

# The Sanctuaries in Uppsala and Lejre and their Literary Antecedents

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*ABSTRACT: Much weight has been attached to the description of a pagan cult at Uppsala written about in Adam of Bremen's *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae pontificum*, although this description was already anachronistic by the time he wrote in the 1070s. Many scholars have tried to salvage some hard historical information both from Adam's imaginative text and the even more fanciful information contained in the scholia to the text which were added later. Little attention, however, has been paid to the literary sources used by this well-read scholar who had a substantial library at his disposal, let alone oral sources. This paper tries to highlight the use Adam has made of a description about a cult at Lejre on Zealand in the *Chronicon* written by Thietmar of Merseburg three quarters of a century earlier. It also asks for the motivations behind those two descriptions.*

*RESUME: Stor vægt er blevet tillagt beskrivelsen af en hedensk kult i Uppsala, der beskrives i Adam af Bremens *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae pontificum*, selvom denne beskrivelse allerede var anakronistisk, da han skrev i 1070'erne. Mange forskere har forsøgt at redde nogle hårde historiske oplysninger ud af både Adams fantasifulde tekst og den endnu mere fantasifulde information indeholdt i scholia til teksten, som blev tilføjet senere. Der har dog været ringe opmærksomhed omkring de litterære kilder, der blev brugt af denne lærde mand, som havde et betydeligt bibliotek til rådighed samt mundtlige kilder. Denne artikel forsøger at fremhæve den brug, Adam har gjort af en beskrivelse af en kult ved Lejre på Sjælland i *Chronicon* skrevet af Thietmar fra Merseburg trekoart århundrede tidligere. Også motivationerne bag disse to beskrivelser undersøges.*

*KEYWORDS: Pre-Christian cult sites; Uppsala; Lejre; clerical sources for pre-Christian religion; Thietmar of Merseburg; Adam of Bremen*

The description of Gamla Uppsala, as recorded in the *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae pontificum* (Deeds of the Bishops of Hamburg), written by Adam of Bremen in the

1070s, is possibly the most famous description of a Germanic cult site to be found. Unfortunately, modern-day scholars of Old Norse religion have frequently used Adam's description of the Uppsala sanctuary as a first-hand source for a Germanic cult, more specifically a Late Viking Age cult centre, but whether they took it as a reliable account or viewed it somewhat more critically, they have certainly given little attention to the rest of his voluminous work to consider the famous description in its context. Having said this, in recent years historians have given new thought to the background of Adam's work, but mainly concentrating on the political situation and Adam's agenda (most recently Jansson 2018, 29-30) rather than the intellectual base for his writing (a notable exception being Kaljundi 2008, 117-119; and passingly mentioned by Garipzanov 2011, 26; cf. more generally von Padberg 1994; Goetz 2013).

Adam wrote this work in Bremen, where he lived, the bishopric having moved there from Hamburg after a disastrous attack by the Vikings two centuries earlier in 845. This move also led to the diocese receiving its dual nomination of Hamburg-Bremen, which it continues to bear to this day. The relevance of Scandinavia to this particular diocese is due to the fact that all missionary efforts launched towards Scandinavia since the early 9<sup>th</sup> century had their base in Hamburg-Bremen. Indeed, in the 10<sup>th</sup> and early 11<sup>th</sup> century, all Scandinavian Christians were still under the jurisdiction of the North German archbishopric.

Book 4 of Adam's work, which takes up about a quarter of the whole *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae pontificum* (this book alone running to 56,000 words), is dedicated almost exclusively to a description of Scandinavia and the Baltic from geographical, ethnographical, historical, and even religious points of view. It is the earliest extant ethnographical and geographical description of Scandinavia, and contains a wealth of material which includes information not only about the history of the Early Medieval church in North Germany, but also about the Christianization of Scandinavia and therefore also about the "heathen" pre-Christian religion of the North.

Adam himself was neither a Scandinavian nor a North German. He calls himself a "Southerner" and was probably either from Franconia or Thuringia. He lived from around 1040/50 to a 12<sup>th</sup> of October between 1081 and 1090. His massive work was written at the behest of Adalbert, then Archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen (1043-1066). Adalbert showed an interest in taking up Ansgar's missionary activity for Sweden, which was later continued under archbishop Liemar. After the conversion of Denmark, Norway, and Iceland had been accomplished at the turn of the millennium, Sweden was the next focus for missionary zeal, but the repeatedly apostate kings in Sweden made the situation there rather complex. Whatever the reasons, Sweden was neither properly Christianized nor organized into appropriate dioceses during Adam's lifetime, despite many attempts in that direction.

The complexity of the situation in Sweden as far as the aim and scope of possible missionary work was concerned – and the lack of verve in the missionary activity under archbishops Adalbert and Liemar – meant that missionary activity did not progress as well as some of his fellow clerics, including Adam, would have wished (cf.

Scior, 2002, 68-72; Garipzanov 2011, 22). Adalbert also found himself seriously involved in and preoccupied by a church scandal on charges of overspending. As a result, despite Adam’s attempt to write as complete a history and description of Scandinavia as possible, it is clear that he harboured a whole series of hidden agenda, which certainly had a significant influence on his work. (A totally different type of agenda is postulated by Jansson (1998), but this would lead us too far from my purpose to explore here.)

Before looking at these matters, however, a brief glance should be cast on the textual history of the work. Adam finished a first version of his book in around 1076, but continued to collect and add material. After his death, which probably occurred soon after 1080, another Bremen cleric tried to (re)organize the book, including Adam’s additional material, but also adding comments of his own. This results in a rather complex version that abounds with so-called *scholia*, with additions by either Adam or the later redactor or someone yet later again (see, for example, Jansson 1998, 33-34), and unfortunately these also concern the sanctuary and supposed sacrifices held in Gamla Uppsala.

The problem becomes clear when a comparison is made of the following text about the sanctuary, where the left column contains Adam’s original version, the right column the two later *scholia* found at this spot:

Adam: <i>Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum</i> , Book IV, 26, according to Ms A (Adam 1978, 470):	Scholia 138 and 139:
XXVI. Nobilissimum illa gens templum habet, quod Ubsola dicitur, non longe positum ab Sictona civitate [vel Birka] <sup>1</sup>	<p>¶ 138: Prope illud templum est arbor maxima late ramos extendens, semper viridis in hieme et aestate; cuius illa generis sit, nemo scit. Ibi etiam est fons, ubi sacrificia paganorum solent exerceri et homo vivus inmergi. Qui dum non invenitur, ratum erit votum populi.<sup>3</sup></p> <p>¶ 139: Catena aurea templum circumdat pendens supra domus fastigia late-que rutilans advenientibus, eo quod ipsum delubrum in planitie situm montes in circuitu habet positos ad instar theatre.<sup>4</sup></p>

- 1 “That folk has a very famous temple called Uppsala, situated not far from the city of Sigtuna and Björkö” (Adam 2002, 207).
- 3 “Near this temple stands a very large tree with wide-spreading branches, always green winter and summer. What kind it is nobody knows. There is also a spring at which the pagans are accustomed to make their sacrifices, and into it to plunge a live name. And if he is not to be found, the people’s wish will be granted” (Adam 2002, 207).
- 4 “A golden chain goes round the temple. It hangs over the gable of the building and sends its glitter far off to those who approach, because the shrine stands on level ground with mountains all about it like a theatre” (Adam 2002, 207).

<p>In hoc templo, quod totum ex auro paratum est, statuas trium deorum veneratur populus, ita ut potentissimus eorum Thor in medio solium habeat triclinio; hinc et inde locum possident Wodan et Fricco. Quorum significationes eiusmodi sunt: "Thor", inquit, presidet in aere, qui tonitrus et fulmina, ventos ymbresque, serena et fruges gubernat. Alter Wodan, id est furor, bella gerit hominique ministrat virtutem contra inimicos. Tercius est Fricco, pacem voluptatemque largiens mortalibus. Cuius etiam simulacrum fingunt cum ingenti priapo. Wodanem vero sculpunt armatum, sicut nostri Martem solent; Thor autem cum sceptro Iovem simulare videtur. Colunt etc deos ex hominibus factos, quos pro ingentibus factis immortalitate donant, sicut in Vita sancti Ansgarii legitur Hericum regem fecisse.<sup>2</sup></p>	
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There is no space here to go into any greater detail of the complex textual history (cf. Trillmich and Buchner 1978, 150-155) of the *Gesta*, and a few brief comments will have to suffice. All the oldest manuscripts belong to Group A, are based on Adam's original text, and have either no or few scholia:

A 1 (Vienna, ÖNB 521) c. 1200: No scholia

A 2 (Leiden 123) c. 1100: Excerpt only, with scholia

A 3a (Copenhagen, GKS 718) c. 1434: Only book 4, partly with scholia

Group B, the so-called "Danish Group", comprises of much younger manuscripts, and partly (but never completely) preserves all the *scholia* found in modern editions. The main manuscripts of Group B are:

B 1a (Wolfenbüttel, Gud. 83) c. 1440/50

B 1b (Copenhagen, GKS 1175) c. 1557

B2 = Copenhagen printed Edition of 1579

It is thus obvious that we have no way of knowing whether some of the *scholia* were added by Adam himself, or by the Bremen redactor after his death, or were added

<sup>2</sup> "In this temple, entirely decked out in gold, the people worship the statues of three gods in such wise that the mightiest of them, Thor, occupies a throne in the middle of the chamber; Wotan and Frikko have places on either side. The significance of these gods is as follows: Thor, they say, presides over the air, which governs the thunder and lightning, the winds and rains, fair weather, and crops. The other, Wotan - that is, the Furious - carries on war and imparts to man strength against his enemies. The third is Frikko, who bestows peace and pleasure on mortals. His likeness, too, they fashion with an immense phallus. But Wotan they chisel armed, as our people are wont to represent Mars. Thor with his sceptre apparently resembles Jove. The people also worship heroes made gods, whom they endow with immortality because of their remarkable exploits, as one reads in the *Vita* of Saint Ansgar they did in the case of King Eric" (Adam 2002, 207).

considerably later in the course of the High Middle Ages. We should therefore be very careful with ascribing any information contained in the scholia to Adam, or to his contemporary informants, or even to the century in which the *Gesta* was written. In the following comments, I shall consequently limit myself to Adam's A-text without the additional information added at a later stage, as only the A-text gives us a reliable picture of Adam's state of information in the 1060s and 1070s.

Problems of textual transmission are only one aspect of the crux when trying to interpret Adam's work. An even bigger issue is the all-important question of Adam's sources, as well as the question of Adam's (hidden) agenda, which are not always obvious from the text itself at first sight, but have to be considered from the circumstances.

Firstly, we have to deal with the source material available to Adam, and what use he made of various types of sources. The most obvious are those he mentions himself explicitly, and for us the most relevant of these is the Danish King, whom he quotes at length when dealing with historical events of the 10<sup>th</sup> century from Book I, 52 onwards. This particular king was Sven Estridsson (r. 1047–† 28.4.1074) and Adam names him repeatedly as his witness: "Testis est Danorum rex, qui hodieque superset, Sueinn" ([This] witness is the King of the Danes, Sven, who still lives today; II, 24; Adam 1978, 260). Adam nearly always refers to Sven as having given him this information orally: "Audiui ex ore" (I heard it from his mouth; I, 48; Adam 1978, 218), "recitavit" (he recited; I, 52; Adam 1978, 224), "Narravit nobis" (he told us, II, 43; Adam 1978, 278), and so on. Sven Estridsson is of special importance since he was not only greatly admired by Adam (no doubt for having divided Denmark into dioceses and thus creating an efficient ecclesial infrastructure), but also because he spent both his youth and then again the year 1042 at the royal court in Sigtuna, Sweden. Born in England around 1019 as son of the Jarl of Skåne, Úlfr Þorgilsson, Sven was raised at the court of King Anund Jakob. This Swedish king was born in around 1000, and reigned from 1022 to 1050. Baptised sometime around 1007/9, (when he took the name Jakob, Anund was quite decidedly Christian, as can be noted by the coins minted in Sigtuna from 1030 onwards, which show the cross on their reverse side. Sven himself, despite being apparently quite ruthless in his political ambitions, grew up also to be an astonishingly devout Christian, and, according to Adam, a man of considerable learning. As a result, there is little reason to doubt the information gleaned by Adam from Sven, probably amassed during visits which he probably made to his court held near today's Aalborg in Jutland. It should be noted, however, that his information about heathen customs in 10<sup>th</sup>-century Sweden is doubly filtered by the Christian attitudes of both Sven and Anund Jakob.

However, oral information about Sweden were by no means the only sources Adam had at his disposal. Quite to the contrary, the bulk of his information is neither contemporary nor oral, but rather came mainly from literary sources, some of which of quite a venerable age.

Previous studies, utilized and discussed in the bilingual critical edition of Adam's work, have unearthed an astonishing number of texts used by Adam. These can be

categorized into three groups: firstly, hagiographical texts, mainly concerned with the activities of early missionaries in Northern Europe, particularly those who achieved martyrdom; secondly Classical and scholarly texts of a historical, geographical, and encyclopaedic nature; and thirdly, works of annalistic or historiographical content pertaining to Germany and occasionally beyond, including Britain (cf. Trillmich and Buchner 1978, 150-155; Kaljundi 2008, 117-119).

The first group of hagiographical texts include Ansgar's *Miracula s. Willehadi*, Rimberty's *Vita Askarii*, the *Vita Rimberty*, the *Vita Willebrordi*, the *Vita Willehadi* and two versions of the *Vita Bonifatii* (I and III), as well as the *Vita Liudgeri*, the *Vita Radbodi*, the *Translatio S. Viti*, and the *Translatio Alexandri* by a Pseudo-Einhard. These works only rarely contain material on Scandinavia itself. Only Rimberty's *Vita Askarii* and the *Vita Rimberty* have some firsthand references to Scandinavia, as Ansgar and Rimberty themselves ventured not only into Denmark but also deep into Sweden.

The second group of works contains a number of what may be seen as set school texts of the period, comprising of the works of Sallust, Horaz, Vergil (and a commentary on Vergil by Servius), Lucanus, Solinus, Martianus Capella, Orosius, and Beda venerabilis. Although these works have, at first sight, little to do with Scandinavia, their influence on Adam's *Gesta* should not be underestimated, as he considered them highly authoritative. To show the extent of Adam's usage of these texts for his own writings, it is helpful to consider his description of the Eastern Baltic region, based on the fabulous accounts given by Solinus, who in turn was quoting Pliny the Elder. Although this example is not directly relevant to the topic on hand, it does show quite clearly that using information taken from Classical authors was common practice among scholars, even if the state of knowledge used had a tradition already a thousand years old by the time Adam was writing, and as such had little relevance to the contemporary state of affairs in the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

The third group of works is of even greater relevance, as the texts it contains are concerned with events in the not too-distant past, mainly belonging to the Viking Age or the era immediately prior to that. They include a short chronicle of Bremen (the *Chronicon breve Bremense*), Gregory of Tours' influential *Gesta Francorum*, Einhard's *Vita Caroli Magni*, the *Annales Fuldenses*, Paul the Deacon's *Historia Langobardorum*, Regino of Prüm's *Chronicon universalis*, and Thietmar of Merseburg's massive *Chronicon*. To these we may add the now lost *\*Annales Corbenses* and the *\*Gesta Anglorum* from Northumbria, as well as the *Swabian World Chronicle*, which has only been preserved fragmentarily, and now only records events up until 1043.

If one considers that Adam could also utilize the extensive archiepiscopal archive of documents in Bremen, this adds up to an impressive library at his disposal. The formidable array of books used in the composition of the *Gesta* is also an insight into the size of the library at the Hamburg-Bremen bishopric in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, which must have matched the best of its day. However, as we have already seen, more often than not the information contained in all those books and archivalia was seriously out of date already by his lifetime.

However, the question concerning us here is not so much the size of Adam's library or the scope of his reading, but the quality of information at his disposal. It should not be forgotten that even the accounts of eyewitnesses, such as the Carolingian missionaries Ansgar and Rimbert who reported on their time in Sweden, were over 200 years old by the time Adam collected material for his *Gesta*. Adam nevertheless follows Rimbert's *Vita Anskarii* to a surprising extent in his terminology, repeatedly quoting phrases from this old source, especially when talking about the pagan cult in Sweden (cf. Fraesdorf, 2005, 256). The question that needs to be asked is whether he had any material pertaining to Scandinavia and to Scandinavian (or rather Viking) activities abroad available from more contemporary sources.

The foremost of these sources must have been his Danish informant, King Sven Estridsson, mentioned above, whose experience with Swedish affairs only went back to the years 1042-1046, when he repeatedly sought shelter with Anund during his struggle with Magnus of Norway for supremacy in Denmark (cf. Morawiec, 2005, 331-338). It is no doubt for this very reason that Sven is repeatedly quoted in the chapter about Sweden, even if the information given about the wonderous races of the Amazones, dogheaded people, and Cyclopes who were supposed to live in Sweden actually comes from Solinus' *Collectanea rerum memorabilium* (3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> century) rather than from the king's mouth. This mixing of oral tradition and literary sources is significant here because directly after this description of the monstrous races in Sweden Adam writes about the superstitions of the Swedes – i.e. their heathen religion – and then goes on to describe the temple in Uppsala. What Adam is trying to do here is difficult to discern. Is he trying to add probability to both topics of monsters and heathen cult by mentioning Sven as his source?

It is hard to tell whether Adam tried to add probability to both paragraphs – the monsters, and the heathen cult – or to only one of them by naming Sven as his official source for the information given. Regardless, it is likely that this Christian informant would be well-informed about the details of a Viking Age heathen cult centre in Uppsala, considering that the court of the devout Christian king Anund Jakob in Sigtuna was just 30 km – an easy day's journey – away.

Adam's second near contemporary source closely concerned with Scandinavia and the Vikings is the chronicle of his countryman, the Benedictine monk Thietmar of Merseburg. Thietmar, born of the noble family of the Counts of Stade in North Germany on 25<sup>th</sup> July 975, was bishop of Merseburg from 1009. He wrote his *Chronicon* sometime between the year 1000, starting possibly even before becoming bishop, and his death on December 1<sup>st</sup>, 1018 (Thietmar 1935). In this work he attempts to write a history of the town of Merseburg, as well as a history of the last five German emperors (Henry I, the three Ottos, and Henry II), doing so with exemplary detail and with a clear understanding of the political situation of his day.

Another German cleric whose work Adam used was Abbot Regino of Prüm, who came from the famous Carolingian abbey in the Ardennes, first becoming abbot there from 892-99 before becoming abbot of St. Martin in Trier from 899 until his death in 915, a good century before Thietmar's lifetime. His life was spent clearly far away from

Scandinavia, and in his numerous writings Regino has little to say about the geography or history – let alone religion – of the North. What Regino and Thietmar have in common, however, is that they were both victims of Viking raids, at the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries respectively. Regino had suffered Viking raids in both 882 and 892, which finally resulted in the total destruction by fire of the formerly-proud royal abbey of Prüm. Because of the loss of all the abbey archives, Regino was forced to reconstruct all the possessions and rights owned by the abbey in 892, and this resulted in one of the works for which he is famous, the *Prümer Urbar* (or *Polyptychon of Prüm*), an early local version of the Domesday book invaluable for its information on early Medieval economics. However, among other works, he also wrote a chronicle in which he repeatedly comments upon and describes Viking raids. He is extremely negative in his attitude towards the heathens from the North, whom he, for obvious reasons, called a *ferocissima gens* “a very wild people”.

A century later Thietmar’s brush with the Vikings was particularly traumatic for him personally, and he relates in graphic detail how the Vikings attacked his hometown of Stade on the river Elbe on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 994 while he was at the cathedral school in far-away Magdeburg. At royal command, the local counts, the brothers Sigfrid, Adalgar, Heinrich, and Udo (Thietmar’s four maternal uncles) moved by ship against the enemy and were squarely defeated, Udo being killed immediately. The Vikings captured several members of the count’s family and held them to ransom. When one of the prisoners, Sigfrid, made an escape from a Viking ship and swam ashore, the Vikings decided to make an example by cutting off the noses, hands, and ears of the remaining hostages – Thietmar’s cousins and their chaplain – before throwing them into the river and then sailing off. None of the former hostages survived their ordeal for longer than a fortnight. It is thus hardly surprising that, when Thietmar wrote down the events two decades later (Book IV, 23-35; Thietmar 1935, 159-173), he referred to the Vikings as “*Execrata vero piratarum turba*” (a truly cursed crowd of pirates) and other similarly unflattering expressions (Book IV, 34; Thietmar 1935, 158-159).

Despite his understandable disgust of the Northerners, however, Thietmar also included a description of a heathen cult place on Zealand, Lejre, in his *Chronicon*. He described a cult celebrated every ninth year in January, during which 99 human beings and as many horses, along with dogs and cocks, were sacrificed to the heathen gods (Book I, 17; 1935, 24-25). By the time Thietmar wrote this account in the early 11<sup>th</sup> century, Denmark had already been a Christian country for nearly 50 years, and it is consequently highly unlikely that this massive public human sacrifice was still going on at the time of Henry II, the German king mentioned by Thietmar at this point. Indeed, it is most improbable that Lejre was still being used as a major sacrificial site by the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century (Kaufhold 2001, 64; Winroth 2012, 147), considering the efforts of the Danish king to Christianize the country at least up to Harald Bluetooth’s death in 987. This latter king was Sven Estridsson’s grandfather, and even if Harald’s direct successor, Sven Forkbeard, was not particularly interested in religious matters either way – preferring to follow Viking pursuits in England between 994 and 1014 – it is



unlikely that a heathen cult sacrifice would be allowed to be performed in this transitional period.

As Adam used Thietmar's *Chronicon* extensively, it can be assumed that he had first-hand knowledge of Thietmar's description of the supposed cult at Lejre. Prior to considering this, Adam's possible sources on Viking activities in general should be considered. Up to now we have mentioned Kings Sven's oral testimony, Thietmar's relatively recent description of events which took place in the late 10<sup>th</sup> century, and the much older eye-witness reports of Regino of Prüm: two of these are from victims of Viking activities, and all three stem from fairly ardent Christians, a point worth keeping in mind. Adam's sources are thus predominantly Christian, but before taking a closer look at Adam's sources for the heathen cult attributed to the Swedes, a closer investigation of the underlying agenda of the *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* will enable us to understand why Adam came to describe the cult at Gamla Uppsala in the way he did. These agenda were determined by several factors: firstly, Adam hoped that the missionary work in the North, which Archbishop Adalbert had originally supported extensively, would be continued by the next archbishop, Liemar (as stated explicitly at the end of his letter dedicating the *Gesta* to Liemar; cf. Trillmich and Buchner 1978, 161). Secondly, the political situation in Germany in 1070 was potentially amenable for his aims, seeing that the young Henry IV (1050-1106, King 1056, Emperor 1084) had been a ward of Adalbert of Bremen until 1066. It was therefore quite likely that he would be supportive of Adam's missionary zeal. Thirdly, the church political situation in the diocese of Hamburg-Bremen was such that there had been accusations of drastic overspending by archbishop Adalbert, who had taken a rigid stance on feudal superiority against the Roman Curia, who criticized him forcefully as a result. Despite strong support from King Henry himself, Adalbert had been frustrated in several of his plans by local magnates, and no less so by the Pope. Fourthly, Adam's personal interest, apparent from his writings, was to move Bremen's power-base north into Scandinavia and thus block curial efforts to create a new, independent diocese within Scandinavia – something which only occurred when the diocese of Lund was established in 1104, two decades after Adam's death.

Adam's agenda was therefore two-fold, a division reflected to some extent by certain discrepancies in the way he described the Scandinavians. On the one hand, he had to convince the curia (as well as the King) that the Scandinavians, as his bishop's wards, were just waiting to be Christianized, and that it was only because of the lack of missionary activity that this had not already been achieved and their heathen customs thus forgiven. This attitude surely reflected what the Christian Sven Estridsson had to say about the kingdom of his near foster-father, the Christian king Anund Jakub.

On the other hand, Adam had to show that it was really high time to do something about the Scandinavian mission, as some of these heathens (namely the Swedes in Uppsala) were set in their evil heathen ways and were supposedly still offering blood-sacrifices to their idols. For this part of his agenda, he could use a whole range of

sources, all of which were critical of the heathen Viking customs, but none was contemporary in their information: first and foremost was Thietmar, who offered a complete description of the heathen sacrifice in Lejre and hated Vikings for what they had done to his family. Secondly, Adam could draw on Regino, who was hardly less critical of Viking customs, and repeatedly referred to them acting according to their obviously well-known habits and even to their “ingenitam maliciam” (genetic maliciousness; cf. Rau 1962, 272, 292), for all he did not touch on their religion beyond the standardized description of them as “heathens”. Thirdly, Adam had at his disposal practically all the Latin sources from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup> centuries pertinent to the missions of Northern Europe, and thus to Germanic cults. Finally, Adam (and everybody else in Hamburg-Bremen) was well-acquainted with missionary formulae used by clerics in Western and Northern Europe in the first millennium, which had roots as old as the lists of heathen practises found in the Old Testament. These were, somewhat anachronistically, commonly used to come to terms with the variety of heathen customs with which the missionaries were confronted.

Hence, when Adam was writing his famous description of the cult at Uppsala, he was not dependent only on what Sven Estridsson had to tell him, but could embellish what facts he had from a whole array of literary models. It is important to remember, and indeed to emphasise, that in other cases where he provides descriptions of cult centres Adam is far more reluctant to wax so eloquent. For example, about the cult centre in Skara in Västergötland he only mentions in passing that Bishop Eginio of Dalby (in around 1066) hacked a famous statue of Freyr to pieces, stating this fact without any other details: “Ibi etiam opinatissimum Fricconis simulacrum in frusta concidit” (there he also cut a splendid image of Fricco into pieces; Book IV, 9; Adam 1978, 444-446).

In the case of the cult at Uppsala, however, he seems to have taken up Thietmar’s description of Lejre as his main model, augmented no doubt from all his other sources and what facts Sven had been able to give him. It is possible that the information about the number of nine years for the interval between the sacrifices may have been given correctly by Sven, given the importance of that number in pre-Christian Scandinavian religion. This in turn may have led Adam to choose Thietmar as his model, since this number figures dominantly in both descriptions. Thietmar’s text reads as follows:

Est unus in his partibus locus, caput istius regni, Lederun nomine, in pago, qui Selon dicitur, ubi post VIII annos mense Ianuario, post hoc tempus, quo nos theophaniam Domini celebramus, omnes convenerunt, et ibi diis suimet LXXXX et VIII homines et totidem equos, cum canibus et gallis pro accipitribus oblatis, immolant, pro certo, ut predixi, putantes hos eisdem erga inferos servituros et commissa crimina apud eosdem placaturos. Quam bene rex noster fecit, qui eos a tam execrando ritu prohibuit! Acceptabilem enim Deo patri hostiam fert, qui humano sanguini parcat. Praecipit enim Dominus: Innocentem et pium non interficias. (Book I, 17; Thietmar 1935, 23-25)

In those parts, the centre of the kingdom is a place called Lejre, in the region of Seeland. Every 9 years, in the month of January, after the day on which we celebrate the appearance of the Lord [6 January], they all convene here and offer their gods a burnt offering of 99 human beings and as many horses, along with dogs and cocks, the latter being used

in place of hawks. As I have said, they were convinced that these would do service for them with those who dwell beneath the earth and ensure their forgiveness for any misdeeds. Our king did well when he forbade them to practise such an execrable rite. The only sacrifice acceptable to God the Father is that which refrains from spilling human blood. Indeed, the Lord declared: you should not kill the innocent and pious. (Thietmar 2001, 80)

A short comparison of the relevant parts both of Thietmar's and Adam's descriptions show a number of striking similarities between the two texts. I have here marked closer correspondences in bold:

Thietmar: Lejre on Zealand (Book I, 17; Thietmar 2001, 22-25)	Adam: The cult at Uppsala (Book IV, 26-27; Adam 1978, 470-472)
Est unus in his partibus locus, caput istius regni, Lederun nomine, in pago, qui Selon dicitur... <sup>5</sup> ubi <b>post VIII annos</b> mense Ianuario, post hoc tempus, quo nos theophaniam Domini <b>celebramus, omnes convenerunt</b> ... <sup>6</sup>	Nobilissimum illa gens templum habet, quod Ubsola dicitur, non longe positum ab Sictona civitate vel Birka... <sup>7</sup> Solet quoque <b>post novem annos communis omnium</b> Sueoniae provinciarum sollempnitas in Ubsola <b>celebrari</b> ... <sup>8</sup>
et ibi diis suimet <b>LXXXX et VIII homines et totidem equos, cum canibus et gallis pro accipitribus oblati, immolant</b> ... <sup>9</sup>	Sacrificium itaque tale est: <b>ex omni animante, quod masculinum est, novem capita offeruntur</b> <sup>10</sup>
pro certo, ut predixi, putantes hos eisdem erga <b>inferos servituros</b> et commissa crimina apud eosdem <b>placatuos</b> . <sup>11</sup>	...quorum sanguine <b>deos tales placari</b> mos est. <sup>12</sup>

A certain number of similarities both in concept and in the vocabulary are obvious, but we also have to look at their significance.

Firstly, we must ask what Thietmar's sources were, or indeed what *his* agenda was. Lejre in 990 or 1000 was unlikely to have been a particularly heathen place anymore, but Thietmar was determined to show the Vikings as being as ferocious and backward as possible. Unlike Adam, the Christianization of Scandinavia was not something foremost on his mind, and Thietmar was far more interested in strengthening the church

<sup>5</sup> "In those parts, the centre of the kingdom is a place called Lejre, in the region of Seeland." (Thietmar 2001, 80).

<sup>6</sup> "Every nine years, in the month of January, after the day on which we celebrate the appearance of the Lord [6 January], they all convene here..." (Thietmar 2001, 80).

<sup>7</sup> "That folk has a very famous temple called Uppsala, situated not far from the city of Sigtuna and Björkö" (Adam 2002, 207).

<sup>8</sup> "It is customary also to solemnize in Uppsala, at nine-year intervals, a general feast of all the provinces of Sweden" (Adam 2002, 208).

<sup>9</sup> ...and offer their gods a burnt offering of ninety-nine human beings and as many horses, along with dogs and cocks – the latter being used in place of hawks" (Thietmar 2001, 80).

<sup>10</sup> "The sacrifice is of this nature: of every living thing that is male, they offer nine heads" (Adam 2002, 208).

<sup>11</sup> "As I have said, they were convinced that these would do service for them with those who dwell beneath the earth and ensure their forgiveness for any misdeeds" (Thietmar 2001, 80).

<sup>12</sup> "...with the blood of which it is customary to placate gods of this sort" (Adam 2002, 208).

in Saxony and then taking his missionary activity to move eastwards from there into Slavic areas. Like Adam, Thietmar had most of the Classical and patristic literature at his disposal as sources, and if he were to construct a human sacrifice for the Danes of the late 10<sup>th</sup> century – however unlikely that may actually have been in his day – there was a huge scope for sources describing barbarian habits of human sacrifices which could be plundered. These range from Prudentius in the 4<sup>th</sup> century (*Contra Symmachum*) to his countrymen Hrabanus maurus (*Commentaria in Librum Judicum*) and Haymo of Halberstadt in the 9<sup>th</sup> century (*Enarratio in duodecim prophetas minores: In Osee prophetam*). All these authors, and many others more, held the supposition that blood-sacrifice and even human sacrifice was rife among those whichever heathens they happened to be dealing with in common. Thus, these sources were excellently suited to Thietmar's purposes of showing the evil and backward disposition of the heathens in question, even though he may have added some local touches, which might well have been known (or at least, rumoured) to any northern German close to the Danish border.

Thus, Adam's second-hand description of the actual sacrifice at Uppsala may owe more to century-old formulae from theological writings than to anything actually happening in Uppsala in the 10<sup>th</sup>, let alone 11<sup>th</sup>, century. The existence of an old cult centre, the remains of which may well have been visible in Anund Jakob's day, gave him the cornerstone of his description, but a substantial part of the description itself belongs to the world of bookish learning.

From this study, we may draw several conclusions about the famous description of the cult in Uppsala in Adam's *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*. Firstly, although Adam had indeed had reliable oral informants about the local and contemporary situation in Scandinavia, he also – and mainly – used many written scholarly clerical and historical sources in his library. These hardly reflected contemporary conditions or attitudes. The details for the nine-yearly sacrifice, the number nine of sacrificial victims, and the human sacrifices he took straight from Thietmar's *Chronicon*. Secondly, the interesting information in Adam is where he differs from Thietmar. Adam's *Gesta* without the *scholia*, and without the information taken from Thietmar, still leaves us with a few items: namely the Scandinavian tradition about a temple or cult centre in Uppsala, the veneration of three gods (namely Thor, Fricco, and Wodan), and the hanging of the victims (from a tree). Thirdly, although we can of course not exclude the possibility that similar sacrifices were held in Lejre and Uppsala, despite the lack of archaeological evidence at the former location, we can safely assume that the mention of large numbers of human sacrifices were used by Thietmar to show the barbarity of the Danes, due to his personal issue with the Danish Vikings who had killed several members of his family. This also allowed him to utilize a long tradition of comments in theological literature about heathens that referred to human sacrifice, which he employed to further dehumanize the heathen population. Lastly, we may trust Adam in the basic information about the existence of a cult centre in Uppsala in Sweden (although that information was long outdated by his times), but not in any of the details concerning the frequency of sacrifices, the number of victims, the temple, or evergreen

trees. Thietmar, on the other hand, in his description of Lejre, we should not trust at all – simply because there was too much personal agenda at stake in his relations with Scandinavia.

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