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Dyvelstenen

Sacred Stone on the Island of Samsø, Denmark – History, Myths and Cult

Introduction

At many places in the Danish countryside, you can find boulders in the landscape, glacial erratics, transported by the ice of the last glaciation from more mountainous regions north and northeast of Denmark. Only the Baltic island of Bornholm has its own solid rocks. Just minor portions of those boulders remain where the glaciers left them. The stones were used in the thousands of megalithic tombs erected in Denmark during the Neolithic, between 3600 and 3200 BC, and more stones were used as kerb-stones of Bronze Age mounds. Large scale Medieval church building activity took further toll on the stone material left in the landscape, as well as renaissance manors and castles.

Still, many smaller and larger stone blocks can be seen in the landscape, some being the last remains of megalithic tombs of the Neolithic, others being used as menhirs, while quite some are seemingly still resting in their original position. Due to the intensive and systematized collection of Danish folklore material during the second half og the 19th century and early parts of the 20th century, we are well acquainted with tales, traditions and legends related to these sacred stones (for instance: Tang Kristensen 1892-1901 & Schmidt 1933) – stones, most of which can be seen and studied in their geographical context today.

It is not the aim, with this article to make an analysis of the motifs of recorded tales related to sacred stones, repeating themselves in Scandinavia, as well as in larger parts of Europe. Instead, by focusing on one sacred stone and its history, *Dyvelstenen*, on the Danish Island of Samsø, in Storebælt, between Jutland and Zealand, we shall follow some particular features of folklore and historical material related to these stones.

Dyvelstenen

Dyvelstenen should be considered as the most splendid example among the Danish sacred stones, packed with layers of legends. In its own mythology it embodies a variety of themes and related actions. (1) A struggle related to the arriving Christianity: A giant has thrown a huge stone after a new-built church, or a church under construction, but missed. Dyvelstenen is one of those 'missed shots', here aimed at the Church of Nordby. (2) Fertility: The children came from Dyvelstenen, they were fetched here. (3) Offerings: Bread offerings on Dyvelstenen, probably related to fertility cult and birth, and the wish for healthy children. (4) Relations to fire: the dangers of fire, farms and houses; possible protection against fire.

Dyvelstenen is situated high in the landscape, though not quite at the highest point, overlooking Nordby Village, about one km south of it. From Dyvelstenen, there is a splendid view over northern parts of Samsø as well as the sea, Storebælt (Fig. 1). Dyvelstenen measures 3.4 x 1.9 m east-west with max. height 1.1 m. It is protected as an ancient monument according to the Danish protection legislation (registered site number (Nordby Parish): 030503-35; protection number: 2717:5).

The name Dyvelstenen could most easily be understood as a local name

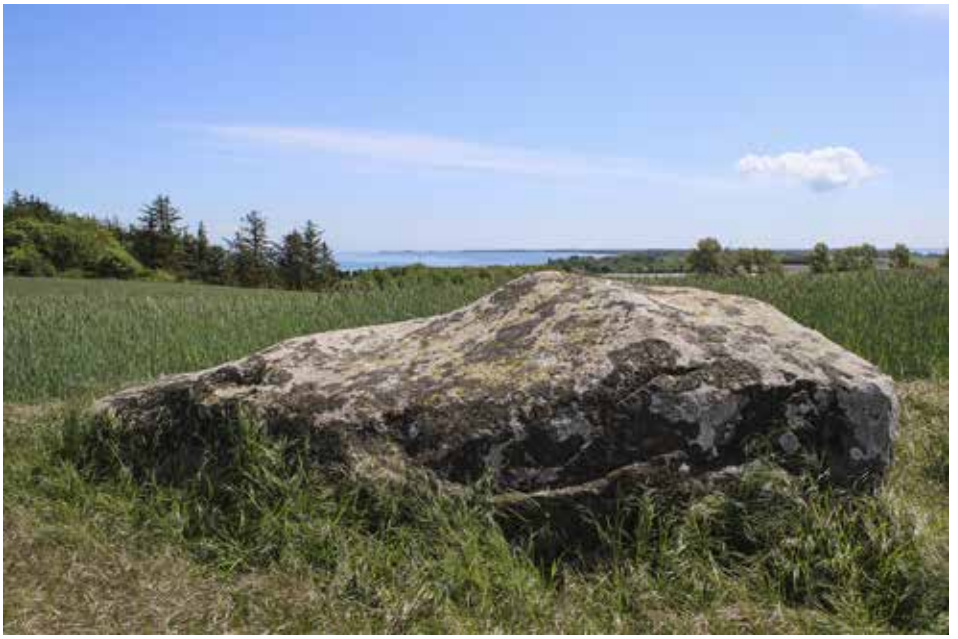


Fig. 1. Dyvelstenen in its landscape setting, with dramatic views over land and sea. Seen towards southeast. Photo: F. Kaul.

for *Djævelstenen*, meaning "the Devil's Stone". However, the name of the hill or highest point close by, has been recorded as *Dystensbjerg*, which in the Parish archive recordings of the National Museum (here 1874) has been interpreted as *Dyssestensbjerg*, meaning "Dolmen Stone Hill". Thus, the name or a nearby place name indicate the presence of a Neolithic megalithic tomb, a dolmen (Eriksen 1990: 53).

History

In September 1932, Dyvelstenen was at risk of being destroyed. The vicar of Nordby Church, Pastor Andreas Bayer, had become aware of plans of breaking the stone into pieces *("Dyvelstenen" som man vil slaa i Stykker)*. Pastor Bayer contacted count *(lensgreve)* Danneskiold-Samsøe of Brattingborg, asking him to contact the National Museum in order to take action; the Danneskiold-Samsøe family then since long – and also today – supporting the antiquarian interests of Samsø in collaboration with the National Museum (Eriksen 1990; Etting 2018). On Friday, 23rd of September, at 2:15 PM the National Museum received a telephone call from count Danneskiold-Samsø asking for help and support on this important matter. According to the administrative notes of that day (documents of the topographic archive at the National Museum, Danish Prehistory, j. no. 666/32), a possible protection of Dyvelstenen, should be considered; and here a connection with tales of unfertile women coming to Dyvelstenen, to be able to carry children, was mentioned.

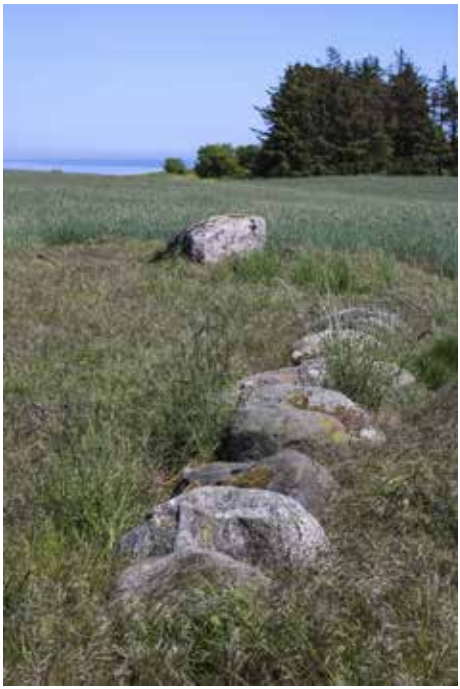
Most promptly, the National Museum went into action. The monument conservator of the National Museum, Julius Raklev, was in these days incidentally working with Neolithic dolmen restauration on Samsø. The notes inform us that a letter would not reach J. Raklev before the afternoon or evening on the following day, Saturday, 24th of September. Consequently, a telegram was immediately dispatched to J. Raklev: *"Contact Pastor Bayer, Nordby. Investigate Dyvelstenen. Consider protec-*

tion of the site". The telegram reached J. Raklev, and during the evening of Friday, 23rd of September, he could plan his work for the day to come, 24th of September 1932. Raklev (and probably a not mentioned team of workmen) worked through the full day of the 24th of September, and a report was soon mailed to the National Museum (in our 'internet-times', we shall not forget, that communication and consequently action was as swift almost hundred years ago, as today).

The site was cleared and cleaned for stone rubbish. The last remains of a recent sheep shelter was removed, as well as piles of larger and smaller stones collected by the farmer from the fields close-by.

After clearing and investigating the site, J. Raklev could conclude that Dyvelstenen was either the capstone or a chamber-side-stone of a ruined dolmen chamber. Furthermore, he pointed out that two of the larger stones north of the ruined monument seem to be at their original place, as kerb stones of the dolmen. No further documentation is presented. But since Raklev, as a prominent researcher and conservator of megalithic tombs, was familiar with their constructional details, he had probably by a small-scale excavation effort found sufficient evidence for this statement, finding traces of the original stone sockets of two of these stones.

Fig. 2. Dyvelstenen, probably the cap stone of a Neolithic dolmen, where the remains of the kerb stones of the long dolmen cairn is seen in the foreground. Photo: F. Kaul).



Even though J. Raklev cleared the site, he could conclude that the dolmen ruin was of no value considering initiating a protection process. According to Raklev, no one would understand that the Dyvelstenen was the remains of a (Neolithic) Stone Age long dolmen. Even though the vicar of Nordby, Pastor Bayer could very well understand these arguments, he was thinking of the possibility of putting the "large and beautiful" stone in upright position, and protect the remains of the long dolmen, for the sake of the tales (in Danish: *"for Sagnets Skyld"*). Pastor Bayer mentioned that at later time he would return to this possibility.

Thus, Dyvelstenen remained unprotected. Somehow, the intervention by the National Museum may have helped in avoiding the threatening demolition. Possibly, the attention to the tales may have contributed. One of the legends related to Dyvelstenen tells that if the stone is removed, it would cause fire in the village of Nordby (see below). Today Dyvelstenen and 12 other stones, representing the kerb stones of the long dolmen can be seen in a nicely kept and cleared area, with easy public access, close to the road. – probably not so different from the state in which Raklev left it in 1932 (Fig. 2, Fig. 3).

From 1932 and till today the history of Dyvelstenen can traced. In 1936, Pastor Andreas Bayer returned to his idea of raising Dyvelstenen in upright position, furthermore, making a small garden like plantation around, and even including an inscription on the stone. The idea was supported by conservator Julius Raklev, though rejected by the authorities of the

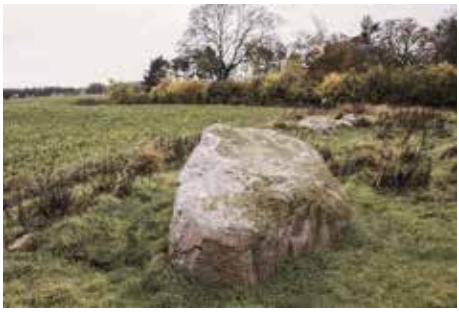


Fig. 3. Dyvelstenen in the foreground, the other remains of the megalith long dolmen in the background. Photo: F. Kaul.

National Museum. However, the leader of the Prehistoric department of the National Museum, Johannes Brøndsted writes in October 1936 that a protection of Dyvelstenen may be considered of "folkloristic reasons" (documents of the topographic archive at the National Museum, Danish Prehistory, j. no. 757/36).

But how could the idea of making an inscription and creating a small park emerge? – The answer is straightforward, when considering the historical context of the first half of the 20th century. In 1920, after the end of World War I, parts of South Jutland (North Schleswig), which was lost to Prussia/Germany after the 1864 war, was reunited with Denmark, after a referendum. The Danish people celebrated the return to Denmark by creating small memorial parks and raising memorial stones all over the country (*genforeningssten*). This 'National movement' continued during the 1930'ties. Also, on Samsø such celebrational monuments were erected (Eriksen 1990; Madsen 2007; Adriansen 2010), as one in Brundby, in the shape of a dolmen, being a symbol of Denmark (Fig. 4).

Fig. 4. Memorial miniature dolmen in Brundby, Samsø, erected in 1920, celebrating the reunion in 1920. The "Slesvig lions" are flanked by the historical years 1864 and 1920. Photo: F. Kaul.

Not all memorial stones erected in Denmark were related to the reunion of South Jutland with Denmark. From 1744 and onwards we can follow a tradition of raising memorial stones related to specific archaeological finds and locations (Wienberg 2007, Kaul 2010: 38-41). Some of these memorial stones (with a temporal concentration in the 1930'ties and 1940'ties) should be understood as 'national monuments', but we shall not forget that such a memorial stone could as well represent a feeling of local identity, marking your own area as a place of importance (Adriansen 2010: 160-165); thus, creating a connection between the past and the present at your own place of living. As an example, I would like to mention a memorial stone, erected in 1945 (the year of the liberation from the Nazi-German occupation) commemorating the 1885 find of more than 110 small gold sheet boats deposited in the Bronze Age, c. 1400 BC at a large Bronze Age burial mound in Thy, Northwest Jutland (the Nors golden boats, see Jørgensen & Vang Petersen 1998: 90-91). The inscription is short and neutral, without any national affection, though we shall bear in mind the year of its erection, 1945: **"HER FANDTES I MULD – DE BAADE AF GULD – 1885"** ("The boats of gold – was found in this ground – 1885") (Fig. 5).

It is in this broad context that we shall understand Pastor Andreas Bayers interest in shaping Dyvelstenen, with inscription, into a 'historic' memorial site. Pastor Bayer was part of the general 'national movement' of the time, supporting the idea of erecting stones commemorating the return of South Jutland to "Mother Denmark". However, the local affection as to connecting the past and present was seemingly his main guidance when at a speech at the yearly St. Poul's Meeting in January

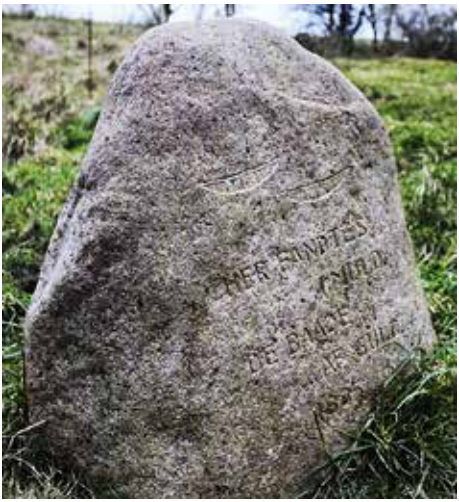


Fig. 5. Memorial stone, marking the find spot of one of the most important Bronze Age votive depositions, the golden boats at Thorshøj, Nors, Northwest Jutland. The monument was created in 1945, the year of the liberation from the German occupation of Denmark, April 1940 – May 1945. Photo: E. Dalby.

1936 in Nordby (a sort of a traditional *thing* meeting, still maintained today (Schmidt 1941: 32)) he argued for erecting Dyvelstenen as a standing stone proper, with this suggested inscription, where Dyvelstenen itself speaks (Article in *Samsø Folkeblad*, 27th of January 1936):

"Fra Jordens Urfjæld kom jeg.
Isen bar mig hertil.
Kæmpegrav dækkede jeg.
Overtro ofrede til mig.
Nu æres jeg kun for min Ælde."

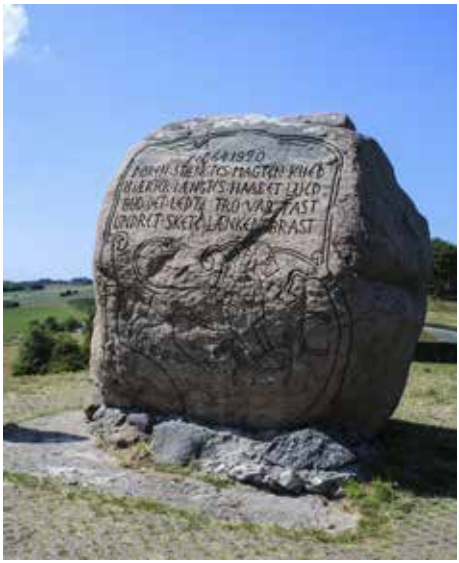
In my translation (FK):

"I came from Archaean rock.
Ice glaciers brought me to Samsø.
Once, I covered a giant's tomb.
Beliefs of superstition gave me offerings.
Now, I am solely honored for my age."

The suggested inscription, in a sense being rational, in a sense showing romantic sentiment, does not refer to South Jutland's reunion with Denmark. However, in Pastor Bayer's speech the connections to those memorial stones celebrating this historical moment are apparent. First, he mentions that Dyvelstenen once was part of a Stone Age dolmen, and it must have been a tremendous undertaking (*et kæmpeværk*) to build the stone dolmen and to place Dyvelstenen as a capstone of the chamber. Then, as sort of comparison he brings up the huge reunion stone raised on the burial mound Esterhøj at Høve, Odsherred, Northwest Zealand, 1920: How virtually all the people of the area by long ropes pulled the gigantic stone from the low coastal land all the way higher places in the landscape, crowned by the ancient burial mounds (Fig 6).

In his speech, Pastor Bayer mentions the beliefs in the supernatural forces of Dyvelstenen that could remedy infertility, when people presented an appropriate sacrifice to the stone. He also notes that the stone several times had been in danger of being broken into pieces. He goes further back in time and speaks about sacrificial ceremonies that may have taken place

Fig. 6. Troldstenen, now a reunion stone on Esterhøj at Høve, Northwest Zealand. The stone weights app. 25 tons. In 1920, It took 14 days for 500 men and 22 horses to drag it (on a wagon) the c. 2,5 km from the coast to Esterhøj, with an elevation difference of 85 m. A great communal celebrational event. Photo: F. Kaul.



when the mighty dolmen for the first time showed its contour against heaven; though we cannot comprehend the full reality of the rituals of those distant times.

For obvious reasons Pastor Bayer could not know that evidence would emerge in the years to come, giving a glimpse of ritual activity taking place at a time when the dolmen was young. In 1957 a votive deposition of one flint halberd and two thin-butted flint axes was found by digging in the yard of Dyvelsgården, just 100 meters west of Dyvelstenen (Fig. 7). In 1960 the three fine flint objects were donated to the National Museum (Ebbesen 1994, 116 & 129; registered site number (Nordby Parish): 030503-15; the National Museum, Danish Prehistory inv. no. A 49062-49064). From the typology of the flint halberd and axes, they belong to the time at the transition between the Early and Middle Neolithic of Denmark, in absolute years c. 3200 BC. Even though this votive deposition can not be directly connected with the Dyvelsten Dolmen, we must envisage that when these objects were deposited, the dolmen would have been seen as a relatively newly built monument standing as a marker in the formation of the Neolithic ritual landscape.

During the late 1970'es (1979), Dyvelstenen once more came into focus. Again, the area around Dyvelstenen had been filled with rubbish and stone heaps. As in 1932 the area was cleared for vegetation and a mess of stones fetched in the nearby fields, almost covering Dyvelstenen, now by the communal administration and road works. Thus, making the site accessible for visitors/tourists. The nearby road was widened (Lidegaard 1994 & personal communication with local informants, 2020). In 1979-1980 the tales of the Dyvelstenen being related to protection against fire or outbreak of fire were invigorated (see below).

In 2008, the work towards a formal protection act was commenced, concluded in 2017 by the official recording (*tinglysning*) of Dyvelstenen as a protected monument, though not as a prehistoric dolmen

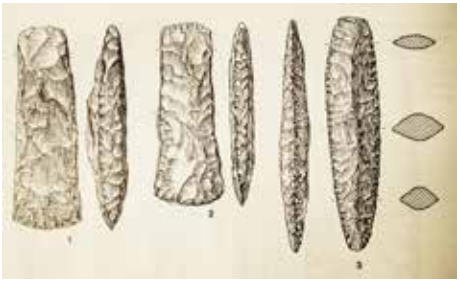


Fig. 7. A flint halberd and two thin butted flint axes deposited c. 100 west of Dyvelstenen. Neolithic Funnel Beaker Culture, c. 3200 BC. Length of the halberd: 16,6 cm. Drawing by H. Ørsnes, after Ebbesen 1994.

as such, but as a "stone of legends" (*sagnsten*), with reference to the related layers of myths. As we have seen, it may very well be the legends that protected this site for years before the formal legislation protection came into use – a scenario known from quite some other Danish Prehistoric monuments (Kaul 1988: 29-30; Eriksen 1990: 55).

Giants or trolls throwing a stone after a newly built church

Such legends are most common, and are known from all over Denmark, (Tang Kristensen 1895, 27 ff.), as well as in Sweden and Norway (Schmidt 1933, 70 ff.). On Samsø itself, the capstone of a dolmen called *Knøsen*, South Samsø, is covered by cup-marks, probably from the Bronze Age. Here, the cup marks were understood as the marks made by the fingers of a giant, while throwing the stone, from Røsnæs, the peninsula of Zealand 'pointing' at Samsø. In this case a church is seemingly not mentioned (Eriksen 1990, 60 & 160). But a stone thrown by the giant living at Visborg Castle, Samsø, was aimed at Kolby Church, Samsø, while being under construction (Schmidt 1933, 148).

Dyvelstenen itself embody different versions of the theme of a giant throwing one or more stones after a church, here Nordby church, but missed – by more than one km. But we should take into account that these giants were living relatively far away, on the East Jutland land of Mols,

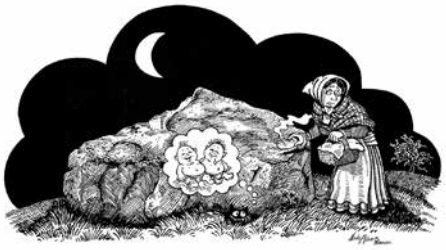
the peninsula of Helgenæs, or the small island of Hjelm, so it may have been difficult to aim precisely (from the southern tip of the Helgenæs Peninsula to Dyvelstenen, there are about 13 km as the crow flies). A more detailed story tells us that a giant of Helgenæs (or Hjelm) visited the giant on Samsø, and here a marriage was promised by the Samsø giant with his beautiful daughter. However, the desirable daughter became a Christian, and she persuaded her father to build Nordby Church. The young, adorable beauty let the Helgenæs giant and the 'gentleman caller' know that the marriage would be cancelled, unless he became a Christian. In his wrath, he threw three stones after Nordby church, one of them: Dyvelstenen (Eriksen 1990, 53-54; Lidegaard 1994, 92).

Even though we are facing legends of folklore considering giants, there might be some 'forgotten' concrete social/political issues concealed in the words recorded. The introduction of Christianity in the Late Viking Age was not necessarily a smooth process when the leading families or clans made their decisions. For a time, old political marriage systems were disrupted by different faith systems.

Fertility – the children came from Dyvelstenen

As to myths related to fertility, Dyvelstenen is of great importance. The children from North Samsø came from Dyvelstenen (Fig. 8), and from here the ready-to-born-children are somehow fetched by the midwife on her way to the birth proper. As stated by an old man from Nordby more than 100 years ago: We all come from Dyvelstenen (Schmidt 1933: 149-150; Eriksen 1990: 54).

Fig. 8. The children came from Dyvelstenen, and you can make bread offerings in the wish for fertility – as shown on this captivating drawing by Niels Milan Pedersen, from Eriksen 1990.



The legend of the children coming from Dyvelstenen is still vivid among the inhabitants of Nordby. In the autumn 2020 I talked with one of the Nordby residents about what could happen if Dyvelstenen was demolished or removed. I said: "A fire might break out in Nordby". The answer came most promptly: "Yes, and the people in Nordby will become infertile" (danish: *barnløse*). The knowledge of the power and qualities of that stone remain intact today. I would here like to underline, that as anthropologist or sociologist of religion, I am not asking as to beliefs proper, but as to knowledge (see Schmidt 1933: 95-97); and we can conclude that the knowledge is intact today. When I asked another informant about the general knowledge of these tales or stories related to Dyvelstenen, I was told that it was common knowledge at Nordby. However, it was mentioned that the young generation may not be so well acquainted with the Dyvelstenen stories as former generations.

Dyvelstenen stands not alone considering the tales that the children should come from the stone or underneath it. More than 25 examples, mostly in eastern Denmark, are known. Often it is told that the midwife fetched the children at the sacred stone, not the stork, or alternatively, it was the stork, which fetched the children at the stone (Schmidt 1933: 93, 132, 140, 156, 162, 164, 189, 198 & 213). At one stone, Troldstenen, the Island of Lolland, South Denmark, it is told that you can hear the small children crying underneath the stone. In this case, the stork fetched the children (Schmidt 1933: 96 & 183; Wolsing 1949).

Bread offerings, rituals, and Dyvelstenen

From a theoretical/methodological point of view – for a researcher in religion – it

seems sensible to distinguish between references to a belief system and references to acts related to this system (Kaul 2004). Following this approach, it is now time to focus on the records on the acts, rituals and offerings related to Dyvelstenen (Fig. 9). The acts recorded are closely related to a fertility cult, where bread offerings for the stone and the not clearly defined transempirical powers behind that stone are essential.

In 1908, an old man (age 79) told that when he was a child, he took part in bread offering acts, carrying bread out to Dyvelstenen, left it on the stone. Then the children waited for a little brother or sister, to come from the stone (Schmidt 1933: 150). As late as in 1975, bread was seemingly offered at the stone (Lidegaard 1990: 93).

In the report by J. Raklev (see above), after clearing the site in 1932, we are informed that: "About "Dyvelstenen" old people told that they still remembered a time when newly baked warm bread was offered to the stone, when wishing an heir" (Danish: *"Om Dyvelstenen vidste ældre Folk at berette, at de mindedes endnu den Tid da man ofrede varmt nybagt Brød til denne naar man ønskede sig en Arving."*). Another similar story is recorded by Raklev (documents of the topographic archive at the National Museum, Danish Prehistory, j. no. 666/32 & Eriksen 1990: 54-55). Furthermore, in the administrative notes regarding the telephone conversation with count Danneskiold-Samsøe, 1932, it is mentioned that unfertile women came to Dyvelstenen, to be able to carry children (Danish: *"for at faa Børn"*).

Fig. 9. A natural hollow in Dyvelstenen offers an excellent place for depositing bread offerings. See fig. 8. Photo: F. Kaul.

In the stories recorded as to the ritual behavior related to fertility and child-birth some details are worth noting: If you want a little brother one sort of bread (wheat bread) should be deposited on the stone, while if wishing a little sister, then rye bread should be offered. However, different versions have been recorded as to what type of bread was connected to girl or boy. In another version, it was the midwife, who on her way to a birth, would offer a piece of bread, a 'sandwich', at Dyvelstenen (Schmidt 1933: 149-150; Lidegaard 1990: 92).

Not just bread was offered at Dyvelstenen. We are informed that in older days, young childless women came out to Dyvelstenen, where they offered small dolls, in the hope of pregnancy (Schmidt 1933: 150).

Bread and sacred stones

At Dyvelstenen, the bread offering evidence seems manifest. However, at a larger number of Danish sacred stones there are recordings of connections to baked bread, though offerings are not explicitly mentioned. Here, Dyvelstenen may be regarded as a 'key stone' for further understanding. In Danish folklore material, again and again, we hear of sacred stones 'enacting' with the human world, jumping or turning when feeling the smell of warm newly baked bread (Schmidt 1933: 96, with many listed examples). Of-

ten, there is just referred to the smell of bread, nothing more. In some cases it is the smell from the bakery in the nearby village that gives the stone the impetus of jumping, in other cases it is the smell of baked bread from the nearby farm, which makes influence on the stone (and supposedly the forces behind and below, trolls, pixies, elves, spirits, whatever).

As an example, Smedestenen at Kallerup, Raklev Parish, on the West Zealand peninsula of Røsnæs, 'ponting at nearby Samsø', should be highlighted. The stone seemingly, had a more advanced taste than normally, since it at certain occasions not just turned around when smelling newly baked bread, but also when smelling a warm omelet. It has been told, already before 1917, in a rational/joking way, that Smedestenen was not any more turning around, since it had lost it sense of smell. Smedestenen is the last remains of a Neolithic long dolmen, probably the cap stone of the dolmen chamber. After the end of World War II, in 1946, Smedestenen was put upright, as a memorial stone, and with an inscription commemorating the liberation after the Nazi-German occupation of Denmark, 9th of April 1940 – 5th of May 1945 (Schmidt 1933: 140; Nielsen 2013: 73-74; Nielsen 2015: 99-100). Dyvelstenen, on nearby Samsø, also part of a ruined dolmen, might have looked like this, if being re-erected as a memorial stone about two decades earlier – as Pastor Bayer of Nordby suggested (see above) (Fig. 10).

All these tales about stones jumping or turning when smelling bread may at first glance seem enigmatic. However, if we consider that these stories represent fragments of memory, then it seems possible to get closer to a meaning, where the recordings related to Dyvelstenen can fill out some of the gaps. It seems relatively easy to understand that the smell of newly baked bread refers to bread being placed on or at the stones. Perhaps, the jump may signify that the stone and the spirits behind has accepted the offering. When some stones respond on the smell from the bakery, then it should be regarded as a 'modernization' of the theme, while the meaning proper was forgotten.

It has been suggested that these stones, which turn when smelling new bread, originally were places for offerings presented or given to the spirits of the stone, probably as acts related to a fertility cult. In some cases, the legends of children coming from the stone and the stories of stones smelling bread is combined in one and the same stone. Through the centuries, at most of the places, the religious meaning was forgotten, only fragments survived, often as a joking remark (Schmidt 1933: 97).

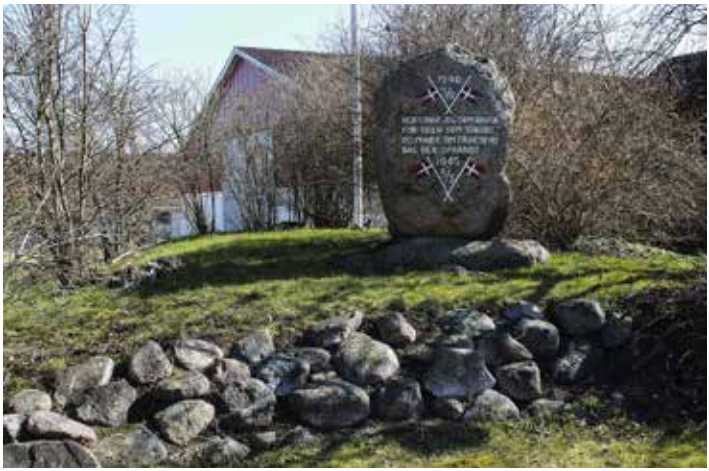


Fig. 10. Smedestenen, Kallerup, Røsnæs, West Zealand. Originally part of a Neolithic dolmen chamber, then being related to 'bread-smelling' legends, and finally serving as a memorial stone, celebrating the liberation from German occupation, May 1945; erected in 1946. The remains of the long dolmen mound is still visible as a slightly elevated structure, the memorial stone standing on top of that. Photo: F. Kaul.

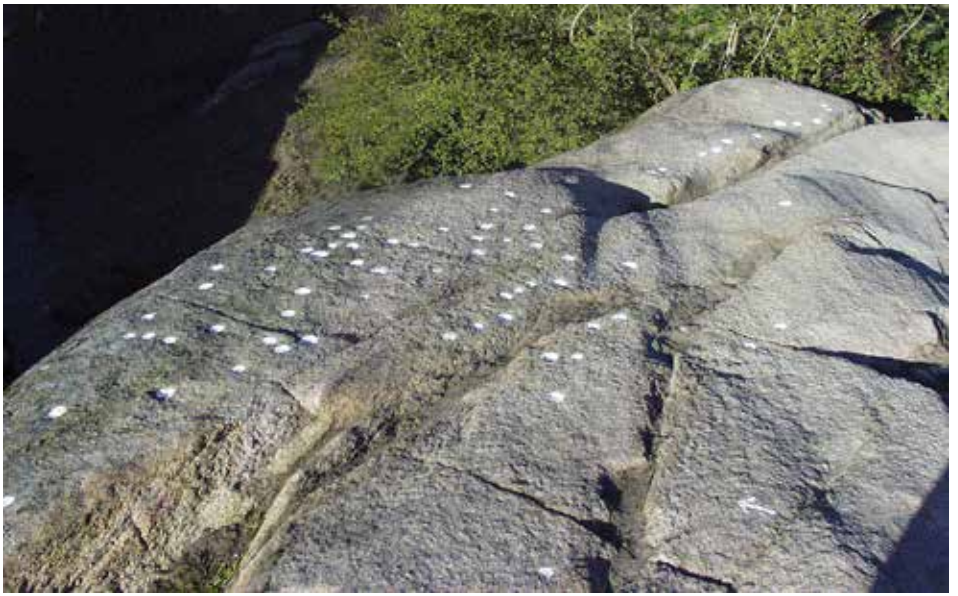


Fig. 11. Protruding rock dotted with cup marks, probably Bronze Age. The cup marks enhanced by chalk painting. A summer cottage is seen close by. Madseløkke/Stakkevænget, Allinge-Sandvig Parish, Bornholm, site registration number 060101: 224. Here, bread crumbs were 'offered'. Photo: F. Kaul/G. Milstreu.

In one case, a ritual act seems to have remained as a fragment, though without any further reference whatsoever. In the years around 2002, I was part of a research team working on a rock art documentation in the area rich in Bronze Age rock carvings between Allinge and Sandvig on North Bornholm (project of the Danish Research Council for Humanities & international EU-project *Rock art in Northern Europe (RANE)*. A number of rock carving sites were recorded and documented for the first time, among these a stone covered with more than 75 cup marks, at Stakkevænget (Kaul 2006: 53) (Fig. 11). As researchers we considered this 'newly found' rock carving as a sort of discovery. However, for one of the local inhabitants, this stone dotted with cup marks was certainly not to be understood as a new discovery. The informant, an elderly lady at about 70, told us that when she was a child, she and her friends were playing at the nearby fields. They went back to her home, and her mother gave them bread or cakes, which they could consume while continuing their play in the landscape. When passing 'our newly discovered' cup mark stone, they put small pieces of bread, bread-crumbs, in the cup marks, as they did with other cup mark stones in the vicinity (Fig. 12). When I asked why, the answer was clear and straightforward: "Because we always did so". Of course, this ritual could be a 'recent invention'. However, it could as well be regarded as representing the last memory of something more serious. At any rate, now this story has been recorded.

Other offerings, including offerings of dolls, a Swedish example

As seen above, young childless women offered dolls at Dyvelstenen, in the hope of pregnancy (Schmidt 1933; Eriksen 1990). From Sweden, there are accounts of offering of dolls at sacred stones, though seemingly not related to fertility aspects, but for curative purposes. From both Sweden and Norway it is recorded that dolls were made to cure illness. The dolls

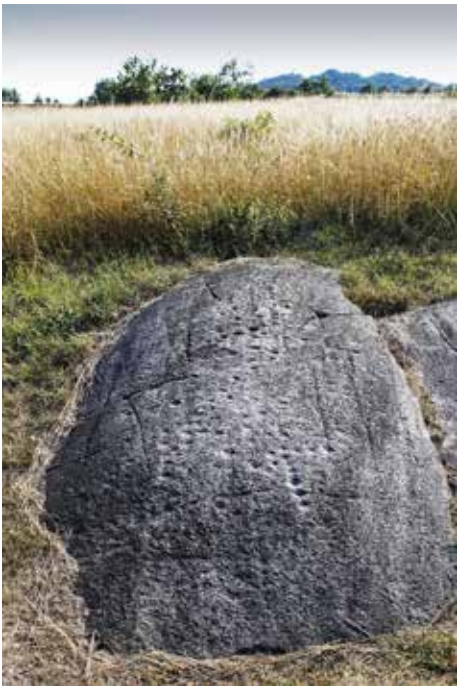


Fig. 12. Cup mark stone in the rich Bronze Age rock carving landscape in Allinge-Sandvig Parish, Bornholm; Madseløkke 2, site registration number 060101: 188. Photo: F. Kaul.

were made of nails, hair and a piece of textile from the clothing of the ill person. The doll was built up around a stick of rowan, a tree with references to folklore magic. According to these accounts, at a particular sacred stone, the Elf Boulder or Troll Stone, at Lindesberg, Västmanland, Sweden, dolls were offered. In 1846 an archaeological investigation was carried out on the cult site. The researcher was able to speak with practicing informants as well as collect some of the sacrificial items on and around the boulder: nine small puppets, eight made from textiles and one made of newsprint from 1821. The puppets contain rowan twigs, nails, hair, scraps of clothing and a brass pin. Five are known to survive today in Swedish collections. In 2003 an excavation was carried out at the very same stone. A number of coins dated from 1717 to 1979 were found. (Goldhahn 2018; Goldhahn 2020).

In the folklore material of Sweden and Denmark there are many accounts of offerings of coins, needles, pins bottoms, etc., some documented by observations at sacred stones (Schmidt 1933: 99; Goldhahn 2018: 226). Even today, you can still find coins in the ancient Bronze Age cup marks; just like in a wishing well or fountain, you perform the 'ritual' without deep beliefs, just as a happy ritual – like the coins thrown into *Fontana di Trevi*, Rome, or anywhere. What is an offering or a sacrifice? – what is an unpretentious wish for good luck?

Dyvelstenen
Fire and fire protection – and how to place a fire in a stone

In 1979-1980 the legends of Dyvelstenen became invigorated. In some sacred stones, as well as in sacred trees, a foreseen fire – a fire not yet to come – not wished to come – could be 'placed' in the firmness of stone or wood. It may seem for us, in our 'rational' world view of today, totally incomprehensive how it would be possible to place or lay a dangerous fire, to come or not to come, in a stone or a tree. But religion and beliefs does not work rational. However, when a farm or a village became a victim of fire, then it may have been quite rational to seek out the possible causes for a devastating fire.

In 1979, the road passing close to Dyvelstenen was widened a bit, and the area around Dyvelstenen was cleared for vegetation and stones fetched in the nearby fields (as in 1932). Now the famous stone could be visible for tourists in a nicely cleared area, respecting the stone itself (Lidegaard 1994: 92-93 & personal communication with Nordby informants). However, not all Nordby people was happy with the activities at Dyvelstenen. While the roadwork and clearing work was in progress, an old man from Nordby protested. He knew that a fire was placed in the stone, and if cleaning up around the stone, that fire – somehow kept in the stone – could be released (Lidegaard 1994: 93). And so it happened, when following

Fig. 13. A house on fire, Nordby, afternoon, 20th of April 1980. From Kalundborg Folkeblad, 21st of April 1980.

this ancient 'course-and-effect-system': On Sunday, 20th of April, at 11:30 1980, a fire started at a larger farm in Nordby Village – the fire sprung to other houses. Fortunately, the wind was relatively calm (it has been storming the day before), so 'only' one large farm and three village house were destroyed by the fire, and no humans or animals were harmed; though the fire was referred to as "the large fire in Nordby" (*storbranden i Nordby*) (Fig. 13).

In the aftermath of the fire, we can read in the newspaper (Kalundborg Folkeblad, 24th of April 1980) about the possible connection with the Nordby fire and Dyvelstenen (FK translation): "From ancient times, it has been told that it is not allowed to clear or tidy up around the stone – then a fire will come to Nordby… What is superstition, and what is coincidence? Dyvelstenen has been cleared, just before the tourist season, so that the tourists can get a better view of the stone. What happened: Last Sunday, there was fire in Nordby" (In Danish: "… *Som fortælles fra gammel tid. Man må ikke rydde væk omkring stenen, for så brænder det i Nordby. Er det nu overtro, eller er det blot en tilfældighed? Dyvelstenen er netop forud for turistsæsonen blevet blotlagt, så turisterne kan få øje på den. Hvad er sket: I søndags var der storbrand i Nordby.*).

In particular, the villages of Samsø were (and are) vulnerable to fire, since the old, compacted village structure has here remained, where no moving out of the single farms has taken place. The farms and houses are still, as in late Medieval times placed close together, and land allotment relates to the farms being in the villages as the centres, not related to single farms established outside the village. Nordby (Fig. 14) is considered as the largest and finest of villages of Denmark as a testimony of the ancient communal system (*landsbyfællesskab*) (Schmidt 1941; Egevang 1978; Etting 2018).

Perhaps, this close-knit community feeling could have kept the legends of 'superstitions' in mind, not just as minor fragments, as seen elsewhere, but as communal knowledge and tradition, and here supported by the local vicar, Pastor Bayer.

Nordby is not the only village of Samsø where this old clustering of farms and houses has remained. Hence, the problems as to fire and fire protections, have probably been more present than in other rural places of Denmark. On Samsø, the

Fig. 14. A nice view of the central part of Nordby. It was not this part of Nordby, which was devastated by the 1980-fire. photo. F. Kaul.

thatched roofs met another. In the records, we learn of more devastating fires than that of Nordby in 1980. Historical recordings from 1700 and onwards account of catastrophic fires on Samsø, such as in Brundby, Onsbjerg, Kolby and Ørby (Holm Sørensen 2004; Rasmussen 2004).

To place a fire in a stone or in a tree, some examples

The idea of a fire being released when making disturbances at sacred stones or trees is not uncommon. But at Dyvelstenen, these ideas seemingly, quite recently, became invigorated by the 1980 Nordby fire.

On south Samsø, south of the village of Kolby, it has been told that a farmer was attempting to remove the stones from a prehistoric tomb. A few stones had already been taken away. But neighbors told him that removing these stones would cause a fire on his farm. The farmer listened; he stopped his work and replaced the stones that were removed. It is not quite clear whether a fire did break out or whether the fire was just avoided by returning the stones to their original place (personal communication, Lis Nymark, Samsø).

Outside Samsø, similar evidence has been recorded. At Linå near Silkeborg, Central Jutland, a larger stone was removed and broken into pieces. Soon after the farm burnt (Schmidt 1933: 287). In a stone on Harreby Mark, at Hygum, West Jutland, a fire had been 'placed'. In 1907, the stone was cleft into pieces by a new owner, in spite of warnings by the neighbors. Soon after, in 1908, Harrebygård burnt. Apart from his own loss, the acts of the owner caused resent, and it was said not to touch the pieces of the stone in order to avoid further disasters. At Sennels at Thisted, northwest Jutland, at stone was broken into pieces, and one of the houses belonging to Ullerupgård burnt. It was told that if the stone disappeared, a fire would break out at Ullerupgård (Schmidt 1928: 68; Schmidt 1933: 233 & 330-331).

At Brædstrup, northwest of Horsens, a sacred stone, *Kræmmerstenen*, carry a part of the same story, though here, a fire, somehow 'hidden' in the stone, never broke out. We are simply told that if the stone became irritated, then the nearby farm would burn. The stone was close to

the children's way to school, and they took a rest on the stone (Lidegaard 1994: 224-225). Seemingly, the stone was happy with this.

Also, if destroying megalithic tombs proper, dolmens, a fire could be released. This is the case with three dolmens on the Island of Als, South Jutland. If the chamber of a dolmen in Kegnæs Parish was destroyed or the capstone was removed, the people of the nearby farm would die, or the farm of the owner would burn. The stones of a dolmen in Lysabild Parish are "fire-stones" (*brandsten*), and if the dolmen chamber was destroyed, the farm of the owner will catch fire. A fire has been placed in a dolmen in Tandslet Parish, and no one dare to destroy it. If this happened, the farm of the owner will be stricken by fire. Furthermore, we learn that people of the area were not afraid of demolishing a burial mound without stones or "fire-trees" (Schmidt 1928: 68).

The idea of placing or laying a fire or the threat of a fire in a tree is much more common than placing a fire in a stone. From Denmark (1928), 75 examples are known, the majority from southern parts of Jutland; there are no recorded examples from Samsø, the geographically closest account is from the area at Vejle, East Jutland (Schmidt 1928: 55-56).

As mentioned above, it may for us in our 'rational' world view of today be quite incomprehensive how it would be possible to place or lay a dangerous fire – to come or not to come – in a stone or a tree. However, a sort of rationalism can still be found behind the mysterious legends. Probably, in some cases, the observations that larger trees attract lightning would have been a decisive factor for choosing the "fire-tree" (*brandtræet*). After a flash of lightning had hit a tree close to the farm or in the farmyard itself, this very tree had taken away the fire from the farmhouses and kept the 'firepower' of lightning in its body. The potentials of a coming fire were stored in the tree (Schmidt 1928: 56; Lidegaard 1996: 33).

If a "fire-tree" was felled, then the fire would be released. If it was felled by storm or lightning, by natural causes, it was important not to remove its remains. While the tree rotted, the potential fire could move down into the ground.

A possible fire could be seen in a vision, in a dream. To avoid such a seen fire to break out, a wise person – such as the priest – could place the fire as a sort of exorcism, probably using a magical spell (Schmidt 1928: 55).

However, a fire could be placed in a tree in a more physical sense. After a vision of pre-fire, a wise person was called. He charred some wooden pegs over the fireplace or stove of the house while reciting a secret magic formula. Then the bark of the chosen tree was loosened, and a hole was drilled into the wood. The charred peg was driven in the hole, which was closed by a wooden plug. Finally, the bark was carefully put back, so that the tree could heal, the fire becoming totally contained in the tree. Actually, such black-charred pegs have been found in fallen 'fire-trees' on the island of Als, South Jutland (Lidegaard 1996: 33). Thus, not just spells were used, but physical pieces of burnt material representing a fire were placed in such trees. At the same time, these charred pegs should be considered as representing a controlled fire. The attempted control of fire and burnt material has become physical, as part of material culture.

Concluding remarks

I consider Dyvelstenen as one of the most important sacred stones of Denmark. In the legends, different folklore phenomena can be followed, representing both beliefs and ritual behavior. Most important is that the traditional tales are not forgotten. At Nordby, Samsø, this knowledge is present today. The research is not restricted to reading old accounts in archives, books and articles; you can meet people, discuss matters, for instance discuss the 1980 Nordby fire, talk with firemen, who remembered that day.

The microcosm of Dyvelstenen with its detailed folklore material, can yield insight and explanation as to stories, not so comprehensive, from elsewhere in the country. From Dyvelstenen's microcosm, the religious phenomena represented here can be traced further in time and space into the large macrocosm of ancient beliefs and rituals related to fertility magic, bread offerings and fire protection. The present article invites to further research, connecting the past and the present, including archaeological evidence.

As an extra plus, Dyvelstenen's historical history can be related to the political history of our times, the ending of WW I, and commemoration of the return of parts of South Jutland to Denmark in 1920. Dyvelstenen was not turned into a standing stone, a local or national memorial; but remained in the field north of Nordby as a humble monument (measuring 3.4 x 1.9 m) carrying a long history.

Thus, in conclusion, the words of Pastor Bayer (1936) are recaptured:

"I came from Archaean rock.
Ice glaciers brought me to Samsø.
Once, I covered a giant's tomb.
Beliefs of superstition gave me offerings.
Now, I am solely honored for my age."

Gently disputing the words by Pastor Bayer, I would like to add one closing comment, addressed to Dyvelstenen itself: Today, you are not merely honored for your age, but first and foremost for the communication that you have shared with peoples of the past and the present.

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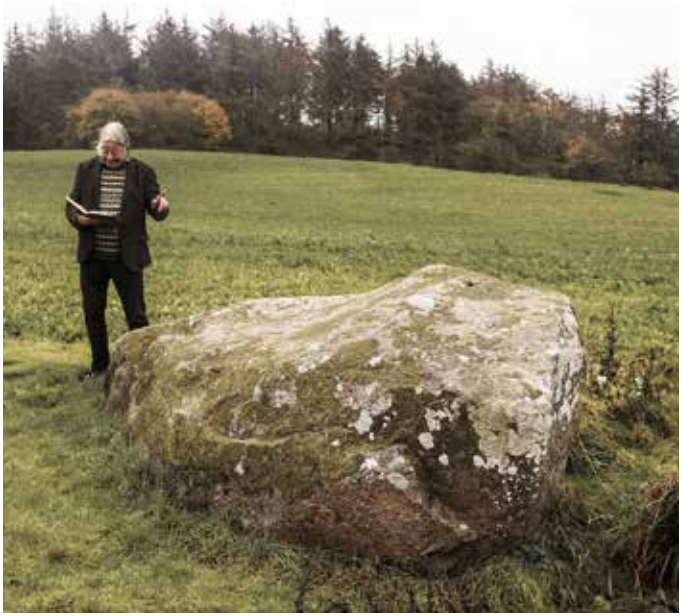

Fig. 15. The present author in communication and research at Dyvelstenen. Photo: Inge-Mette Petersen.