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Citation: Laine, M. (2025). Rune Stones and Honourable Wounds: The Gothic Idea in Two Eighteenth-Century Swedish Medals. *Diciottesimo Secolo* Special Issue: 79-86. doi: 10.36253/ds-15463

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Data Availability Statement: All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

Competing Interests: The Author(s) declare(s) no conflict of interest.

Rune Stones and Honourable Wounds: The Gothic Idea in Two Eighteenth-Century Swedish Medals

Merit Laine

Stockholm University, Sweden

Abstract. This paper discusses Northern European antiquity as perceived in Sweden during the Age of Liberty (1720-1771). Two unique medals presented to wounded participants in battles of the Pomeranian war are used as points of departure. The paper argues that the general perception (as opposed to specialist discourse) of Swedish antiquity in this period was based on conceptions of collective past identities, characteristics and practices, rather than specific individuals or events. This perception should be understood as a «networked idea», as defined by Shane Butler: «... what no single text has shown us, but which is seen all the same as residing in the tradition itself...». It is here designated «the Gothic idea», as the Gothic heritage was dominant among its sources. It was closely associated with the harsh natural conditions of the north, which were supposed to produce courageous and war-like inhabitants. Not least in martial and patriotic contexts, the Gothic idea was thus part of masculine self-understanding. It was also referenced in the literary and social culture of the time. However, it was difficult to represent and was thus disproportionally absent from visual and material culture. Rune stones were virtually the only type of object that was both widely familiar and associated with Swedish antiquity. Valued as literary sources, they were alien to eighteenth-century taste, but their depiction on the two medals discussed in this paper demonstrate that, on apparently rare occasions, rune stones were used to visually reference the Gothic idea. Their presence situated both givers and receivers of the medals within a living idea of northern antiquity that had been developed for several centuries (indeed, since antiquity) and, for better and worse, continues to evolve to this day. The development of an iconography that goes far beyond rune stones is part of this later story.

Keywords: Age of Liberty, Gothic Heritage, Networked Idea.

Several, interconnected ancient pasts were of interest to the increasingly global eighteenth century[1]. In this article, I will discuss Northern European antiquity as understood in Sweden during the Age of Liberty (1720-1771),

[1] This article draws on research carried out for the project *The Visual Strategies and Court Culture of Adolf Fredrik of Holstein-Gottorp (1710-1771) and Lovisa Ulrika of Prussia (1720-1782), King and Queen of Sweden*, funded by the Berit Wallenberg Foundation, with additional funding from the Åke Wiberg Foundation, and hosted by the Department of Art History at Uppsala University. I am most grateful for their support.

using two medals presented to the wounded of the battles of Pasewalk and Neukalen as my point of departure (figs. 1, 2)[2]. To the eighteenth century, medals were important historical sources, and new specimens were designed with this function in mind – they were to be witnesses of their own time for future generations. However, they were not intended as mere repositories of facts: combinations of motifs and inscriptions allowed for complex messages that presupposed shared knowledge and shared patterns of association but also afforded the pleasures of interpretation and speculation[3].

TWO MEDALS FROM THE POMERANIAN WAR

The battles of Pasewalk and Neukalen, fought in 1760 and 1762 respectively, were two rare Swedish victories in the Seven-Year War, or more precisely the Pomeranian War (1757-1762). Both medals were minted on the initiative of officers participating in the war and engraved by Gustaf Ljungberger, considered the foremost Swedish medalist of the time.

The Pasewalk medal shows a miniature landscape comprising a stormy sea, clouds, unyielding cliffs, a cottage, and hardy trees associated with the northern wilderness[4]. The inscriptions read in translation «Fatherland», and on the obverse, «The wounded but not vanquished». Clouds, trees, and a barren ground reappear on the Neukalen medal, here combined with the words «For the fatherland» and on the obverse «Honourable wounds». Both medals also include rune stones, which in the eighteenth century were the most familiar artefacts of Swedish antiquity. The runes are unreadable, but the stones are accurately represented: they have characteristic flat surfaces, upstanding formats, and uneven edges, and the pseudo-runes are arranged within a typical band-like framework (fig. 3). The stone on the Neukalen medal (fig. 2) also includes a symbol reminiscent of a templar cross – a detail to be found on many rune stones, which here may also be a masonic allusion, given that many officers were members of lodges[5]. On this

Figs. 1, 2. Gustaf Ljungberger, Medals distributed after the battles of 1), Pasewalk (1760) and 2), Neukalen (1762). Stralsund. Silver, diam. 31 and 29 mm respectively. The National Historical Museums, Stockholm. Photo Ann Nordlöf/SHM (CC BY-SA 4.0).

[2] B.E. Hildebrand, *Sveriges och svenska konungahusets minnespenningar, praktmynt och belöningsmedaljer,* Kongl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien, Stockholm 1875, vol. II, pp. 103-105, nrs Adolf Fredrik 32, 33. For Swedish medals, see Y. Haidenthaller, *The Medal in Early Modern Sweden: Significances and Practices*, Föreningen mediehistoriskt arkiv, Lund 2021.

[3] Haidenthaller, *Medal*, cit., p. 8; M. Laine, *En Minerva för vår Nord: Lovisa Ulrika som samlare, beställare och uppdragsgivare*, Uppsala universitet, Uppsala 1998, pp. 43-44.

[4] K. Neville, *The Land of Goths and Vandals: The Visual Presentation of Gothicism at the Swedish court, 1550-1700*, «Renaissance Studies», 27, 2012, 3, pp. 435-459: pp. 451, 455.

[5] A. Önnefors, *Frimureriets moraliska kosmos*, in *Mystiskt brödraskap – mäktigt nätverk: Studier i det svenska 1700-talsfrimureriet*, ed. by A. Önnefors, Avdelningen för idé och lärdomshistoria vid Lunds universitet, Lund 2006, pp. 37-98: pp. 38-39. For the crosses see E. Dahlberg, *Antiquarianism, Politics, and Self-Fashioning in Magnus Rönnow's Poem Scanicae Runae cum Ense Thosiöensi (1716)*, in *Boreas Rising: Antiquarianism and National Narratives in 17th and 18th-century Scandinavia*, ed. by B. Roling and B. Schirg, De Gruyter, Berlin and Boston 2019, pp. 129-150: pp. 139-142.

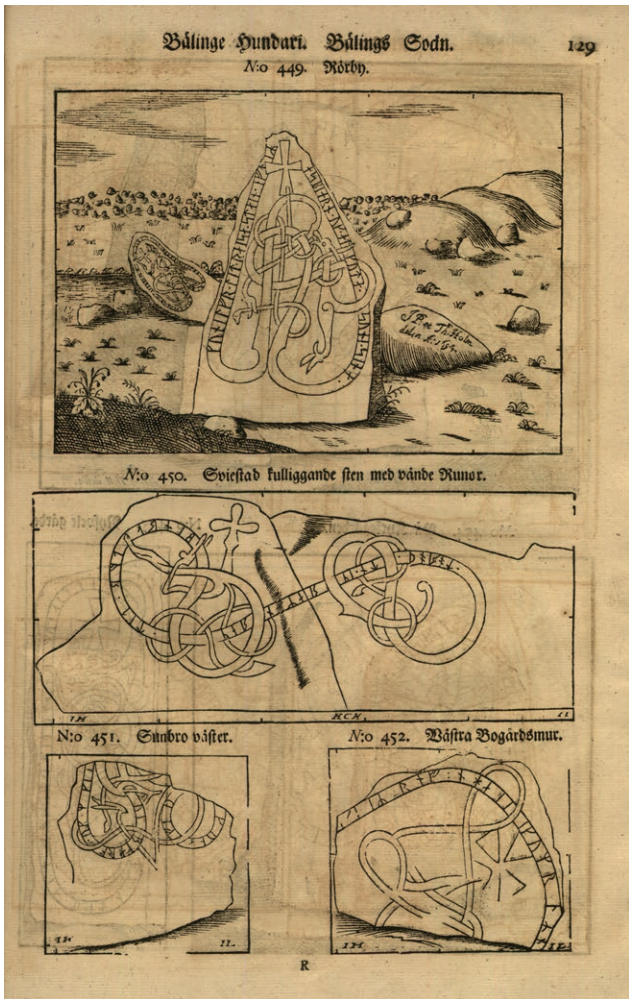

Fig. 3. Rune stones at Rörby, illustration in J. Göransson, *Bautil* (1750). Woodcut, signed, J P: et Th: Holm delin. A: 1694. <https://digital.ub.umu.se/resolve?urn=urn:17a_000068:0158> (06/2024).

stone, there is also a small ship that was surely intended to recall the Viking raids that were already well-established in the perception of Sweden's ancient history. The ship was copied from *Bautil* (1750), a complete, illustrated catalogue of the Swedish rune stones that also included a few other ancient objects and monuments[6]. The sword on the Neukalen medal may be a simplified version of a supposedly ancient weapon depicted in the same publication, while also referencing the Swedish Order of the Sword and emphasising the martial context.

THE GOTHIC IDEA IN THE AGE OF LIBERTY

The complicated and in part contested early modern perceptions of Swedish antiquity rested on biblical, classical, and Icelandic sources as well as later theories and research[7]. The first kings were believed to be descendants of Noah's grandson Magog, and early inhabitants were identified with the Hyperboreans as well as with the Scythians and the Goths (sometimes interchangeable), which were connected to, among other peoples, the Amazons and the Massagetae. These traditions, the Aesir, and the classical past were united in the writings of Snorri Sturluson, who euhemeristically identified the Aesir god Odin as a refugee Trojan who came with his people to Scandinavia[8]. Icelandic medieval texts were used as historical sources from the 16th century onwards, and in the following century were increasingly also appropriated as remains of the literary culture of Sweden's ancient past[9]. During the second half of the seventeenth century, the claims for the antiquity and prestige of this past increased, culminating with Olof Rudbeck the Elder's identification of Sweden with Atlantis and hence the source of European civilization.

Bautil's author Johan Göransson was among the few scholars of the Age of Liberty who defended Rudbeck's theories, but many more, including sceptical historians such as Olof von Dalin and Sven Lagerbring, accepted the historical truth of the Gothic heritage and mined Icelandic texts for information on the religion, laws and

[6] J. Göransson, *Bautil, det är: alle Svea ok Götha rikets runstenar, upreste ifrån verldenes år 2000 til Christi år 1000…*, Lars Salvius, Stockholm 1750, pp. 313 (ship), 319 (sword). <https://digital.ub.umu.se/resolve?urn=urn:17a_000068> (06/2024). For the sword see Dahlberg, *Antiquarianism*, cit., pp. 133, 144.

[7] The summary above is of necessity very simplified. See for recent overviews of the European context K. Enenkel and K. Ottenheym, *The Quest for an Appropriate Past: The Creation of National Identities in Early Modern Literature, Scholarship, Architecture, and Art*, in *The Quest for an Appropriate Past in Literature, Art, and Architecture*, ed. by K. Enenkel and K. Ottenheym, Brill, Leiden 2019, pp. 1-12; K. Neville: *Gothicism and Early Modern Historical Ethnography*, «Journal of the History of Ideas», 70, 2009, 2, pp. 213-234; *The Art and Culture of Scandinavian Central Europe 1550-1720*, Pennsylvania State University, University Park 2019, pp. 13-28. For the Age of Liberty see e.g. Anttila, *Power*, cit., pp. 247-305; contributions to *Boreas*, cit.; L. Gustafsson, *Fornnordisk mytologi och mentalitet: en Uppsaladissertation om «Eddorna» 1735 och kontinuiteten mellan göticism och nordisk renässans*, in *Gudar på jorden: Festskrift till Lars Lönnroth*, ed. by S. Hansson and M. Malm, Symposion, Eslöv 2000, pp. 215-224; M. Legnér, *Fäderneslandets rätta beskrivning: mötet mellan antikvarisk forskning och ekonomisk nyttokult i 1700-talets Sverige*, Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland, Helsingfors 2004, pp. 48-79; J. Nordin, *Ett fattigt med fritt folk: Nationell och politisk självbild i Sverige från sen stormaktstid till slutet av frihetstiden*, Symposion, Eslöv 2000, pp. 218-229; Wallette, *Sagans*, cit., pp. 169-222.

[8] R.W. Rix, *Oriental Odin: Tracing the East in Northern Culture and Literature*, «History of European Ideas», 36, 2009, 1, pp. 47-60: pp. 48-50 https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1016/j.histeuroideas.2009.10.006 (06/2024).

[9] Wallette, *Sagans*, cit., pp. 85-99, 140-156; Widenberg, *Fäderneslandets*, cit., pp. 168-172.

culture of ancient Sweden[10]. In 1755, the even more sceptical Queen Lovisa Ulrika set the query Why have the Goths left no rune stones in Spain or Italy? as a subject for the yearly competition of the Royal Academy of Letters[11]. This question, based on the premise of a shared Gothic past, confirms that Swedish antiquity remained a relevant topic for research and debate.

However, I suggest that the general perception of Swedish antiquity in the Age of Liberty (as opposed to specialist discourse among historians and antiquarians), did not depend on specific authorities or sources, or considered opinions about, for example, chronology, the age of the runic alphabet or the Sagas as historical documents. Rather, this perception should be understood as a «networked idea», as defined by Shane Butler: «... what no single text has shown us, but which is seen all the same as residing in the tradition itself...»[12]. As indicated above, this tradition had many sources, but the Gothic heritage was dominant, and I will therefore refer to it as «the Gothic idea». While not a dominant feature of Age of Liberty culture, it was nevertheless a familiar one, and appeared in serious as well as occasional poetry, speeches, jokes, toasts, political satire, emblems, and letters, and provided subject matter for the first classicist tragedies in the Swedish language[13]. The Gothic idea had a stable core but was subject to varying interpretations and evaluations. For instance, Odin could be acclaimed as «to us a Romulus and a Numa» or be regarded as a corruptor of the virtuous Scythians; some celebrated the war-like nature of the ancient Swedes, while others condemned it or sought to tone it down[14]. The Gothic idea provided material for the feminist poet Hedvig Charlotta Nordenflycht, who described a beautiful army of women committed to conquest, glory and cruelty, and brides who preferred steel to women's garments[15]. Other writers, including Dalin in his play *Brunhilda* (1738), were negative towards the tradition of warrior women, but both interpretations, like the medals discussed here, presupposed a perception of the ancient Swedes as a war-like people. While Nordenflycht praised the martial heritage in some contexts, she described it in negative terms in others, which further demonstrates the versatility and wide rhetoric possibilities of the Gothic idea[16].

Interest in Swedish antiquity also found expression in amateur archaeological excavations, popular at court as well as in elite and clerical circles[17]. Objects with runes were appreciated collectables – in Sweden and abroad – and creating new ones, most often in the form of rune calendars, became a popular pastime[18]. A further instance is a few blades for dress swords inscribed with runes, dating from the 1750s. The runic alphabet or futhark was thus not the preserve of scholarly experts,

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[10] Gustafsson, *Fornnordisk*, cit., pp. 219-223; Malm, *Minervas*, cit., p. 15; Nordin, *Fattigt*, cit., pp. 220-222; Wallette, *Sagans*, cit., pp. 101-108, 176-210.

[11] Stålmarck, Torkel, *De vittra tävlingarna i «Drottningens akademi»*, in *Drottning Lovisa Ulrika och vitterhetsakademien*, ed. by S.Å. Nilsson, Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien, Stockholm 2003, pp. 115-135: p. 128. For Lovisa Ulrika see her letter to Sophie Dorothea, Dowager Queen of Prussia, 20/11 1747, in *Luise Ulrike, die schwedische Schwester Friedrichs des grossen: Ungedruckte Briefe an Mitglieder des preussischen Königshauses*, ed. by F. Arnheim, vol. II, Perthes, Gotha 1910, p. 83; for the Spanish-Swedish Gothic connection I. Söhrman, *Gothicism – the final flourish of a long history*, in *Relaciones entre Espana y Suecia desde mediados del siglo XVII hasta comienzos del XIX*, ed. by K. Benson, M. Mörner and I. Söhrman, Avdelningen för spanska vid Göteborgs universitet, Göteborg 2002, pp. 187-220.

[12] S. Butler, *Homer's Deep*, in *Deep Classics: Rethinking Classical Reception*, ed. by S. Butler, Bloomsbury Academic, London 2016, pp. 22-48 and p. 39. The work of earlier antiquarians provided a foundation: «... a picture developed of an ethnic formation in which people who called themselves Swedes – Svea and Goths – shared a common origin, historical memory, cultural characteristics (not least language) and associations with a special territory...» (Widenberg, *Fäderneslandets*, cit., p. 258). See also Nordin, *Fattigt*, cit., p. 229.

[13] L. Breitholz, *Studier i Frihetstidens litteratur*, Skrifter utgivna av Svenska litteratursällskapet, Uppsala 1956, pp. 27-46; M. Laine, *Forntid på lek och allvar. Om Adolf Fredriks och Lovisa Ulrikas intresse för Sveriges äldsta historia*, in *Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademiens årsbok 1999*, Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien, Stockholm 1999, pp. 171-183: pp. 174-175; Wallette, *Sagans*, cit., p. 101. A few instances in letters are C.C. Gjörwell to S. Baelter 4/7 1758, and to C.G. Warmholtz, 30/3 1759, both MS in the Swedish National Library, Stockholm, KB H Ep G 8:1; Lovisa Ulrika to Sophie Dorothea, 16 January, 3 and 27 February 1749, in *Luise Ulrike,* cit., pp. 153, 453. The tragedies are O. Celsius the Younger, *Ingeborg* (1737) and O. von Dalin, *Brunhilda* (1738).

[14] J. Ixel, Speech on the occasion of Queen Lovisa Ulrika's birthday, 1755, MS in Lund University Library, De la Gardieska arkivet, Cod. XII: a 14, fol. 34-36; Wallette, *Sagans,* cit., pp. 193-194, 203-204.

[15] H.E. Nordenflycht, *Den frälsta Swea* (1746), in H.E. Nordenflycht, *Samlade skrifter*, ed. by H. Borelius, vol. II, Svenska Vitterhetssamfundet, Stockholm 1927, pp. 240-271: p. 242; H.E. Nordenflycht, *Defence of the Female Sex against J.J. Rosseau, citizen of Geneva (1761)*, ed. by E. Mansén, transl. A. Crozier, Ellerström, Lund 2016, p. 22. For Nordenflycht see in English E. Mansén, *Introduction*, in *Defence*, cit., pp. 3-7. See also Dahlberg, *Antiquarianism*, cit., pp. 137-138; Wallette, *Sagans*, cit., pp. 201-202.

[16] E.g. H.E. Nordenflycht, *Tåget öfwer Bält*, in *Witterhetsarbeten I* (1759), ed. T. Stålmarck, Svenska Vitterhetssamfundet, Stockholm 1990, pp. 1-17; *De gamla götars tal til de närwarande krigsbussar. Wid et echac-spel*, in *Samlade*, cit., pp. 174-182; *Den frälsta*, cit., p. 242.

[17] O.W. Jensen, *Earthy Practice: Towards a History of Excavation in Sweden, in the 17th and 18th Centuries*, «Current Swedish Archaeology», 12, 2004, pp. 61-82: pp. 65-68; Laine, *Forntid*, cit., pp. 172-174; M. Magnusson Karlsson, *En fornälskares utgrävning: En studie av den tidiga arkeologin i Sverige*, unpublished BA thesis, Dept of Archaeology, Uppsala University Campus Gotland 2017, http://www.diva-portal.se/smash/get/diva2:1107830/FULLTEXT01.pdf (06/2024)

[18] M. Clunies Ross, *An Anglo-Saxon Runic Coin and its Adventures in Sweden*, «Anglo-Saxon England», 32, 2003, pp. 79-88: pp. 84-87; A. Hirsjärvi, *Svenska kalenderklingor från 1700-talets mitt*, «Livrustkammaren: Journal of the Royal Armoury», 5, 1950, pp. 45-48; Jensen, *Earthy*, cit., p. 67; *Luise Ulrike*, cit., pp. 153, 453. The blades are in the Royal Armoury, Stockholm, inv. no: s LRK 15/147 and 2071.

though the ability to read it was a comparatively rare accomplishment[19].

THE SWEDISH LANGUAGE AND THE GOTHIC IDEA

Like medals, rune stones had commemorative functions. In his introduction to the first volume of the transactions of the Royal Academy of Letters (1755), Dalin explained that the ancient Swedes presented truths and morals through emblems, poetry and riddles – also like medals[20]. In the Pasewalk and Neukalen medals, the modern Swedish and the pseudo-runic inscriptions indicated further supposed connections between the past and the eighteenth-century present modes of communication. The pseudo-runes represented the ancient Swedish language, which was the origin of its modern counterpart, just as the Goths were the origin of the Swedes[21]. In the past, both the people and their language were manly and direct – qualities that were also considered desirable in the Age of Liberty patriotic discourse on masculinity.

Conservative writers and translators sought to (re) introduce words found in Icelandic texts and thereby bring contemporary Swedish closer to its supposed origins[22]. While this in general met with limited success, using such words was an effective means to allude to the Gothic idea. An example is Nordenflycht's epic poem *The Crossing of the Belt (Tåget öfwer Bält)*, written for the 1753 competition of the Royal Academy of Letters[23]. It describes the march of the Swedish army in 1658 across the frozen Belt strait between Sweden and Denmark and uses archaic words and Norse mythology to present the soldiers and their king and commander Karl X Gustav as latter-day Goths, willing to risk their lives in battle and on the treacherous ice. The pseudo-runic inscriptions on the medals should be understood as a pictorial approximation of such verbal allusions, though only able to represent ancient Swedish as a general concept. Nordenflycht also mentions (non-existent) monuments to the march across the ice inscribed with runes, thus, like the medals, connecting past and present deeds, past and present memorials.

NATURE, LIBERTY, AND THE GOTHIC IDEA

In early modern perceptions, the history of the northern Goths was inextricably intertwined with the climate and unyielding nature in which these people lived[24]. Swedish nature as «a stark and unforgiving land» has consequently been interpreted as a defining continuity connecting past and present[25]. Particularly clear interpretations of this idea were the landscapes depicted in the publication *Suecia Antiqua et Hodierna* (in progress 1661-1715), intended to present the glories of Sweden to an international audience. Here, as noted by Kristoffer Neville, northern topography and antiquity were mutually reinforcing, particularly when places associated with cults or other ancient practices were represented. The woodcuts of the above-mentioned publication *Bautil* (fig. 3) were less ambitious than the *Suecia* engravings, but largely date from the same period (though published later) and have similar traits. A few *Bautil* images included topographical views, and many others indicated a bare, rocky ground with a few tufts of grass. In the Pasewalk and Neukalen medals, comparable conventions were used to represent northern nature, which thus not only served as the setting for the rune stones or as a general geographical indication, but also expressed the Gothic idea. As characterised by the antiquarian Johan Peringskiöld in 1719, nature and antiquity were both embodied in the rune stones. Made of northern granite, they were more enduring than marble, and thus preserved for all eternity the names and deeds of the warlike heroes of the ancient Goths[26].

A further trait associated with the north was love of liberty.[27] In his epic *Liberty* (1735), the Scottish poet James Thomson described how the Scandinavians «... by keener air/their genius purged, and tempered hard by frost...» received Liberty as she fled from the oppres-

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[19] *Luise Ulrike,* cit., p. 153. For Swedish runology up to the 1770s, see K. Östlund, *Johan Ihre on the Origins and History of the Runes: Three Latin Dissertations from the Mid 18th Century*, Uppsala universitet, Uppsala 2000, pp. 26-30.

[20] O. von Dalin, *Inledning*, in «Kongl. Svenska Vitterhetsacademiens handlingar», vol. I, Lars Salvius, Stockholm 1755, pp. 15-38: p. 16.

[21] V. Johanterwage, *She «lät illa i sömnen»!? How Eric Julius Biörner can still be read with profit and even delight*, in *Apotheosis*, cit., pp. 107-135: pp. 117, 132; Malm, *Minervas*, cit., pp. 185-186; Wallette, *Sagans*, cit., pp. 153, 154, 186, 209.

[22] A.H. Hannesdottir, *Svenskt och osvenskt i 1700-talets svenska ordböcker*, in *Nationalism och nationell identitet i 1700-talets Sverige*, ed. by Å. Karlsson and B. Lindberg, Uppsala Universitet, Uppsala 1999, pp. 87-99: 91, 95, 98; Johanterwage, *Hon lät*, cit., pp. 109, 117, 119-122, 130-131; Malm *Minervas*, cit., pp. 185, 196; Wallette, *Sagans*, cit., p. 101.

[23] Nordenflycht, *Tåget*, cit., reference to runes p. 12. See also Stålmarck, *De vittra*, cit., pp. 120-121.

[24] See e.g. Eriksson, *Atlantic*, cit., pp. 105-107; C. Frängsmyr, *Klimat och karaktär: Naturen och människan i sent svenskt 1700-tal*, Natur & Kultur, Stockholm 2000; Neville, *Land*, cit.; Nordin, *Fattigt*, cit., pp. 236, 263; Wallette, *Sagans,* cit., p. 210.

[25] Neville, *Antiquarianism without Antiques: Topographical Evidence and the Formation of the Past*, in *Boreas*, cit., pp. 82-101: pp. 85-91; Neville, *Land of Goths*, cit., pp. 438, 451, 455-459; Neville, *Art*, cit., quote p. 25.

[26] Legnér, *Fäderneslandets*, cit., p. 56.

[27] Frängsmyr, *Klimat*, cit.

sion of the declining Roman empire[28]. Similar ideas were transmitted by Montesquieu, who considered that a cold climate and an infertile, mountainous habitat bred vigorous, courageous, warlike, and frank defenders of liberty[29]. This perception was particularly appealing to Swedish elites in this period when the constitution represented a jealously guarded rudimentary parliamentarism. Ancient history, northern nature, and liberty as embedded in the Gothic idea emerge clearly in the initial verses of Gustaf Fredrik Gyllenborg's *Winter Poem* (*Winter-Qväde*, 1759)[30]. Gyllenborg carried this theme into the present, exhorting his contemporaries to ensure that Sweden, the mother of heroes, should never become the miserable abode of slaves. It seems likely that this aspect of the Gothic idea also informed the medals so that the «honourable wounds» referred to in the Neukalen inscription were received not only for the fatherland but also for its liberty.

PICTURING THE GOTHIC IDEA

Given the importance of the Gothic tradition in seventeenth-century Swedish political and scholarly contexts we might expect it to have had a similar place in visual and material culture. Yet this was not the case: direct representations were rare, except for antiquarian renderings of the material remains of the past[31]. In the Age of Liberty, the foremost arbiter of taste Carl Gustaf Tessin repudiated the «heavy piles of stone of the ancient Goths», while Dalin considered that the ancient Swedes did not know how to paint or design[32]. The development of a style expressing the Gothic idea was thus hardly possible, for aesthetic reasons. However, this does not explain the scarcity of pictorial subjects taken from the Gothic tradition, as such subjects would not require an authentic style, only a recognizable iconography. While the archaeological evidence and pictorial traditions available were unpromising as sources for such an iconography[33], I suggest that the most important explanation can be found in how pictorial art, as well as poetry, conveyed meaning. In turn, this explanation contributes to an understanding of the choice of rune stones as motifs for the medals.

Specific heroes, gods, or occurrences of Swedish antiquity were rare not only in seventeenth-century visual culture but also in poetry. Furthermore, the deities that appeared with any frequency in literary texts were those that could be directly translated into a classical counterpart, such as Frigga/Fröja/Venus/Aphrodite, and these were usually inserted into a classical context. Stina Hansson concludes that Norse mythology was too unfamiliar: «... the repertoire that the poets were able to refer to, and their readers interpret, was not Nordic or Swedish but classical or biblical»[34]. This unfamiliarity extended to history: for example, despite attempts, ancient Swedish exempla could not replace those found in classical or biblical traditions[35]. Hansson's conclusions are equally valid for the visual arts, where the construction of meaning depended on well-known concepts, individuals, and events that could be alluded to through familiar symbols, such as the owl of Minerva or the trumpet of Fame.

In the Age of Liberty, Swedish antiquity was hardly more well-known than in the previous era, and classical equivalents were still used to explain unfamiliar allusions. An example is the translation of Montesquieu's *Le temple de Gnide* (1725) into *The Temple of Fröja* (*Fröjas tempel*, 1759), in which Venus and Fröja are interchangeable, and which otherwise has no Nordic content[36]. Yet the desire to introduce the ancient Swedish past confirms that such allusions were meaningful, as emerges clearly in the above-mentioned *The Crossing of the Belt*. Nordenflycht used several solutions to make her poem work, factually as well as poetically[37].

[28] J. Thomson, *Liberty* (1735), in *The Poetical Works of James Thomson*, William Pickering, London 1830, vol. II, p. 157; D.M. Wilson, *The Viking Age in British Literature in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, in *The Waking of Angantyr: The Scandinavian Past in European Culture*, ed. by E. Roesdahl and P. Meulengracht Sørensen, Aarhus University, Aarhus 1996, pp. 58-71: pp. 59-61.

[29] P.A. Rahe, *Montesquieu and the Logic of Liberty*, Yale University, New Haven (CT) 2009, pp. 156, 164, 173-174.

[30] G.F. Gyllenborg, *Winter-Qväde*, in *Witterhetsarbeten I*, cit., pp. 34-47: pp. 35-36; Breitholtz, *Studier*, cit., pp. 47-56. In earlier periods, liberty was associated with freedom from foreign rule and the peasant's freedom from serfdom; in the Age of Liberty, it was primarily understood as freedom from absolute rule.

[31] See for the seventeenth century e.g. R. Josephson, *Det hyperboreiska Upsala*, «Svenska humanistiska förbundets skrifter», 51, 1940; B. Magnusson and J. Nordin, *Drömmen om stormakten: Erik Dahlbergs Sverige*, Medströms, Stockholm 2015, pp. 128-131; J. Nordin, *Spirit of the Age: Erik Dahlberg's Images of Sweden's Past*, in *Boreas*, cit., pp. 103-105. Of Kristoffer Neville's studies see e.g. *Land*, cit.; *Antiquarianism,* cit. Gothic traits in the visual culture of the Age of Liberty are little studied, but see T. Göransson, *Ättehögen i 1600- och 1700-talets svenska gravkonst*, «Tidskrift för konstvetenskap», 30, 1957, pp. 187-209; M. Olausson, *Den engelska parken i Sverige under gustaviansk tid*, Piper, Stockholm 1993, pp. 341-342, Laine, *Forntid*, cit.

[32] C.G. Tessin, *En Gammal Mans Bref Til en Ung Printz,* vol. II, Lars Salvius, Stockholm 1756, p. 303; Dalin, *Inledning*, cit., p. 20.

[33] As noted in Neville, *Land*, cit., pp. 441-445.

[34] S. Hansson, *Gudar, repertoar och svenskhet: Exemplet Lucidor*, in *Gudar*, cit., pp. 403-414: pp. 408-414, quote p. 412.

[35] Hansson, *Gudar*, cit., p. 406. Swedish exempla were suggested in J. Schefferus, *Memorabilium Sueticae gentis exemplorum liber singularis* (1671).

[36] *Fröjas tempel*, in *Witterhetsarbeten*, cit., pp. 176-230.

[37] Nordenflycht, *Tåget*, cit., p. 10 (Äge), and 8-10 (Bore and Bore's breath).

The Norse sea god Äge was one of several phenomena explained through classical parallels inserted in footnotes, in his case consisting of the single word «Neptune». Other footnotes provided modern synonyms, such as «chief» for «visur». Bore as the god or personification of winter on the other hand did not have a classical counterpart and could not be explained by a single word. His appearance and icy abode in the far north thus became the subject of an ekphrastic description that emphasised the central role of the cold in the poem and explained Bore's powers and weapons, including the north wind. This was described as the breath of Bore – a simile that also required a footnote.

Literary difficulties of this kind might seem to contradict the familiarity and relevance of the Gothic idea that I argued above. But the point is rather that this idea consisted of general concepts that alluded to collective past identities, qualities and practices, not to a specific mythology or set of historical persons and occurrences. When Nordenflycht referred to the proud, courageous army of the Goths, and even its female counterpart, or claimed that victories would be commemorated with runic inscriptions, no annotation was necessary[38].

The range of familiar pictorial allusions was narrower than the verbal, and could not be supplemented with footnotes or other explanations. For instance, the Gothic army was a concept without a corresponding, recognizable image. Pictorial translations between classical and Norse mythologies would not have worked – if the symbols that identified Venus were used, the depicted female body would *be* Venus, not Fröja. The rune stones on the other hand were familiar and unequivocally associated with Swedish antiquity. Their very existence in the landscape, or occasionally as spolia in later buildings, served as proof of and sign for the authenticity of the Gothic past: it was fact, not legend. The rune stones, and the futhark as such, furthermore shared the versatility of the Gothic idea, so that they could visualise this idea in a multitude of contexts. As we have seen, particular aspects of the Gothic idea could be invoked by the choice of allusions in texts. The Neukalen and Pasewalk medals exemplify how a similar effect could be achieved pictorially. The ship suggesting Viking raids, the sword, the inscriptions, the Nordic nature and the context for which the medals were intended, all affirmed and celebrated the war-like and masculine aspects of the Gothic idea, but it was the rune stones that visualised the idea as such.

[38] Nordenflycht, *Tåget*, cit., pp. 3-5, 11-12; *Defence*, cit., p. 22.

CONCLUSION AND POSTSCRIPT

In the Age of Liberty, Sweden had lost its position as a great European power, but this loss was not seen as permanent. Many considered that territory and international standing should be recovered through warfare, and notions of courage as a national virtue and war as the natural occupation for Swedes were put forward as arguments for the feasibility of such a strategy[39]. This attitude provides the background for the medals and for the literary, visual, and social culture that sustained the martial interpretation of the Gothic idea. This interpretation was even more important in the seventeenth century, and its survival demonstrates the continuity with the previous era in the self-understanding of especially the officers of the Age of Liberty[40]. The hitherto overlooked Pasewalk and Neukalen medals contribute to our understanding of the Gothic idea in this period and confirm its continued validity. While the martial interpretation of this idea was widespread, the medals were commissioned and distributed in a context that brought a scholarly, antiquarian, and literary tradition uniquely close to real warfare.

In the Gustavian period (1772-1809), the Gothic idea became increasingly visible, but in a manner considerably more eclectic than previously. In the stage designs, carrousels and landscape parks of Gustav III and his brothers, northern antiquity, including rune stones, were mixed with references to ancient Egypt, classical antiquity, medieval chivalry, freemasonry and mysticism. Following the deposition of Gustav IV Adolf in 1809, the French marshal Jean-Baptiste Bernadotte was chosen as heir to the Swedish throne. Nine years later, he ascended the throne as Karl XIV Johan. Proving very talented in the art of royal self-presentation, he launched himself as a new Odin, thus breathing life into the interpretation of the Norse god as a human, wise, and benevolent immigrant ruler[41]. The arrival of Bernadotte coincided with a

[39] M. Roberts, *The Age of Liberty: Sweden 1719-1772,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1986, pp. 30-31; Nordin, *Fattigt*, cit., pp. 367-370.

[40] G. Artéus, *Krigsmakt och samhälle i Frihetstidens Sverige*, Militärhistoriska avdelningen vid Militärhögskolan, Stockholm 1982, pp. 385-389; M. Laine, *1720-1809*, in *Konst och visuell kultur i Sverige I: Före 1809*, ed. by L. Johannesson, Signum, Stockholm 2007, pp. 259-335: pp. 320-328; Nordin, *Fattigt*, cit., p. 179.

[41] See for the Gustavian period e.g. Laine, *1720-1809*, cit., pp. 263-264 and references; J. Mjöberg, *Drömmen om sagatiden*, Natur och Kultur, Stockholm 1967, vol. I, *passim*; Olausson, *Gustavianska*, cit., *passim*; for Karl XIV Johan e.g. contributions to *En dynasti blir till: Medier, myter och makt kring Karl XIV Johan och familjen Bernadotte*, ed. by N. Ekedahl, Norstedts, Stockholm 2010, and references; Laine, C., *Rosendal: Scenrum och sommarnöje för en dynasti*, in *Broderfokenes vel=Brödrafolkens väl: Unionen 1814-1905*, Livrustkammren, Stockholm 2005, pp. 43-54; Mjöberg, *Drömmen*, cit., *passim*.

new Gothic movement which called for a visual art with subjects taken from northern antiquity[42]. Norse mythology and the Vikings took precedence over the older traditions, and a coherent iconography for these subjects began to develop, expressing the converging interests of the king and his subjects (fig. 4). In the later nineteenth century, the cultural perception of Swedish antiquity would lose its international connections and increasingly emphasize the supposedly unique character that was already implied by the perception of northern nature as the source of manly, war-like virtues.

Fig. 4 Carl Stefan Bennet, *The Studio of Bengt Fogelberg in Rome*. Ca 1830. Oil on canvas, 42x35 cm. Nationalmuseum, Stockholm. Photo Cecilia Heisser (CC BY-SA 4.0). Fogelberg is portrayed with his statue of Odin, commissioned by Karl XIV Johan and delivered in 1830.

[42] E.G. Geijer, *Betraktelser i afseende på de Nordiska Mythernes anwändande i skön konst*, «Iduna» 7, 1817.