

# När andra ser

Gravmonument, social praktik och aktörskollektiv  
under 1100- och 1200-talen i Vänerlandskapet

with an English summary

*Anna Nyqvist Thorsson*

Institutionen för historiska studier



GÖTEBORGS  
UNIVERSITET

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# Abstract

Nyqvist Thorsson, Anna. 2021. *När andra ser. Gravmonument, social praktik och aktörskollektiv under 1100- och 1200-talen i Vänerlandskapet (When others see. Grave monument, social practice and collective actors during the 12th and 13th centuries in the Lake Vänern region)*. Written in Swedish with an English summary. Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Historical Studies, University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

Grave monuments showing rich imagery were made to a remarkable extent in the area around Lake Vänern during the 12th and 13th centuries. This thesis is about these monuments and about the physical remains of burials that were carried out over 800 years ago. The production of such grave monuments, especially in the province of Västergötland, has no equivalent in other provinces in Sweden. The rich sculptural and pictorial representations on the monuments have earlier mainly been discussed on the basis of symbolism and iconological interpretations within the field of art history. However, the specific occurrence of these monuments in the area around Lake Vänern implies that visually prominent monuments became an important part of the burial practice of the social elite during this period. This thesis therefore examines the social dimensions of the monuments in terms of burial practices, visual practices and how they were involved in the social and political transformations of society during the period.

The primary source material is comprised of trapezoidal grave slabs with images of trees of life and crosses as well as multi-part monuments with raised gable slabs and beveled grave covers. The study examines monuments and burials from an archaeological perspective, but sources as inscriptions, images and historical texts are also included.

In this study archaeologically examined graves with a monument in situ are used to identify burial practices involving different kind of monuments. Attention has also been given to bodily remains, and practices involving both manipulation and reuse of these remains. This also includes handling of bones from holy persons as relics. In relation to this, the reuse of older grave monuments, especially early Christian grave monuments, in the burial practices of the 12th and 13th centuries is discussed. Throughout the study, variability has come forth as an important aspect in many ways. Different style elements are here understood as active and deliberate choices of style. In addition, the inscriptions in runes and in Latin letters on the grave monuments are considered as a specific burial practice.

Grave monuments from the 12th and 13th centuries were deeply entangled in the burial practices of the social elites and part of how one viewed and related to death and the dead. The monuments were linked to the strategies of the living to ensure that the dead were included in the resurrection. In the performative encounter with the viewer, the monuments could, through form, colour and imagery be transformed into protectors and signposts in the passage of the dead from earthly life to heaven. Through form, image and inscription, they were also able to maintain a relationship to dead ancestors and past contexts. By considering choices of style as a social practice, variations in the burial practice that either emphasise or exclude the past have been identified. These choices can be linked to different social formations and groups within the social elite. In addition to more visible groups of actors such as the monarchy and the church, other social groups emerge e.g. the old aristocracy and a new social group with ambitions for socio-economic advancement. All of these groups had ambitions to maintain and/or gain influence in the socio-political development of societal processes. During the 12th and 13th centuries, the grave monuments were an important part of the formation of different groups in this period of social turbulence. The grave monuments were thus complex material phenomena that were active both as performative transition objects and as statements in socio-political strategies.

*Keywords:* social practice, burial practice, iteration, seriality, collective actors, grave monuments, stone coffins, grave slabs, multi-part grave monuments, church yard, medieval, images, social and political elites, Västergötland, Vänerlandskapet