

Conjecture on a shipbuilding aspect of the Bremer Kogge of 1380

Version 2, Translations by the Author
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The state of the ship

According to [Kiedel, p.59], "a violin-shaped plank was added to the top of the anterior inner stems, and its function has not been fully clarified."

The following photos show in detail the position and shape of the unconventionally cut plank aboard the Ubena of Bremen, the replica of the Bremer Kogge from 1380:



The violin-shaped plank

Conjecture about the function or meaning of the component

Naturally, as a sailor you first look for possible functions and applications of this component. I can think of two possible applications:

- Supporting a deck hand, which is busy as lookout or with the admission of taking soundings as far as possible in front of the ship. The sailor would have found half-lying, half-standing hold on the plank and so sightings and soundings - the second most important navigation method of the time in addition to the observation of terrestrial landmarks - can be taken. The notches would have allowed freedom of movement of the arms and at the same time get hold around the stem. The soundings were made aloud so that they would be heard aft. Now cogs had a masthead for the lookout, so this function only made sense in fog. Whether the site was suitable for taking soundings could be directly tested in the context of experimental archeology on board.
- In addition to the aforementioned function as a stand for lookout or bosun the plank could have served as a place of punishment of crew members if the convict was tied to

the plank e. g. to be flogged. On the other hand, in later times the delinquents were tied to the mast.

The shape of the plank in turn is reminiscent of old Germanic wooden idols and cult piles, [Simek, p. 42]



Wooden poles A, B of Wittenmoor



violin shaped plank of the cog

So could it be the portrayal of the "ship's deity", the guardian spirit of the ship, the "ship's goblin" or similar?

It is striking that in the German sailor mythology the „Klabautermann“, the capricious, goblin-like, good ship spirit is preferred to be portrayed as living in the forecastle. In old engravings it shows up exactly at the point where the plank has been attached to the cog, namely on the inside of the stem.



Klabautermann

By the way, a man plucking at the foreship would lumber around quite neatly, making an unmistakable noise in the forecastle as he bawls around like this ...

In traditional sailing ships, the figurehead, as it were a representation of the name, the "soul" of the ship, is attached to the stem.

Could it be seen as an outward plank of the good soul of the ship, the ship's deity, the „Klabautermann“, etc.?



Figurehead

This is of course all hypothetical and speculative and presumably can not be substantiated by documents, especially as cogs were created at a time of almost complete Christianization of northern Europe.

Comparisons

The similarity of said plank to Germanic pole idols has already been mentioned above. There are other similarities. The old north German Hall houses are mostly equipped with gable decoration, known as the crossing horses. Farmhouses in Seester on the northern bank of the river Elbe show a different shape: abstractly cut, intersecting boards, which also resemble the "violin plank" of the cog.



Gable decoration at north German hall houses

In the Westphalian region, where there are gable fences in the form of upright piles, these are called "Geckpfähle" and are said to refer to Germanic sanctuaries, such as. to trace back the Irminsul:

This particular form of gable decoration can be found especially in Westphalia and there especially in the Ravensberger Land at many hall buildings, while in neighboring Niedersachsen frequently encountered at the hall houses, the crossed horse heads. In other areas of Germany similar gable piles can be found. They are also referred to as Giebelpfahl, Firstpfahl, Firstspitze, Husbrand, Geck {„dude“}, Brandstang, Bram or Brant, in Wendland it is also known as Wenden stick. In addition to their purely ornamental meaning, all these gable endings should prevent damage to the house, see also „Neidkopf“. Some speculate that the shape of the Geckpfahl dates back to the Irminsul, whose location is suspected in Ostwestfalen . [Wikipedia].



„Geckpfahl“ on Westphalian house gable

Sources

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