierung Skandinaviens. Letzter Programmpunkt der Exkursion waren die im Lipperland gelegenen Externsteine, bedeutsam durch die vor Ort erhaltene Nachbildung des Heiligen Grabes zu Jerusalem, zu welchem auch ein überlebensgroßes Relief der Kreuzabnahme Christi gehört, und berüchtigt durch die Deutung als germanisches Heiligtum durch Nationalsozialisten und völkische Gruppierungen.

Den Druck des Konferenzbandes haben die Altertumskommission für Westfalen und die Ausstellungsgesellschaft Paderborn finanziell getragen. Unser Dank gilt Beverly Hirschel für die redaktionelle Betreuung der englischen Beiträge sowie Deborah Zarnke M.A., die sowohl die Tagung organisatorisch begleitete als auch für Redaktion und Satz des vorliegenden Bandes verantwortlich war.

Wir möchten diesen Band dem Angedenken an Torsten Capelle widmen, der im Juli 2014 verstorben ist. Nicht nur den beiden Herausgeberinnen, seinen Schülerinnen Christiane Ruhmann und Vera Brieske, sondern auch den Kolleginnen und Kollegen und der Institution des Sachsensymposiums war er stete Stütze und Inspiration. In Dankbarkeit erinnern wir uns an ihn und veröffentlichen in diesem Band die letzte seiner großartigen Sachsensymposiums-Zusammenfassungen sowie die Liste seiner wissenschaftlichen Publikationen zum Interessengebiet der Arbeitsgemeinschaft, dem 1. Jahrtausend n. Chr. in Nord- und Mitteleuropa.

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# Expressions of cosmology at the central place of Uppåkra, southern Sweden

Lars Larsson

## Introduction

The central place of Uppåkra in south-western Skåne, southern Sweden, was found during the building of a farm in 1934 (Fig. 1). Only a small excavation was carried out at the time (VIFOT 1936). Due to the interest in the process of social development from tribe to state during the first millennium AD, and in the establishment and significance of central places, Uppåkra became a focus of research (STJERNQUIST 1996; LARSSON 1998). Archaeological investigation has continued every summer season since 1996. The whole site covers an area of roughly 40 hectares and seems to have been occupied continuously from c. 100 BC until c. AD 1000 (LARSSON 2002; 2003).

The term 'expression of cosmology' used in the title of this paper can mean everything or nothing. In this context, the term is used in a broad sense and includes finds and features that suggest manifestations and ritual activities that might relate to world-views, or might reflect such beliefs.

In some cases, these elements may be comparatively unproblematic since they can be related to Old Norse cosmology, as mentioned in the written sagas and tales, as well as to Christian concepts. In other cases, information comes from

combinations of objects or types of structures that exhibit a striking divergence from ordinary situations. In some instances, a combination of objects and structures provides the basis for identifying a site as having an exceptional position, with ritual and ceremonial functions.

## A special stave building

The most striking feature at Uppåkra is a building in the central part of the site, perceived as a building for religious, ritual and ceremonial activities; a cult house, judging from the structure of the building itself as well as from the character of the find assemblage (LARSSON 2006; 2007; 2011). Excavation revealed a very complex sequence of layers, suggesting a tall timber building in stave construction with deep trenches for the walls. The form and structure of this stave building was strictly maintained throughout six rebuilding phases, which spanned about seven centuries. The house had three entrances, one facing north and two facing south (Fig. 2). Despite the large number of rebuilding phases, only minor changes were made to the original plan. The building had straight gables and slightly convex walls. It was 13.5 m long and 6 m wide. Inside were four large post-holes, placed in pairs, that had held the posts supporting the roof. In most phases of the stave building there was a centrally located hearth, but some instances of double hearths were also recorded. The hearths were indicated by fire-reddened clay and a concentration of ash and charcoal, but without any special delimitation. In some of the phases, ember pits were found.

The stave structure had one-metre-deep wall trenches. A post had been placed in each of the four corners of the building. The four additional posts mentioned above were placed in pairs in the interior of the building to support the roof. The pits for the large posts were about 2 m deep. In three of the inner post-holes, the packing stones used to stabilise the load-bearing structure were found, indicating that the posts had been about 0.7 m in diameter. The corner post-holes were of the same size as the inner post-holes. At the bottom of the wall trenches semicircular depressions were readily apparent, indicating the use of the stave construction technique. This sturdy construction suggests a high superstructure.

The finds in the fill layers of the wall trenches and post-holes were particularly rich. They also reflect the archaeo-

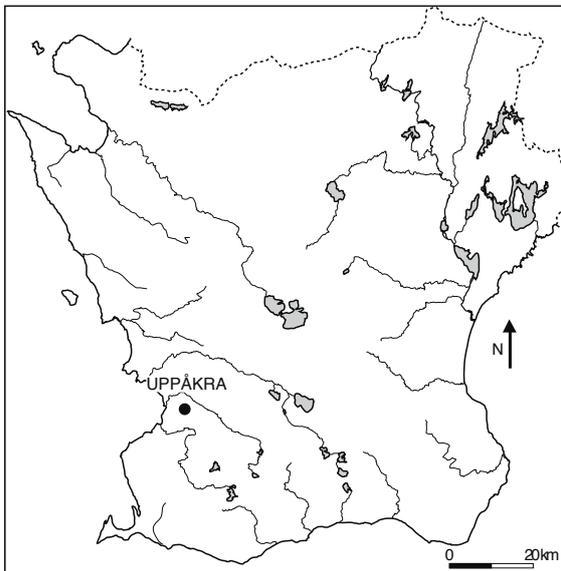


Figure 1. The location of Uppåkra in the southernmost part of Sweden (Map: L. Larsson).

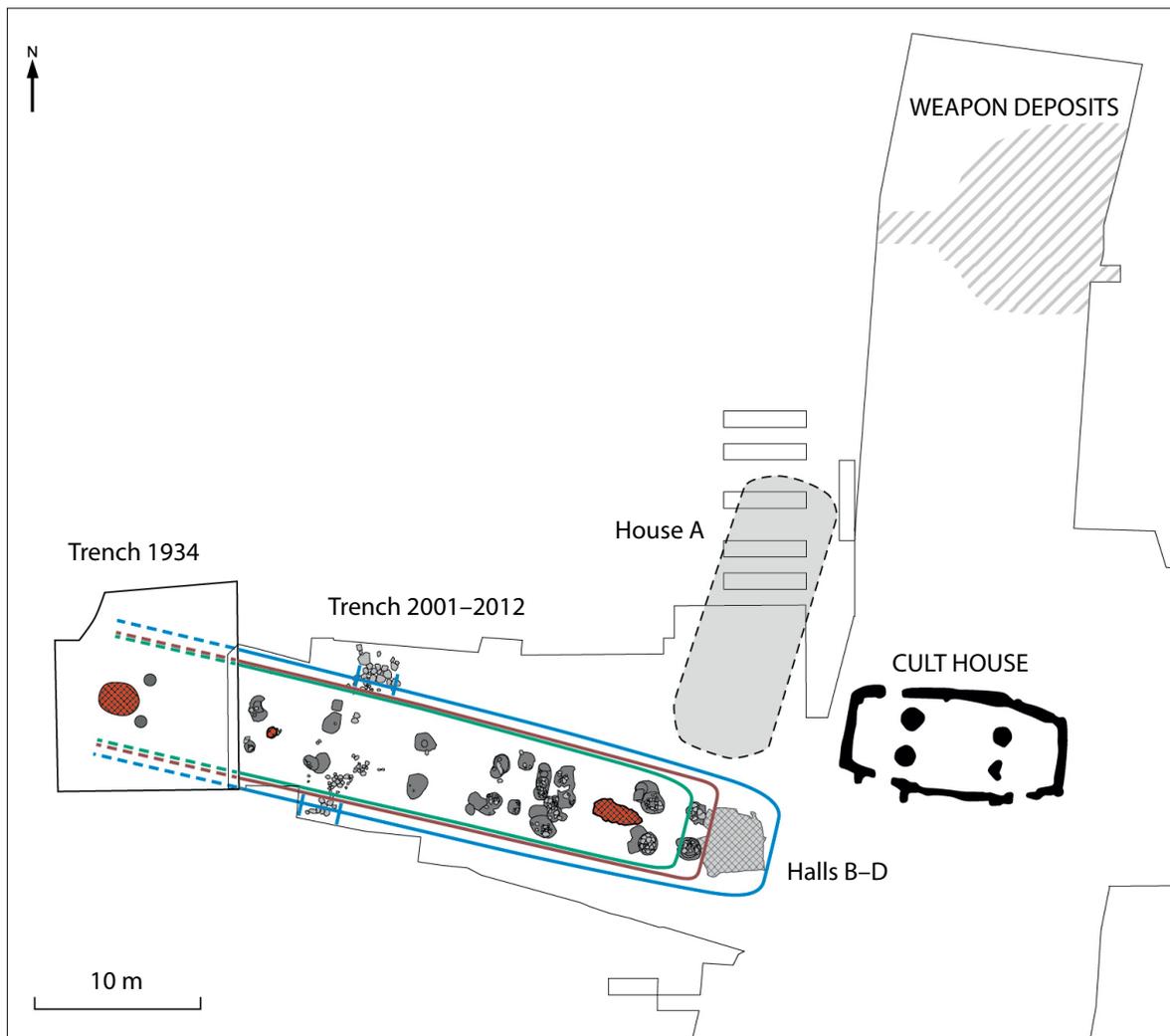


Figure 2. The stave building and its immediate vicinity (Plan: H. Pihl).

logical challenges associated with the long occupation of Uppåkra. The finds include brooches, beads, fragments of crucibles and potsherds, dating from the Pre-Roman Iron Age to the Viking Age. A radiocarbon assay confirmed the early date of the first house, i.e.  $1880 \pm 50$  BP, cal AD 20–245 (LuS 6246). The clay floor layer of the oldest stave house had been laid on the ancient ground surface, dated to  $2080 \pm 45$  BP, cal 210 BC–AD 30 (Ua-22073).

The finds indicate that the most recent intact stave house continued to be used into the Viking Age. According to the radiocarbon dates, this final stage may have ended as late as the tenth century. Radiocarbon dates for the bones in the post-holes indicated  $1148 \pm 30$  BP, cal AD 770–980 (Ua-38989), and  $1118 \pm 30$  BP, cal AD 860–1020 (Ua-38988).

Even though later renovations of the building had destroyed earlier remains, some elements are worth mentioning. The western part of the initial building was paved with

small stones, a construction element not repeated later. A small vessel was found below the floor in the eastern part of the building and was interpreted as a house offering. The destruction caused by later rebuilding has left few finds indicating specific activities that took place within the structure.

Yet there were both earlier and later buildings on the same site that indicated longer continuity. The floor layer of the oldest stave building was on the original ground surface, but it did have a forerunner (LARSSON and LENNORP 2004, Fig. 14). This was a traditional longhouse, the remains of which consisted of four filled post-holes. The stratigraphy showed that the posts were in the form of planks measuring  $0.9 \times 0.3$  m – very rare dimensions for houses constructed during the late Pre-Roman or early Roman Iron Age. Unfortunately, the excavated area was too small to provide an indication of the length of the house. However, it is interesting to observe that this earlier construction has the same orientation as the later building.

There were some traces of a later building, pit features that had been truncated by modern ploughing. The floor of this house has not survived (LARSSON and LENNTORP 2004, Fig. 15). It is not likely that the houses of the later period were comparable to those that had occupied this location earlier. A possible suggestion is that one group of pits represents the remains of a building erected on a stone sill. In this case, too, the later building had an orientation similar to that of the previous structures.

It is interesting to note that the NNW–SSE orientation of the stave building is also evident in the sequence of large houses further to the west (LARSSON and SÖDERBERG 2013) (Fig. 2).

#### Equivalent structures

When looking for structures comparable to the stave building, very few examples can be found, especially from the third century. A building of similar shape has been identified at Møllebækvej on eastern Zealand (NIELSEN and SCHÖNWANDT 2012). The building had two pairs of roof-supporting posts and an entrance in the north-western corner. It had a length of almost 11.4 m, similar to the length of the building at Uppåkra, and was enclosed by a palisade partly consisting of a double row of posts. No finds were associated with this building, but other buildings and finds indicate a date in the late Roman Iron Age.

During the excavation of a large area just one kilometre to the north of Uppåkra several farmsteads were identified. Farm C had a building with a structure similar to the stave house (ASPEBORG et al. 2013, Fig. 66). It had a length of 9.3 m, with some-

what convex long sides, two pairs of deep inner postholes, a clearly distinguishable trench for the walls and a further set of post holes in the interior. Two openings were situated on the south side and one on the north side. There were no finds in this building, which has been dated to the late Roman Iron Age or early Migration Period (ASPEBORG et al. 2013, 110).

Even if there are good reasons for viewing the stave building as a form of construction based on the earliest hall buildings, dating from the Roman Iron Age (HERSCHEID 1993; 2009), there might be other influences. Symbols more or less obviously related to Odin are frequent at Uppåkra (HÄRDH 1999). Some colleagues view Odin as influenced in part by the Mithras cult, which was especially well represented on the well-defended northern borders of the Roman Empire (KALIFF and SUNDQVIST 2004). The worshippers of Mithras were mainly military personnel and the cult became very popular during the second century. A number of men from southern Scandinavia might have served with the auxiliaries already in the late first and early second century, at the time when the stave building was erected. Indeed, the structure of the stave building has some similarities with a mithraeum in terms of its size and the space for benches along all four inner walls.

#### Objects found in the stave building

##### A beaker and a glass bowl

Among the finds from the stave house, some groups of objects have a character or distribution that might be especially relevant in understanding their role during the Iron Age oc-



Figure 3. The bronze and silver beaker with embossed gold bands (Photo: B. Almgren).

cupation of Uppåkra. First of all, let us consider the beaker and glass bowl, which were deposited below the floor level of the second-to-last stave building (Fig. 3). The beaker is made of bronze and silver, covered with embossed gold bands with figurative depictions of humans, snakes and horses. Such figures are also depicted on other contemporaneous objects, but it has not been possible to identify them as related to any specific event known from Norse mythology. It was probably produced around AD 500, perhaps on the site itself (HÄRDH 2004). The glass bowl consists of two layers of glass: a colourless, transparent underlay and a cobalt-blue overlay, which has been cut away to create raised bands that form a rosette with its petals spaced around the body (STJERNQUIST 2004a). The bowl is dated to the same period as the beaker and probably originates from the Black Sea region. Besides the complete bowl, a number of sherds of bowls and beakers were found (STJERNQUIST 2004b). Most of the glass sherds are in a very fragmentary state, but judging by their shape, colour and decoration, they represent about ten vessels.

#### Gold objects

A number of small gold artefacts were found within the building. They include objects such as a capsule covered with granulated decoration, and a small piece of a bracteate with a 'T' rune (LARSSON and LENNTORP 2004). There is a small peg on the bottom of the capsule, indicating that it was fastened to a larger object of high quality. Similarities can be observed in



Figure 4. Y-shaped pieces of gold foil resembling male figures; scale: 2,5:1 (Photo: B. Almgren).

the small decorations placed between the torsos on the large gold collars of the Migration Period, as seen on the find from Möre (HOLMQVIST 1980).

The gold finds include fragments of objects made of foil of differing thickness, along with pieces of raw gold, such as twisted wire and fragments of small bars. Among the pieces of foil, some have a Y-shaped end (Fig. 4). These could possibly be regarded as very stylized figures, similar to the wooden depictions of human beings that date from the Iron Age (CAPELLE 1995). They might represent men as two examples have a perforated piece of gold and a small buckle that could mark the phallus (WATT 2004) (Fig. 4).

That the strips of gold foil are not merely waste from the manufacture of figures is indicated by their distribution: the majority were found in the fill of the post-holes and close to the east gable, like most of the gold-foil figures. The strips could perhaps be regarded as some kind of substitute for human depictions.

The discovery of crucible fragments with traces of gold grains, found just to the south of the house, might indicate a direct link between ideology and the manufacture of gold objects.

#### Gold-foil figures

The finds in the fill layers of the wall trenches and post-holes were also particularly rich. A total of 111 gold-foil figures were found (Fig. 5), produced from more than fifty dies: they constitute the second-largest collection in Scandinavia (WATT 2004). Most represent males with a variety of attributes; females are somewhat less frequent, and there are a few male-female pairs. Some gold-foil figures are similar to the figures



Figure 5. Gold-foil figures; scale: 1,5:1 (Photo: B. Almgren).

from the Sorte Muld site on the island of Bornholm (WATT 1992). In several cases, they were made from identical dies.

Most of the gold-foil figures were found right beside the heavy roof-supporting posts. The find situation at Uppåkra might suggest that the figures had been fastened to the posts. There is nothing on the figures to show how they could have been attached to the posts, but their light weight compared with the size of the available surface would have made it easy to use an adhesive such as honey or fat.

Trees, including the ash Yggdrasil at the centre of the earth, are important features in Norse mythology and the cosmological landscape (ANDRÉN 2004). In Snorres Edda the tree Glasir is located just outside Valhalla (SNORRES EDDA 1997, 140). This tree is characterized by its golden leaves or needles and is regarded as the most beautiful tree among the Æsir and Vanir. The leaves of Glasir are a kenning for gold (SNORRES EDDA 1997, 162).

The posts of the building might represent the trees in the neighbourhood. A special post covered with gold-foil figures could have been interpreted as a metaphor for Glasir at Valhalla.

#### Ring handles

Besides gold objects, other finds in the fill of the north-western roof-supporting post-hole included a ring handle for a door, made of iron (Fig. 6). The ring has a diameter of 15 cm and is fashioned with four forged knobs spaced regularly around the ring (ÖDMAN 2003). A staple was attached to the ring, so that the ring could easily turn in the eye of the staple.

A second iron ring handle was found at Uppåkra during a metal-detector survey. This one has a diameter of 23 cm and four knobs attached to the ring. The staple is also preserved.

Knobs are common on the ring handles of Romanesque doors, but there are usually no more than three, placed close together and symbolizing the Holy Trinity. The regularly arranged knobs have been suggested as representing pre-Christian symbolism, such as four gods (ÖDMAN 2003, 95). The ring handle from this building is equal in size to the church-door handles of later date (KARLSSON 1988).

The door handle is a symbolically charged object. The ring as such was a sign of power and wealth as well as a symbol of the gods (VIERCK 1981). There might be a mix of traditions, for example, a tradition deriving from the use of torques along with influences from the Roman Empire. Neck rings appear on wooden statues considered to depict gods (CAPELLE 1995) as well as on representations of figures from the aristocracy or from mythology (WATT 2004). The holding of rings indicates a function beyond that of a decorative attribute for nobles. Such gestures may hint at a relationship between earthly and supernatural forces, as when people swore oaths by holding a ring. The oath ring is an attribute connected with the god Ull (NÄSSTRÖM 2001). The ring is therefore of political, religious and legal importance.



Figure 6. View of the northwestern post-hole of the stave building, with the iron ring and the skull of a cow still in position (Photo: K.-M. Lennertorp).

#### Nails

Nails are a category of finds that would generally not arouse much interest in a find situation such as a house. The reason for discussing the distribution of nails as possibly connected with rituals and ceremonials is the noticeable concentration of nails found in the middle section of the northern wall trench. A total of 19 nails were found within an area that is small in both vertical and horizontal terms. Some of the nails were deformed by use. The position of the nails denotes intentional deposition in one of the small pits formed by the removal of the posts of the wall belonging to the final re-building phase of the house.

As far as the deposition of nails is concerned, we can refer to statements about *reginnaglar*, i.e. the nails of the gods, which were hammered into the pillars of high-seats (SIMEK 1993, 262). Thus, the location of the nails might indicate the position of the high-seat close to the northern wall, as mentioned in Norse written sources (STRÖM 1985; BERTELL 2003).

#### Weapon and bone deposits

The weapons deposited on both sides of the stave building number more than 300 objects, among which lance heads and spearheads make up the largest group (HELGESSON 2004; 2010) (Fig. 7). The deposits also include shield bosses, shield handles, arrowheads, sling stones, and iron objects that might have been used as surgical equipment (FRÖLICH 2010). Most of the lance heads and spearheads had been rendered useless, the damage varying from bending of the point to twisting in a



Figure 7. The weapons deposited on the northern side of the stave building number more than 300 objects: lance heads and spearheads make up the largest group (Photo: K.-M. Lenntorp).

loop. They were found together with large numbers of bones, placed in shallow pits, but also on pavings made of small stones. The lance heads and spearheads date from Period B1 of the Roman Iron Age up to the beginning of the Merovingian Period (HELGESSON 2010).

A number of lance heads and spearheads were found to the south of the stave building, together with a small number of objects that came from a helmet, such as an eyebrow fitting and two small pig-like mounts (HELGESSON 2004) (Fig. 8).

Even though the weapon depositions have attracted the most interest, the large amount of bone among the weapons indicates aspects connected with rituals. Among the bones in the concentration to the north of the stave building, weighing some 190 kg, a small number were identified as being of human origin (MAGNELL et al. 2013). These include six bones from different parts of the bodies of at least two individuals, providing a date of  $1550 \pm 50$  BP, cal AD 405–605 (Lu S 6252). This date coincides well with the dates for other bones, indicating that the human bones do not belong to disturbed graves but were deposited contemporaneously with the other bones. The human bones show gnawing marks and weathering, just like the rest of the bones, indicating that they, too, had been placed on the ground. The areas to the north as well as to the west of the stave building were covered with white bones: this could have served not only as a mark of wealth, demonstrated through feasting, but also as a sign and reminder of events that included human sacrifice (MAGNELL 2011).

Viewed together, the tall timbered house and the finds unearthed in it could perhaps be taken to represent the hall of Odin at Valhalla, manifesting the cosmology of Norse mythology. Valhalla was thought to be as tall as three high-seats placed one above the other (SNORRES EDDA 1997, 32). In the hall, spears were used as rafters and a shield covered the entire hall (Norberg 2003). The mix of spearheads of different ages in the depositions just outside the hall at Up-



Figure 8. The eyebrow arch and two mountings shaped like boars from a magnificent helmet; scale: 3:4 (Photo: B. Almgren).

påkra indicates that the spears had been stored for generations – most appropriately, in the hall itself. Parts of shields constitute the second most numerous group of finds in the depositions and might also originate from the hall.

In the early Iron Age, most of the activities with a religious or cultic connection seem to have taken place in the open air and to have centred on the deposition of tools, weapons, gold objects, animals and humans: these are mainly preserved in wet environments (FABECH 1991). At Uppåkra, such activities seem to have been performed both outdoors, in the form of the deposition of weapons (although in this case on dry land) and indoors, within the stave building.

#### A sequence of halls

The area to the west of the stave building was not entirely devoted to domestic functions. The building closest to the ceremonial house, burnt down during the late Roman Iron Age or early Migration Period and containing the remains of three burnt human beings, was covered by a layer containing a considerable number of bones (Fig. 2: house A). Within this layer, disarticulated parts of at least three humans were identified. Two radiocarbon samples, from two different human beings, have given an identical date,  $1660 \pm 50$  BP, cal



Figure 9. Gold bracteates and a pendant from the deposition on top of a burnt-down house; scale: 3:4 (Photo: L. Larsson).



Figure 10. Fragment of a gold necklet found at the bottom of a post-hole; scale: 3:1 (Photo: B. Almgren).

AD 310–535 (LuS 8339; LuS 8340). The human bones, like the other bones, exhibit gnawing marks and weathering, thus indicating that they had been left out in the open for some time. In addition, three gold bracteates and a gold pendant were found in the same layer (Fig. 9). These finds seem to constitute parts of a chain of bracteates, augmented with another pendant, which was deposited in this area.

Based on these finds, a tentative chronological sequence can be suggested. The house, along with at least three inhabitants, was burnt down at the transition from the Roman Iron Age to the Migration Period. The bodies inside were either partially recovered or, more likely, just left there, and the area was levelled. Less than a century later, a large number of bones (including human bones) and the gold objects were deposited on top of the remains of the house. It is interesting to note that the age of the bone deposits fits well with that of the bone deposits connected with the large number of deformed weapons found to the north of the stave building.

The shortest distance between the burnt-down house and the stave building is not more than about 5 metres (LARSSON and SÖDERBERG 2013). No evidence has been found of sudden changes affecting the stave building, such as destruction by fire. This is proof of adaptation to traditional behaviour and regulations – a continuity that is exceptional for Iron Age buildings.

Only about 10 metres to the southwest of the stave building, a sequence of halls has been partly excavated (LARSSON 2011; LARSSON and SÖDERBERG 2013): this covers at least three building phases, dating from the Migration Period to the Viking Age. At about the same time as the above-mentioned deposition of bones and gold objects was taking place, a large building burnt down with at least five persons inside (Fig. 2: hall B). Two samples of human bone have given dates of  $1665 \pm 100$  BP, cal AD 130–585 (Lu S 8376) and  $1585 \pm 50$  BP, cal AD 380–600 (Lu S 8375). The disarticulated state of the bones shows that some kind of disturbance occurred. This proves that the walls remained standing for a certain length of time after the fire, yet valuable things like gold objects were not removed. That human beings were killed need not have any direct association with aspects of a world-view. However, the fact that the human remains were not buried in accordance with normal practices



Figure 11. Mount, probably from a sword scabbard: the decoration shows a winged human figure and a bird's tail. It may depict Wayland the Smith escaping by means of a flying device from the anger of King Nidud after killing the latter's two sons and raping the daughter, according to the *Völundarqviða*; scale: 1:1 (Photo: B. Almgren).

might be linked to the way these people were regarded from the point of view of custom and tradition. No trace of cut marks has been observed on the human bones (MAGNELL et al. 2013).

The construction of a building on top of the one that had burnt down, with human remains still inside, must relate directly to the values held by the people who built it. This aspect is even more pronounced when human remains are mixed with waste from feasting, as exemplified by the weapon deposits and the layer of bones above the earliest burnt hall.

Disaster struck in the shape of fire at least three times. The actual number of such events may prove to be even higher, as only parts of the area have been excavated. This presents a picture of an unstable society with a stable building for ritual and ceremonial purposes.

Within the hall sequence, some finds and one particular feature could directly relate to aspects of a world-view. Special objects were found at the bottom of the post-holes of the hall dated to the Migration Period. One example is a small piece of a gold necklet similar to a heavy gold necklet found at Trolleberg, just a few kilometres to the northeast of Uppåkra (STRÖMBERG 1963, Fig. 30a) (Fig. 10). This kind of house offering is quite common, but rarely takes the form of a gold object (CARLIE 2004). In other post-holes there were depositions of bones, such as the jaw of a large pig.

Due to ploughing, only the post-holes and the stone paving in the easternmost part of the youngest sequence of the halls were preserved (Fig. 2: hall D). This stone paving, consisting of fire-cracked stones, had a D-shaped layout. Within the paving a large number of bones were found as well as a mount in the form of a human figure with wings and a bird's tail, probably depicting the well-known figure of Wayland the Smith (HELMBRECHT 2012) (Fig. 11).

The paved structure shows interesting similarities with a platform found at Lilla Ullevi, Uppland, in central Sweden,

that has been interpreted as a cultic harg and dated to the Merovingian Period (BÄCK and HÄLLANS STENHOLM 2012). As at Uppåkra, the structure at Lilla Ullevi is shaped like the gable of a large house.

#### Pits

Of some interest is an assemblage of pits, most of them in a row, which was recorded in the area to the north of a sequence of buildings located to the east of the stave building. At least eight such pits, containing millstones, were identified. Two of these were excavated and they turned out to be quite shallow. Fragmentary and intact millstones were found in a horizontal position, almost filling the pits, so this was evidently not packing for posts.

A number of intact millstones have also been found in a row in the area to the south of the stave building as well as in the features connected with the burnt-down houses to the west (LARSSON and SÖDERBERG 2013).

In addition to their everyday use in the household, millstones had an important symbolic meaning, such as the mill Grotti, grinding gold as well as peace and good fortune, war and disaster (HULTKRANZ 1991; ZACHRISSON 2004).

Another function might also be proposed: as holders for staffs. There is a well-known find of a griffin-like object on a staff from Thorsberg bog (ENGELHARDT 1853). It was recorded that the remains of a flag or streamer were also found attached to the staff, unfortunately now lost. Such staffs could have supplemented the symbolic marking of the site.

#### Burial mounds

Today, two mounds are visible within the site, known as Storehög and Lillehög. During a small excavation of Storehög it was determined that the fill did not contain any artefact that could originate from the Iron Age settlement, so the mound must date to the earliest part of the settlement, or even earlier (LINDELL 2001). That it might be of Iron Age origin, despite its resemblance to a Bronze Age mound, is suggested by the flat top, a characteristic observed on Iron Age mounds, for example at Lejre (CHRISTENSEN 1991).

A grave with a necklace of glass beads dating from the Roman Iron Age was found during the excavation of a mound at Uppåkra in the mid 19th century, but we do not know the location (BRUZELIUS 1878). A geophysical survey in the vicinity of Storehög and on the highest point of the site revealed anomalies that indicate the existence of at least one, or maybe two other mounds (GABLER et al. 2013, Fig. 6; LARSSON et al. 2014). A late Neolithic grave was found within one of these, probably covered with just a small mound. A written source mentions a mound in the churchyard to the north of the church, which was removed during the 18th

century (SWANANDER 1958). Mounds might have already existed on the site from Neolithic times onwards, and it is not known whether any of them date from the Iron Age.

A late medieval source mentions a market named the 'Three Mounds Market' (ANDRÉN 1998). This might be a reference to a former market at Uppåkra, as at least three mounds should have been visible as late as the early 18th century.

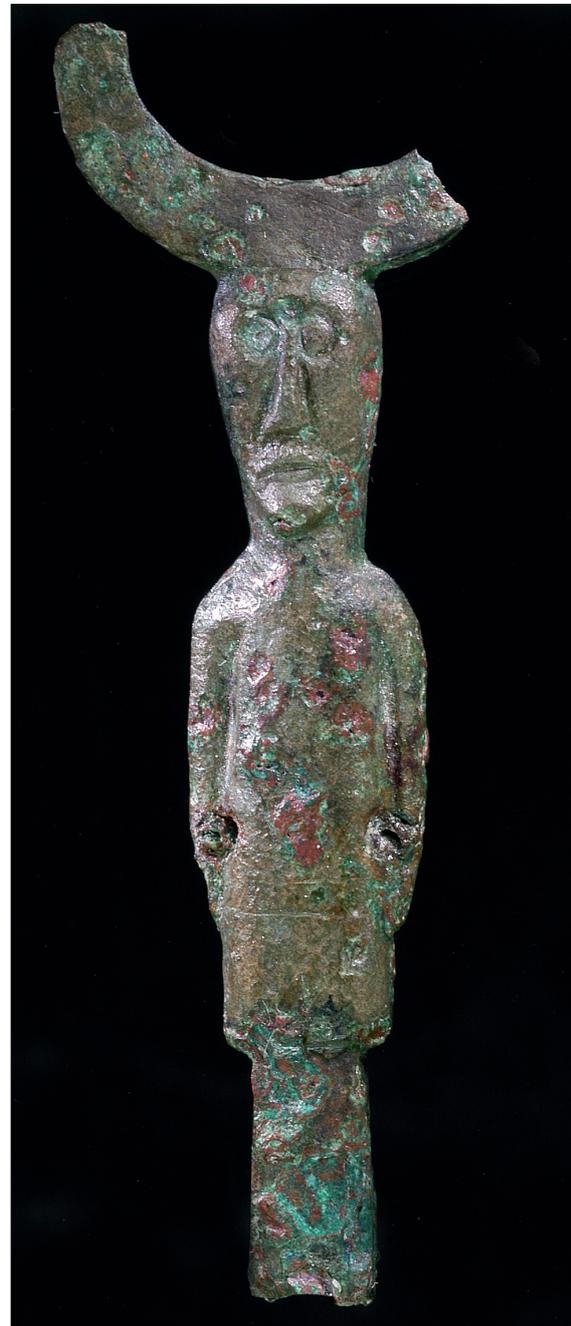


Figure 12. A figurine depicting a man with clothes reaching down to his ankles and who has horn-like protuberances. As the figurine has only one eye it may depict the god Odin; scale: 3,5:1 (Photo: B. Almgren).

## Objects found during metal detector surveys

A number of metal-detector finds might have had some religious connection. A small figurine was found in the south-eastern part of the site (BERGQVIST 1999; HÄRDH 2010). It probably depicts a man whose clothes reach down to his ankles, and who has horn-like protuberances (Fig. 12). If we consider other similar representations, we might suggest that these are not horns, but protruding elements ending in birds' heads. As the figurine has just one eye it may depict the god Odin, the protuberances being his two messengers, Hugin and Mumin. In each hand he holds an object that is now lost. However, traces of rust indicate that these objects were made of iron. One reasonable suggestion is that they were spears, as Odin was the god of war and the spear Gungnir was his attribute (SIMEK 1993). The shape of the projecting end indicates that it was fixed to a wooden frame.

Miniature bronze spears have also been found, along with swords, sheep shears and hammers. These date from the Merovingian and Viking periods. Some scholars want to associate these miniatures with the attributes of various gods, such as the spear of Odin and the hammer of Thor (KROKTVEDGAARD ZEITEN 1997), while others interpret them as protective amulets (CAPELLE 2003). According to another hypothesis they are bridal gifts that provided symbolic protection for women (ROSENGREN 2010).

A gilded silver pendant depicting two snakes, one in a sleeping position with its eyes closed, the other awake, might also relate to Odin, as the snake is one of his disguises (HÄRDH 1999). Some items of jewellery might also be related to Odin. For example, human-like faces can be seen on bird-shaped brooches (HELMBRECHT 2013). In view of the somewhat irregular size and position of the eyes, they might be representations of Odin.

## Bracteates

Found in the same area as the figurine was a bracteate depicting a horse-like animal and a human head (the object was used as the logo for the 64. Internationales Sachsensymposium) (AXBOE 2001). They are thought to represent the god Odin and his horse Sleipner. In the south-eastern part of the settlement a large but irregular stone setting was found, measuring 9 x 2.5 m, in which there were numerous bridle stones, bones, fragments of bronze and fragments of silver foil. It differs markedly both in form and finds from other areas in the same part of the settlement (LENNATORP 2013). So far, the excavated area is too limited to permit us to firmly establish or reject a connection with possible religious or cult activities.

Six more or less intact bracteates and a fragment of a seventh have been found at Uppåkra (AXBOE 2001; AXBOE and STOKLUND 2003; AXBOE 2011). Three of these were made using the same stamp and depict a horse-like animal with a human head on its back. Another has a bird depicted below the horse. Yet another bracteate shows a head resting on a number of

triangular motifs with a bird facing the head (Fig. 9). It is surrounded by a band of runes that have proved illegible. However, there must be some kind of intentional pattern, as two extra marks on the 'T' rune are located opposite each other. As mentioned before, this bracteate and the two others made using the same stamp, as well as a pendant with a cross motif, were found within a limited area in a layer rich in bones that covered the burnt remains of a house from the fifth century AD (LARSSON 2011) (Fig. 9). Within the same limited area, three more or less completely burnt human bodies were found below the remains of the collapsed, burnt walls of the house. Is it a coincidence that the gold objects were found just above the burnt bodies? They might have been deposited to honour the victims, since about a century had passed between the house fire and the deposition. Another bracteate was found close to a post-hole belonging to a hall dated to the Migration Period.

A number of objects might have some kind of connection with the Old Norse world-view. Three fragments probably depict Valkyries in profile (BERGQVIST 1999; HÄRDH 2010; HELMBRECHT 2013). A small silver figure showing a man in profile with wide, baggy trousers, probably wearing a mask, has been identified as Odin (HÄRDH 2008).

## Christian objects

A number of the artefacts found have been related to Christianity. These include a hinge, two mountings with enamel decoration, one of them showing a cross, and a fragment of an image of a four-legged animal (HELGESSON 2001). The hinge might be part of a reliquary. A silver object with gold inlay



Figure 13. A lion-like animal struggling with two snakes, which could represent the struggle between Christianity and paganism; scale: 1.5:1 (Photo: B. Almgren).

depicting a lion-like figure fighting two snakes has been regarded as representing the struggle between Christianity and pagan beliefs (HELGESSON 1999) (Fig. 13). Most probably, it was originally mounted on a reliquary and dates to the late eighth or early ninth century.

All of these are from sacred objects. They might have been looted in raids in western Europe or represent the remains of an early Christian mission. Three of these objects were found quite close together. Helgesson has suggested that they were connected with an important area that included the seat of the leaders of the settlement (HELGESSON 2001). Later, the stave building and the sequence of halls were discovered in this same area.

Yet another find, a cross brooch, has its best parallels in the Merovingian tombs of the Rhine-Main area and dates to about AD 700 (KOCH 2003). It could well be one of the earliest objects with a Christian connection to be found in Scandinavia.

There are a number of metal-detector finds with a connection to Christianity, dated to the late Viking Age/early Middle Ages. These include so-called 'Urnes brooches', depicting a struggle between elongated figures of a lion and a snake (HÄRDH 2010). The most obvious example is an encolpion showing Christ with a laurel wreath on his head (STAECKER 1999) (Fig. 14). It had been used as a reliquary and was probably of German origin, dating from the middle of the 11th century. The bottom part has been damaged. It might have belonged to an early wooden church and could have been found during the demolition of the Romanesque church, when so-called 'papist' objects were carelessly handled.



Figure 14. An encolpion, probably from Germany, dated to the middle of the 11th century; scale: 3:4 (Photo: B. Almgren).

## The name

The name Uppåkra may be of interest from a religious perspective. The name – upaccri – is mentioned in the deed of a gift of several farms from King Knut to the cathedral of Lund in 1085 and means 'the high fields' (HALLGREN 1991, 286). But we may ask whether this is a rather late name, referring to the field in the area of the site, or whether it could have had some metaphorical significance, meaning something like 'the fields in heaven' and used already during the existence of the settlement. Another explanation is that the site might have been known by the name Lund, a name that was later transferred to the site of the present-day town (ANDRÉN 1998). Lund is a theophoric place name, meaning 'a small grove of trees', most likely indicating a place used for sacrifices, of which there are several indications at Uppåkra.

## The church

The present church dates from the middle of the 19th century: it replaced an older, Romanesque structure. Based on documentation from the 1840s, the oldest part has been dated to about 1200 (ANGLERT and JANSSON 2001). When an excavation was carried out in the sanctuary of the present church, parts of the foundation walls of the Romanesque church were found. Further excavation, outside as well as inside the church, for the purpose of installing a drainage and heating system has yielded excellent information about the old church in relation to the new one. During the excavation in the sanctuary, it was observed that a foundation wall had partly disturbed an east-west oriented grave. A radiocarbon assay gave the date 1160±65 BP, cal AD 691–1012 (Ua-14936). This was clearly a Christian grave, most probably dug during the Viking Age (ANGLERT and JANSSON 2001). It also indicates the existence of an early cemetery and might be related to a wooden church. However, no remains of such a church have been identified, perhaps due to the fact that only small parts of the interior of both the present and previous churches have been investigated. Just to the east of the wall of the Romanesque church, the skeletons of three children were found. One skeleton was radiocarbon dated to 950±20 BP, cal AD 1024–1155 (UGAMS 14225) (NILSSON 2013). This indicates that there would have been a cemetery to the west as well as to the east of an early wooden church.

If, indeed, there had been a wooden church here, the time gap between it and the last stage of the stave building, less than two hundred metres to the south, might not have been more than a couple of generations.

The position of the present church is somewhat unusual as it is situated to the south of the present village, which is of medieval origin. The reason might be that the earliest church had been erected close to the Viking-Age settlement. As indicated by the field name Dynnegårds agri, the church might have been connected with an early manor (RIDDESPORRE 1998).

## Final comments

This article has presented an overview of features and objects that can be linked with Old Norse cosmology as well as with a Christian world-view. These world-views had a much more profound influence than is indicated by the features and objects presented above. Further scrutiny of the decoration on the jewellery and mountings could well reveal a number of depictions of humans and animals relating to sagas that were well known to the earlier inhabitants but are unknown to us: an example is the decoration of the embossed foil on the beaker found inside the stave building (HÄRDH 2004), which depicts intertwined humans, dragons and horses' heads. Buildings such as the sequence of the halls found to the west of the stave building include structures relating to ritual or ceremonial activities (LARSSON and SÖDERBERG 2013). Even the setting of the central place as a whole may be linked to a cosmological concept (HEDEAGER 2002).

For many centuries Uppåkra continued to function as a central place for religious, ritual and ceremonial activity, with the stave building as a focal point (FABECH 2009). Most scholars have directed their interest towards the manipulative use of religious beliefs by which a group, a family or individuals endeavoured to achieve, retain and extend power within a society. To scholars affected by the aggressive atheism that permeates modern society this view seems to be the only realistic way of understanding religion. However, we should not disregard the idea that people had a real faith in the imaginary world and its participants, which affected not only subordinates, but also the social elite.

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