

## Second thoughts on some names of days

As Gad Rausing specifically writes in his article in *Fornvännen* 1995, pp. 234 ff., the innovative theories he describes concerning the background to the "lördag"-name were derived from his personal communication with the undersigned on April 2nd 1994. Thus I feel free to comment on Lars Hermodsson's objections (*Fornvännen* 1997, pp. 229 ff.).

Hermodsson's objections are convincing but traditional. The names "laugardagr" or "lögerdager" from the 12th century are facts. The etymology of how they were transformed to the modern "lördag" is a problem in itself. The real difficulties started however already in the late 3rd century, when, probably along the Rhine valley (Maass 1902, p. 280) some pagan Germanic tribes "translated" the Latin patrons of the days into comparable German gods: Dies Martis was understood to be Zis tag (Tyr's dag) and so on. How did these pagans contemporaneously translate dies Saturni? This intricate question calls for a delicate approach. Hermodsson ends his comments with the very true statement: "Thus earlier than the word now known, there may have existed in Northern Germanic an older term for this day about which we know nothing, but which further hypotheses perhaps will elucidate."

One approach is to formulate a plausible hypothesis which may then be confirmed by circumstantial evidence. *Lódurrs* or *Lokes dager* is part of such a hypothesis.

It is known that c. 450 AD the Anglian Continental tribes called this day "Satertag" (F. Kluge 1967, entry "Samstag"), a name which in my opinion is probably *not* derived from the Latin god Saturn but from a Celtic(?) god Sater(n) or Sæter(n)e. Pears Cyclopaedia (1971-72) gives ground for this theory: "Saturday ... derived its name from Saturn, or, as some hold, is called after the Saxon idol, Saterne, which was worshipped on this day." H. Sweet (1991) too can give some support as he states: *Sæt* = ambush, *sætere* = robber, waylayer, spy, seducer (devil), *sætung* = treachery, sedition, all of which suggest that Sater(n)e or Sæter(n)e was an evil god, similar in this re-

spect to Saturn. It is interesting to find that Satertag was still in use in modern German until the 19th century, at least (K. Heinrich, 1835, entry Satertag).

In the same way as it is difficult to find a strict linguistic development from *Satertag* to the later German *Samstag* or *Sonnabend*, it is hard to establish a fundamental etymology from a possible *Lódurrs dager* or *Lokes dager* to the known *lögerdager* of the 12th century. This does not pertain to the lack of statutory sound-shiftings or other linguistic laws, but may simply be due to a "decision", a linguistic mutation, which changed the language more or less "over night"! As Gad Rausing hints, this decision was probably taken "in order to obliterate the memory of the evil god". Many such attempts were made with or without success on several occasions when the Church had grown strong enough to impose its will: Dies Solis was renamed dies Domini already in 321 AD. Isidorus and later also Bede protested over the immorality of having weekdays named after pagan gods (E. Maass 1902, p. 267). Their protests gave no lasting results. On the other hand, according to Müllenhoff (1900, p. 644), the Christian Germans were offended at the "Wuoternes dæg" and had it changed to "mittiuëhha", i.e. the modern "Mittwoch", a name which endured. The Icelandic week is the only example where Christianity succeeded in expelling all the heathen gods.

It is an expressive sign of the weakness of modern traditional explanations of the origin of "laughardager" that Lennart Moberg (1953, p. 6) in his very detailed article "Lördag", without objections quotes Seip (1954, p. 302 ff.) saying (translated from Swedish): "The impulse towards the Nordic names could have arisen from the Continental Germanic *sambaztag*, 'Samstag', which was to be linked by popular etymology with the word bath!" That the name should originate in a pure misunderstanding is hard to believe, as is the fact that the Northern peoples at that time used two words for bath, that is *bad* (for a hot bath) and *laug* (for cold water; Müllenhoff 1900, p. 335).

Why translate *baz* with *laug*, when *bad* already existed in their own language? Another example of the researcher's struggle to explain the translation of *dies Saturni* consists in Müllenhoff's (1900, p. 644) mention of the difficulties in finding a Germanic god corresponding to Saturnus. Seip (1954 p. 303) expresses this by saying (translated from Norwegian): "Only when naming one weekday did the Teutons not have a god, who could be used instead of the Roman god Saturnus ..." This strange supposition is repeated without objections by Bæksted (1990 p. 17).

Hermodsson considers Loke to be the principal name of the god and Lódurr, if indeed an alternate, to be a second name. Most experts, who believe they are names of the same god (de Vries 1933, p. 49), nevertheless regard Lódurr as being earlier and Loke of later date. It is even suggested that Loke is an abbreviation of Lódurr. So which is the principal name? Is the Christian Snorre to be the judge?

The names of the heathen gods differed from one district to another in the Germanic world. The Rhine valley names Ziu, Wuotan, Thunar and Vrie were translated to Tyr, Odinn, Thor and Frigg in the Northern regions. Thus if the name Sater or Sætere was translated to a Nordic Lódurr or Loke, it would not be too remarkable, or ...?

My research into these questions, of which Gad Rausing was informed in 1994, has continued. Today many pieces in the puzzle fit in well, some of course still lack cohesion. Perhaps it is time to publish the structure of my hypothesis, which could at least add some new and refreshing ideas to the problem of the *lögardag*. Even if it only introduces new approaches to an old problem!

#### References

- Bæksted, A. 1990. *Nordiska gudar och hjältar*. Oslo  
 De Vries, J. 1933. The problem of Loki. *FF Communications No 110*. Helsinki.  
 Heinrich, K. 1835. *Tyskt och svenskt handlexikon*. Volume I. Örebro.  
 Kluge, F. 1967. *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der Deutschen Sprache*. Berlin.  
 Maass, E. 1902. *Die Tagesgötter in Rom und den Provinzen*. Berlin.  
 Moberg, L. 1953. *Lördag*. *Nysvenska studier, Tidskrift för stil- och språkforskning*. Uppsala  
 Müllenhoff, K. 1900. *Die Germania des Tacitus*. Berlin.  
*Pears Cyclopaedia*, 1971-72.  
 Rausing, G. 1995. The days of the week and Dark Age politics. *Fornvännen 90*.  
 Seip, D. A. 1954. *Lördag i norsk og islandsk*. *Svenska landsmål 1953-54*.  
 Seznec, J. 1953. *The Survival of the Pagan Gods*.  
 Sweet, H. 1991. *The Students Dictionary of Anglo-Saxon*. Oxford.

Jan Ekermann

Nordengatan 11, 603 80 Norrköping

### *The Viking weathervanes were not navigation instruments!*

In *Fornvännen* 1996, pp. 137 ff., Jan Engström and Panu Nykänen presented "New interpretations of Viking Age Weathervanes". In short, they suggest that the two miniature vanes with Borre style ornament from Saltvik and Birka were used as quadrants for measuring the heights of stars above the horizon, while the full-sized vanes from Söderala, Källunge, Heggen, Høyjord, and Tingelstad enabled the measurement of the height of the sun above the horizon. The vane from Norderhov is not

mentioned, nor are the miniature vanes on the candlesticks from Dale and Urnes, nor a similar miniature vane found in Lund. Little attention is paid to chronology, for the Romanesque vanes from Høyjord and Tingelstad are most definitely not "from the Viking Age".

In my opinion this new interpretation is not convincing. The main reason is that we have no proof whatsoever that the practice of measuring the height of the sun or stars in degrees above the horizon was followed by, or even