

# Dogs in graves – a question of symbolism?

by

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## *Abstract:*

A 9<sup>th</sup> century female boat-grave is the starting point for a discussion about dogs in Scandinavian graves from c. 500-1100 AD.

Some Scandinavian prehistoric material is presented: Mesolithic dog graves, Bronze Age rock carvings, canine bones from cremation graves and from sacrificial finds, from the Neolithic to Roman Iron Age. From c. 500-1100 AD there is a large corpus of dog bones from graves, cremations as well as inhumations. In the high status graves, the dog bones have been regarded as an element of aristocratic horseback hunting. In ordinary cremation graves dog bones occur frequently.

Turning to the history of religions it is quite clear that the dog is an important animal. In Old Iranian as well as in Celtic culture the dog had high status both mythically and in reality, in contrast to Semitic cultures, where the idea of the dog was more negative. Concerning Old Scandinavian mythology, evidence from Old Norse literature and also from Adam of Bremen, Thietmar of Merseburg and Ibn Fadlan clearly demonstrates the connection between dog and death. The mythical dog seems to be a medium on the border between the living and the dead, and in all likelihood the archaeological material reflects this important symbolic-mythological meaning in the transformation from life to death.

In one of the boat graves from Old Uppsala, Uppland, Sweden, excavated in 1974 and dated to the 9<sup>th</sup> century AD, a woman in a splendid dress and with very rich ornaments was buried together with two animals, a hen and a dog (Fig. 1a-b). The dog was placed outside the stern; the excavator commented this with the following words: “the dog seems to have been taken by its tail and been slipped down between the boat and the wall of the pit”.<sup>1</sup> In my view, the plan gives a strong impression of the importance of the dog for the funeral ceremonies, as well as the hen in the stem, the latter probably as a symbol of rebirth. It is a well-known fact among Scandinavian archaeologists that dogs occur frequently in graves from the second half of the first millennium, but does it also occur in earlier periods? What does it mean and how frequent are dogs in women’s graves? I will start with an overview of how dogs appear in the prehistoric-early medieval material from Scandinavia, give some examples as comparison from the Continent and from the Classical world and then finally discuss the meaning of the dog from a perspective of religion.

Dogs in graves are normally interpreted as grave gifts, the faithful companions following the masters or mistresses, sometimes also as a sign of high status. In my view, none of these interpretations is sufficient - the dog may well have been a beloved companion, but it may also have had a deeper, symbolic meaning.

From Mesolithic cemeteries in Denmark and Southern Sweden (c. 5000 BC), we know of separate dog graves, where the dogs have been buried with the same carefulness as human beings. They lie crouched as if they sleep, covered with red ochre, in single cases they have even got grave goods.<sup>2</sup> In Swedish Bronze Age cremation graves dog bones from most parts of the body occur, in contrast to, for example, pig bones and sheep bones, which occur only from fleshy parts of the animal, used for food.<sup>3</sup>

Among Scandinavian Bronze Age rock carvings there are several pictures of dogs, drawn with various degrees of conciseness, from very indifferent canine animals to such that permits a characterisation of breed (Fig. 2). With their erect ears, curled tails, and steep angulation of both forequarters and hindquarters they are similar to modern spitz dogs.<sup>4</sup> The scenes are often said to be hunting scenes, but a scene like fig. 3 gives in my view more the impression of a ritual performance, some kind of ceremony.

Obviously the dog has played an important role in sacrifices. In a Bronze Age sacrificial find from Southern Sweden (Östra Vemmerlöv in Scania), where artificial ponds in a swamp constitute the proper cult site, there is a large amount of human and animal bones. Dogs are beyond comparisons the largest species.<sup>5</sup> Other sacrificial finds from wells in the same area, Röekillorna, dated from the Neolithic to Roman Iron Age, contain a lot of dog bones and horse bones, 30 and 31 % respectively of the total amount of animal bones. This is in contrast to settlement finds, where bones of dogs and horses are normally very rare.<sup>6</sup> An exception is the finds from the fortified settlement Eketorp on the island of Öland. In the strata from phase II (c. 400-700 AD) at least 31 dogs are represented and from phase III (c. 1000-1300) at

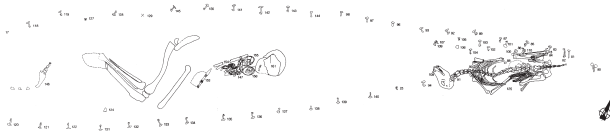


Fig. 1a. Plan of boat grave 36, the Vicarage, Old Uppsala, Uppland, dated to the 9th century (detail). After Nordahl 2001.

least 67 dogs. However, these figures are the minimal number of individuals, probably the number was considerably larger. Variations in size and stature are evident, although most of them are said to be of the size of a modern German Shepherd (c. 50 cms height at withers). There are also bigger dogs, with a height at withers of 65 cms, and smaller, c. 30 cms height at withers.<sup>7</sup>

From the second half of the first millennium, dogs occur frequently in grave finds, both in high status graves and in more poor ones.<sup>8</sup> A good example of a high status burial from the Vendel Period (c. 550-750/800 AD) is a cremation grave situated in a large mound, Rikeby in Vallentuna parish north of Stockholm, dated to the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD (Fig. 3).<sup>9</sup> The dead warrior, 40-50 years old, was buried with fine weapons, a dice inscribed with runes, one horse, four dogs, some birds of prey and, as meat, parts of pigs, sheep and cow. The four dogs belonged to at least three different types: one dog normally built with a height at withers of c. 40 cms, two rather big slender-limbed dogs, c. 55-65 cms height at withers and one dog, big and coarse-limbed, c. 65-70 cms height at withers. The osteologist's conclusion is that these dogs must have had different functions in their lifetime.<sup>10</sup> The two slender-limbed dogs may well be interpreted as sight hounds.

Osteological analyses of 14 high status cremation graves from the second half of the first millennium AD in the Mälaren area show this content of animals as a common pattern. One of the graves, Arninge in Täby, contained the remains of no less than 11 dogs!<sup>11</sup>

Also the famous Vendel Period boat-graves from Vendel and Valsgärde in Uppland give evidence of the chieftain's hunting with birds of prey and sight hounds. The osteologist I. Öhman has compared the skulls of two of the dogs in one of the Vendel graves to that of modern dogs, and the best counterpart found was modern greyhound.<sup>12</sup> The height at withers of these two dogs was c. 70 cm, while the rest of the Vendel dogs have a height between 40 and 60 cm. There is no information about height of the dogs in the Valsgärde graves as they were often in a bad state of preservation, but at least in one of them there were skeleton remains of "a dog with long legs, probably a sight hound".<sup>13</sup>

From several boat-graves in Vendel and Valsgärde we have remains of dog collars and/or leads: mounts (normally of iron but some of them of silver, beautifully decorated), rings, pieces of chains and buckles.<sup>14</sup> The chain pieces represented certainly the lower part of the leads. Similar leads are still used today with dogs or puppies, wanting to bite at the lead. From one of the Viking Age boat-graves from Valsgärde, grave 10 dated to the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, we have the most spectacular find of this kind: a spiked dog collar (Fig. 5a).



Fig 1 b. The dog skeleton in situ. After Nordahl 2001.

Fragments of another one were found in the somewhat older boat-grave III (c. 750 AD) in Vendel.<sup>15</sup> Similar collars with spikes have been used up to modern times to protect hunting dogs, herding dogs and guarding dogs from attacks of wolves and other beasts. The collar shown in fig (Fig. 5b). 1 was used during the middle or later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Many more examples of high status graves with dogs could be mentioned; I will only take one of them, the Danish ship-grave from Ladby on the island of Fyn, dated to the 10<sup>th</sup> century AD.<sup>16</sup> The dead chieftain was followed by at least four dogs, put together on an ingenious lead, where the straps from each collar are gathered in a guilt bronze ring, from which one strap made up the handle for the master. Sometimes, this principle is used still today when walking with a couple of dogs.

It could have been expected that the richly equipped chamber graves in Birka, the early Viking town on Björkö in Lake Mälaren, many of them with horses, should contain dogs. However, that is not the case. In a contemporary, somewhat simpler chamber grave from Långtora in Uppland the dead warrior was accompanied by a dog and horse.<sup>17</sup> In an inhumation grave from the 10<sup>th</sup> century from northern Sweden, Rösta in Ås parish in Jämtland, where the dead man had been buried probably laying on a sledge, he was followed by a horse and a dog.<sup>18</sup>

In spite of all these chieftains' graves that immediately come to one's mind when discussing the presence of dogs in graves of the second half of the first millennium AD, obviously even women could be accompanied by a dog, as my first example showed. More examples are to be found, e.g. from Tuna in Alsike, Uppland, boat grave IX dated to c. 900-950 AD, containing a woman,





Fig. 2. Bronze Age rock carving, Fossum, Tanum, Bohuslän. After Bertilsson 1989.

a horse and a large dog<sup>19</sup> and from the cemetery Ihre in Hellvi on Gotland, where eight of the Viking Age graves contained dogs; at least two of these graves are women's graves.<sup>20</sup> For Norway the 9<sup>th</sup> century ship grave at Oseberg, where two women were buried, must be mentioned. Some chains as leads were found in the ship, next to a skeleton of a dog in the stem. A head of a dog and a head of a horse were situated in the middle of the stem, and on top of them there was a chain, at least 1.10 m long.<sup>21</sup> In the other big Viking ship grave in Vestfold in Norway, Gokstad, dendrochronologically dated to 895 AD, the dead man had got at least 12 horses and 6 dogs who were found outside the ship.<sup>22</sup>

But what about the large material of ordinary cremation graves from the second half of the first millennium? Unfortunately, the vast majority of the cremated bones are not analysed osteologically. The material from some cemeteries has been analysed however, and among them we find some very interesting examples. At the large cemetery of Lindholmøhje in Jutland, Denmark, dog bones occur in most of the c. 700 graves, as common in female as in male graves.<sup>23</sup> At the cemetery of Tuna in Badelunda, Västmanland, Sweden, 53 cremation graves were excavated and in almost 50% of them dog bones occurred, representing dogs of different sizes, from very large to small, both in men's and in women's graves.<sup>24</sup> From Birka the first hundred excavated cremation graves were analysed by Hj. Stolpe already in the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Human bones were found in them all, dog bones were found in 25 graves, four of them were men's graves and three women's graves, the rest were not possible to determine as to sex.<sup>25</sup> In the 1970s another sample of graves, from the so-called Grindsbacka cemetery, were analysed osteologically. Humans, horses, dogs, pigs, sheep/goats, cats and birds are represented. In none of these graves human sex could be determined.

At the already mentioned boat-grave cemetery of Valsgårde, about 60 cremation graves were scattered over the site. At least 31 of them have been determined osteologically as women's graves.<sup>26</sup> In as much as 28 of these 31 graves dog bones occurred. One of these graves, dated to the 10<sup>th</sup> century, contained an richly equipped, old woman, followed by one horse, two dogs, one of them big the other medium-sized, and a cock – an interesting parallel to the boat-grave from Old Uppsala with the woman buried with a dog and a hen.

Concerning the size of the dogs, there are regulations in the medieval Scandinavian laws about boots for killing various types of dogs: lap dogs had a double value compared to hunting dogs, herding dogs and guarding dogs, in the Frostatings law even a triple value.<sup>27</sup> The osteological material shows that lap dogs really existed in Scandinavia during the second half of the first millennium, for example in the above mentioned cremation graves from Tuna in Badelunda. The Viking Age town of Hedeby in southernmost Denmark (today Germany) could also be mentioned, a zoological investigation of 1020 dog bones, representing a minimal number of individuals of 100. The smallest dog had a height at withers of only 25 cms.<sup>28</sup>

In the contemporary iconographic material we find some pictures of dogs. As hunting dogs they occur on some Gotlandic picture stones and also in one case running beside a cart (cf. the Dalmatians in later times!).<sup>29</sup> The rune stone with primitive Norse runes from Möjbro, Hagby parish, Uppland, dated to c. 500 AD, shows a mounted warrior, followed by two dogs. The Viking Age rune stone from Böksta, Balingsta parish, Uppland, shows a hunting scene, where the mounted hunter is chasing a deer or an elk, attacked by a bird of prey (Fig. 4). Another interpretation of this scene is that it depicts the aesir god Oden riding his horse Sleipner, followed by his two wolf dogs (or wolfs) Freke and Gere.<sup>30</sup> The birds are then seen as Oden's two ravens, Hugin and Munin. Turning to dogs in the archaeological material in areas outside Scandinavia, the Dutchman Wietske Prummel's big article on early medieval dog burials among the Germanic tribes is very valuable.<sup>31</sup> She has registered dog graves from 110 cemeteries in Europe from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup> century, totally 271 graves. Her analysis is divided into two areas, one for the Continent and England (area 1) and another for northern Europe, including Denmark, Sweden and Finland (area 2). Norway is not included in her investigation. A remarkable difference between the two areas is that separate dog graves are much more frequent in area 1 (21%) than in area 2 (1%), one separate dog grave from Finland). This is heavily stressed by the fact that separate animal graves, i.e. a) dogs, b) horses and c) dogs + horses) show a percentage of 63% in area 1 and still 1% in area 2. The category humans + dogs has a percentage of 27% in area 1 and as much as 59% in area 2. In her table 4 where dog graves are divided according to tribe or country, it is obvious that Sweden has by far the largest number of dog graves in her investigation, 157. That is many more than in Denmark or Finland and also many more than in any of the continental tribes. A certain source criticism is needed here, as she obviously has not come across all evidence of dog graves in Sweden and Denmark.

The dog burials of the various tribes and areas are unevenly distributed when divided in time. While the Thuringians, the Langobards, the Franks, the Alamans and the Anglo-Saxons have most of their dog graves in the period c. 400-700, for the Saxons and the Frisians the corresponding time is c. 600-800, and for Scandinavia c. 600-1050 with an increasing number in the Viking

Age.<sup>32</sup> In my view this chronological/spatial difference reflects clearly the progressing Christianity, as animals in graves is one of the strongest criterion of non-Christian burial customs.<sup>33</sup> Prummel has also looked at the human sex in graves with humans and dogs and found a higher frequency for dogs in women's graves in Continental Europe and England, compared to northern Europe. However, purely male graves dominate in both her areas, 58% for area 1 and 76% for area 2. Purely female graves are 32% and 17% respectively, and mixed graves are 11% and 7 respectively. Concerning the function of the dogs in the graves Prummel concludes that they, as well as the horses, are to be seen as grave gifts, as expression of prestige and wealth. She regards the dogs in their lifetime mainly as hunting dogs but suggests that most of the large dogs were fighting dogs or wolf-attacking dogs in the first place.<sup>34</sup>

Separate dog graves are reported from many excavations in Poland from pre-Roman and Roman Iron Age. However, Tadeusz Makiewicz has convincingly shown that the absolute majority of these are not to be regarded as dog graves but instead as dog sacrifices in connection with buildings. They are found in settlement contexts, sometimes under the threshold of a house or even under the hearth, in a few cases also close to cult buildings.<sup>35</sup> Dogs as possible amulets in cremation graves, dated to Late La Tène period, have been found in Hessen in southern Germany, in a Celtic cultural context. The ten small sculptures are made of clay, bronze, glass or jet. Hartmut Polenz is of the opinion, due to the other artefacts in the graves, that they are all from female graves, either adults or girls. She interprets them as amulets rather than toys or substitutes of real dogs and gives many examples of the importance of dogs in the Celtic culture as shown in the iconography.<sup>36</sup> However, a later osteological analysis of one of the graves (Offenbach A.M.- Rumpenheim) has shown that all the cremated bones derived from a dog, not from a human being. Peter Blänske suggests the interpretation of a ritual burial of the dog, a rite known from Czechoslovakia in Celtic time.<sup>37</sup>

At a recent excavation of a cemetery at via Nomentana, close to Rome, 26 human graves and four dog graves were excavated, datable from the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD. The dogs were all more or less complete, with the skeletons in anatomical order. Their height at withers differ between from just under 40 up to 55 cms.<sup>38</sup> In Italy dogs occur in graves from the Neolithic period up to the Roman period. One interpretation is that the dog should continue its faithful work for his master after death, perhaps to guard the grave. But they could also be seen as a strong therapeutic medium.<sup>39</sup> At the excavation of 47 children's graves (babies and also some foetues) in Lugnano in Teverina, dated to the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD, 12 puppies and one dog about a year old were found. Four of them were nearly intact but the others lacked important parts:



Fig. 3. Reconstruction of a Vendel Period chieftain's funeral. Following the example of a grave in Rickeby, Vallentuna, Uppland, which contained the undisturbed remains of the pyre, it was possible to reconstruct the position of the body and the animals. After Sten & Vretemark 1988.

some had mandibles but no crania, others had crania but lacked mandibles. The one-year-old dog lacked its head. Puppies held a prominent place in Roman folk medicine and probably some of the puppies had their heads, or part of them ritually removed, in order to stop the disease that had killed the babies. According to Pliny the Elder, puppies were thought to absorb the power of a disease when they sucked milk from a diseased infants mouth. They were then killed and buried and their blood was a sacrifice to the underworld gods.<sup>40</sup>

In the Classical mythology we meet dogs, following the hunting goddess Artemis, the war god Ares but also Asklepios, the god of medicine. One version of his birth myth tells that he was born in Epidauros and set out on a mountain, where a goat nourished him and a herding dog guarded him. Therefore, beside the snake, the dog was also Asklepios' sacred animal.<sup>41</sup> We meet also dogs connected to the infernal regions. Kerberos was, with his three heads, an ugly and frightening beast to judge from the texts.<sup>42</sup> He guarded the entrance to the realm of the dead, so that the living could not enter and the dead could not leave. When depicted on paintings or in sculptures he is however a rather beautiful dog, even if he has three heads. It is striking how important the artistic style is!

But the goddess really associated with dogs is Hekate, originally from Asia Minor, who got a wide distribution and popularity throughout the Hellenistic and Roman world. She was the goddess of the moon, but also the chthonic goddess, who drifted about in the night together with the souls of the dead and accompanied by her whining dogs.<sup>43</sup> Connected to the infernal realm and to funerals, Hekate was also the messenger between the world of the dead and that of the living.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore she was the one who could help women in labour at childbirth and she guarded the entrance of the home. Besides, she was worshipped at junctions where three roads met. Iconographically she is depicted either with one head and one body or with three heads and one body or with three heads and three bodies. Her attributes are torches, dogs and a crescent. The dog is associated with the infernal Hekate. The same dog accompanies the Sumerian god-





Fig. 4. Rune stone U 855, Böksta, Baltingsta, Uppland with an aristocratic hunting scene (falconry), or perhaps a mythological scene. After Upplands runinskrifter.

dess Gula. However, the dog seems originally have been a symbol of celestial cult, worshipped in ancient times in Egypt, Persia and Sumer and attached to Magna Mater, the goddess of all nature.<sup>45</sup> In Caria the dog was the principal sacrificial animal, and dog sacrifices to Hekate are mentioned by ancient authors. Archaeological evidence is known from Didyma near Miletos, where a large amount of dog bones were found in wells.<sup>46</sup> It is obvious that there is a connection between dog and death in the Classical mythology. A small bronze dog found in Cortona, Italy, has an inscription to the Etruscan chthonic god Calus.<sup>47</sup>

Let us now return to the initial question – what does the dogs in the Scandinavian graves mean? As we have seen, dogs were frequently used as sacrificial animals, both in Scandinavia, in Continental Europe and in the Classical world as well. On the contrary, one of the authors of the article “Hund und Hundegräber” in *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde* writes: “soweit sich erkennen lässt kommt der Hund in der altgermanischen religion indessen keine herausragende Bedeutung zu”.<sup>48</sup> This is in accordance with the interpretations that suggest status and companionship as the main reasons for the dogs in the graves. However, in my opinion there is every reason to suggest a religious interpretation.

The meaning of the dog has been different from culture to culture. Old Iranian people saw the dog as a holy animal with high status, both mythologically and in reality, whereas the Semitic cultures had a more negative view; in the Bible dogs are often mentioned as impure animals, an idea that has been taken over by Islam. In the Old Iranian culture the dogs were regarded as an efficient weapon against the evil and the demons, and they played an important role at the funeral ceremonies,

where dogs were led up and down in order to drive away the demons.<sup>49</sup>

Likewise, in the Celtic religion the dog was an estimated animal, with an important role in mythology, and it is frequently found in iconographic and documentary evidence. In early Irish sources we find many dog names and compound names, where one element is the word dog.<sup>50</sup> To a high degree, in the Celtic religion the dog is connected to water and spring cult – this is an interesting parallel to the sacrificial sites in southern Sweden, mentioned above. On some of the plates from the large silver cauldron from Gundestrup in Jutland (of Celtic production dated to pre-Roman Iron Age) dogs are depicted, one of them in a scene connected to this – a dog jumping up below the cauldron where a human being is just being sacrificed.

Manfred Lurke has stressed the dual role of the dog in religious dimensions. The dog is both nature and culture, both good and evil and stands between this world and the other world. The dogs could bear the souls through the border area from the land of the living to the land of the dead. The dogs of the goddess Hekate, mentioned above, were maybe such souls in the shape of dogs. But dogs were not only conductors to the realm of the dead, they also acted as guards at the entrance of the underworld, so that the living could not enter and the dead could not leave. This seems to be a general Indo-German phenomenon, mentioned in Rigveda about the two dogs of Yama, the god of the realm of death. Dogs and wolfs as demons of death are found over the whole of Eurasia as well as in North America.<sup>51</sup>

Turning to Old Scandinavian religion and mythology – how is the dog regarded there? Maybe you could expect a negative attitude, when you see the word “dog pagan” (ON *hundheidinn*) for insulting, as for example in Olav Trygvason’s Saga at the dramatic meeting between king Olav and Sigrid Storråda.<sup>52</sup> The French historian of religions, François-Xavier Dillmann has recently studied the background and the use of this word. He presents many examples from medieval songs, tales and poems, and it is never a positive concept. His conclusion is, that, as dog and horse played such an important role in Old Norse religion, it was quite natural that they were regarded as negative during the early Christian period in Scandinavia,<sup>53</sup> a statement that it is easy to agree with. In this connection it could also be worth mentioning Adam of Bremen and his Church history of the Hamburg-Bremen diocese, written in the 1070s. In his description of the coast areas of the Baltic Sea, he tells about the wild amazons living there, whose male offspring are the cynocephali, men with a dog head at their breast.<sup>54</sup>

Adam of Bremen presents maybe the most famous evidence for the role of the dog in Old Norse cult. He describes the grove beside the temple in Uppsala in the following way: the grove is so holy that each single tree is regarded as sacred because of the death and the corruption of the sacrificial victims. Adam speaks of dogs and horses hung up there as well as human corpses; and a Christian informant had told him that he had once

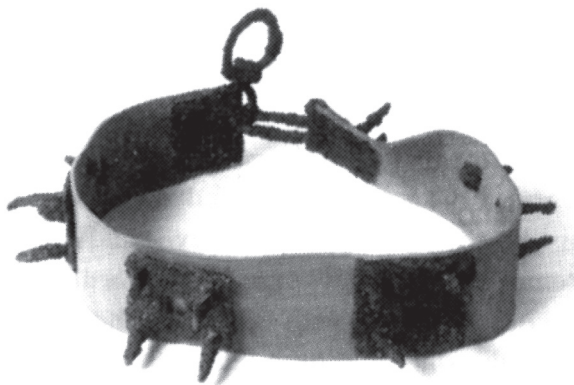


Fig. 5a. Spiked collar from boat grave 10, Valsgärde, Old Uppsala, Uppland, dated to the end of the 10th century. After Öhman 1983.

counted 72 bodies hanging there.<sup>55</sup> Thietmar of Merseburg describes the cult in the Danish cult-place Lejre on Zealand in a very similar way: they sacrifice 99 men and the same number of horses, dogs and cocks.<sup>56</sup>

In this connection the so-called *Völse tattle* in Holy Olav's Saga in the Icelandic *Flateyabók* comes to one's mind, with the description of a pre-Christian domestic cult. A horse phallus, wrapped up in linen cloth, together with onion and herbs, was circulated by the housewife to all members of the household, and each one told an incantation. The disguised Christian king, who visited the house, threw it in disgust to the dog, who ate it. The housewife became very upset and asked the men of the house to lift her up "over the door hinges and over door-lintels to see if I can retrieve the holy sacrifice".<sup>57</sup> This shows that the phallus eaten by the dog was seen as a sacrifice and that the woman tried to get it back from the other world, to where it has passed with the help of the dog. The same interpretation of the role of the dog is most likely the case when the Arab Ibn Fadlan (920s AD) describes how merchants of Norse origin behaved on their arrival to a marketplace on the Volga.<sup>58</sup> They worshipped a tall wooden pillar with a human-like face and other pillars and posts and laid meat, bread and drinks there as offerings. If their trade was successful, they returned with a thank-offering, a sheep that was killed and the meat was laid at the pillars and posts. Ibn Fadlan adds that the dogs ate this meat by night, but that the stupid Rus merchants were content to think that the gods had accepted the sacrifice. In both these cases the role of the dog may, in my view, be regarded as symbolic, the one who is responsible for the transformation to the divine. In his account of the funeral of a Rus chieftain, to which he was an eyewitness, Ibn Fadlan notes also that a dog is killed and thrown into the ship where the dead was laid.<sup>59</sup>

In the Eddic poem *Balder's dreams* we get to know that, on his ride to Hel, Odin meets a bloody and whining dog, coming from Hel, the realm of the dead.<sup>60</sup> This dog has been regarded as the guardian of Hel and has been connected to the dog Garm in *Voluspá* – the dog who whines at the *Gnipahálan*, the cave that has to be passed to reach Hel.<sup>61</sup> In another connection, the importance of caves as liminal places has been stressed by Robin Skeates. He states that caves are often con-



Fig. 5b. Spiked collar from central Sweden, used in the middle or end of the 19th century. After Hundspott.

sidered to be the point of contact or transition between the supernatural and profane world.<sup>62</sup> The dog Garm is also mentioned in *Grimnesmal*, where we are told that he is the best among dogs, as Odin is best among the *aesir*, Sleipner among the horses, Skidbladner among the ships and so on.<sup>63</sup> Historians of religions have seen a relation between the dog in the Eddic poems and the Indoeuropean dog of the realm of the dead, for example the Greek Kerberos, the guard of the entrance to Hades.<sup>64</sup> Bruce Lincoln has pointed out that there are linguistic reasons to connect the names Garm, Gere and Kerberos; they have the same proto-indoeuropean origin. He pays also attention to the relation between the Homeric word *lyssa* and the fury of wolves; he refers to the *Ynglinga Saga* about the fury of the berserks and to an old Irish poem on the hero Cu Chulainn – the name means Chulainn's dog, a dog presented as "the hound of plunder and battle".<sup>65</sup> Dogs and wolves are connected with the warrior ideology. Kim Mc Cone has studied this with respect to the Indogermans.<sup>66</sup> Obviously, dog and wolf were symbols for the groups of warriors, consisting of young, unmarried men from special families in the Germanic society and connected to Odin, the god of death and war, but Greek and Iranian examples of warriors compared to dogs and wolves show that this idea was more widespread. In his opinion, dogs as sacrificial animals could be seen as substitutes of wolves.<sup>67</sup> Recently, Olof Sundqvist has pointed out that the personal names in a group of runic inscriptions from Blekinge, southern Sweden, dated to c. 550-650 AD, *Hatuwulf*, *Hariwulf* and *Heriwulf* may reflect an aristocratic family with a lycanthropic idea (that a man could be transferred to a wolf).<sup>68</sup> In Snorre's Edda there are many examples of how Freke and Gere, the wolves of Odin, gorge on the fallen warriors at the battlefield.<sup>69</sup>

The literary evidence brought forward here demonstrates clearly the connection between dog and sacrifice as well as between dog and death, sometimes illustrated in the funeral ceremonies. The mythological dog seems

to be a border medium between the living and the dead. In my view, it is reasonable to believe that the archaeological material reflects the same idea. The dogs in the graves of the first millennium should probably not only be regarded as the loyal and loving companions of their dead master or mistress in lifetime or as a token of status, but they should also be ascribed an important symbolic-mythological meaning with relation to the transformation from life to death.

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- <sup>1</sup> Nordahl 2001, 57; Molnar 2001, 94.
- <sup>2</sup> Larsson 1989, 219-220.
- <sup>3</sup> Mattisson 1994.
- <sup>4</sup> von Rosen 1954, 116.
- <sup>5</sup> von Post 1919, 169 f.
- <sup>6</sup> Stjernquist 1997, 14, 50 f.; Möhl 1997, 130 f.
- <sup>7</sup> Boessneck, von den Driesch-Karpf & Gejvall 1979, 143-157.
- <sup>8</sup> Sten & Vretemark 1988, 152 f.
- <sup>9</sup> Sjöswärd 1989.
- <sup>10</sup> Vretemark 1989, 35 f.
- <sup>11</sup> Sten & Vretemark 1988, 151.
- <sup>12</sup> Öhman 1983, 172.
- <sup>13</sup> Arwidsson 1942, 112, Taf. 44.
- <sup>14</sup> Arwidsson 1942, 68, Taf. 29; 1954, 77, Taf. 23; 1977, 65, Taf. 25; Öhman 1983, 170 f.
- <sup>15</sup> Öhman 1983, 173 f.
- <sup>16</sup> Thorvildsen 1957, 50 f.
- <sup>17</sup> Arbman 1936, 90.
- <sup>18</sup> Kjellmark 1906, 364 f, fig. 18.
- <sup>19</sup> Arne 1934,
- <sup>20</sup> Stenberger 1962, 114, 128.
- <sup>21</sup> Grieg 1928, 248 f.
- <sup>22</sup> Sjöqvold 1985, 53
- <sup>23</sup> Ramskou 1966, 311, 1976, 107 f.
- <sup>24</sup> Nylén & Schönback 1994, 199; Ihregren 1994, 204 f.
- <sup>25</sup> Hallström 1913, 27-84.
- <sup>26</sup> UMF archives.
- <sup>27</sup> Bernström 1962, 66.

- <sup>28</sup> Wendt 1978, 65.
- <sup>29</sup> Lindqvist 1941, 89, fig. 128, 134, 178, 137, 139.
- <sup>30</sup> Silén 1983, 90.
- <sup>31</sup> Prummel 1992.
- <sup>32</sup> Prummel 1992, 139, table 5.
- <sup>33</sup> Gräslund 2000, 86.
- <sup>34</sup> Prummel 1992, 154 f.
- <sup>35</sup> Makiewicz 1988, 99-103.
- <sup>36</sup> Polenz 1975.
- <sup>37</sup> Blänkle 1986.
- <sup>38</sup> Minniti 2001, 81-84
- <sup>39</sup> De Grossi Mazzorin 2001, 85 f.
- <sup>40</sup> Soren & Soren 1995, 43 f.
- <sup>41</sup> Kerényi 1955, 129 f.
- <sup>42</sup> Kerényi 1955, 52.
- <sup>43</sup> Sarian 1992, 987.
- <sup>44</sup> Sarian 1992, 986.
- <sup>45</sup> Laumont 1958, 419 f.
- <sup>46</sup> Tuchelt 1992, 75.
- <sup>47</sup> De Grossi Mazzorin, 86 f.
- <sup>48</sup> Nedoma 2000, 216.
- <sup>49</sup> Hultgård 1978, 553 f.
- <sup>50</sup> Ross 1993, 423 f., 439 f.
- <sup>51</sup> Lurker 1969, 199, 202 f., 206 f., 209.
- <sup>52</sup> Olav Tryggvason's Saga, chapter 61.
- <sup>53</sup> Dillmann 2001.
- <sup>54</sup> Adam IV:19.
- <sup>55</sup> Adam IV: 26.
- <sup>56</sup> Thietmar I:17.
- <sup>57</sup> Saga of St Olaf, Volsa tattr, strophe 13, transl. N. Price in Price 2002, 168.
- <sup>58</sup> Ibn Fadlan chapter 85.
- <sup>59</sup> Ibn Fadlan, chapter 89.
- <sup>60</sup> Balder's dreams, strophes 2-3.
- <sup>61</sup> Voluspa, strophes 44, 49, 58.
- <sup>62</sup> Skeates 1991, 127.
- <sup>63</sup> Grimnesmal, strophe 44.
- <sup>64</sup> Lincoln 1991, 96 f.
- <sup>65</sup> Lincoln 1991, 131 f.
- <sup>66</sup> Mc Cone 1987.
- <sup>67</sup> Mc Cone 1987, 102 f., 119, 124
- <sup>68</sup> Sundqvist forthcoming
- <sup>69</sup> Ström 1985, 108.

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- Völuspá see *The Poetic Edda*.

#### Abbreviations

UMF = Uppsala Universitets Museum för Nordiska Fornsaker (Uppsala University, Museum of Scandinavian Antiquities)