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**The “Ljudota Sword?”
(An Episode of Contacts Between Britain and Scandinavia
in the Late Viking Age)**

At the end of 19th century, a sword dating from the Late Viking Age was found near Hvosshcheve village in Ukraine.¹ It was a stray find and there is no detailed evidence concerning the circumstances of its discovery. Because of its hilt decoration, which was associated with the style of Swedish runestone ornamentation, the sword was seen only as proof of the Scandinavian production of Viking Age swords in Old Rus'.² Later, Anatoli N. Kirpichnikov discovered traces of an inscription on the blade of the sword, which he interpreted as the name of the Slavonic smith (“Ljudota/Ljudosha smith”) who forged the sword. He also claimed that the sword is a specimen of local production, reflecting diverse cultural and technical influences: Western European (the inscription technique), Scandinavian (the decoration) and local (Cyrillic letters and form of the pommel).³

Probably because of its evident uniqueness, the hilt of the sword has never been studied; its typology and decoration has not been extensively analyzed. For this reason, the purpose of this preliminary paper is a contextual analysis of the type and style of the sword. This article is a part of the author’s project, “Viking Age Swords of Scandinavia and Eastern Europe. An Analysis of the Swedish Sword Finds and Related Studies”, sponsored by Statens Historiska Museum and the Archaeological Institute of Stockholm University, funded by the Swedish Institute and the Berit Wallenberg Foundation.

The sword is kept at the National Historical Museum in Kiev (B–2714). It measures: total length, 85.7 cm; length of the blade, 67.9 cm; width of the blade, 4.9–3.8 cm; and the length of the grip, 17.8 cm. The bronze grip is composed of five basic parts: a triangular pommel, a curved upper guard, a grip, a curved lower guard, and the base of the lower guard (fig 1).

1 Тітков О. В. До питання про існування на Русі спеціалізованих збройних майстерень, *Полтавський археологічний збірник*. 1999. С. 60.

2 T. J. Arne, *La Suède et l’Orient* (Stockholm, 1914), 57, fig. 42.

3 Кирпичников А. Н. *Древнерусское оружие*. М.; Л., 1966. С. 37 ff, pl. 13–15; A. N. Kirpichnikov, The Connection between Russia and Scandinavia in the 9th and 10th Centuries, as Illustrated by Weapon Finds, Varangian Problems, *Scando-Slavica, Supplementum 1* (Copenhagen, 1970), 66ff, fig. 6–7.

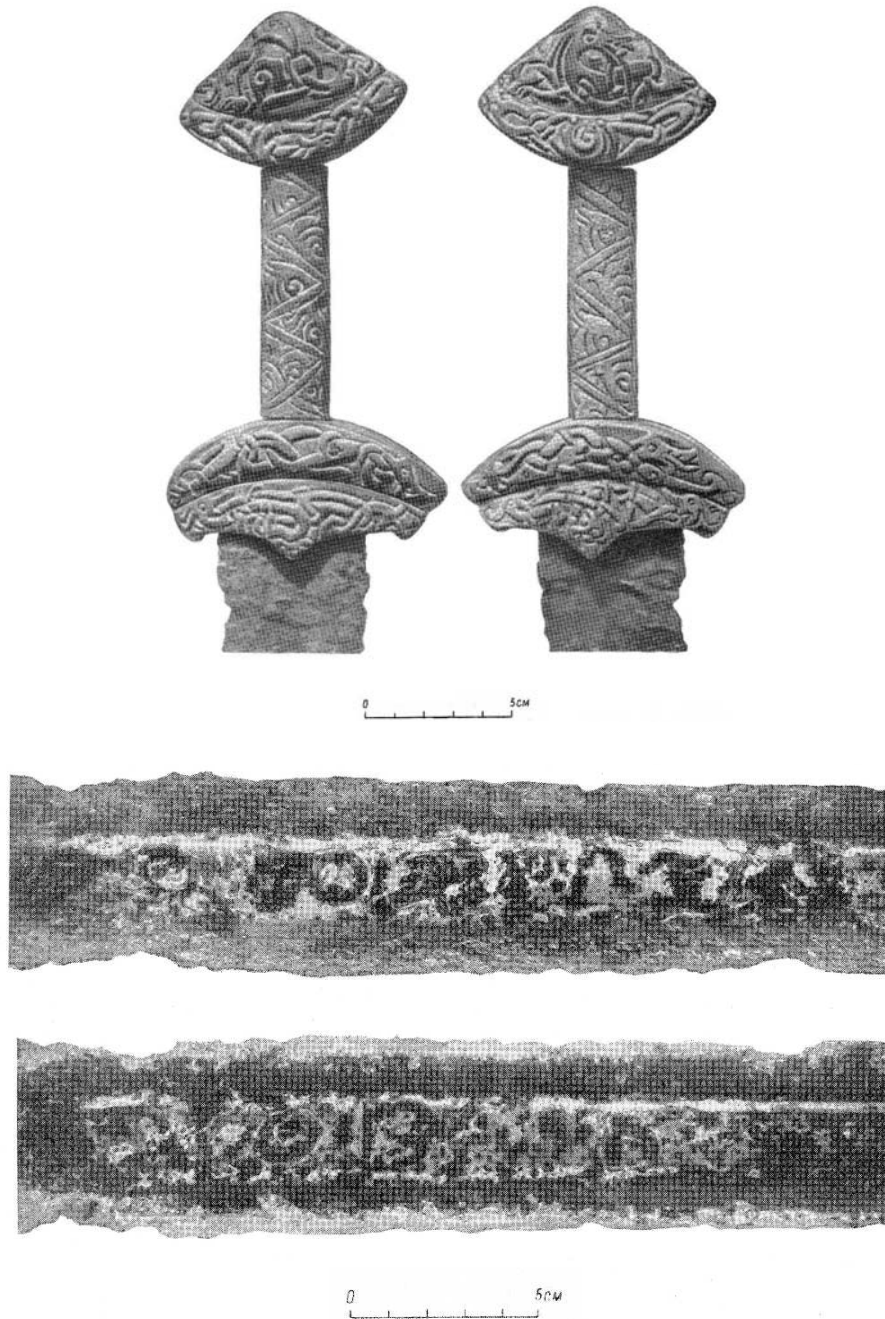


Fig. 1. Sword from Hvoshcheve in Ukraine (after A. N. Kirpichnikov)

The style of ornamentation of the sword from Hvoshcheve is not quite typical for Swedish runestones from the Late Viking Age. A large beast with two paws, tail (and a wing?) is depicted on each side of the pommel. On one side the beast’s head, with a large almond-shaped eye and gaping jaws, is turned back. On the opposite side, the depiction of the beast is more schematic, consisting only of a paw and tendrils like twigs, probably a careless or schematic depiction of an intertwined snake. Snakes with gaping jaws are visible on both sides of the upper guard and on the lower guard with its base. This pattern of decoration, depicting a large beast together with an intertwined snake with almond-shaped eyes, is more usual for specimens decorated in the Ringerike style.⁴ A similar pattern can be seen on the grave-slab from St. Paul’s Cathedral in England⁵ (fig. 2). The runic inscription which is carved on the stone provides evidence that it was Scandinavians who ordered the stone. D. Wilson and J. Klindt-Jensen suggest that a craftsman of Swedish origin might have been responsible for carving the slab.⁶ Indeed, the patterns on two Swedish vanes from Källunge (Gotland) (fig. 3) and Söderala (Hälsingland) could be noted as parallels to the English stone.⁷ However, a more closely related object is another vane originating from Heggen kirkja, Modum, Buskerud in Norway (fig. 4).⁸ Two lion-like figures have been engraved here beside a cast bronze figure of a large beast of the same design. One of the engraved figures is smaller, with its head turned back. Its snout is not so elongated as that of the beasts on the St. Paul’s Cathedral stone and the pommel of the sword from Hvoshcheve. Besides, one more important feature — an intertwined snake — is missing. For this reason I would like to suggest that the pattern on the grave-slab from St. Paul’s Cathedral is more closely related to the motif on the pommel of the sword from Hvoshcheve.

The grave-slab from St. Paul’s Cathedral is dated to the Late Viking Age. However, its pattern composed of a large beast entwined with a snake undoubtedly originates from a scene on the famous runestone of Jellinge in Denmark.⁹ An important innovation on the decorated specimens in the Ringerike style is the appearance of a bird figure in the composition. There are two good examples on two so-called “Sigurd carvings” (Swedish: *Sigurdsristningar*) in Södermanland¹⁰ (fig 5). It is also important that both carvings depict the same type of sword we are dealing with. The same pattern with the addition of bird figures can be seen on the decoration of sword hilts

4 S. Fuglesang, *Some Aspects of the Ringerike Style. A Phase of 11th century Scandinavian Art, Medieval Scandinavian Supplements*, vol. 1 (Odense, 1980).

5 S. Lindqvist, *Den helige Eskils Biskopdöme, Några arkeologiska vittnesbörd om den kristna kyrkans första organisation inom Mellersta Sverige* (Uppsala, 1915), 75–80.

6 D. Wilson, O. Klindt-Jensen, *Viking Art* (London, 1966), 135–136, pl. XVIIIa.

7 S. Fuglesang, *Some Aspects*, no. 43; G. Graham-Campbell, *Viking Artefacts. A Select Catalogue* (London, 1980), 80, no. 284.

8 S. Fuglesang, *Some Aspects*, no. 42; G. Graham-Campbell, *Viking Artefacts*, 79–80, no. 283.

9 D. Wilson, O. Klindt-Jensen, *Viking Art*, 135–136; G. Graham-Campbell, *Viking Artefacts*, 146–147.

10 Sö 327, Sö 101 according to E. Brate, E. Wessen, *Södermanlands runinskrifter* (Stockholm, 1933), 306–311, pl. 166; (1936), 388.

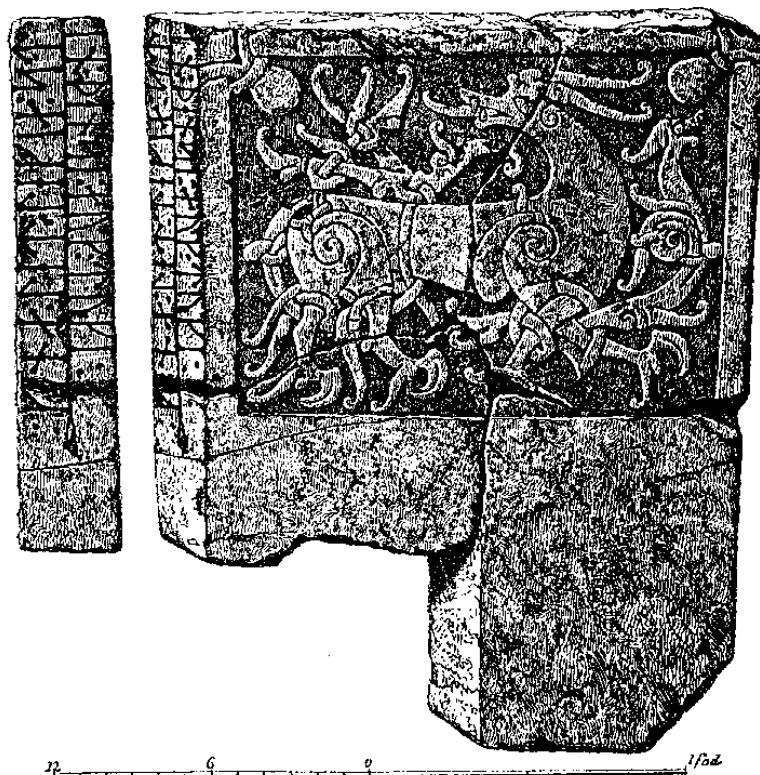


Fig. 2. Grave-slab from St. Paul's Cathedral in England (after S. Lindqvist)

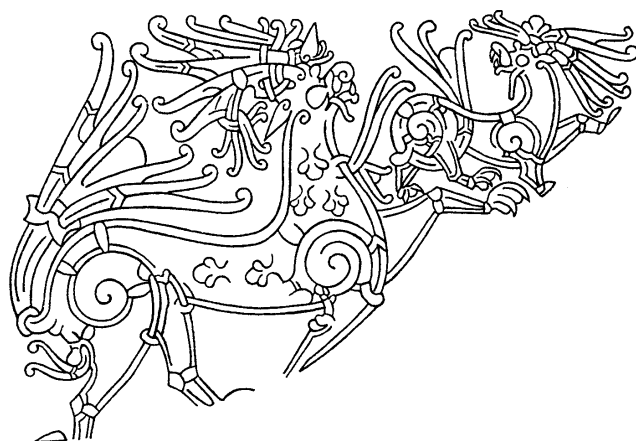


Fig. 3. Van from Källunge, Gotland in Sweden (after D. Wilson & O. Jensen)



Fig. 4. Van from Heggen kirkja, Modum, Buskerud in Norway (after D. Wilson & O. Jensen)



Fig. 5. Depiction of swords on “Sigurd carvings”, Södermanland in Sweden

from Vrångabäck and Dybäck in Scania (Sweden), which are decorated in the Winchester style and will be discussed below. The popularity of the scene in Scandinavia in the Late Viking Age might be explained by intimate contacts between Denmark and Britain, and the earliest examples of it were probably produced in a Danish setting in Britain. In this connection, a bronze plate with an large engraved beast and snake from Winchester Cathedral should be mentioned (fig. 6). This plate is dated to the middle of the 11th century and has been interpreted as an Anglo-Saxon imitation of the Ringerike style or as a specimen of Scandinavian production in England. It is interesting that the plate was found near the Old Minster and could be interpreted as evidence of such contacts, since the Danish King Knut, Queen Emma, and their sons are buried in the Old Minster.¹¹

In his publication, A. N. Kirpichnikov could not find a Scandinavian parallel to the sword type from Hvoshcheve. His claim that it was of Scandinavian-Baltic type applies more to the decoration of the sword than to its type.¹²

In my opinion, the hilt of the Hvoshcheve sword is made in the same way as that of the sword found in Dybäck, Ö. Vemmenhög, Scania (SHM 4515) in Sweden¹³ (fig 7). Its pommel is missing but the upward curved upper guard, the grip bounded with gold wire, the lower guard and its base have survived. All parts of the hilt are cast in silver and embellished with engraving and stamping. Two opposed birds with open beaks, closed wings, two-toed feet and squared-off tails are visible on the upper guard. A beast with raised paws entwined by a snake is depicted between the birds.

11 B. Kjøbye-Biddle, The Winchester “Weather — Vane” Reconsidered, *Hikuin* (10, 1984), 307–314.

12 Киричников А. Н. Древнерусское оружие. С. 41, 84, № 87.

13 M. Strömberg, Untersuchungen zur jüngeren Eisenzeit in Sconen, I–II, *Acta Archaeologica Lundensia*, series prima in 4, no. 4 (Lund, 1961), 138–140, pl. 65,2; G. Graham-Campbell, *Viking Artefacts*, 70–71, no. 250.

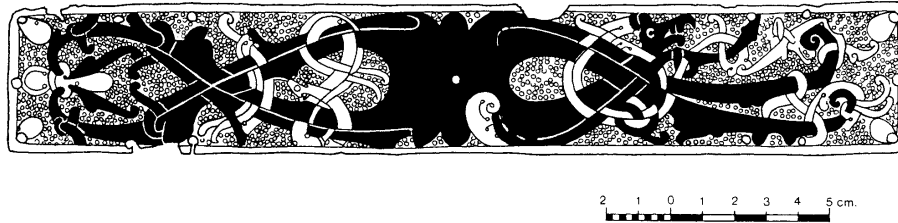


Fig. 6. Bronze plate from Winchester Cathedral in England (after b. Kjölbye-Biddle)



Fig. 7. Sword from Dybäck, Scania in Sweden (photo ATA)



Fig. 8. Pommel from Vrångabäck, Scania in Sweden (photo ATA)

The snake is biting one of the birds. On each edge of the downward-curved lower guard a fantastic beast facing upwards flanks a scene of fighting between two birds and a snake. The base of the lower guard is embellished with four heads of fantastic animals linked together with beaded ribbons. The upper face of the lower guard and the lower face of its base are adorned with a tendril motif. It should be mentioned that the style of the lower guard base is decorated differently from both guards. The animal heads with circular eyes and short massive snouts as well as beaded ribbons have close parallels in a Danish art tradition which goes back to the Mammen and Hidsensee styles.¹⁴

The pommel of the sword from Dybäck is missing, but it undoubtedly must have looked similar to another one from Vrångabäck, Scania¹⁵ (fig 8) which is also cast in silver and has a base that curves upwards. A three-lobed pommel shaped like an eagle's head was fitted into the upper guard with two rivets. From the motif and technique of depiction it is evident that both hilts were the product of the same artist.

¹⁴ W. Duczko, *Kungar, thegnar, juveler och silverskatter* (1995), tor 27:2, 644ff.

¹⁵ M. Strömberg, *Untersuchungen zur jüngeren Eisenzeit*, pl. 65.

J. Brøndsted suggested a long time ago that the ornamentation of the sword from Dybäck is an example of a Scandinavian imitation of the southern British animal style.¹⁶ Now it is generally accepted that the ornamentation of both swords from Scania corresponds to typical specimens of the British Winchester style.¹⁷

The pattern of the grip on the Hvoshcheve sword is in a different style. Both faces of the grip are subdivided by a double zigzagged ribbon into six triangles with schematic palmettes inside. This ornament is similar to the motif of the “running tendril” which was popular in Romanesque art. For example, such a motif can be seen on the bronze grip of a sword from Kiviniemi, Sakkola in Karelia.¹⁸ However, the palmettes of the Hvoshcheve grip do not have direct parallels, with the exception of a similar one on the bronze crucifix from Clonmacnoise, County Offlaly in Ireland (fig. 9).¹⁹ It is claimed that palmettes like those on the specimen from Clonmacnoise were a characteristic feature of Irish art at the end of 11th and beginning of the 12th centuries.²⁰ This dating of Irish patterns, as well as different styles of decoration, provide a basis for suggesting that the hilt from Hvoshcheve was formed at different times. First, in the middle of 11th century, the pommel and both guards were produced and then at the beginning of 12th century the grip was made. It is interesting that both stages of hilt composition were related to the British Isles, where the sword most probably came from. Regarding the origin of the sword from Hvoshcheve, one more “British” trait should be mentioned. Triangular pommels with upwardly curving guards are only characteristic of swords of Petersen’s type L, which were common in Britain during the Viking Age.²¹ However, the multipiece downward-curved lower guard of the sword from Hvoshcheve is a feature which relates to swords of Petersen’s type Z.²² That is why, in my opinion, the sword from Hvoshcheve is one of the latest specimens of type L swords, which absorbed some characteristics of contemporaneous sword types.

The cast silver hilts of the swords from Vrångabäck and Dybäck were found in Scania, formerly a part of Denmark, and were undoubtedly related to royal settings. Parts of the hilt from Hvoshcheve were cast in bronze. There are only two parallels — bases of lower guards from Gotland (Go, Vall parish, SHM 14065; SHM 2976:210)²³ decorated in the primitive Borre style which is probably associated with swords of Petersen’s type Z. Nevertheless, as was shown above, the hilt of the sword from Hvoshcheve was produced in a Danish context in Britain or possibly in the area of Sweden influenced by Denmark.

16 J. Brøndsted, *Early English Ornament* (Copenhagen and London, 1924), 267–268, fig. 192.

17 G. Graham-Campbell, *Viking Artefacts*, 71.

18 C. A. Nordman, *Nordisk ornamentik i Finlands järnålder*, ed. H. Shetelig, *Nordisk kultur*, 27 (Stockholm, 1931), 180–201, 199, 200, fig. 35.

19 F. Henry, *Irish Art During the Viking Invasion (800–1020 A. D.)* (London, 1967), 161, pl. 8.

20 *Treasures of Ireland, Irish Art 3000 B. C. — 1500 A. D.* (Dublin, 1983), 166–167, no. 78, pl. 175.

21 J. Petersen, *De norske vikingesverd* (Kristiania, 1919).

22 D. Wilson, O. Klindt-Jensen, *Viking Art*, 32–54; V. Evison, A Sword from the Thames at Wallingford Bridge, *The Archaeological Journal* (124, 1967), 160–186; S. Fuglesang, *Some Aspects*.

23 L. Thunmark-Nylen, *Die Wikingerzeit Gotland* (1998, bd. II), taf. 231:5.



Fig. 9. Bronze crucifix from Clonmacnoise, Co. Offlay in Ireland (after F. Henry)

Thus, it is only the Cyrillic inscription that suggests Slavonic production of the Hvoshcheve sword. However, certain problems with its interpretation should be noted. In his publication, A. N. Kirpichnikov points out that only two letters — “IO” and “A” are readable on the sword’s blade (which alone would make the reading rather problematic). In 2001 I examined the sword at the National Historical Museum twice and it was apparent that only a circle-shaped mark flanked by two vertical lines is to be observed. I also checked a sword (HMIY B-329) with another “Slavonic” inscription (“SLAV” according to A. N. Kirpichnikov). The blade of the sword is in extremely bad condition and damaged by various hollows together with the remains of individual marks, which A. N. Kirpichnikow took for an inscription with a Slavonic name. In fact, these are only a circle and zigzag-shaped marks.

It is remarkable that both “Slavonic” inscriptions have been discovered on the blades in extremely poor state of preservation that makes a reliable reading all but impossible. The initial poor condition, further worsened by a specific restoration technique, most certainly is responsible. No Slavonic marks have been identified on the better-preserved swords. To sum up, one has to admit that Slavonic inscriptions are more wishful

thinking than fact. Slavonic marks might yet be discovered in the future with the assistance of modern technology, but for the moment, the Slavonic production of swords during the Viking Age still remains to be proven.

It is important to note that workshop marks such as “Inegeldr” or “Ulfberht” do not provide evidence that swords were produced in continental Europe. Swords’ blades might have been exported, but hilts were manufactured by local smiths. A find of five marked blades without hilts from Hulterstad parish, Skärlöv, Öland in Sweden (SHM 3104) and also separate finds of pommels and guards in Hedeby²⁴ and Birka (SHM 5208:248, 5208:249, 5208:250, 5208:547, Fnr 21672, 25217, 30397, 43173, 43658) suggest that this was indeed the case. I have examined in detail approximately 400 Swedish, 100 Norwegian, 30 Danish, and 25 Icelandic hilts (my drawings of the Swedish swords are available at the Statens Historiska Museum in Stockholm). The conclusion that I came to is that the length of the tangs, the total lengths, and the weights of the swords are different, and it should be evident that swords during the Viking Age were not standardized products. Each of them was forged for an individual customer. On the other hand, modern experimental production of pattern-welded blades and inscriptions has shown that it was not difficult for Scandinavian smiths to produce such swords.²⁵ This supports the suggestion that Frankish swords were copied by Scandinavian smiths.²⁶ It is a common view now that swords of the Viking Age were exported from continental Europe and this cannot be an argument in discussions on the contacts between Scandinavia and Rus’. If we follow such an assumption, any sword with a marked or pattern-welded blade should be considered an import. Only female ornaments would be left for discussion. On the basis of their analysis we would come to ridiculous conclusions about mass migration of women only from Sweden to Rus’. Quite clearly, such a conclusion is wrong.

Despite apparent similarities between swords from Western Europe, Scandinavia, and Rus, the frequencies of the various types of swords show clear regional peculiarities. Some types of sword are typical of Norway, some of Sweden and some of Denmark. Close correlation between the sets of sword types typical of various Scandinavian regions and other parts of Europe reflects interregional contacts, which are also indicated by written sources and imported objects.²⁷ The sword from Hvoshcheve is good evidence for this statement.

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24 A. Geibig, *Beiträge zur morphologischen Entwicklung des Schwertes im Mittelalter* (Neumünster, 1991).

25 K. Andressen, Dekor og inskrift pü vikinesverd — hvordan ble det utført?, *Spor* (8/15, 1993), 38–39.

26 M. Müller-Wille, Ein neues Ulfberth — Schwert aus Hamburg, *Verbreitung Formenkunde und Herkunft*, Offa (27, 1970), 65–91, 75; A. Stalsberg, The Russian-Norwegian Sword Project, *The Twelfth Viking Congress*, vol. 3 (Stockholm, 1994), 187–188.

27 F. Androschuk, Vikingar och bönder, Några anmärkningar om den sociala tolkningen av svärden och de långa kontakterna under vikingatiden. 2002. *In press*.