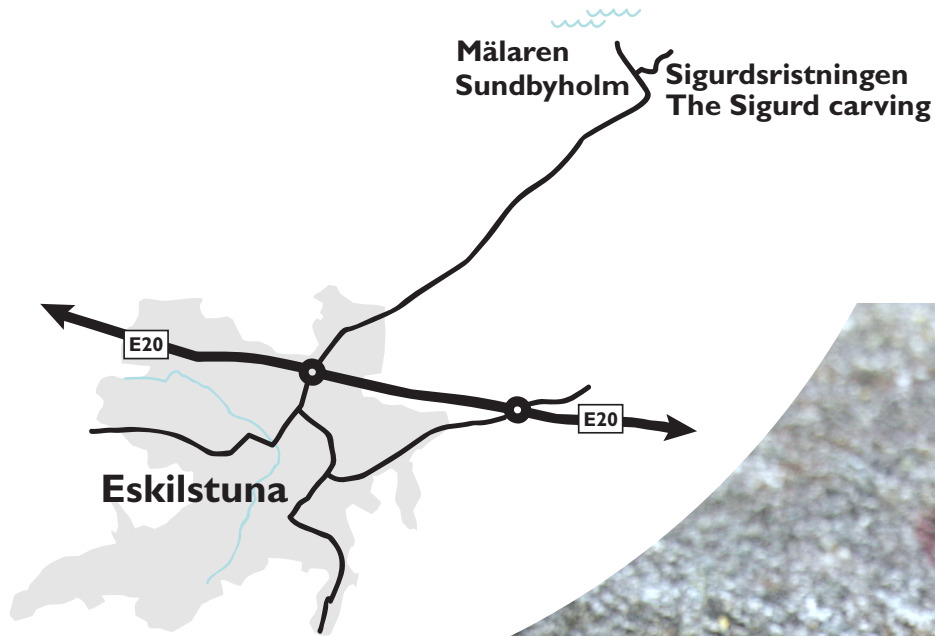




An illustration
of almost 1000 years!

The Sigurd Carving



Sundbyholm Eskilstuna

The Sigurd Carving

The runic carving near Sundbyholm Manor House in one of Sweden's foremost ancient monuments. The fact that it ranks so high among the 100.000 relics of the past and the 400 runic carvings in Södermanland is chiefly due to its remarkable content of pictures.

Here we have an illustration, almost a thousand years old, of some well known episodes from the saga of Sigurd the Dragon Slayer, as we know it, for instance from the ancient Poetic Edda on Iceland.

The runic line is an inscription in memory of a dead man, Holmger, initiated by his widow Sigrid. It is written in a form that was customary on the runic stones of the 11th century. The inscription specifies the dead man's nearest relations; a combination of these names with others appearing on some runic carvings in Södermanland and Uppland has revealed a family of most distinguished lineage

originating from the northern and southern shores of Lake Mälaren. It is obvious, too, that Sigrid was a Christian and, according to contemporary practice, had done a charitable act for her husband's salvation by building a bridge. Traces of this can still be seen in the form of a bank of earth and stone below the carving. The water level in the Ramsund channel was 9-12 feet higher during the Viking era than today.

What the rune-carver has depicted on the Ramsund rock in his design of almost 15 feet are some separate episodes from the Sigurd saga. The Sigurd carving is probably the first illustration of a bladesmith and his tools.

About Runic Stones and Vikings

Runic writings appear most likely under the influence of the Roman culture circle, among the Germanic people during the centuries immediately after A.D. In Sweden the first inscriptions appeared in the 3rd century. In the beginning the runic stones were not used for actual writing but for symbols with a magical significance engraved on objects, usually weapons. A runic stone, erected in honour of a deceased friend, mainly belong in the end of the Viking Age, i.e. the 11th century.

Sweden has over 3 000 runic inscriptions, of which about 1 300 are to be found in Uppland and 400 in Södermanland. Most of the runic stones in Södermanland are in the flat country to the east. There are also several in Rekarne (about 50), which indicates that it was an important district here already at the transition between Prehistoric times and the Middle Ages.

The runic inscriptions tell you about the Viking's journeys to the West and to the East. On two of the three runic stones at Gredby Street, Eskilstuna's oldest exit towards Strängnäs, is inscribed "he travelled with Ingvar", which means – according to the inscription on a stone at Gripsholm set up in memory of Ingvars's brother – that "they died in the south, in Särkland", i.e. the land of the Saracenes, south of the Caspian Sea, possibly Persia. Furthermore, we meet important people from noble families. The most noble one is Sigrid, daughter of Orm, mother of Alrik, wife of Spjut and later of Holmger, mentioned on two of the most remarkable runic stones in Rekarne, the runic stone of Kungshället on the Kjula ridge and the Sigurd inscription on the Ramsund Hill in Jäder.

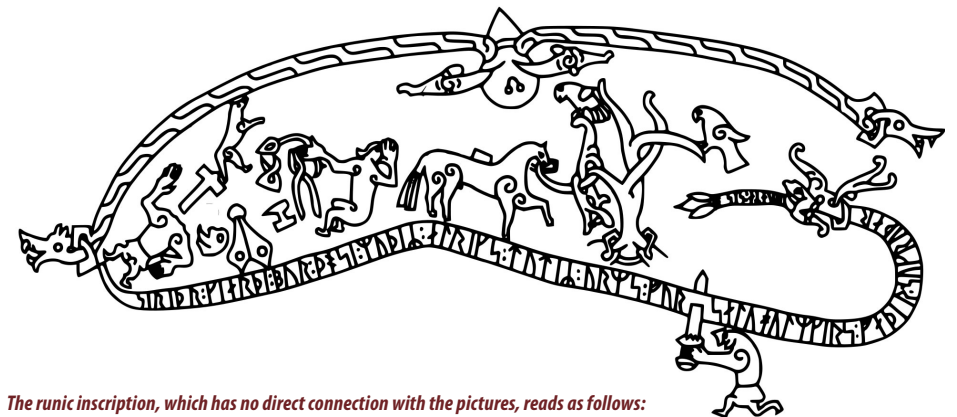
The story

Sigurd was a young man, a king's son. His foster father was the cunning dwarf Regin, who had two brothers, Otter and Fafnir. The former often transformed himself into an otter and fished for salmon in a stream. One day while fishing Otter was killed by the asa god Loke, who had come to the place with Odin. The gods had to pay a penalty for their crime by covering the otter's skin with gold. Fafnir kept the whole treasure by himself and in the shape of an enormous snake guarded it on Gnita moor.

But Regin wanted to get hold of the gold. He egged on Sigurd to slay Fafnir and forged him a noble sword. Sigurd dug a hole for himself just where Fafnir used to crawl down to the lake to drink, and there he thrust the sword into him. The runes are carved on the serpent's body. In the space enclosed by the runic coil are the pictures, and we see Sigurd sitting with the serpent's heart on a spit roasting it for Regin over a blazing fire. Then he wanted to touch it,

the story tells us, to make sure that it was done enough. He touched it and thereby burnt himself and stuck his finger into his mouth to cool it. He then got Fafnir's blood on his tongue and suddenly he could understand the birds twitter and heard them saying that Regin's intent was to deceive Sigurd to get the sole possession of the treasure. They advised Sigurd to slay the sleeping dwarf. Sigurd did so. We see Regin lying with his head cut off and beside him his tools, hammer, bellows, anvil and tongs. Sigurd's horse Grane tethered to the tree in which the birds are perched, with the treasure loaded on his back.

The rune-carver has not pictured neither what then happened to Sigurd, nor how the treasure brought misfortune to him and his family.



The runic inscription, which has no direct connection with the pictures, reads as follows:

siri r: kiar i : bur : osi : mu iR . alriks – tutiR – urms fur salu : hulmkirs : fa ur : sukru ar buat asis

Which means: "Sigrid, Alrik's mother, Orm's daughter, made this bridge for her husband Holmger's Siggröd's father's, soul".