

# Kort meddelande

## *A 14th century Flemish brass sepulchral ornament from Jättendal in Hälsingland*

In 1848 a farm worker named Jöns Olofsson unearthed a fragment of engraved brass (fig. 1) near the village church of Jättendal, 48 km south of Sundsvall in Hälsingland. He dutifully handed it over to the State, which rewarded him with two Riksdaler Banco, and it was placed in the Museum of National Antiquities in Stockholm (SHM 1354). It measures 145 x 74 mm, and is in good condition apart from a hole near the lower edge, implying a torn-away rivet for fixing. No other rivet is visible.

The piece is part of a sepulchral slab, of Flemish design, from the prestigious Tournai school, and represents Abraham receiving the soul of the deceased into his bosom. This is a standard element on the monumental brasses and incised slabs of this school, though I know of no other surviving separately-inlaid piece like this. The Tournai workshops used the black limestone from the nearby hills for tomb slabs, which were decorated either by cutting the design directly into the stone, an "incised slab", or by plating the stone with sheets of copper-alloy, a "monumental brass". The two techniques could be combined, with brass plates inlaid to highlight portions of the incised design, or thin white stone slabs inserted into brass plates, as on the well known example at Ringsted. This, and fire-damaged fragments at Trondheim and Oslo, are the only other surviving Flemish brasses known in Scandinavia. The brasses at Väster Åker, Lund and Bergen are probably of North German, Lübeck, manufacture.

The Tournai school in the fourteenth century used very similar designs for their brasses and slabs, irrespective of the material. Typically the deceased would be shown recumbent, with hands joined, but under a Gothic arch supported by wide pilasters inhabited by diminutive



Fig. 1. Abraham receiving a soul. Flemish brass sepulchral ornament, c. 1325–50. Hälsingland, Jättendals sn. SHM 1354. Photo ATA.

standing figures. In the architectural work above the arch would be a representation of the soul of the deceased being received into the bosom of Abraham, usually accompanied by angels on either side bearing incense burners. A fine example is the surviving incised slab of Birger Petersson and his wife, 1328, at Uppsala, where the figures in the side-shafts represent their children, including St. Birgitta (Gardell 1945–1946, pl. 282–3; Greeny 1891, p. 39). One sadly destroyed was the large brass of Bishop Niels Jepson, 1395, formerly at Roskilde (Löffler 1885, pl. 4). Both of these showed the souls being received by Abraham, in designs very similar to the Jättendal fragment, which indicates the wide date-range possible. However, incised slabs on which only certain details are inlaid fall within a narrower range, and the best parallels are the slabs at Leicester, c. 1325 (Greenhill 1958, pl. IV); Ashby Puerorum, Lincolnshire, c. 1330 (Greenhill 1986, pl. 21); Brussels c. 1330 (Greeny 1891, p. 40) and Vielsalm, Luxembourg, c. 1350 (Greenhill 1976, pl. 57a). On none of these do the actual inlays

survive, but the indents are clear, for the figure of Abraham flanked by two angels. A probable date range for this fragment can therefore be c. 1325–1350.

Like so many of these Flemish brasses and slabs, it was presumably traded by the Hansa, and brought up the east coast of Sweden to some port near Jättendal.

#### *References*

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