

**DESCRIPTION OF A NORWEGIAN
CLOG-CALENDAR:
COMMUNICATED TO THE
CAMBRIDGE ANTIQUARIAN
SOCIETY, MAY 13, 1878**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649017362

Description of a Norwegian Clog-calendar: Communicated to the Cambridge antiquarian society, may 13, 1878 by Eiríkr Magnússon

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

EIRÍKR MAGNÚSSON

**DESCRIPTION OF A NORWEGIAN
CLOG-CALENDAR:
COMMUNICATED TO THE
CAMBRIDGE ANTIQUARIAN
SOCIETY, MAY 13, 1878**

*To the Bodley and Library
from the All the*

DESCRIPTION

OF A

NORWEGIAN CLOG-CALENDAR.

COMMUNICATED TO THE

CAMBRIDGE ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY,

MAY 13, 1878.

55

BY

EIRÍKR MAGNÚSSON, M.A.,

UNDER LIBRARIAN, UNIVERSITY LIBRARY, CAMBRIDGE.

(From the Cambridge Antiquarian Society's Communications, Vol. iv. No. 2.)

Cambridge:

PRINTED BY G. J. CLAY, M.A.

AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS.

1879



SUMMER.



WINTER.

Norwegian Clog Calendar of the Fifteenth Century.
One-fourth of real size.

XI. DESCRIPTION OF A NORWEGIAN CALENDAR. Communicated by EIRÍKR MAGNÚSSON, Esq., M.A., Trinity College. -

[May 13, 1878.]

THE old-time almanac, to the contents of which I am going to call attention, was brought to this country from Norway about half a century ago (either in 1826 or 1829) by the Rev. Richard Carter Smith, M.A. His daughter, Mrs Atkinson of Clare College Lodge, was kind enough, some time ago, to inform me of the existence of the document, which had been carefully preserved in the family, and to persuade her brother, Richard G. Smith, Esq., the present owner of it, to allow me to examine it, and to exhibit it to the Society on the present occasion.

In shape this calendar represents the familiar type of the so-called clog-almanacs of England, more specially called "*the Staffordshire cloggs*." This term for calendars, scored on solid objects of portable nature, has been generally adopted in England ever since that learned keeper of the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford, and Professor of Chymistry in the University, *Dr R. Plot*, wrote his researchful *Natural History of Staffordshire*. So far as I have been able to trace, he is the earliest authority for the use of this term, as applied to these calendars. He introduces the subject of these Staffordshire antiquities in the following words:

Canutus took possession of the whole kingdom, and reigned sole King of England for 20 years: during which time, and the reigns of his two successors also Danish Kings of England, many of their Customs and Utensills, no doubt on't, obtain'd

here, amongst which I guess I may reckon an ancient sort of Almanacks they call *Cloggs*, made upon square sticks, still in use here amongst the meaner sort of people, which I cannot but think must be some remains of the Danish government, finding the same with little difference to have been used also formerly, both in Sweden and Denmarke, as plainly appears from Olaus Magnus and Olaus Wormius.

After this statement, to which I shall return presently, the Doctor proceeds :

They are here called Cloggs, for what reason I could not learn, nor indeed imagin, unless from the English Logg (a term we usually give to any piece of wood), or from the likeness of some of the greater sorts of them to the Cloggs, wherewith we usually restrain the wild, extravagant, mischievous motions of some of our doggs.

If these *cloggs* were really a species of almanac adopted by the English from the Danes, as Dr Plot maintains, and all English writers who have dealt with the subject since his day, it must be assumed as *natural* that with the Danish thing, its Danish name should also have been adopted, and as *certain*, that with it its Danish type must have been preserved, in all its essential characteristics at least, at the same time.

But, as to the name, it is a matter beyond any question, that at the time, when the supposed adoption of these Danish time-markers took place, that is to say, in the 11th century, the Old-Norse language knew no such word as *clogg* for calendars scored on wood, or on any other object of a solid, portable nature, or for such pieces of wood, or of other material, as were specially used for carving runes on. The standing term for logs or pieces of wood, or of other material on which runes were cut, was *kefli*, a word which cannot possibly be supposed to have corrupted in Saxon mouths into *clogg*. On the other hand, *clog* seems to be a word well known in English dialects for a *piece of*

wood fastened to a string for husbandry purposes¹. The word is, I think without a doubt, a good old English word, akin to German *klots*, Danish *klods*, Swedish *klots*, all meaning a log of wood, but in none of these languages used for such pieces of wood, or of any other substance, on which calendars were habitually carved. The clog-almanacs show, that it has been customary to hang them up by a piece of string, when they were not in use, most of them showing at one end a hole, through which such a string must have been drawn, or some other contrivance, to which it must have been attached, for the purpose of hanging them up when they were not consulted or carried about as controllers of passing time.

As to the *type*, it is a fact, which hitherto has been entirely overlooked, that it is *not Danish at all*. The typical Danish clog is a *runic stave*; that is, its seven dominical letters are represented by the first seven letters of the later runic alphabet, and its golden numbers by runes as well. But on the Staffordshire clog, so far as I know, runes never occur. Its dominical letters are represented by straight lines, or else by scores in the edge where two planes meet. But the character of golden numbers is exclusively peculiar of this very kind of calendar:

· : : : | | | | | | + + + + + + † † † † † † † † † † =
 I II III IV V VI VII VIII IX X XI XII XIII XIV XV XVI XVII XVIII XIX

and never occurs on the typical primstave of Denmark.

Thus the Staffordshire clog preserves, in reality, no feature distinctive of the typical runstave of Denmark.

If we look a little closer into the matter of the Danish origin of this kind of clog, we shall be able to judge, on the evidence of probability, at least, what plausibility there is for the assumption, which makes the barbarous Northern free-

¹ Halliwell's *Dictionary of archaic and provincial words*, I. p. 256.

booter of the 11th century the calendric teacher of the Englishman of the time.

It is only repeating an historical truism, to say that, where a custom has longest prevailed and struck deepest root among the masses as an unavoidably necessary item of their civilisation, there the longest time and the most radical measures are required for the complete eradication of the same. Now, we know that the Danish element was longest established in the North of England and, as a matter of course, we should expect an important item of Dano-Christian civilisation, which even up to the end of the 17th century was understood, and turned to practical purposes by the "meaner sort" of people in non-Danish Staffordshire, to have been known in some way to the people in the old Danish kingdom of Northumberland. Such, however, is not the case. There is only scanty evidence of probability to show, that the clog-calendar was used in the North of England. The absence of a positive evidence on that head need, however, amount to no more than an accident; nor does it warrant any conclusion to the effect that clog-almanacs were never known there; but what it warrants, is a conclusion to the effect that this supposed purely Danish institution took deeper root among, and got firmer hold of, strangers than of its own inventors and cultivators; and that, in the nature of the matter, is a most unusual thing ever to happen.

Taking a comparative survey of Northern clog-almanacs, we find that, by the type of their Sunday letters, they fall into two distinct groups: the clog *with* runes, to signify the Sunday letters, and the golden number, a type which obtains through Denmark and Sweden; and the clog *without* runes, which obtains throughout Norway. This clog may be said, broadly speaking, to be identical in type with the Staffordshire clog. Its Sunday letters are either straight lines, scored on the planes, or else scores in the edges, where two planes meet. Its mark-day emblems bear a singular resemblance in many cases

to the same emblems on the Staffordshire clog, and occur, as far as my observation as yet goes, never on Danish or Swedish staves. From the missionary history of the North, we know that, while Denmark and Sweden received Christianity chiefly through German agency, Norway was redeemed from paganism principally by English enterprise. At that time the vernacular alphabet of the whole of Scandinavia was the runic. It was only a natural adaptation of a foreign to a vernacular time-marking contrivance, that the first seven letters of the Roman alphabet, which did service in the Roman Calendar as Sunday letters, should be replaced, for the same purpose, by the first seven letters of the current Scandinavian alphabet, those letters being **Þ Æ R R Y ***. We are not at liberty, I think, to presume, that this natural mode of adaptation which obtained in Sweden and Denmark should have been discarded without a cause in Norway. And still less are we at liberty to assume it as the result of a pure accident, that the type actually adopted by the Norwegians, should agree entirely with that which in the 17th century turns out to be popularly current in Staffordshire.

Further, it should not be forgotten, that the Christian dominical letter-system had been known and used for calendric purposes throughout England for centuries before the Norwegian had any notion of it as a time-marking contrivance. To suppose that the semi-barbarous Norwegian, during the very time that he was struggling for the maintenance of his dear paganism against the "odious" creed of "White-Christ," took care to popularize the fundamental law of the Christian Church, which enjoined due observance of Saints' days, with their fasts and vigils, with a view to the utter eradication of the pagan high-day observances, is as preposterous, as it is absurd, for a moment to imagine that Englishmen, observing the Christian cultus for centuries, were incapable, all the time, of providing themselves with a popular and practical contrivance, serving as a guide to the proper observances of the ecclesiastical seasons,