

The Queen of the Mist and the Lord of the Mountain

Oral Traditions of the Landscape and Monuments in the Omberg area of western Östergötland

Torun Zachrisson

The mountain of Omberg rises high above the plain. It has functioned as a hub in the landscape, and many oral traditions have been woven around it. The mountain was not inhabited by man, but by supernatural creatures. In its interior, Rödgavel, the lord of the mountain, lived together with his people. His female counterpart, Omma, who was the mist personified, was associated with the remains on top of the mountain. That a mountain has a female/male dimension is very unusual. Omberg can be interpreted as a gateway into the landscape where the supernatural and human worlds met. The article aims to make landscape visual by means of folklore traditions.

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A landscape acquires its visual identity through the scenery and the monuments. Features like settlements, roads, bridges, churches and ancient burial grounds are visible and distinct. But a landscape not only comes to live through its scenery (Burström, Winberg & Zachrisson 1997). Equally important are the names, events and tales that are linked to different places (Strid 1993; Hyenstrand 1993). What we actually perceive is just as much a product of our own "inner" landscape as the physical landscape in front of us (Löfgren 1981:237; Welinder 1992; Zachrisson 1997:80ff). The immaterial and material memories give a landscape its character.

THE SETTING

Certain landscapes with unusual or monumental traits have captured the attention of people more than others have, and consequently become the subject of people's stories (cf. von Sydow 1978:115). The area around Omberg in western Östergötland is such a landscape. The natural scenery is distinct and rich in contrasts. The mountain of Omberg rises above the fertile plain. The mountain stands with one foot in the deep and cold lake Vättern, and with the other it nearly reaches the lake Tåkern, a shallow and flourishing lake of the plain.

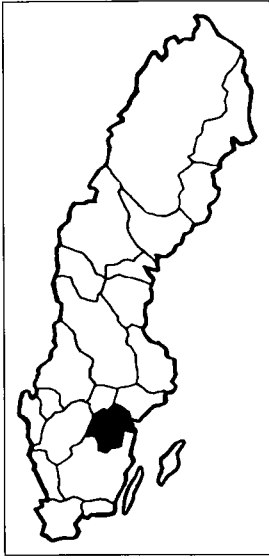


Fig. 1. Omberg is situated in Östergötland, in eastern middle Sweden.

The Omberg-Tåkern area has been selected to represent a part of Sweden's national heritage (Sw. *riksintresseområde*). It has a concentration of cultural remains from different time periods that are placed in one of Sweden's most vivid and shifting types of landscapes, the plain (cf. Svensson 1998). When Scania still belonged to Denmark, this was one of the country's finest grane-producing areas. In the 17th century, when the first maps were drawn, the area stood out as a district devoid of forests with large farms that cultivated grain (Helmfrid 1962:3, 47). Today the plain accommodates modern farms as well as modern wind power stations. In the centre of the national heritage area we find evidence of our own use of the cultural landscape as a recreational area (cf. *Miljön och det förflutna* 1998). The lookout tower at

the peak of Omberg, the hiking trails, the tourist hotel, the ski-slope at Ombergs-liden, the many towers for birdwatchers at the lake Tåkern, the outdoor museum nearby the rune stone at Rök and the tourist route Ödeshög-Alvastra-Omberg are all examples from different times.

The scenery around Omberg and Tåkern appeals to people. The local tourist agency estimates that about 300 000-350 000 persons visit Omberg every year (Ödeshög tourist agency 2002). What makes the landscape so grand and fascinating is the strange combination of nature and culture, of memory and man, of past and present (cf. Hedrén 1998:89f).

The landscape has long since been a source of inspiration for both painters and poets. More clearly than in other places, it is possible to see the effect of the encounter between the oral tradition and the written word. This materializes in the rune stone at Rök, where Varin's elegy over his dead son touches upon obscure memories (Gustavson 2000:21f). Another example is Verner von Heidenstam's poetry in which is found the stories, places and people from Omberg and Tåkern (1904).

Our view of the landscape around Omberg is deeply influenced by what has been written about it. How people might have perceived this landscape when the oral, not the written, history dominated the minds of man seems almost impossible to approach (see Ong 1982). Nevertheless I will try to create a picture of this other landscape by means of folkloristic sources. My purpose is to find out whether it is possible to visualize a landscape through the oral tradition. What kind of landscape will emerge? Will it be fragmentary or composite? I am aware that the landscape that may stand out is hardly a landscape of great age, but it may diverge in many respects from the landscape we perceive today, thereby encouraging us to reflect upon it and view it in a different way.

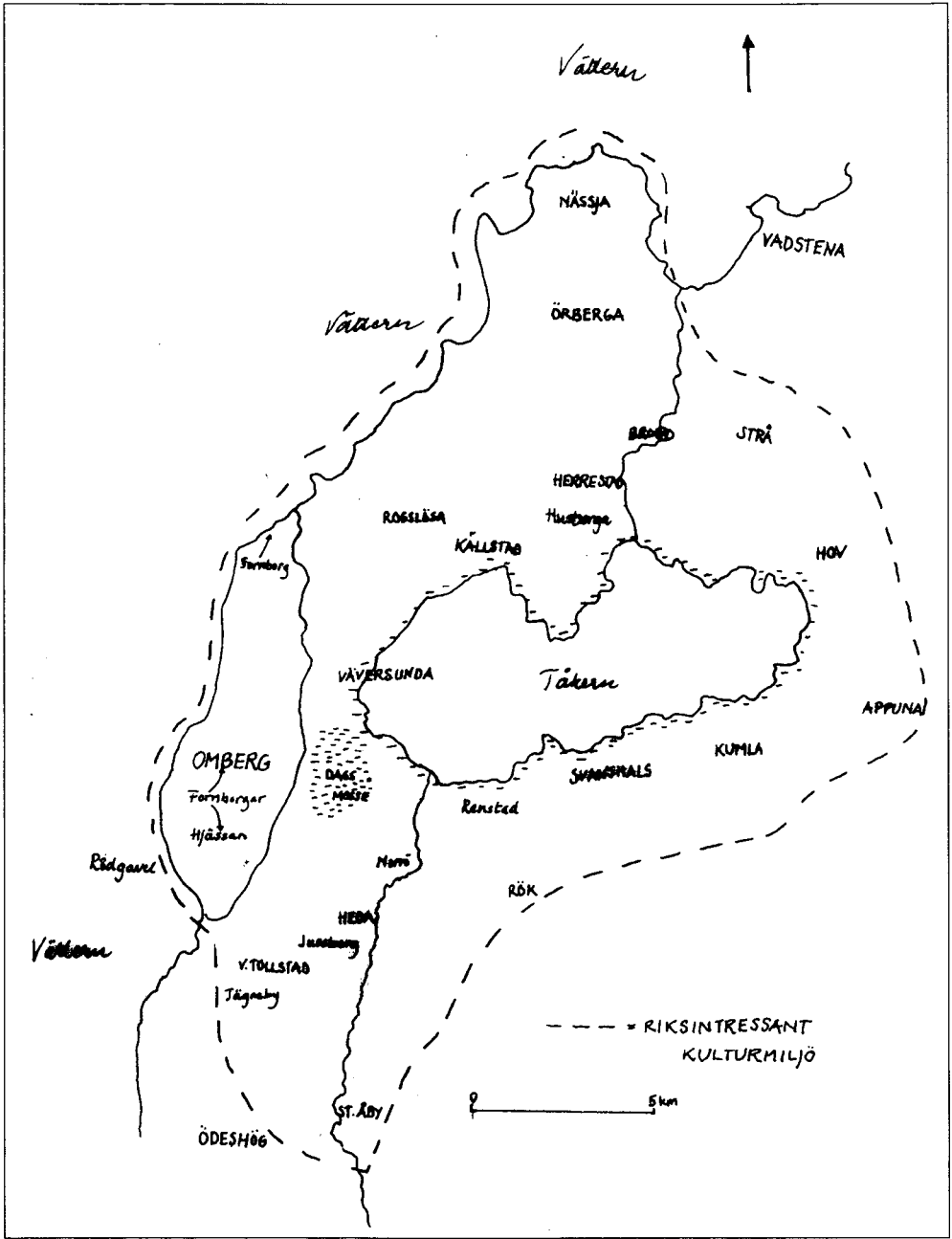


Fig. 2. The national heritage area of Omberg-Täkern. National Heritage Board.

METHOD AND SOURCES

Collective memory is multi-layered and heterogeneous – a new phenomenon slowly replaces an old one. There is an ongoing dialogue between the new and the old, which brings them together in a polemic and dialectic relation. This aspect of collective memory means that research is more focused on continuity than change (Peltonen 1999:116f).

Collective tradition is a concept that is closely linked to collective memory. It is a tradition generally known and accepted by the community (for this see Eskeröd 1947:74-79; Honko 1962:125-129). Legends, recorded memorates (narratives about real experiences) and folkloristic notes can together form a collective tradition. The legends (Sw. *sägner*) supplied knowledge to people. However, this knowledge was not the officially sanctioned one. It was a knowledge that lay between the certain and the speculative or fantastic. Many people have believed in what the legends told, but not everyone (Dégh & Vazsonyi 1971).

Legends are often rather stereotype and dominated by themes common to large areas but with details that are very specific to the local milieu. The place is of vital importance for the construction of the whole tale (Klintberg 1986b:128f). Oral traditions often give detailed descriptions of where a certain event has taken place. The time of the event is a lot dimmer. The point in time has not captured people's attention the same way as the place (Glassie 1982:ch. 9). Following the character of oral traditions, I will mainly deal with space by focusing on landscape and places. Changes in the oral history over time will also be touched upon, however. The national heritage area of Omberg-Tåkern sets the limits for the research area (www.raa.se/ri/exempel/omberg.htm).

Since my aim is to visualize the landscape through oral history, I have selected all the traditions that are place-bound, whether they concern natural or cultural remains. The folkloristic material mainly consists of legends and shorter folkloristic notes. The earliest sources for the oral history of Omberg are topographic descriptions. In 1760 Carl Fredric Broocman published his description of Östergötland. The legends and traditions of the landscape play an even greater role in the book titled *Omberg och dess omgifningar* written by the parish priest of Rogslösa Johan

Bohman, in 1829. Both Broocman and Bohman speak in general of the local traditions without mentioning any of their individual informants, however.

Memory exists within the framework of social hierarchy. Researchers of mentalities have



Fig. 3. A view over the fields of the plain towards Omberg. Photo taken from Renstad near Rök by the author; August 1998.

abandoned the idea of a unified culture, maintaining instead that there exists a number of parallel mentalities and world-views which represent, for example, different genders, religious and ethnic groups or social classes (Peltonen 1999:115ff). The oral history of the late 18th and the early 19th century in the Omberg area was compiled by members of the middle or perhaps the lower upper class of the society. The oral history that was collected in the late 19th and the early 20th century has a somewhat different social background. In Sven Rothman's book on the folk memories of Östergötland (1941) and Elis Åström's book on the folklore of Östergötland (1962), the lower section of the peasant society is represented. But unlike the earlier folk traditions, these are individual statements. The informants were smallholders, fishermen, smiths, skippers, stone-breakers, carpenters, old women, soldiers, yeomen and schoolteachers who lived in the country-side (cf. the register of informants Rothman 1941:139 and Åström 1962:151ff; see also Haeffner 1913). In the folklore collections in the archives of Nordiska museet (NM) similar kinds of informants are represented, as well as school children from Omberg's school.

THE SCENE: THE MISTY MOUNTAIN, THE FERTILE LAKE AND THE DANGEROUS WATER

Omberg is a mountain, 10x3 kilometres large, which in the west falls steeply to Lake Vättern and in the east slopes down to the small bridge of land that divides the mountain, Lake Tåkern and Dags mosse. The name *Ammobicærh* (mentioned in 1279-81?) is connected with the Nordic words for mist/smoke, **ama*, and mountain *biærgh*, and means the mountain that is wrapped in haze or mist (cf. Bohman 1829:4; Nerman 1912; Hellqvist 1939:730). People used to say that the mountain becomes hazy, *åmmar*, when it is swept in veils of mist (Nerman 1912:3; Franzén 1982). The peak of the mountain reaches 264 meters above sea level. It is called *Hjässan* (*The Crown*, Pettersson & Samuelsson 1994). On the western side of the mountain there are caves which the water has dug out. The largest of these is *Röd gavel* (Red gable). The name alludes to the steep, reddish wall that rises high above the cave (*Ortnamn på nätet*).

The mountain is most impressive from the seaside, from Vättern. This lake is situated in a depression and its edges are steep in places. It has a mean depth of 39 meters, but outside Visingsö it reaches 128 metres (*Nationalencyklopedin* 1996). People have had trouble in understanding that the lake can be so deep, since few signs can be seen of its flow. This has been explained by the assumption that Vättern had subterranean flows and connections with other lakes, such as Vänern (Hjärne [1916]; Ridderstad 1918:12f; Jörälv 1986:9ff).

The name *Wetur* is known from 1222-30 and may contain an ancient word for water or lake (*Nationalencyklopedin* 1996). The water of Vättern is cold and clear, and the lake is poor in nourishment. Severe storms can occur in wintertime. Vättern is then only partly covered with ice. The lake has been regarded as dangerous since it could quickly become stormy, roar and whistle. People could

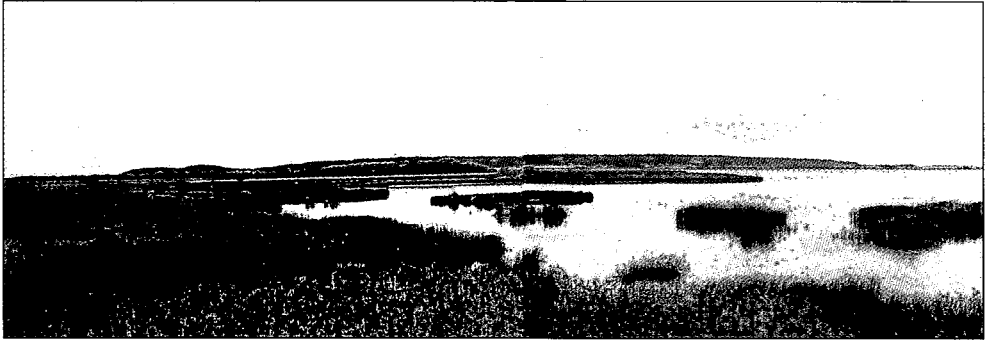


Fig. 4. From Glånås on the south eastern shore of Tåkern the silhouette of Omberg is clear. The crown of the mountain, Hjässan, is the marked hump to the left in the picture. Photo by the author, August 1998.

hear it laugh derisively when someone went through the ice and drowned (Åström nr 264). Vättern is also known for its optical illusions and mirages (Ridderstad 1914:13).

If Vättern was thought of as capricious, Lake Tåkern was seen as quite the opposite. The name *Thughn* (1336) means “swelled”, which alludes to its recurrent floods (*Nationalencyklopedin* 1995). Tåkern is a fertile, muddy, shallow lake of the plain. In different, more positive words people have spoken of the inexhaustible natural wealth that the lake contained. C. J. Karlsson (born in 1878), one of the smallholders on Dag’s bog, recounted that: *In Tåkern there was fish without an end. When I was a little boy, we would walk on the shores and hit the pikes with switches... During spawning-time they would lie closely packed up against land, and when you walked on the shore, they jumped around your legs so that you could pick them up with your bare hands* (my translation, Åström nr 307).

THE HUB OF THE LANDSCAPE

Today we lean on a scientific world-view that gives us explanations as to how the landscape was formed and what kind of natural forces once existed. In a time when one didn’t know about the inland ice or that Omberg was a faulted rock, there was a need to describe and explain the ancient times that had preceded man’s presence in the landscape (Bohman 1829:66; Burström 1994:48; Klintberg 1986a:25f). In the folk traditions the giants were the original inhabitants of the land. The lakes Tåkern and Vättern and the islands in Vättern were formed long before man existed. The *giant put his big fist in Dag’s bog and took up a stone that he threw towards Västergötland*. He only managed to reach halfway and the stone dropped into Vättern and turned into the island *Jungfrun (the Virgin)*. The hole from which the stone was taken became filled with water, and today it forms the lake *Tåkern* (Åström nr 44, after an informant born in 1885).

Many legends are linked to Omberg. The mountain was not thought of as belonging to man. Instead it was perceived as housing creatures that personified the natural powers: giants, trolls and Omma, the queen of the mist (Bohman 1829).

There are no legends that tell how Omberg was created. The mountain seems to have been looked upon as extremely old, as something that had always existed.

The lord

Foremost among the creatures of the mountain was Rödgvavel, the lord of Omberg. He had a long, red beard and lived inside the largest cave in the mountain, which bore his name *Red gable* (although Värme, in 1878, says that he originally lived at kalkhöjen in Sik, see Haeffner 1913:44). The cave was at the same time the entrance to a palace (Sw. *Rödgvavels port*). Inside the mountain there were enchanted gardens. If you happened to get lost on the mountain you could turn some of your clothing inside out, and then the spirit of the mountain could no longer mislead you (Bohman 1829:68).

In the folk traditions Rödgvavel and his people are either called giants or trolls. The great difference between them is that while the giants are perceived as an extinct race, the trolls are thought to still live among the people. Both the giants and trolls were believed to be heathens (Klintberg 1986a:26f). The trolls lived their lives in the same way as ordinary people did, but they lived in mountains and mounds. In the traditions the creatures of Omberg are partly apprehended as historical beings, and partly as existing among people.

Giants belong to an age which preceded that of man, and they were perceived as dying out (Klintberg 1986:28; Burström 1994). During a period of transition, however, the heathen giants and the Christian people lived side by side. Some giants were then lured into using their enormous strength to erect a stone church. This is said to have happened in Heda (Ridderstad 1918:714). The church roof there was made of copper that came from Rödgvavel, and the church silver also originated from Omberg (Franzén in *Ortnamn på nätet*). On Christmas nights the giants of Omberg raided the church to try to recover their silver (Ridderstad 1918:714; Hassler 1980:84).

When people converted to the Christian faith and started to build churches, the heathen giants became angry. They could not bear the clang of the church bells (Klintberg 1986a:26). In fury the giants threw large boulders at the churches and their bells. This is said to have occurred at the churches in Rogslösa, Heda and Stora Åby (Bohman 1829:67; Rothman nr 127, 128; NM jättar, Heda sn). Rödgvavel tried to throw stones at the monastery of Alvastra, but he failed. He then attempted to drown the monks at Alvastra by digging a hole through the mountain. This failed as well, but the monks profited from the spring that very conveniently arose by the monastery. Rödgvavel then crawled further into the mountain to escape the sounds from the three churches of Heda, Tollstad and Alvastra monastery (Haeffner 1913, after Värme in 1878).

The people of the plain wanted to get rid of the heathen creatures. Therefore when the trolls of Rödgvavel were celebrating a wedding, the parish clerk of Strå sneaked up to the cave. He stood behind a door, and when the trolls passed by with a beer cauldron he managed to pour baptismal water into it. The power of

the holy water made the trolls so wild, that they killed each other. Only one old woman was left. She had hidden herself in the oven. When the parish clerk found her, she said that she had lived in Rödgväl while seven oak forests had grown up and rotted down, but never had she experienced such a noise. If you have lived so long, the parish clerk told her, you might as well be prepared to die. He then shot her (Rothman nr 124, after Väva-Tilda born in 1847).

The lady

The queen of the mountain, Omma, was perceived as the mist personified, and at the same time inducing and escaping (Nerman 1912). She used to dance beautifully on Stocklycke meadows on Omberg with her people. She could also be seen wandering with her ladies on the lake Vättern with their skirts trailing behind (Haeffner 1913:44ff after Anders Värme 1878). Omma's element is water in its different forms. She was intimately connected with Vättern. The lake was believed to have been formed from Omma's tears. She shed them when one of her wooers from Västergötland fell into the sea as he tried to ride up the rocky western side of Omberg. Therefore Vättern is easily moved, since it consists of tear water (Rothman nr 135). And it was wisest not to be out on the lake when Omma sat in her weaving chamber thudding and beating (Karlsson 1982:5).

Between the queen of the mist and the lord of the mountain there was an erotic struggle. The skipper Anders Värme of Hästholmen told August Haeffner in 1878 what had happened. Rödgväl had been fishing and came to Stocklycke meadows, where queen Omma and her people were dancing. He had never before seen so much beauty. He went home and gathered some of his people and came back. The giants took one of the ladies each. Rödgväl brought Omma with him to his cave and started to ravish her. But she complained about the heat in the cave and asked the giant to open the door slightly, so that she could get some fresh air, which he did. Then she fled from him by turning into a veil of mist and disappearing out over the Hästholmen bay, up the brook Alebäcken and into Lake Tåkern. Her pursuer could not follow her anymore or he would have walked into the bog and drowned (the full version is found in Haeffner 1913:44f or NM Jättar, Östergötland).

If Rödgväl was thought to have his lodgings inside the mountain, then Queen Omma was associated with the remains on top of the mountain. She lived at the hill-fort farthest north of the mountain, called *Borgs udde* or Queen Omma's hill-fort. The door of her pigsty had been moved down to Rogslösa to become a church door there, and the marks from the pigs' teeth can still be seen. Omma is said to be buried under a flat stone at the top of Omberg, formerly called *Ämmekulle* (Ämme hill) (Bohman 1829:69f).

NARRATIVES FROM BELOW

The plain seems to be the starting-point for man. From there people have looked upon the world around them. The stories give the impression that people have

stood at different places looking up at Omberg or out over Vättern or Tåkern. The contrasts that we perceive in the landscape today are accentuated in the oral tradition. They form sets of binary oppositions: the warm and gentle lake versus the cold and capricious water, and the misty mountain versus the plain.

The oral traditions show that people relate to the natural landscape and give it meaning and significance (cf. Bradley 2000). Through different legends, memorates (narratives about real experiences) and shorter folkloristic notes, places are linked together with other places and relations are established in the landscape. The traditions of Omberg connect the surrounding plain with the mountain and make them part of the same web.

The plain itself was not a subject for the folk traditions. But the creatures of Omberg and their deeds provided explanations for seemingly inexplicable traces on the plain. These traces could either be formed by nature, such as boulders (stones in Västra Ledet, the giant's stone in Häggestad, Heda parish, the boulder near Rogslösa Church, see Haeffner 1913 and Bohman 1829:67f) or springs (Alvastra, see above), or formed by man, such as churches (Heda, St. Åby, Rogslösa, Västra Tollstad and Alvastra) and ancient burial grounds (Klämsgrind, Örberga parish, see Rothman 117; Åström 73). They all fitted into a much larger story that was woven around the ancient mountain. It is above all the adjacent district that is connected with Omberg, including places such as Örberga, Strå, Rogslösa, Västra Tollstad, Heda och Stora Åby parishes. In particular Heda and Rogslösa churches stand out as having many links with the creatures that inhabited Omberg.

In the oral traditions Omberg stands out as a gateway into the landscape where the earthly and supernatural worlds meet. This is precisely what is characteristic for a sacred place (Vikstrand 2001:26; cf. Eliade 1968:20f, 25). Per Vikstrand, a researcher of onomastics, defines a sacred place as “a scene where the mythological worlds become manifest in the human world, a portal where in some respect it is possible to communicate with these worlds and their inhabitants” (2001:26, my translation). This communicative aspect of sacred or holy places is well known (cf. Brink 2001).

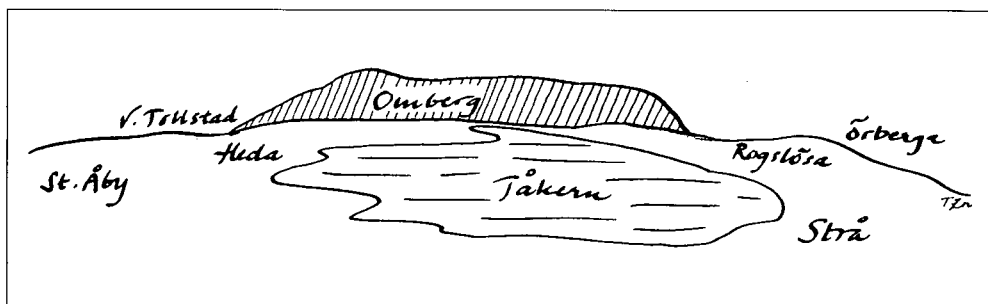


Fig. 5. The oral traditions of the landscape tie Omberg and the plain together. Drawing by the author.

The people of the plain regarded Omberg as a guardian of prosperity and health. In the mountain there were powers and forces that people used to protect themselves and their cattle. Once a year people took lime-bleach from the White Clay Brook (*Vitlersbäcken*) at Omberg, for Ascension Day. With this lime they painted their fireplaces to keep evil powers out and sickness away (Ridderstad 1918:7). At Whitsunday people used to gather at sacred wells (*Hälle källor*) in the middle of Omberg to drink water for one's health. It was a tradition that everyone regarded as extremely old. Nobody drank without offering something (informant born 1874, Åström nr 282). According to the legends, three sisters were killed there. Afterwards three wells arose at the spot, and they haven't petered out yet (Rothman nr 131, 133; Åström nr 240; cf. Arwidsson 1837:413). When the custom of drinking well-water ceased, people began to gather at Hjässan instead. As many as 10 000 persons could meet there at Whitsunday, and they came from Närke, Västergötland, Småland as well as other parts of Östergötland (Åström nr 281).

Through the oral memories and folk traditions Omberg can be interpreted as a sacred place. Yet in medieval and historical times there were farms and stone quarries on the mountain. How should this be understood? The mountain does not seem to have been settled before the Middle Ages. There are, however, three hill-forts from the Iron Age in the northern and southern ends of the mountain. In at least one of these, Queen Omma's hill-fort, charcoal and burnt bones have been found (in 1827, see Bohman 1829:70; cf. Hellman 1971), which indicates some kind of cultural layer. Researchers of today regard hill-forts as having complex meanings and functions that point to both defensive and ritual aspects, as well as communal gathering places and secluded areas for certain members of society (see Olausson 1995; Johansen & Pettersson 1993). The hill-forts of Östergötland are tied to the Late Roman Iron Age and Migration period (Kaliff 1999:119). They sometimes bear theophoric place-names such as Visten or Odensten (cf. Franzén 1937:239f). The ancient monuments of Omberg do not contradict the idea that the entire mountain was perceived as sacred.

A different view

Omberg was originally a common (Rosén 1949:37,143; cf. Helmfrid 1962:82; and Tollin & Holmström 1990:313). On the wooded mountain the people of the plain could collect firewood, timber and let their animals graze. There may have been a deer-park at Omberg (Andrén 1997:485; cf. Ridderstad 1914:6), as was usual over large parts of Europe. In a deer-park kings and lords could hunt for game like roe and red deer. The noble hunt of the aristocracy of Sweden has roots that go back to the Late Iron Age (cf. Andrén 1997).

In the 12th century at the latest, the king/Crown laid claim to the district commons of Götaland (Sw. *kungstreding*), including Omberg. It is not a coincidence that this occurred in the same time period as the founding of Alvastra monastery in 1143. The monastery seems to have initiated clearings on the southern part of

Omberg (Holmström & Tollin 1990:312f). The mountain was also used for quarrying large quantities of stone that were needed for the many Christian buildings.

Christianity had a great impact on the landscape around Tåkern and Omberg. The 12th- century churches lie close to each other, and they all show individual traits due to the desires of their prominent builders (Bonnier 1996:83). The human geographer Clas Tollin has shown that Alvastra monastery was founded on the estate of the family of King Sverker. In Tollin's view the district south of Omberg was an area of great symbolical values, largely due to the earlier churches at the southern foot of the mountain (Tollin 2002:238ff). In the churchyard that surrounded them an extraordinary amount of people found their eternal rest (see Ersgård 1996:13f). But the question is, whether the closeness to the mountain itself may have increased the symbolical value of the place chosen for the monastery.

The use of Omberg in the Middle Ages can be interpreted such that the monastery and Christianity had a different relation to the mountain than that of earlier periods. Nico Roymans has discussed the Christianisation of pagan beliefs in the southern Netherlands. There Christian propaganda was used to transform pagan deities and mythical characters into 'negative antipodes of Christian values'. This is a process that Roymans calls "diabolisation" (Roymans 1995:15, 20; see Altenberg 2001:109). The heathen character of Omma and the giants seems to be in focus in the earlier oral traditions of Omberg (18th and 19th centuries). These oral memories might reflect the Christian communities' desire to put forward the potential threat which the heathen powers of Omberg constituted. However, these

creatures never succeeded in destroying the churches or monastery, and the boulders that were left on the plain became moral examples of the victorious Church (Bohman 1829:68).

In a Christian world-view the cultivated land is Christian; here the work has been fenced by Christian rituals, and fire and steel have broken the powers of the natural spirits. A characteristic feature of the cultivated land is that it was not perceived as being inhabited by spirits. The lakes, woods and the forested mountains represented the wild land; in the world-view of the farmers, that was the heathen land where the spirits lived.

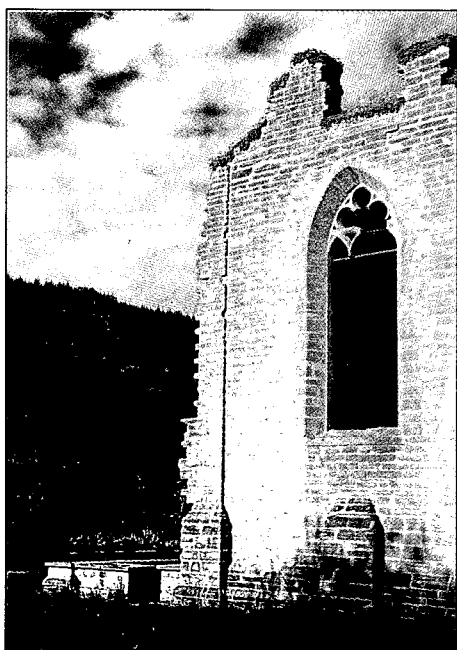


Fig. 6. The monastery of Alvastra lies virtually at the foot of the mountain. Photo by the author, August 1998.

THE MOUNTAIN AND ITS TWO DIMENSIONS

Among the creatures and spirits that were believed to dwell in Omberg, two individuals stand out, namely the male represented by Rödgvavel and the female by Omma. Rödgvavel's colours are identical with the mountain itself, and he himself is a manifestation of the mountain, its lord and master. He is associated with the interior of the mountain and its largest cave. Omma, on the other hand, is identified with the mist that envelops the mountain and the water that surrounds it. The mountain is thus perceived as having both a male and a female dimension. This is very unusual and has no obvious parallels (orally Bent af Klintberg, August 2002).

Omma is a metaphorical creature; she belongs to a group of female spirits associated with the mist. Other examples are the *mossakäring* (Sw.) and *mosekonen* (Da.), that is, the old bog woman. When the mist rose from the bog, people used to say that the old bog woman brewed. This was merely a saying; no legends were tied to the bog woman as they were to Queen Omma (cf. Sydow von 1935:157). Strangely, or interestingly enough, Queen Omma has turned into a physical body, who behaves just as supernatural beings in legends do. This is not usual for the kind of spirit that Omma belongs to (cf. Honko 1978:100). The lord of the mountain, Rödgvavel, and his giants, on the other hand, fit well into the known oral history of the landscape. Legends of giants or trolls and their deeds are common across the country (Klintberg 1986a:25f). The male dimension of the mountain seems thus to be the expected one, whereas the female aspect of the mountain seems extraordinary.

Omma

In 1912 the archaeologist Birger Nerman stated that nothing is known of Omma (1912:1). Yet already in 1829 the priest of Rogslösa parish, Johan Bohman, wrote that the most important oral tradition concerning Omberg circles around Queen Uma (op.cit:69). Nerman was familiar with Bohman's text, but viewed the stereotype expressions as a sign of poverty that indicates that the tales of Omma were long since forgotten. Nerman believed that it was only by studying the place-names that one could reach a closer understanding of Omma. He would perhaps have preferred tales, but those have not been preserved and his respect for the source-value of legends seems to be modest. He therefore treated the poet Verner von Heidenstam's essay *Drottning Omma* with haughtiness, saying that the poet was forced to invent her completely out of his own imagination (cf. Heidenstam 1904:10ff).

The character of Omma has many similarities with the mythical beings (Mysing the viking, King Uggla etc.) whose presence provide explanations for certain place-names, ancient monuments and natural formations in the local landscape (Zachrisson 1997:90ff). These beings are often considered to belong to royal families (see Schön 1996:52ff). In some of the traditions Omma has borrowed traits from the sea spirit (Sw. *sjörå*). One legend connects the shaping of Visingsö with a giant couple that were invited to the sea-lady of Omberg for a pike luncheon

(NM, informant born 1860; *Östgötacorrespondenten* 29.10.1948). In the essay of Verner von Heidenstam, on the other hand, Omma's character is highly marked by the fact that she dwelled in the woods, wearing a mask in the form of a horned owl (1904:10ff). Heidenstam's essay has had a strong influence on the three school children of the school at Omberg; their statements go hand in hand with the author's writings (NM, EU 123490). Not only Omma but also the giants of Omberg have added different legendary elements to their repertoire, such as the tradition of the giant woman who had lived long enough to see seven oak forests grow up and rot down (see above). This is a variant of a legend that is normally connected with changelings (Sw. *bortbytingar*) (see Klintberg 1986a:148f). Both Omma and the giants of Omberg have come to dominate the traditions in the district by a process that the folklorists call "motif attraction", that is, when a supernatural being has acquired an especially prominent place in the folk traditions (Eskeröd 1947:81).

The shaping of the Queen

The image of Omma might have been part of the oral traditions of the area during the Middle Ages and even earlier, but we lack direct source-material that shows this. When Olaus Magnus mentions *Amaberg* in 1555, his interest is in the stone quarrying on the mountain and he says nothing of the oral traditions that may have existed about the mountain (1555, book 12, ch. 1). Neither does the information that the priests of the district had to deliver to the Secretary of Antiquities reveal any traditions of Omma or the giants. The statements for Västra Tollstad, Väversunda and Rogslösa parishes are written in strict soberness (see Olsson, Stahre & Ståhle 1962:260, 282).

The antiquarian Carl Fredric Broocman is probably the first person to write about Omma. He was of the opinion that the mountain got its name from the pagan woman, Ama, who was the first mother of the dynasty of the Amals (1760:639f). This local tradition of Ama, mother of the Amals, appears to emanate from a learned hand. It may have its roots in the 17th century with its strong interest in the Goths and Gothic connections (Stenroth 2002:69f). But it could have its origin in even earlier times. Theodoric the Great belonged to the Amals. His genealogical descent was traced by the historian Cassiodorus in the early 500s back to the first Gothic king Odin/Gaut. It is not known whether Cassiodorus used an elaborate oral tradition when he reconstructed this genealogy or if he made it up himself (cf. Hedeager 1997:40f). Theodoric is mentioned on the rune stone of Rök which was erected in the early 800s. In the year 801 Charlemagne moved a statue of Theodoric from Ravenna in Italy to his residence in Aachen. The statue showed Theodoric sitting on his horse with a shield at his shoulder, and this is how he is portrayed in the inscription on the rune stone (Strid 1991:40f; Gustavson 2000:27). The rune stone was erected close to a major route in western Östergötland, not far from Omberg (see Fig. 3, which shows the view from the area around Rök towards Omberg). Although the rune stone was bricked in around

1150, its front side was still visible with the line alluding to Theodoric (cf. Wessén 1975:5f; and Gustavson 2000:2f). The opinion that Ama/Omma was one of Odin's wives might go back to the circle around Varin, the raiser of the rune stone at Rök. He might have been eager to trace his family's descent back to Theodoric the Great and in the end to Odin/Gaut himself, thereby connecting his family to the mythological history of the Goths. The local people in the beginning of the 19th century thought of Ama/Omma as a wife of Odin, since Ome is one of the many by-names of the heathen god (Bohman 1829:4; cf. Snorre's Edda:39,47). These oral memories could be an expression of the mythical lineage of Varin's family, but they could also be products of more recent times.

The picture of Omma as a queen or lady of the castle is due to a process which Birger Nerman believed took place in the Middle Ages. In his view, this was a means of expanding the mythical Omma into a heroic age (Nerman 1912:13). Alvastra monastery was founded in 1143 on the estate of the family of King Sverker (Tollin 2002:238ff). The monastery probably took part in the oral traditions that were formed around Omberg in the Middle Ages. It is assumed that the monastery of Alvastra and the royal court at Näs castle on Visingsö were milieus that played an active role in the formation of the legend of the sorcerer Gilbert (for the legend see Carlsson 1975:6f; Rothman nr 139). Kettil Runske fettered Gilbert by using rune sticks that he got from the god Odin. The sorcerer is forever in captivity in a cave on Visingsö (see the picture in Olaus Magnus III:ch. 20). Gilbert can be connected with a historical person, the pope Gerbert from Auvergne (999-1003), who was defamed and thereafter treated as a black magician (see Ahnlund 1945; Granlund 1951:102).

NARRATIVES FROM ABOVE

Throughout time, travellers have come to the district around Omberg. From the 17th century there are written accounts that show how the travellers perceived the landscape. The 17th century also ushered in the scientific revolution, where nature was looked upon as something useful that God had given people to reshape and control (Johannisson 1984:17). This goes hand in hand with the Authorities' interest in maps and mapping, which became accentuated in the 17th century (Helmfrid 1990:40). The travellers that walk up to the top of Omberg consequently pay no attention to the wild and bewitching nature, but note with content the waving fields of grain and large villages (see Hassler 1980:18).

A recurrent trait since the 18th century and up to modern time is people's desire to measure the view from Omberg by counting it in the number of districts, towns and churches (Hassler 1980:35, 55, 123). In popular speech it is said that you will be able to see 50 church towers from the top of Omberg. This was something that already Carl von Linné had heard of when he visited Omberg in 1749 on his way to Scania. He and his companions could not see more than 20 churches, however, which was a big disappointment to them (see Hassler 1980:22).

Not until the 19th century was the wild nature seen as something to seek strength

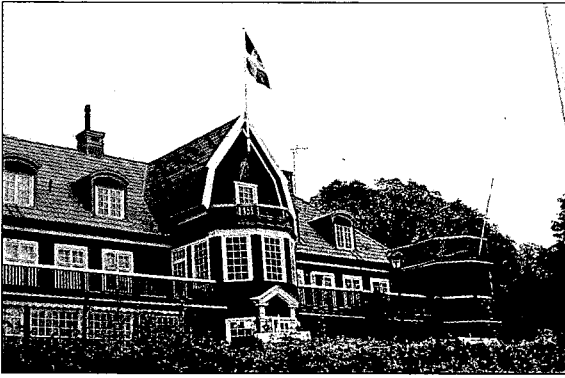


Fig. 7. The tourist hotel lies at the foot of Omberg. From here the hiking trails start that lead up side of the mountain. Photo by the author; 1998.

and healing in. In particular the picturesque landscape, that is the transition between the wild nature and the cultivated lands, was highly appreciated (Johannisson 1984:29ff). The wild Omberg, with one side facing

Vättern and the other the fertile plain, was a perfect illustration of the idealistic landscape of that time. In the 1880s the tourist and outdoor movement began in all earnest in Sweden. As early as 1894 a tourist hotel was built at Alvastra. In a tourist guide from 1900, one is recommended to go to the ruins of Alvastra monastery, to the peak of Omberg, and to the cave of Rödgvavel when passing by. It was also possible to get transport up the mountain, and one could arrange to take a boat ride to the cave Rödgvavel (Lundberg 1900:118).

Omberg has fascinated people as far back we can see, and it continues to fascinate us, whether we are residents of the plain gazing up at the mountain or tourists climbing up and looking down.

CONCLUSIONS

In the early 20th century a number of archaeologists and historians treated different folk traditions of monuments and landscapes. The researchers were mainly concerned with the truth and accurateness of folk traditions in comparison with the archaeological evidence and the facts of historical sources (e.g., Nerman 1921, 1953; Ahnlund 1926). With Brynjulf Alver's contribution, the debate continued from a folkloristic perspective. He maintained that researchers had been searching for a type of fact that one could not expect to find in historical legends. The legends mediated values and not the truth of a certain event (1977).

During the last decade folklore traditions have once again entered the archaeological discussion. The post-modern debate concerning meaning and the interest in the cultural biography of monuments have actualised the value of ancient monuments over time.

Mångtydiga fornlämningar by Mats Burström (1993) represents a turning-point in this respect, by putting forward the ancient monuments of the district Österrekarne in Södermanland and the meanings that have been attributed to them in a long time perspective. The volume *Fornlämningar och folkminnen* penetrates the relationship between the establishment of archaeology as a discipline and the subsequent disinterest in the oral history tied to ancient monuments (Burström, Winberg & Zachrisson 1997, esp. Zachrisson 1997:20-26). The folklore

of today concerning monuments and landscape is also discussed. In 1996 the theme of the TAG (Theoretical Archaeological Group) conference was *Archaeology and Folklore*. The meeting aimed at opening up a dialogue between archaeology and folklore studies. The conference volume is leavened with the idea that folklore can enrich archaeological practice and raise new questions for research (*Archaeology and Folklore* 1999).

Archaeologists have thus a renewed interest in the oral traditions of the cultural landscape, but the different studies usually illuminate the folklore surrounding a single monument or type of monument over time (Burström 1996; Gren 1989:74f; Käck 1996; Zachrisson 1998a:chapter 2; Grundberg 2000; Wall 2002). Mia Krogh has studied the oral traditions of monuments and landscape within a district of northern Norway, and by means of these traditions she analyses the kind of relations people have to the cultural landscape that surrounds them (1999:ch.4). The study was part of a research project whose principal aim was to gain a better understanding of the conditions that lead to the preservation or destruction of ancient monuments (Bertelsen, Hansen & Olsen 1996:2).

Oral history is seldom treated from the point of view of its own preconditions. Instead it has been and continues to be treated as a source material that lacks proper scientific weight. In his last book, the aging Carl-Herman Tillhagen looked back on an entire life-time as a folklorist and wrote: "In the peasant home of the ethnologist nearly every chair, every bed and every pot are described, and the cottages have a doctoral thesis about every single detail in them. It is only the people that once lived in these peasant homes of the objective researchers, that we lack. The homes that the museum curator describes are just as empty of life and people as Skansen's cottages after closing time. We know little of the thoughts and feelings of all those people that lived and worked in the well-analysed cottages of the researchers" (1999:12, my translation. Skansen is the first open-air museum in Sweden).

The questions posed in *Fornlämningar och folkminnen* (Burström, Winberg & Zachrisson 1997:145) still seem relevant: What do the folk traditions reveal about the thoughts and values of the people that created them? What kind of landscapes do the oral traditions express? This article has been written with a desire to penetrate these questions and ultimately to search for the cognitive dimensions of the area around Omberg.

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