

The Pagan Temple

In 1926 Sune Lindqvist, then professor of archaeology at Uppsala University, excavated the bottom layers of clay in the present day parish church at Gamla Uppsala (Nordahl 1996, 14-15). This was in conjunction with the churches renovation and Lindqvist noted a number of larger and smaller wooden postholes in the deepest of the clay layers (Figure 4). From the pattern of these holes Lindqvist constructed an inner square (posthole numbers 9, 10 and 12) and an outer square (posthole numbers 11, 14-20 and 23-24) as a plan for a pagan temple (Figure 5).

Recent Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) surveys in 2003 and 2004 have also revealed traces a large Iron Age house attached to the north of the present parish church (Alkarp and Price 2005). These are the deep N4 and N5 radar anomalies in their Figure 2 north of the north transept and coming out from this transept (Figure 7). Provisionally these structures are earmarked as an Iron Age house but being precisely beside the old wooden church raises immediate questions. Its situation can naturally be ascribed to a wooden temple next to which a church might later have been built and also explains the odd angle of the unearthed walls of the later built cathedral.

How are these findings to be reconciled with the available literary records? Adam of Bremen's 1070 account (*Gesta Hammaburgensis*, Book IV, xxvi-vii, only copies survive) mentions a pagan temple at Uppsala: "... entirely decked out in gold ...the statues of three gods ...Thor occupies a throne in the middle of the chamber, Odin and Frey have places on either side." Adam had never set foot in Sweden and received all his information from the Danish king Sven Estridsson who had however lived in the Svea king's household in his youth. Adam also mentions that in the land of the Svea live amazons, Cyclops, one footed hopping creatures and human flesh eating monsters. Adams account of the temple must be questioned though probably not discarded as worthless. The gold reference is likely to be influenced from descriptions of he knew of heathen temples of the Romans and Babylonians. The Icelander Snorri Sturlusson around 1220 also describes a hall in Uppsala dedicated to Freyja the Dis. Hence there may have been a separate cult temple.

Today archaeologists' reconstructions of the pagan temple emphasise that a simple wooden structure probably did exist, likely containing wooden carvings of the three most important gods, possibly as a separate building on a separate plateau to the Royal Hall (Figure 6). This belief in a separate pagan temple was also dramatically supported in 1967 in a publication by Kjell Kumlien. This paper presented the "Annotationes scriptis ex Karoli episcopi Arosiensis excerptae" document which stated that in Gamla Uppsala the wooden church was joined to a temple and the new cathedral was to be built over the top of them both. After the disruptions caused by Anund a special area, outside the Royal Hall, may have been created for cult worship, specifically separating the royal from the public spheres, and the new pagan temple built there.