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# For Whom the Bell Tolls

Björn Magnusson Staaf

Time perception has important consequences for how human activity is structured. The question of how time perception has shifted in history could therefore be of certain importance in archaeological interpretation. This article is an attempt to analyze the construction of time in early- and high-medieval Ireland and Scandinavia. The bell and the sound of the bell related to a theological concept in Christian ideology which referred to time. The bell was to become an utensil of power in the process of christianization. With help of the bell, the church partly abolished the subjectivity in the perception of time. When the bell rang it thereby dictated a common sense of time. We could therefore perhaps assume that a conceptual polemic concerning time has been one of the reasons for conflicts in medieval Ireland and Scandinavia.

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*For what is time really? Who can briefly and easily explain it? Who can grasp it in his mind clearly enough to express it in words? Yet, what word is more familiar and well known in our language than the word "time"? We understand the word, when we speak about time. We also understand it, when someone else speaks of it. What is time then? If nobody asks me I know. But if I try to explain it to someone who asks me, I do not know.*

*St. Augustine, Confessions Book 11 §§ 12*

## ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE PERCEPTION OF TIME

Archaeology is a field of study dedicated to the analysis of how and why human conditions change through time. Time is normally referred to as a dimension similar to spatial dimensions in the archaeological discourse. Chronological reasoning is for instance founded on the treatment of time as a constant dimension. The chronology or the order in which things take place is funda-

mental for all archaeological interpretation.

Yet, just as we subjectively can experience the dimensions of space, we can experience time. Spatial analysis and the study of how a landscape can be experienced and used with shifting strategies is a recognized part of archaeology. One of the obvious reasons for this is that spatial dimensions are constant and visual. One can, for example, actually see how various archaeological remains relate to each other in a landscape. It is therefore possible to suggest shifting interpretations of how the landscape has been perceived in prehistory.

The study of how the perception of time may have shifted through time should not be a less recognized form of archaeology. It has only rarely been brought to discussion, perhaps because it offers certain evident difficulties. Changes are visual and objects for all our senses, but we can not of course grasp time in the same way as we do, for example, space. The dimensions of space are a constant variable, but the dimensions of time are

flowing and archaeology is based on the analysis of manifest traces. How, then does perception of time leave manifest traces? Again, the dimensions of time and space can be seen as related. A monument can be seen as a manifestation in space, but it can also be regarded as a manifestation in time since it is permanent in shape and location through time. The manifestations of time perception left by monuments are still very general. A more detailed analysis of time perception can directly or indirectly be given through the study of written sources. The long calendrical datings inscribed on stelae from the classic period of the Mayan culture are an excellent example of this (Morley, Brainerd & Sharer 1983:555-558).

Still, do we have to rely only on written historical sources in order to make an in depth analysis of time perception? In this article I will try to show one way in which such an analysis could be made on an archaeological material. Part of my interpretation will, however, also be based on historical sources, but the link between text and archaeological artifact will be more indirect. Changes in an archaeological material might implicate, even if not explicitly, a changing perception of time. The methods and way of thinking that I intend to present here are not new. I only hope to show some new applications for them.

The historian Jacques Le Goff has discussed the question of the changing time perception in the European Middle Ages (Le Goff 1980:29-39). One part of his study focuses on observations made of objects, or more specifically, time-measuring objects such as clocks (Le Goff 1980:41-50). From this point of view his work could be said to rely more on archaeological sources than historical. In this article my reasoning will be closely related to Le Goff's interpretations, but I will concentrate my study on the early European Middle Ages rather than the late Middle Ages. The Christianization of Europe during the early Middle Ages will be

a point of discussion in this text. I believe that the conceptual polemic and the dialectics of concept formation play an important role in historical change. I have chosen to study the formation of the early medieval time concept in order to show an example of this.

An archaeological study on the topic of time has been conducted by Cristopher Gosden (Gosden 1994). It is an interesting work because it shows the great possibilities of studying time perception through spatial analysis. The theories of Gosden show some similarities with the time-space geography of Hägerstrand, even though they differ quite radically in their historical perspective (Gosden 1994:79-80). Still, I will not discuss this time-space approach in further detail. There is another theoretical element in Gosden's text which will partly serve as a basis for my discussion. Gosden's reasoning refers to the phenomenological philosophy as developed by Husserl and Heidegger (Gosden 1994:103-114). This is not unusual since the analysis of the subjective experience is central in phenomenological analysis and it is the experience of time which is the subject of Gosden's study. It will also be so in the study at hand.

My reasoning will rest on a phenomenological discourse as well, and in a sense it will do so on two levels. Firstly, the interpretation is based on certain phenomenological postulates, such as the fundamental consideration that the human subject is a perceiving agent living in the world. Secondly, the archaeological interpretation of a period of change in the early European Middle Ages will take its beginning from a text by St. Augustine, which actually shows strong links with phenomenological theory. Husserl's references to the concept of time show similarities with Augustine's (Husserl 1928). The metaphysical notion of God as being the totality of time, as having complete knowledge of the past and present, is of course never brought to question by Husserl, but he

did believe that time was a phenomenon dependent on perception. Augustine had 1500 years earlier brought the reasoning one step further though, by bringing in the metaphysical concept of God.

#### ST. AUGUSTINE'S PERCEPTION OF TIME AND ELEMENTS OF CHRISTIAN FAITH

Time is a central point of discussion in the eleventh book of Augustine's *Confessions*. Three different types of time presence are considered in this work: the presence of the past is memory, the presence of the present is perception, the presence of the future is expectation. Man was thought of as a being who perceived the world through a time process. He could therefore not distinguish or give a fully objective definition of time as existing outside the individual. Time was, according to Augustine, measured and experienced in the soul of man. God, on the other hand, was by Augustine considered to be eternal, as existing beyond time in a dimension without sequence where all things were present at once, in a single now (Augustine [1991]).

The concept of eternal life was a fundamental and basic thought in the Christian theology presented by Augustine. The idea of an eternal life presupposes a linear perception of time. The life on earth was only a dimension of existence preceding the existence in an afterlife dimension. Man should, in his daily deeds constantly give consideration to God and the afterlife, the eternal existence. The earthly life was considered as a preparation for the eternal life. The way an individual acted in the earthly life had consequences for his afterlife, according to the Christian theology of Augustine. (Augustine [1991]). Thus there were strong elements of existential thought in Augustine's theology. Augustine is considered as one of the four early apostolic fathers, and his texts on theology were to serve as an important foundation for the development of a Chris-

tian church in western Europe.

All Christians were to submit themselves to the ideological values determined by the church, which represented the earthly manifestation of God. A Christian society could therefore not tolerate syncretism. Christian belief demanded total religious and ideological supremacy. A very important duty for the Christian was to take part in the divine service. Regular participation in the public worship was a matter of concern for all individuals belonging to the Christian faith (Augustine [1969]). The Christian faith therefore required a general and mutual perception of time since the Christian ideas rested on the concept of eternity. The de-

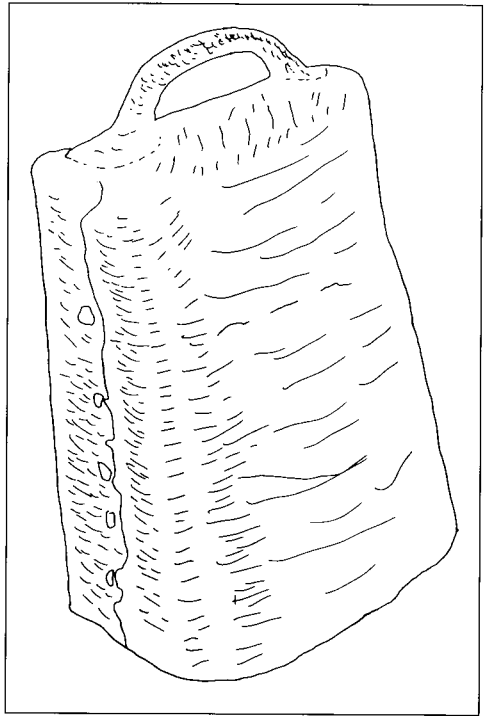


Fig 1. "St. Patrick's bell", an example of a so called hand-bell, probably dating to the sixth-eighth century; height 19.3 cm. The bell is constructed of two sheets of bronze-coated iron instead of one which is a unique feature for Irish handbells. (National Museum of Ireland)

mand for constant and regular participation in the church rituals was indirectly a way of introducing a specific perception of time to the congregation. There is reason to believe that one of the implements used in this Christian ritual was of specific importance for that purpose. This implement was the bell, and bells will be given a short presentation in this article. Bells and the use of bells in early medieval Europe will hopefully form a part of a more detailed analysis which I intend to conduct. The reasoning and interpretations are therefore so far only founded on a very preliminary study of the material from Ireland and to some degree from Scandinavia. So far I have not yet been able to study early medieval bells from continental Europe to any larger extent.

#### EARLY MEDIEVAL BELLS

According to written sources, bells and cymbals were used in the western European church service in the sixth century, and archaeological evidence from Ireland seems to verify this. Ireland offers perhaps the best opportunities for a study of the use of bells in the Christian ritual during the early Middle Ages. Some of the earliest known bells in a Christian context are from Ireland. These bells are handbells, normally made of iron and having a bronze coating. The handbells are usually made of one folded sheet of iron which has been secured by rivets on one side of the bell. Forty-one bells of this type are known from Ireland, but they appear to have existed also in Scotland and Wales. It is difficult to give these bells a closer dating, but the oldest probably date from the sixth century and only a few seem to have been made after the ninth century (Bourke 1980:52-56). The reason that many of these handbells have been preserved is that they have achieved the status of relics. This appears to have occurred at an early stage for some of the handbells, since certain bells have been contained in shrines produced during the eleventh century, for ex-

ample, the bell of St. Patrick and the bell of St. Cuilean (Henry 1970:94-97, 102).

At least in Ireland, it appears as if the first type of handbells were replaced during the ninth or tenth century. The tenth century was the period of time when the round towers on Ireland began to be built. These constructions are found in the vicinity of churches and on monastic sites. Their function has often been a question of discussion. It has, for instance, been suggested that they served as watch-towers and refuges from raiding Vikings (Cruise O'Brien & Cruise O'Brien 1972:37). The Celtic-Irish name for round tower is "*cloigtech*", meaning belfry. This also seems to be the most likely function for these buildings, even though no bell has been preserved in its original place. The belfries suggest the use of a new type of bell, which could have been a larger bell. The belfries at least made it possible to hear the sound of bells over a larger area. This could be an indication that the bell was getting more differentiated functions. The belfries imply that the use of a bell had started to be viewed as so important that it was worth manifesting in monumental buildings.

In the Western church the use of bells became a recognized part of the "*Ritus Eucumenicus*", the common and universal church service, during the ninth century. The most obvious use was to call the members of the congregation to divine service. In the liturgical symbolism they were called "*predicatores*" (Bringéus 1958). It seems plausible to assume that this is founded on an old ecclesiastical tradition which can have been filled by the handbells. Could the use of larger belfries in Ireland reflect a perception of a new or different time?

Ireland was a stronghold for Christian theology during the early Middle Ages, but the island had become Christianized first during the fifth and sixth centuries. The comparatively large amount of handbells could be an indication that the use of bells in the divine service was not uncommon at an

early stage. We have no reason to believe that the use of bells in the divine service emanated from this island though. No Irish handbells have so far been found in any pre-Christian context. It could, however, be that they were of significance during the Christian mission, since they appear to have been introduced during an early phase of Christianization. Christianization has thus affected the "sound" environment in Ireland. The bell presented a new sound for the perception of man, a sound which was being regularly and constantly repeated. The mission can have resulted in a changed perception of man's listening, a listening that was becoming connected with the perception of time. Was it this perceptual notion that was emphasized as the use of bells started to become more intensified during the tenth century in Ireland?

The larger bells that remain from the early Middle Ages are so called beehive bells or Theophilian bells, since the method for constructing these bells was described by a person called Theophilus during the

eleventh century. We cannot say whether beehive bells were used in Ireland to any great extent, since hanging bells of this type seem to appear rather late on the island. Beehive bells are more well known from continental Europe. The oldest surviving bell of this type comes from Viterbo in Italy and dates from the eighth century. The beehive bells were made of bronze and were made in a *cire-perdue* technique. This type of bell appears to have been the most common type during the later part of the early Middle Ages and the early high Middle Ages (Walter 1913). It seems as if it was this kind of bell that was dominant during the mission period in northern Europe.

Irish monks were to play a central role in the European mission in the period between the seventh and ninth centuries, perhaps especially in Anglo-Saxon and Frankish areas (MacNiocaill 1972; Prinz 1965). Both of these areas were in turn to become important centres for the mission, amongst else for Scandinavia. One can detect at least two sources for the mission to Scandinavia, one

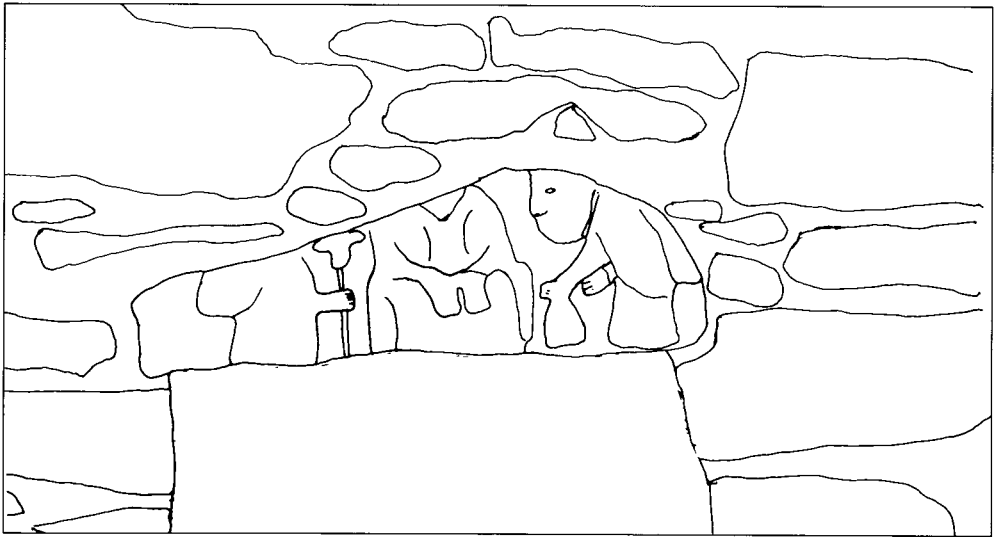


Fig. 2. Fragmentary lintel from the old Church at the monastic site of Glendalough in Ireland, probably dating to the tenth-eleventh century. The character to the right of the seated figure is holding a handbell in his hand and the character to the left a crucifix.

from Britain and another from Germany. The bell appears again to have been a central implement in the northern and the eastern mission.

The German mission to Scandinavia is the most well documented in written sources. In a letter from Fulda dated to the first half of the ninth century, the abbot Hrabanus Maurus mentions that one large bell and one handbell have been sent to Gautzbert, the bishop at the congregation in Birka: "*mitto vobis unam gloggam et unum tintinabulum*", meaning, "*I send you one bell and one handbell (?)*" (Holmbäck 1951:15-16).

There is, however, also a number of archaeological finds of early medieval bells from Scandinavia. The archaeological find of a beehive bell in the harbour of Hedeby is most likely one of the oldest bells retrieved in Scandinavia. This bell shows similarities with other preserved beehive bells, for example, the one from Viterbo - and it can probably be dated to the second half of the tenth century (Drescher 1984). Drescher has claimed that metallurgical analysis shows that the copper in the Hedeby bell comes from Rammelsberg in Harz (Ulbricht 1992). Bells were also produced at an early stage in Lund. Two pits which have been interpreted as having been used for the casting of bells, have been found in an excavation of the early high medieval Lund. The find context and stratigraphic level where the pits were found is dated to the middle of the eleventh century (Roslund 1987). There are early Scandinavian depictions of bells as well, for example, on a runestone from Harg in Uppland dated to the twelfth century. Bells are also depicted on the Skog-tapestry, which was found in Hälsingland 1912. The dating of the tapestry has been a point of discussion, but it seems to date from around 1200 (Franzén & Nockert 1992). One of the details on the tapestry shows three persons pulling two ropes tied to two bells hanging in a belfry. Next to the belfry is a church with a smaller bell on top of its roof. The

church and the belfry are surrounded by creatures which are difficult to define. Sylwán has interpreted the creatures as lions symbolizing evil. The tapestry shows a congregation of Christians seeking refuge in the church and using bells to fight evil, according to Sylwán's interpretation (Sylwán 1949:330-351). Several popular tales show that the church bells were considered to protect against the devil and other evil forces. It was a powerful tool, or even a weapon, for the Christian church against Satan and his followers (Floderus 1938:80). The stories clearly show that bells have constituted a remarkable element for the medieval person.

There is reason to assume that, next to the cross, the bell was one of the most important Christian artifactual physical symbols during the early Middle Ages. It was a material metaphor for a central concept in the Christian ideology. Nobody could escape God, nobody could escape time, nobody could escape the sound of the bell. It would not be strange if the bell was considered as a central implement in the mission and Christianization process. Yet, the Christianization of Europe took place at an uneven pace. Large parts of northern and eastern Europe first became fully Christianized in the high Middle Ages. The mission therefore deserves some closer observation.

#### THE MISSION AND THE STRUCTURES OF POWER

We do not know for sure whether the Christianization of Ireland was a peaceful process or involved conflicts. However, the texts dating from this time do not seem to reflect any larger conflicts relating to the change of religion. The Christianization of Ireland would then have differed from that of northern Europe. In the northern and eastern parts of Europe the new religion was met with a reaction which sometimes had an outright violent character (Steinsland 1989). If there were differences between the Chris-



tianization process in Ireland and in northern Europe, what could they have depended on?

The status of the church in western Europe in the eleventh century was quite different from the position it had in the sixth century. It was first with the alignment with the Frankish kingdom and the succeeding renewed Roman Empire in the ninth century, that the power of the Western Christian church was truly stabilized (Southern 1970: 59-61). The Christianization of Ireland in the fifth and sixth centuries must have taken place fully on the conditions of local petty kings and chieftains. The church was not connected with any authority that had the resources to exercise any form of superregional power. The political history of Ireland in the early Middle Ages is characterized by the rivalry and competition between several lineages and royal dynasties controlling shifting regions of the island. The church became fully integrated into this system and often played an active part in it, showing shifting loyalties (O'Corrain 1972). The church of Ireland was seemingly independent of the pope until 1172, when the Norman king Henry II from England forced the bishops of Ireland to recognize his overlordship at the synod of Cashel. Encouraged by the Pope, Henry had invaded Ireland in order to establish a firmer papal authority on the island. The Norman invasion of Ireland was to involve the establishment of a power structure which differed strongly from the earlier Irish. The Norman rule had a more centralized authority centred around merchant cities, which started to emerge during this period. The conflict between the Irish and the Normans continued through the Middle Ages. Within this conflict one can also trace an ideological clash between two directions of Christian ideology, each one legitimizing a different form of authority (Dolley 1972). They can, however, also be seen as representing two different opposing mentalities, or two different ways of perceiving. The development of Christianity in

Ireland can be seen in contrast, but also in relation, to the Scandinavian Christianization process.

The mission in Scandinavia starts at a later point than in Ireland. The church was then fully allied with the Carolingian Empire and represented a considerable force in Europe. A full recognition of the Christian faith and church would also involve a measure of submission to the emperor. The final Christianization process in Scandinavia therefore took place in a very complex political situation involving a great deal of competition for authority. A few lineages aspired to a superregional authority, and the church can have played a determinant role in the conflict this involved. Southern Scandinavia was to become fully Christianized in the eleventh century. This period in the early high Middle Ages also described a point at

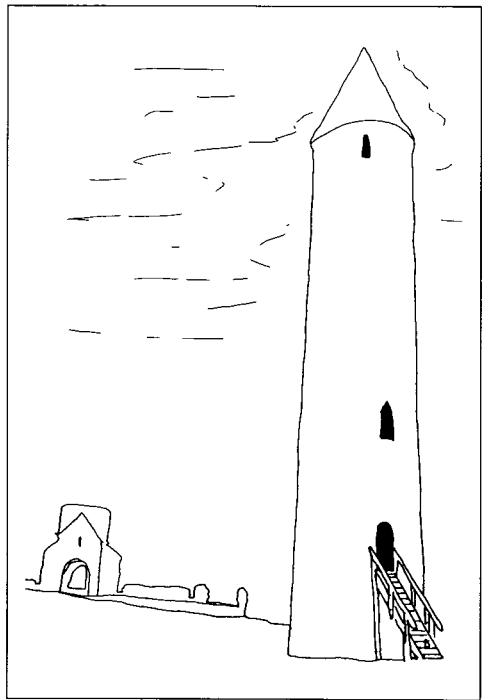


Fig. 3. Cloigtech from the monastic site of Devenish, Ireland.

which the church started to distance itself from the Empire; in the later part of the eleventh century the conflict of investiture started. The clientship between the emperor and the church was not longer a fundament for western Christianity. The church had now its own resources in enforcing its authority. It could also seek other allies than the emperor. This ensured a more independent position of the dynasties in northern and western Europe.

The introduction of Christianity in Scandinavia was intertwined with a changing power structure. A new type of urban centre, characterized for example by Lund, can be seen as a reflection of this new power structure (Andrén 1985). It was a structure of authority showing strong resemblances with patterns of authority on the European continent. The Christianization of eastern central and northern Scandinavia was slower. Other, more regionally based, power structures in these areas probably remained strong for a long time.

The development in Ireland and Scandinavia during these periods can of course be described in the form of a structurally determined power struggle, as has been done above. The actual ideological differences is from this perspective of a more peripheral importance. Jakobsson has analyzed these historical events in Scandinavia from an angle related to this structuralist perspective. In his analysis, the struggle between Christianity and Paganism is not primarily interpreted as a conflict between two religions with different references to moral concepts and norms and with varied ways of perceiving the world. Jakobsson interprets instead the struggle between Christianity and Paganism as a conflict between two different ideological systems of legitimizing power (Jakobsson 1992:133-177). One could then interpret the development in Ireland and the conflicts between the Normans and the Irish, as being a part of a similar structural process. Let us briefly consider another pos-

sible interpretation, an interpretation which differs to some degree from Jakobsson's.

#### THE MISSION AND THE PERCEPTION OF TIME

This interpretation will take its beginning from the perception of time as discussed above. Augustine was to have a considerable impact on the Christian Catholic ideology during the Middle Ages. The importance of a specific notion of time is expressed in his works. Did Augustine's thoughts represent a new attitude towards time or did they express a general conception? Augustine's time concept can be said to describe a linear time. It does not seem to have been a totally foreign time concept in the Roman-Hellenistic world. A system for long calendrical dating was used in the Roman empire, which marked its beginning from the legendary foundation of Rome in 753 B.C. The Hellenistic world used a long calendrical dating, taking its start from the first Olympic games in 776 B.C. A long calendrical dating is also used in the Islamic world, beginning with Muhammad's flight to Medina in 622 A.D. A linear time conception seems to have been well established around the Mediterranean by the time of the early Middle Ages.

A linear time conception is sometimes contrasted with a cyclic conception of time. A cyclic time involves a regular recurrence of events, for example, the cycle of day and night, astronomical cycles, or the cycles of life which organic beings might seem confined to. Cyclic and linear time do not have to exclude each other, however. There are for instance cycles in the ecclesiastical year. The cyclic time in Christian belief could be considered as an aspect of the linear time, a time moving as a spiral into eternity. One can also imagine that there are aspects of a linear time perception in an outlook on the world founded on a cyclic time. A long calendrical dating does not, for example, necessarily have to be founded on a belief or ideology based on the concept of a linear time. The

religion of the classic Mayan culture was founded on a cyclic time perception. The differences in the outlook on the fundamental character of time can be of considerable significance.

Did, then, the Christian faith present a new perception of time in the areas Christianized in the early Middle Ages? It is difficult to say whether the concept of time in Ireland and in Scandinavia was linear or cyclic. The mythological sources are scarce, even if the idea of "*Ragnarök*" - the destruction of the world and the gods - in the early Norse mythology could be interpreted as a belief founded on a cyclic perception of time. Astronomical-calendrical considerations appear to have been taken when certain prehistoric monuments and constructions in both Scandinavia and Ireland were built (O'Kelly 1982, Säfvestad & Björhem 1993:112-116). These constructions do not give us more than a very general idea of time perception though. It is difficult to discern any pre-Christian artifact in Scandinavia, or in Ireland, showing a similar function or meaning as the bell. Systems or devices for a more regulated indicating of time do not appear to have existed. The bell, creating a novel sound, could very well have been an implement conveying a new outlook on time. What consequences could this have had for human action?

The monastic institutions were central to the establishment of the early church. The activities of the Benedictine order (which is considered to be the oldest in western Europe) were devoted to divine service, spiritual practice and work - an existence which can be concluded in the phrase "*ora et labora*" (Gallén 1980 (1956) pp. 451-452). The Augustinian rules belong to the earliest monastic rules. Augustine might have been author of some of the texts, but they were fully accomplished first in the seventh century. The so-called *regula secunda* contain directives for the schedules and organization of the shifting activities in the monasteries

(Gallén 1980 (1956):283-284). The division and organization of time and activity was to constitute the core of the daily life in the monasteries. The early church in Ireland was to a large degree centred around monastic sites. The monastic sites were also to become important centres of production for various crafts during the early Middle Ages. A monastery presented a disciplined environment for an intensified and efficient production. The fundamental condition for this was the perception of a more finely divisible time.

The perception of time had consequences for how human activity was to be organized. The bell could be used as an implement for controlling activity, at the same time as it demonstrated the supremacy of the church; the bell was thereby an instrument of power. Part of the reaction against Christianity

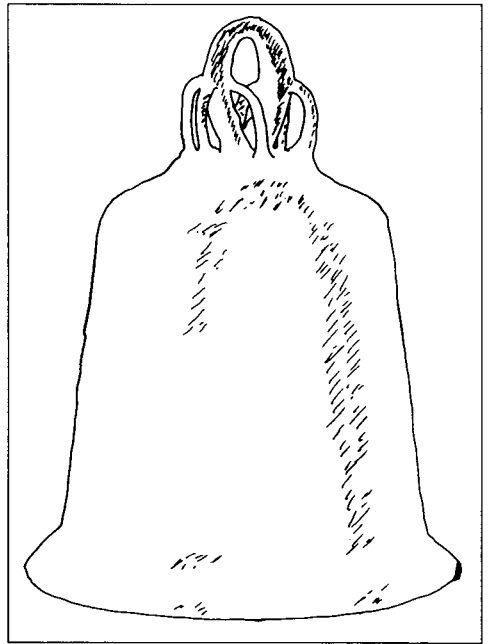


Fig. 4. "The Hedeby bell", an example of a so called beehive bell, probably dating from the later half of the tenth century. Height 52 cm. (Archäologisches Landesmuseum Schleswig)

could have been a reaction against the public manifestation of the church. Shifting religions were tolerated at Wollin in the tenth and eleventh centuries, but the Christians were not allowed to practice their religion in public (Filipowiak 1991:34). This ought to have involved a quite restricted use of the bell. The medieval tales about church bells irritating the forces of evil are perhaps reflections of an older heathen reaction against the public manifestation of the church. A reaction can have been directed against the bells, since the sound from them was an important symbol of the church. Still, if this was the case, then it was not only a reaction against a physical power but a reaction against a mode of perception, a mode of perceiving time. People perceived the same sound, but they had shifting references to the sound. These references can have shifted in important details, which affected actions and strategies. The differing concepts, or more correctly the conceptual polemic between shifting ideologies, can very well have been of considerable importance in the conflicts during the Christianization of Scandinavia. Therefore do these conflicts not necessarily

have to be interpreted as mere conflicts resulting from a competition for power. It was also a competition between two outlooks on the world.

The conflict between the Irish and the Normans could be described as a conceptual polemic as well. Still, it shows some interesting differences from the conflicts in Scandinavia, even if shifting references to time might have been a contributing factor to the conflict also in Ireland. A Christian time concept must have been well established in Ireland by the twelfth century. The Irish clergy tried to reform the church, which they considered as having become decadent and too involved in matters of material gain. This could be interpreted as a reaction against a profanation of time and the emergence of a merchant time, if we use the vocabulary of Le Goff. The use of bells was changing in the merchant cities of the high Middle Ages (Le Goff 1980). It was the Normans who founded the merchant cities in Ireland. Merchant time emerged from Christian time. The Christian church time and the more secular merchant time actually relate to a similar perception of time, but

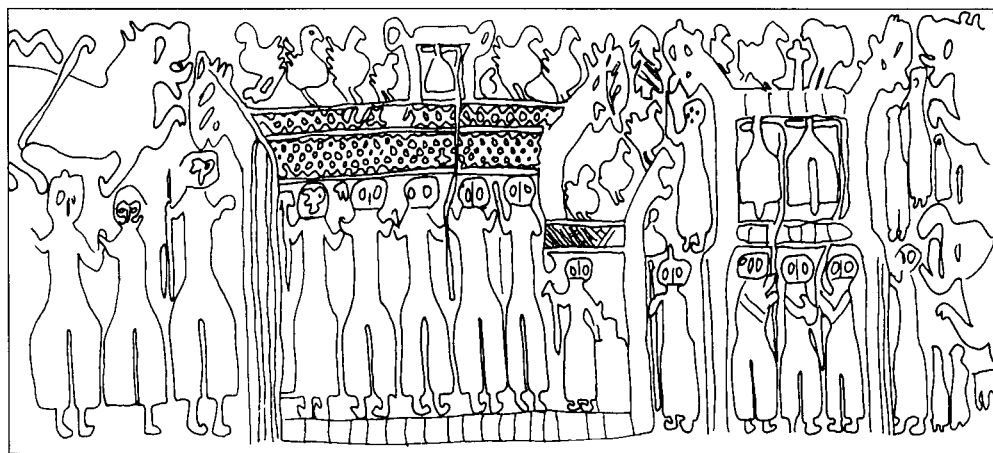


Fig. 5. Detail of the tapestry from Skog depicting scenes from a church and a belfry. One bell is situated on top of the roof of the church, another outside the apse and yet two others hang in the belfry to the right in the picture. The large creatures to the top left and to the far right have been interpreted as lions or monsters.

they represent different references to the concept of time. The Christian perception of time refers to God and eternity, the merchants' perception of time to material profit. There are important differences in the complexities of the conflicts in early medieval Scandinavia and Ireland, that can be worth taking into consideration when making an interpretation.

This requires a detailed study of the multivocal meaning of concepts. The archaeological artifacts have functioned as representations of these concepts. The artifacts and their context can be studied and one can thereby perhaps suggest some of the many possible references for these concepts. Such suggestions can of course only serve as possible postulates for an interpretation. An interpretation founded on these postulates would of course in the end always depend on the general perspective of history applied.

## CONFLICTS AND THE CHANGE OF HISTORY

All conflicts can not of course be explained as conflicts centered around time. Or can they? The intention of this article is at least not to show that. Conflicts are often used in order to explain historical change. From this perspective the dynamics of history rest on the conflicts arising from a competition for power. Concepts and their ambiguous multivocal references are then often considered as being of secondary importance - they are almost regarded as adornments of the central question, Who is going to be in control?

The question of control brings forth the question of power. How shall it be defined? The answer to this question depends of course on what dimension of power we choose to analyze. Power can be tied to physical individuals as is often done in the historicistic tradition of interpretation. This perspective focuses on the specific and detailed events in archaeology and history. Power can, however, also be regarded as describing impersonal structures, in which the

power rather belongs to a group or a class of people. The individuals therefore become less interesting: it is not persons that compete for power in this perspective, it is categories. One could say that this approach concentrates on analyzing the general mechanisms of conflict rather than the specific questions in the conflict. The conflict between categories is considered the dynamic force and the specific questions involved are secondary to the conflict itself. In a structural Marxist perspective, the conflict is often regarded as emanating from the mode of production. A question of conflict is therefore often related to the competition for controlling the means of production. I have in an earlier work argued against theories of history which put social conflicts as being prime movers for historical change (Magnusson Staaf 1994). I will therefore not go into the details of my criticism of these theories. The alternative theory I intend to present is inspired and strongly influenced by Tom Andersson's ideas concerning conceptual polemic (Andersson 1994). Andersson's work concentrates on a study of multivocal references to concepts in the contemporary society, but some of the ideas can also find application in archaeological or historical interpretation.

## CONCEPTUAL POLEMIC AND THE CHANGE OF HISTORY

One could regard perception as a form of power. It strongly influences the actions of the individual agent. Perception is sometimes held as being determined by class. The social categorization would in other words determine our consciousness. I would like to dispute this. Generally held references to seemingly objective concepts influence our actions regardless of class. Time could be seen as an example of these concepts. The references to these concepts are often more ambiguous and inconsistent than we suspect. They are also constantly changing; we manipulate and play with them in our lan-

guage and in our actions. This would not have been possible if there was not a general and common understanding of them. The interpretative problem arises if we assume that we can ascribe definite, uncontradictory and absolute semantic meanings to these concepts. This is not the case, since most concepts we use are multivocal, ambiguous, contradictory and inconsistent. It would, however, be absurd to claim that the concepts should therefore be regarded as false or meaningless. In our everyday life we manage very well to communicate by using these concepts (Andersson 1994:15-29).

The general and common (and inexact) understanding of a concept does not have to be determined by the social category. Class conflict can for instance be based on a perception shared by classes. For example, a certain product or type of goods may be appreciated for the same quality regardless of class. A conflict can therefore arise over how this product shall be distributed, or over the question of who shall be in control of its production. The behavior is in this case determined by a mutual and common perception of a concept. These conflicts can naturally have important consequences for the social organization.

Differences or changes in how concepts are perceived might change human activity radically. The body of the concept might be the same, but our references to it can shift. These changes of reference often take place unconsciously. The consequences which these changes will have on our actions are not possible to foresee. Perhaps the most important changes in history therefore take place in the unconscious, or what Merleau-Ponty would call the *tacit cogito* of man (Merleau-Ponty 1945 (1992):423-468). These changes may result in social conflict, but it does not necessarily have to be so.

Parts of this reasoning relate to that of Max Weber, whose theories have deeply influenced my own perspective on history (Magnusson Staaf 1994:66-85). One could

even interpret the development in western Europe during the early Middle Ages in a Weberian perspective. Christian faith influenced and transformed the unconscious mentality of man in the early medieval European society. The Christian ideology brought on changes in the common references to mutually shared concepts such as time. Time was to be devoted to the constant and regular worship of God in order to prepare the individual for eternity. An unforeseen consequence of this was the emergence of a merchant time, which rested on the perception of time as being divisible, a perception of earthly time developed by the church. The church even provided the material devices for this, namely the bells. The changing perceptions, the changing actions of man, brought forth conflicts or what we might call conceptual polemic.

The conceptual polemic of contradictory values and references is however, not restricted to open conflicts between classes with fixed ideas. It also takes place within man, within his own unconscious. Pagan and Christian references to common concepts can have co-existed for centuries in certain parts of Scandinavia. What we therefore might interpret as contradictory in some medieval customs, or as remnants of meaningless pagan ritual, show instead some of the multivocal and indeed complex references to certain concepts. These behavior patterns can be founded on very old traditions filling central functions in social communication. They have most likely been perceived as fully rational and fully current in their meaning. This adds of course considerably to the complexity facing the person who wants to interpret these ideological changes. Lars Ersgård's study on the change of religion and its artifacts in Upper Dalarna can be seen as an analysis of the slow change in people's unconscious references to common concepts (Ersgård 1995).

Other questions are, why the merchant time was successful and why it was that the

secular references to the understanding of time won general acceptance? If one was to fully apply Weber's theory to the development outlined above, then it would depend on the inherent efficiency or the strong instrumental rational character of merchant time. Weber's view was pessimistic concerning historical development (Weber 1904-1905 (1988)). Weber's reasoning is convincing and I do hold it as very plausible, but we can consider yet another alternative. Concepts do not have fixed meanings, their meanings are undergoing constant and inevitable change. Man is an active agent in this process. The dialectics of concept formation can, however, be fully unpredictable. What we perceive as an inevitable process in history, might be an illusion created by our own concept formation.

The concepts we use in our everyday life are also very much the concepts by which we perceive the world. These concepts do not have a fixed meaning, they are ambiguous in character. Our references to them may change, we can play with the references, but it would be dangerous to believe that these games will be without consequence. The concepts refer to a real world surrounding us, and to relations within this world. We may therefore not always be aware of why we refer, as we do, to certain concepts, but we are fully responsible for how we use them. This is the content of the historical perspective I have presented above. It is a perspective influenced by existential and phenomenological philosophy.

## CONCLUSION

I will now try to summarize some of the points I have tried to make in this article. My reasoning has centered around perception and the dialectics of concept formation. My reasoning concerning human perception is founded on the ideas of Merleau-Ponty, and the theory of history I have applied in the interpretation is based on the works of

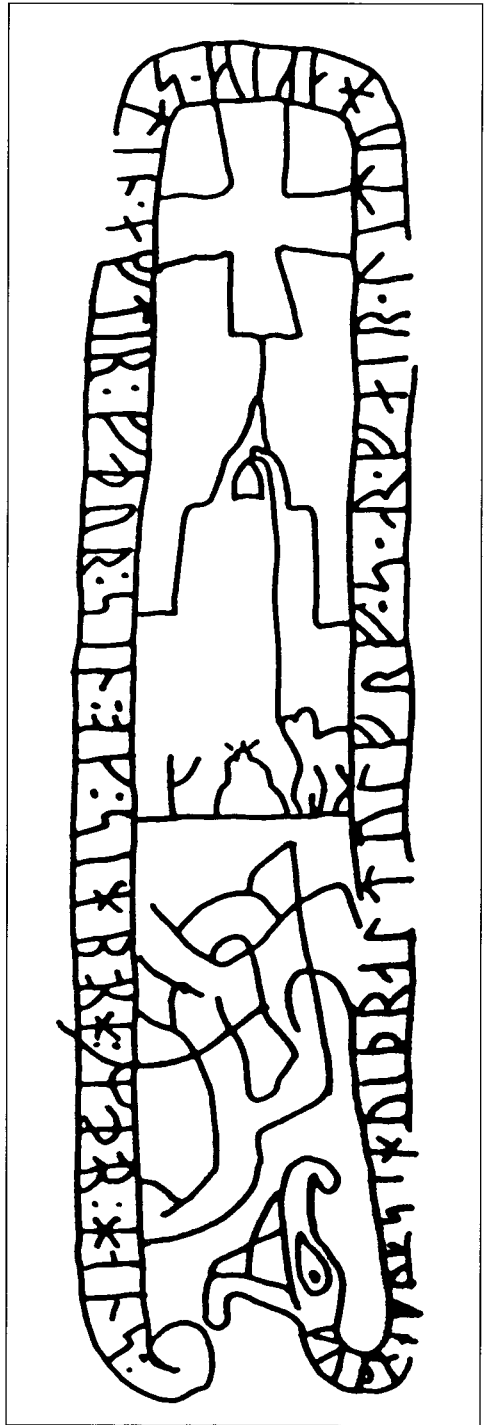


Fig. 6. Runic stone from Harg in Uppland depicting a scene with a man ringing a bell.

Andersson and Weber. The concept which is brought under a closer examination is time.

The living world is perceived through the senses of an active subject. People are not behavioristic machines, and perception should therefore not be considered as a simple mechanic one-way process. Perception is always related to the mind of an active subject, but it is likewise related and connected with a living world surrounding the subject. (Merleau-Ponty 1945 (1992):I-XVI). Archaeological analyses have tended to concentrate on the visual environment, but the sound environment is of considerable importance as well, for how people perceive and have perceived the world. References to the concept of time can, for example, be connected with the perception of sound. A study of bells is therefore a study relating to the perception of sound, which in turn is assumed to be connected with the concept formation, or rather the changing concept formation of time.

Time is a concept which can be perceived differently and subjectively. Yet, social organization of activities is founded on general and common references to time. The analysis of how the references have changed towards the concept of time has been an almost neglected field of study in archaeology. One may come closer to the problem by studying artifacts which can be suggested as having functioned as manifest representations of the time concept.

The archaeological interpretation in this article suggests that the perception of time changed during the early and high Middle Ages as a consequence of the mission and Christianization. The bell was to become an important implement in this development, since it had an important impact on the sound environment, at the same time as it

filled a central symbolic function. Christianity might have presented new references to the concept of time, which can be described as linear. Of course a cyclic time perception was to continue to dominate far into the post-medieval periods (Frykman & Löfgren 1979:21-44). The development of a merchant time, as described by Le Goff (Le Goff 1980:29-39), could, however, have its foundation in the perception of the Christian church time. This interpretation which focuses on the unpredictable consequences of Christianization, is similar to Weber's reasoning in his analysis of the Protestant ethic and the development of capitalism (Weber 1904-1905 (1988)). What ought to be stressed in the archaeological interpretation is the importance of the unpredictable dialectic concept formation and the conceptual polemic this can lead to. If one strives for a complex interpretation of history, then one must consider the multivocal references to concepts, even if they are inconsistent and ambiguous. The different outlooks on the world in Christian and Pagan ideology can have played an important role for historical change. We should thus not just study how a concept was manifested, but try at least to formulate and postulate hypotheses to some of the references for the concepts which might have been manifested in the archaeological material. An example of such a postulated reference could be that the sound of the bell might have been connected with a specific perception of time.

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