

DANISH VIKING MARKS ON STONE?

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Non-literate marks on stone blocks in the form of images and symbols from the Stone Age, Bronze Age and Iron Age are known from many sites in Denmark. From the late Iron Age and Viking Age we know about texts carved on stone blocks, so called rune stones. On two small islands, Illumoe and Vigoe in the Bay of Helnaes southwest of Funen, there are fragments of a 4-km system of upright monoliths. The construction consists of hundreds of stones. Some stand in distinct rows, others have fallen down from the stand. 68 monoliths with 163 non-literate marks have been observed. The small marks on the stones on Illumoe and Vigoe are circular and beaker-shaped with an average diameter of 37 mm and a depth of 40 percent of the diameter. The marks are different from the common Bronze Age/Early Iron Age cupmarks from southwestern Funen. They have an average diameter of 44 mm and a depth of only 16 percent of the diameter. The marks are called beakermarks to express their characteristics.

Experiments to make copies of the beakermarks with different types of tools found that it was only possible to create them with tools of iron. It is not possible to date the monoliths or the stone rows precisely, but the evidence from the experiments show that they must be from the Iron Age or later, i.e. from 500 BC onwards.

Geological research shows that the islands in the Bay of Helnaes were a joined landscape for a period in the past. There is also evidence that suggests that the islands were connected by land to Helnaes. The name of the peninsula Helnaes means 'the holy peninsula'. It makes good sense to recognize Helnaes in the past as an overall landscape that included the small islands.

Texts on a rune stone from Helnaes mention Roulv, priest of the peninsula. The rune stone is dated to the Late Germanic Iron Age (c. 700 AD). In the late Iron Age and early Viking Age the Scandinavian society of peasants and warriors was united in a religious community by the ancient Asa

religion in connection with the text on the Helnaes rune stone.

When looking for an answer to the question why the beakermarks were chipped in the monoliths, we must make this qualified guess. In the past the monoliths along the shores of the two small islands were a clear indication that the area was something special. It seems reasonable to assume that the monoliths were a fence around a holy place where Roulv carried out sacred rituals.

Chipping experiments have shown that the Bronze Age cupmarks were very time-consuming to produce with tools of hard stones. Efforts to produce a cupmark were perhaps a sacred act with a specific purpose. Creating a beakermark with tools of iron took only a short time. It is not the work, but the mark itself that is important. Runic writing came to be used in Scandinavia already in the first centuries AD. Early runic inscriptions are often associated with precious art objects or texts on stones set by kings, warriors, priests and chiefs. The three known rune stones from the southwest of Funen with Roulv's name are not written by him, but signed by the rune writer Aurir. The ability to read and write runes was perhaps reserved for the upper class, while commoners were rune-illiterate. Viewed in this context, Iron Age beakermarks are non-literate messages to the contemporary population.

Beakermarks on monoliths at Helnaes are a clarification of the message of the monoliths, which at least tells the visitor that he is entering a special area with different rules of behaviour. It is possible that each beakermark shows that a holy act is performed by and on the stone. All the constructions' beakermarks show a high degree of uniformity. There are no special marks which could be interpreted for special deities, such as Tor, Odin and Freya. Uniformity can be interpreted as a request to 'Regin', an Old Norse word meaning 'powers'. It is a holistic concept that includes the personified forces of nature, the ancestors and the divine.

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