Sivs festskrift

Primitive tider

Sivs festskrift

Primitive tider

Spesialutgave 2023

Redaktører spesialutgave: Anja Mansrud, Ingunn Røstad, Unn Pedersen og Kristin Armstrong Oma

Spesialutgave 2023

ISSN 1501-0430

Postadresse:
Primitive tider
Postboks 6727, St. Olavs plass
0130 Oslo
Norway

Epost: kontakt@primitive-tider.com

Nettside: https://journals.uio.no/PT/index

Ombrekk: Marie Dave Amundsen

Trykk: Grafisk senter, Universitetet i Oslo

Forsideillustrasjon: Arne Johan Nærøy © Arkeologisk museum, Universitetet i Stavanger.
Foto s. 3 (neste side): Bodil Teig, Gyldendal.

Skrive for Primitive tider?

Primitive tider oppfordrer spesielt uetablerte forfattere til å skrive. Vi er interessert i artikler, kommentarer til tidligere artikler og rapporter (enklere, ikke fagfellevurderte tekster). Kanskje blir din artikkel neste nummers debattema! Send inn ditt manuskript og la det få en faglig og seriøs vurdering av redaksjonen. Husk at hele prosessen kan være tidkrevende, så planegg i god tid.

Innleveringsfrister og forfatterveiledningen finner du på våre nettsider:
https://journals.uio.no/PT/index

Dear Siv,

Throughout the years you have inspired us all immensely, with your books, articles, talks in museums and beyond, and not least the many informal chats. You approach people like you approach the archaeological material, with curiosity and enthusiasm, seeing and supporting us at the different stages in our careers. You generously share your vast knowledge and keen insights. Combining a sharp eye with a kind and inviting attitude, you encourage people around you and make them aware of their strengths. With this book we hope to give something back to you as a token of our appreciation. Here is a collection of articles from researchers and museum staff you have encountered at different times in your career, and a Tabula reflecting your wide international network of colleagues and friends.

When sending out the invitation to a selected group to contribute with a paper to this collection, we made the order both specific and open, simply asking for 'something you would like Siv to read!' The invitation included texts to be peer reviewed, and more popularising, non-reviewed papers. The result is a mix of texts from scholars in various fields, including craft practitioners and designers. The outcome shows that the contributors have taken our request to heart, making this a personal book, with contributions both in English and all the Scandinavian languages on various "Siv-related" topics.

The book testifies to your huge impact, and how your thinking and publications have stimulated research in various fields. You will notice how the contributors have a secondary agenda, reminding you of all the research projects – big and small – and all the discussion and dialogue still ahead of you. We hope you will take these hints as subtle invitations towards further joint efforts and collaborations in the years to come.

The editors, Anja Mansrud, Ingunn Røstad, Unn Pedersen og Kristin Armstrong Oma,
on behalf of all of us

Tabula Gratulatoria

Marie Dave Amundsen,
Universitetet i Oslo

Ingvild Andreassen,
Universitetet i Oslo

Anders Andrén,
Stockholms universitet

Rica Annaert,
Ekeren

Arkeologisk bibliotek,
Universitetet i Oslo

Kristin Armstrong Oma,
Universitetet i Stavanger

Morten Axboe og Else Bojsen,
Virum

Irene Baug,
Universitetet i Bergen

Charlotte Behr,
University of Roehampton London

Birgitta Berglund,
NTNU

Jostein Bergstøl,
Universitetet i Oslo

Knut Andreas Bergsvik,
Universitetet i Bergen

Rosie Bishop,
Universitetet i Stavanger

Ruth Blankenfeldt,
Zentrum für Baltische und Skandinavische Archäologie

Meriem Boulaziz,
Universitetet i Oslo

Heidi M. Breivik,
NTNU

Margareth Hana Buer,
Universitetet i Stavanger

Grethe Bjørkan Bukkemoen,
Universitetet i Oslo

Jørgen Tinglum Bøckman,
Veien kulturminnepark

Ellen Tjørnholm Bøe,
Universitetet i Stavanger

Claus v. Carnap-Bornheim,
Fahrdorf

Torben Trier Christiansen,
Nordjyske Museer

Barbro Dahl,
Universitetet i Stavanger

Volker Demuth,
Universitetet i Stavanger

Tania Dickinson,
University of York

Sigrid Alræk Dugstad,
Universitetet i Stavanger

Bettina Ebert,
Universitetet i Stavanger

Krister Eilertsen,
Universitetet i Stavanger

Øystein Ekroll,
Nidaros Domkirkes Restaureringsarbeider

Kathy Elliott,
Universitetet i Oslo

Asbjørn Engevik,
Universitetet i Bergen

Per Ethelberg og Anne Birgitte Sørensen,
Museum Sønderjylland

Lars Forseth,
Trøndelag fylkeskommune

Per Ditlef Fredriksen,
Universitetet i Oslo

Ingrid Fuglestvedt,
Universitetet i Oslo

Kidane Gebremariam,
Universitetet i Stavanger

Berit Gjerland,
Førde

Lars Erik Gjerpe,
Universitetet i Oslo

Zanette T. Glørstad,
Universitetet i Oslo

Line Grindkåsa,
Vestfold og Telemark fylkeskommune

Anne-Sofie Gräslund,
Uppsala universitet

Sverre Christoffer Guldberg,
Universitetet i Stavanger

Svein H. Gullbekk,
Universitetet i Oslo

Sigrid Mannsåker Gundersen,
Viken fylkeskommune

Ingar Mørkestøl Gundersen,
Universitetet i Oslo

Ulla Lund Hansen,
Københavns Universitet

Sue Harrington,
Durham University

Åsa Dahlin Hauken,
Universitetet i Stavanger

Lotte Hedeager,
Universitetet i Oslo

Charlotte Hedenstierna-Jonson,
Uppsala universitet

Catherine Hills,
University of Cambridge

John Hines,
Cardiff University

Kari Loe Hjelle,
Universitetet i Bergen

Tove Hjørungdal,
Göteborgs universitet

Hege Ingjerd Hollund,
Universitetet i Stavanger

Alf Tore Hommedal,
Universitetet i Bergen

Anne Karin Hufthammer og Svein Indrelid,
Universitetet i Bergen

Randi Håland,
Universitetet i Bergen

Nelleke IJssennagger-van der Pluijm,
Fryske Akademy

Xenia Pauli Jensen,
Moesgaard Museum

Tuija Kirkinen,
University of Helsinki

Arild Klokkervoll,
Universitetet i Stavanger

Egge Knol,
Groninger Museum

Kyrre Kverndokk,
Universitetet i Bergen

Grete og Arnvid Lillehammer,
Universitetet i Stavanger

Anders Lindahl,
Lund University and University of Pretoria

Julie Lund,
Universitetet i Oslo

Ole Madsen,
Universitetet i Stavanger

Bente Magnus,
Oslo

Anja Mansrud,
Universitetet i Stavanger

Toby Martin,
University of Oxford

Sonja Marzinzik,
Bavarian State Archaeological Collection

Lene Melheim,
Universitetet i Oslo

Trond Meling,
Universitetet i Stavanger

Marianne Moen,
Universitetet i Oslo

Marte Mokkelbost,
Universitetet i Bergen

Michael Neiß,
Lunds universitet and Aarhus Universitet

Karen Høilund Nielsen,
Aarhus Universitet

Camilla Nordby,
Universitetet i Bergen

Linda Nordeide,
Viken fylkeskommune

Astrid J. Nyland,
Universitetet i Stavanger

Arne Johan Nærøy,
Universitetet i Stavanger

Sigmund Oehrl,
Universitetet i Stavanger

Terje Oestigaard,
Uppsala universitet

John Olsen,
Vest-Agder-museet

Unn Pedersen,
Universitetet i Oslo

Grethe Moéll Pedersen,
Universitetet i Stavanger

Alexandra Pesch,
Zentrum für Baltische und Skandinavische Archäologie

Aina Margrethe Heen Pettersen,
NTNU

Christopher Prescott,
Universitetet i Oslo

Lisbeth Prøsch-Danielsen,
Universitetet i Stavanger

Linn Eikje Ramberg,
Universitetet i Stavanger

Morten Ramstad,
Universitetet i Bergen

Andreas Rau,
Zentrum für Baltische und Skandinavische Archäologie

Katja Regevik,
Vest-Agder-museet

Håkon Reiersen,
Universitetet i Stavanger

Martin Rundkvist,
Uniwersytet Łódzki

Bente Ruud,
Universitetet i Stavanger

Solveig Sølna Rødsdalen,
Universitetet i Stavanger

Christian Løchsen Rødsrud,
Universitetet i Oslo

Ingunn M. Røstad,
Universitetet i Oslo

Margrete Figenschou Simonsen,
Universitetet i Oslo

Ole Jacob Stalheim Skagen,
Oslo

Dagfinn Skre,
Universitetet i Oslo

Brit Solli,
Universitetet i Oslo

Marte Spangen,
Universitetet i Oslo

Kathrine Stene,
Universitetet i Oslo

Randi Stoltz,
Bergen

Nils Ole Sundet,
Agder fylkeskommune

Olof Sundqvist,
Stockholms universitet

Birgit Tansøy,
Vestland fylkeskommune

Espen Uleberg,
Universitetet i Oslo

Hege Vatnaland,
Stavanger

Marianne Vedeler,
Universitetet i Oslo

Tingvatn fornminnepark,
Vest-Agder-museet

Vibeke Maria Viestad,
Universitetet i Oslo

James Walker,
University of Bradford

Anna Wessman,
Universitetet i Bergen

Sara Westling,
Universitetet i Stavanger

Nancy L. Wicker,
University of Mississippi

Ingrid Ystgaard,
NTNU

Torun Zachrisson,
Upplandsmuseet

Mari Arentz Østmo,
Universitetet i Oslo

Hanne Lovise Aannestad,
Universitetet i Oslo

Innhold

Fagfellevurderte artikler:

Andre artikler:

Giving mixed signals
On gendered readings of Late Iron Age figurines

Marie Dave Amundsen
Department of Archaeology, Conservation and History, University of Oslo

Marianne Moen
Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo

When faced with bodies from the past – both figurative and literal – archaeologists tend to assign identity according to certain criteria, out of which gender is often top of the list. Thus, when faced with burials (the literal remains of past bodies), one of the first questions asked, and which consequently determines how the identity of the deceased is envisaged by the archaeologist, is whether the body should be understood as male or female (Arnold and Wicker 2001, Crass 2001, Arnold 2006). This is no different when we are faced with pictorial representations (figurative bodies): here again, we seek to assign a legible and binary gender through which we can make sense of what it is we are seeing (as discussed in e.g. Danielsson 2007, and evident in Mannering 2013). This ties in with the deeply engrained and naturalised modern ideals of sex and gender as interdependent (as discussed in e.g. Danielsson 2007, Moen 2019), and we posit here that this interpretative hurdle hinders exploration of identities across intersectional and relational lines.

In this brief and explorative paper, we seek to discover what happens when we detach such bodies from the expectation of them embodying gendered realities. We frame our discussion by using two well-known Viking Age figurines, both representing human forms but with somewhat mixed gendered characteristics that also in previous literature has been held up as corresponding case studies (e.g. Danielsson 2010, Christensen 2010:147, Arwill-Nordbladh 2014). One is a small, silver pendant from a grave in Aska, Östergötland in Sweden, often interpreted as a representation of Freyja (Figure 1) (Arwill-Nordbladh 2008, Arwill-Nordbladh 2012). The other is the seated figurine from Lejre in Denmark, commonly labelled 'Odin from Lejre' (Figure 2) (Rundkvist 2009, Christensen 2010, Danielsson 2010, Arwill-Nordbladh 2014). In juxtaposing these two figurines, we are drawing inspiration from previous work by both Elisabeth Arwill-Nordbladh and Ing-Marie Back Danielsson (as above).

In order to situate our study, a short explanation on where we are thinking from is needed, as the ideas used to formulate thinking matter (Pétursdóttir 2020:93 with references). Dealing with deeply dualistic ways of thinking and being in the world, and the desire to categorise people, places and objects according to modern and often Eurocentric worldviews, the fragmented material remains from the distant past is – naturally – put into frameworks that make sense for us today. Seeking to break away from this, we argue that the past is a foreign country (Lowenthal 1985), and that gender, as so many other things, may have been done differently there. We are all entangled with the materialities around us;

materials, things and different entities. When confronted with archaeological material, we are faced with something that is also a meeting place between many different knowledges, pasts and presents. Laurent Olivier (2011) has implied that archaeology is closer to memory than history, as the fragmented state of the archaeological record has much in common with the fragmented ways memory works (see also Pétursdóttir 2012:600). Despite the fragmented state of the archaeological material, things possess the agency to transfer memory across the depths of time. For example, in the process of making 'our' two small figurines, there was a dialogue between the materials, the things, the people and the societal context they came to be in, as studies of technology have clearly shown (see e.g. Amundsen 2021, for a discussion). The many relations that make the beings of things are thus one of our main starting points in this brief exploration. We propose that the gendered ambiguities of the two figurines, often debated within an either/or binary gender framework (Rundkvist 2009, Mannering 2013), can instead be approached with a view to exploring their symbolic language in a relational and fluid context (see also Danielsson 2010). Below, we instigate a discussion of gendered relevance as set against what we perceive as a symbolic language that must be understood as very different from modern Eurocentric values and perceptions. We offer this paper not as a manual for new interpretations of the past, but rather as an experimental assessment aimed at raising questions and debate. In short, we offer this brief exploration in the spirit of Siv Kristoffersen's interpretative glance where form and function in symbolism can be understood in multiple and coexisting ways, to create stories that can shed new light on how we view the past.

Background

The past several decades has seen considerable scholarly focus on gender in Iron Age archaeology (e.g. Dommasnes 1982, Arwill-Nordbladh 1998, Kristoffersen 1999, Stalsberg 2001, Pedersen 2008, Hillerdal 2009, Moen 2019), resulting in nuanced views of ways of being in relation to gendered identities in the past. Older and more conservatively grounded versions of Iron Age social order place men in visible positions of power and in active roles of social endeavour, often with an explicit reference to their social superiority over women (e.g. Solberg 2003, Sigurðsson 2010). Conversely, gendered and feminist scholarship has amply demonstrated that this is too simple, failing to take into account the numerous social roles inhabited by both men and women, and the variable degree of social agency according to status (Stalsberg 1991, Arwill-Nordbladh 1998, Kristoffersen 1999, Pedersen 2008). The result has been a highly necessary redress of an outdated and overly simplistic view of the past, yet a dimension that remains somewhat underexplored is a critical view of what gender is assumed to mean. How it is constituted, its relationship with bodies and embodied experience, and indeed its role in identity creation and maintenance are becoming apparent as new and potentially fruitful questions to pose (Danielsson 2007, Moen 2019, Croix Forthcoming).

Parcelled into the process of determining gender, lies a set of established characteristics and assumed social roles that come with assigned status, allotted tasks and responsibilities. Thus, we tend to use dress accessories, dress, insignia and certain tools to decide whether we believe bodies – both figurative and literal – should be seen as male or female (Danielsson 2007, Moen 2019, Croix Forthcoming). In mortuary archaeology, this results in interpretative divides between presumed 'male' and 'female' graves, often neglecting that these graves have quite as much in common as they have that set them apart, in the shape of common tools and equipment, animal remains and other finds. A further neglected dimension is that there is most often a considerable number of graves that cannot be assigned a gender at all (Moen 2019: 263-5, Amundsen 2021, Croix Forthcoming). In pictorial representations, it leads to a

tendency to ascribe gender based on dress and hairstyle. Women are identified by long hair and distinctive hairstyles such as the Irish ribbon knot ponytail (Arwill-Nordbladh 2016), along with long dresses and distinctive jewellery (Mannering 2013). Men tend to be identified through weaponry, facial hair, trousers or visible legs (Mannering 2013, Ashby 2014). Whilst we do not seek to quibble with whether or not these traits can indeed communicate gender, it remains an interesting dichotomy that a considerable number of representations seem to combine traits from both. Thus, we find women bearing arms in a variety of representations (Gardeła 2017, Vedeler 2019), whilst men can have long hair, and facial hair is by no means universal (Ashby 2014, Arwill-Nordbladh 2016). We wish to consider this in light of Ing-Marie Dack Danielsson's discussion of how gendered markers in pictorial representations need not remain constant through time, and are best understood as contextual (Danielsson 2007:46-8). It may be that when we seek to determine what sex the body represented in a figurine is meant to be, we are asking the wrong question. There is moreover a point to be made about how much we know about normative dress and accessories in Viking Age daily life. It bears considering that reconstructed dress styles from pictorial representations and grave finds may communicate an ideal more than a universal template, communicating fixed roles rather than the nuanced whole of a person's lived identity. Research on gender in Iron Age archaeology has followed societal trends in how gender is understood. It is fair to say that we may be approaching a crossroads in terms of what we believe gender is, and how this intersects with bodily realities (Fausto-Sterling 1993, Joel et al. 2015, Lykke 2016). Whilst in the past archaeological interpretations took gender as naturally embodied and therefore prescriptive of how to view past bodies, more recent work seeks instead to nuance this by asking different questions about how identities are created. It is in this spirit we will turn to our two examples below.

Material presentation and discussion

Siv Kristoffersen's capacity for meeting the archaeological material not only with scientific precision, but also with a sense of wonder has formed our inspiration here. In our meetings with the two figurines, wonder (or perhaps wondering), has been an essential method for trying to see beyond their assigned identities of 'Freyja' or 'Odin', and instead explore them detached from earlier, largely gender-determined interpretations. In the below, we offer descriptions of the two figurines that form our material. We add the caveat that our study is based on visual interpretations of photographs. Any inaccuracies in our interpretations are fully our responsibility, and the descriptive passages below cannot be taken as established truth: they are instead our interpretations of how we experience the material.

Ambiguous figures – a pregnant lady with a helmet and man with skirt and apron?

The figure from Aska is a small silver pendant, dated to approximately 800 AD, found in a burial excavated in 1920 (Arwill-Nordbladh 2012:45). The figure from Lejre is also made of silver, but this time seated in an elaborate chair and with two bird figures, one on each of the armrests, dated to around 900 AD (Arwill-Nordbladh 2014:87). It was found during the excavations at Lejre in 2009, between two of the hall areas (Christensen 2010:143), in what can be described as a high-status context. As will become clear in the following descriptions of the two figurines they have many traits in common, as well as divergent features.

The Aska figure is a pendant. It is open-worked and has probably been cast in one piece. It consists of an outer ring, where the lower part of the ring is broader, with a concave back. A human figure is placed inside the ring, with the figure's head protruding outside the ring. The figure's head is covered, with a rounded helmet, possibly with a nose cover, or other type of headgear. The back of the head is concave, and there are holes at either

Figure 1. The Aska figurine, length 3,8 cm (Photo by Gabriel Hildebrand © The National Historical Museum, Stockholm, CC BY 2.5 SE)

side of the head for a chain or strap. The features of the figures face are unclear. The protruding parts of the figure has clear wear marks, and the face is also probably worn down. There is a massive disc-on-bow brooch placed horizontally just under the figure's chin. This brooch can be seen both as part of the figures dress and as a part of the ring enclosing the figure, acting to reinforce the self-referencing, circular motif. The brooch can also be interpreted as an animal's head (possibly a serpent), where the ring around the figure constitutes the animals' body, and the animal 'biting its own tail'. The ring has clear marked ridges along the left side with deep grooves (possibly beaded), while the middle, lower, part has curved incisions. On the right side of the ring the beading isn't as clear (maybe non-existent), and there seems to be inconsistent grooves filled with some a darker substance. There are also what we interpret as signs of breakage on the figure's right side, with possible repair marks on the back. The right side of the ring might also have been repaired. Together, the marks along the ring can be interpreted as scales or similar. It is interesting to note that beaded wire around the outer edges is often used on e.g. gold medallions, both from the Viking Age, but more common on Migration Period (400–550 AD) gold bracteates.

The animal's head and/or the disc-on-bow brooch is decorated with five punch marks, in the form of small concentric rings. Two of the rings are at the headplate and three on the footplate; two right under the bow and one on the disc terminal. These might be imitations of garnet inlays as often seen on disc-on-bow brooches (see e.g. Glørstad and Røstad 2021). One of the concentric rings under the bow seems to be filled with the same kind of substance as seen on the right side of the outer ring. From the pictures it is not possible to determine what this might be or if it is original, and so speculation as to the potential symbolic meaning of impaired vision is left open here.

Under the brooch there is a crescent moon shape, maybe a part of the dress (or for example a neck ring). Under this again follows four beaded rows covering the figure's chest, often interpreted as a beaded necklace (Glørstad and Røstad 2021). The belly is protruding, and the figure's arms (beaded) and hands placed around the belly. The reigning interpretation of this is that it indicates pregnancy (Arwill-Nordbladh 2008, Danielsson 2010, Arwill-Nordbladh 2012, Mannering 2013, Arwill-Nordbladh 2014). From the outer sides of both arms there are triangle-shapes towards the outer ring, which can indicate a cloak and legs. Under the arms and hands, between the triangle shapes, there is a flat panel with two lines of crescent-moon shaped punch-impressions towards the top and bottom of the panel. A row of nine irregular shaped 'beads' lies on top of another protruding and somewhat rounded panel.

Under this panel there is another row of eight somewhat larger beads. Together, these panels have been interpreted as an ankle length dress/skirt or a kind of apron (e.g. Arwill-Nordbladh 2014:88–89). There are remains of gilding in several places, and the whole front of the figure might originally have been gilded or at least it has had gilded inlays. There are also traces of gilding on the back of the figure.

Figure 2. The Lejre figurine, hight 1,75 cm (Photo by Ole Malling © Lejre Museum/ROMU).

The Lejre figure is also probably cast in one piece and it is hollow. Christensen (2010) describes the figure through three elements; the chair, the birds and the human figure (or 'person' in his words) (also see Sommer and Warmind 2015). Here we will mainly focus on the human figure, though some mention of the chair and birds are necessary. The chair has been recognised as a carved so-called pillar chair, where two of the pillars at the back end in carved anial heads (Christensen 2010, Sommer and Warmind 2015). The animal heads both have eyes and a gaping mouth, and around their necks, just below their heads, there is a (neck) ring. The two birds are placed on the armrests of the chair, and both sit with their wings crossed over their backs. Across their wings there are inlays of niello. Their heads are pointing upwards toward the head of the human figure.

The human figure sits on the chair, gaze pointing forwards. It has a rounded head, also with some sort of covering, possibly a rounded helmet or other type of head piece with an edge at the bottom around the front and sides of the head. The eyes and nose are clearly marked, but the eyes aren't exactly alike. The right eye has an open look to it, whilst the left is more diffuse (see discussion on this in Arwill-Nordbladh 2012: 48–49, 51–52). Right under the nose there is a protruding line that goes around the head and ends by the edge of the headpiece on the side of the head. This has been interpreted as a possible moustache (Christensen 2010:149). There is a small gap underneath, before another protruding line that goes around the neck of the figure. This has by for example Christensen (2010:150) been interpreted as a neck ring. As on the figure from Aska there are four rows of beads on the Lejre figure's chest, a cloak (here closed at the top and open in front) and long skirt. Along the front of the skirt is a border emphasised by niello around circular shapes in the middle, by some interpreted as an apron (Mannering 2013:83).

Inquisitive wondering and material conclusions

Founded in Haraway's (1991, 2013 [1988]) situated knowledges, and inspired by Manual DeLandas (2006) assemblage theory, we implement a relational perspective in our interaction with the two figurines. It is in the relations between objects, interactors, established symbolism and knowledge structures that meaning is formed, and thus it remains fluid and ever-changing at any given time. DeLanda makes a clear distinction between the properties and the capacities of things (DeLanda 2006:11). While the properties of things may be known or possible to deduct, the capacities of things are dependent on its properties, but cannot be reduced to them as they also "… involve reference to the properties of other interacting entities" (DeLanda 2006:11). In other words, the capacities of things are partly present in their form, but their actual becoming is dependent on its relations. This gives a sense of unpredictability to their future (Pétursdóttir

2017:184), but also to their pasts when studied through 'the abyss of time' (Olivier 2011, see Amundsen 2021:29). The most important aspect of this in the context of this article, and seen in relation to the archaeological record as memory, is that it pinpoints and puts into words how we cannot really know the totality of a things being, or the relations it is and has been part of. It also pinpoints how the societal need to categorise bodies as distinctively gendered today are pushed towards different pasts in the false recognition of it. Altogether, this amplifies a sense of humility and indeed wonder in how we study the past through its material 'leftovers'. In relation to the figurines, this is crucial as we in this exploratory study of them only highlight certain aspects of their previous beings within an–at least for us–fragmented reality. The distinctive otherness and wonder (see Pétursdóttir 2012) encapsulated in these figurines is also present in recognising them as material entities in which–in the words of Olivier (2011:133)–"the memory of a moment in time is recorded", and that this memory is also dependent on absence. DeLanda's (2006) concepts of properties and capacities are helpful here, as they put this absence into words, and allows for a dialogue across different times and time gaps through the figurines.

Both figurines have in many earlier studies been interpreted as gendered deities, which arguably serves the need to create relatable pasts both by assigning a recognisable bodily reality as well as a known identity. By assigning divine identities, the question of the figurines' ambiguous traits is easily resolved, as the Norse gods could be rather famously gender-fluid (Solli 1998). Centring on elements of dress and mythology, different interpretations of the figure from Lejre have ranged from communicating ambiguous gender, representations of female deities in positions of power, or even Odin in his role as shaman, transgressing gendered boundaries and potentially communicating this via dress (Rundkvist 2009, Christensen 2010, Danielsson 2010, Mannering 2013, Arwill-Nordbladh 2014, Sommer and Warmind 2015, Pedersen 2017). At the core of many enquiries, we find the question of what gender this figure can be claimed for. The same can be said for the Aska figure. As most recently presented by Glørstad and Røstad (2021), the figure invites comparisons with the goddess Freyja through a number of references. The protruding belly, read as pregnancy, can be linked with Freyja's role and associations with fertility. The disc-on-bow brooch links clearly with the preceding Merovingian period, when such brooches were worn (and buried with) high status women, and where they have been interpreted as representing the goddess' necklace Brisingamen (Glørstad and Røstad 2021, see e.g. also Arrhenius 2009:223–225). This visual link with the past can also be seen in other parts of the grave goods from Aska, where nine small, gilded silver pendants links with the past and the present at the time in which the burial was completed, ranging from the Roman Iron Age (AD 150-200) to the Viking Age date of the burial (Arwill-Nordbladh 2008). The depth of time represented spans several centuries. Connected with the potentially pregnant belly symbolising the future, this may indicate a role as a keeper of history or collective memory.

However, there are a few additional characteristics of the Aska figure that have attracted comment. It appears to be seated for one thing, which in traditional interpretations, like the one from Lejre, can be tied to positions of rulership. It also appears to be wearing a helmet, a form of armour most commonly associated with male figures in pictorial representations, and certainly through archaeological interpretation (Arwill-Nordbladh 2016, Stylegar and Børsheim 2021). This would not necessarily detract from the established interpretation of the figure as Freyja, as she was a goddess with strong associations with war. Indeed, Arwill-Nordladh has suggested that covering the hair on this figure was a conscious way of signalling ambiguity in gender (Arwill-Nordbladh 2014). However, and not wishing to challenge earlier interpretations, we offer an alternative way of seeing this figure, drawing Danielson's (2010) thoughts on

the Lejre figurine further. We see the presumed gendered attributes of both figurines not as being contradictory, but in fact of secondary importance: instead we interpret these figurines as communicating someone inhabiting a space of power, using established symbols whose potency transcends gendered lines. In this space, the pregnant belly signals potency and curation of the future, the helmet signals protection, and the seat is a seat of power. Surrounding it all, is a serpent symbolising the circular nature of time and the cosmos. Drawing on DeLanda, some of the figure's properties are well-known today (such as the materials and techniques of their production, place and context of deposition etc.). Still, their capacities as symbolic actors within the larger assemblage of the social context in which they were made and used, their relations in these contexts are neither one-sided or clear. These symbols are only ambiguously gendered in so far as they speak to our reality and our projection of our gendered bodies on to the past: if we detach our thinking from this, we can instead suggest that communicating power and potency need not come back to (gendered) bodies at all.

As we alluded to above, designating these figures respectively as Freyja and Odin may be less than helpful when it comes to discussing their symbolic meaning. By so naming them, we connect them not only with characters from written sources, thereby cementing the way in which they are viewed in terms of their symbolic meaning and agency. We furthermore set certain gendered expectations. With those expectations, comes pronouns and presumptions of bodies underneath the clothes and how they ought to act, look and be beheld. But more than that, by naming them as Freyja or Odin, we connect them to modern understandings of Viking Age ways of being, which we (and others before us) argue may be too narrowly defined to accurately encapsulate the symbolic language embodied by these figures.

The naturalised associations between body and dress enforced in recent historical times has deeply coloured the ways in which we encounter the past. We encounter fragments of past memories in objects, what we can recognise as distinctive properties, but to view them as memories akin to modern cultural frameworks may be to neglect their situatedness in past relational networks and to deny their (to us) hidden capacities. The symbolic references inherent in them may, we propose, hinge on different ways of viewing representations of power and potency than ours. In our view, a potentially fascinating approach may be to suggest we see them less as specific deities or individuals, and more as collections of symbols that together create a meaningful entity. In this sense, their gender ambiguity may not matter at all, but may rather speak to functions and powers less tied to specific bodies and more to dressed status. We would further suggest that this way of understanding past material expressions can also be applied to grave goods: the division of burials into male/female categories often neglects a wider meshwork of shared object categories that may be argued to indicate a less binary way of being than recent historical European models (see e.g. Moen forthcoming). In this way, detaching gendered readings of the past from recent historical understandings of gender as naturally embodied can open for different ways of understanding ways of being.

We study the past in the present, with all that this entails of viewing the past through Eurocentric ontologies and concepts. However, we suggest that by situating our knowledge claims within our specific cultural frameworks, and by drawing on relational ways of viewing the material at hand, we can suggest here an experimental approach infused with a sense of exploration and relationality. All knowledge is naturally situated within a given cultural framework, but openness and exploration of what these frameworks mean can help break prescribed boundaries of perception. Similarly, it is in the relations between objects and their interactors, materials and cultural setting that we ought to seek to find meaning.

By accepting that we have only fragmentary access to past totalities, we hope to encourage openness and playfulness in how we might view 'ambiguously gendered' figurines from the past as perhaps less ambiguous and instead more foreign to modern ways of seeing.

Concluding remarks

Representations of humans from the past have the power to make us ask questions about who they were, including how they were. However, we view the past from our particular situated knowledge platforms, wherein identity is encoded in explicit, visual ways. Eurocentric views expect expressed gender to relate to a physical body as a matter of fact. A pregnant belly must belong to a woman, and a seat of power to a man. When that woman wears a helmet, or the man a dress, our sense of naturalised gendered identities encounters an interpretative problem, often solved by finding interpretations of gender ambiguity. These are valid, useful and viable interpretations. We however, have here asked the question of what happens if we detach our interpretations from assumptions of bodily realities underneath the clothes. Instead, we propose that the symbolic language we seek to grasp may be as much about dressed identity as about bodies, and that by applying this to the figurines in question, we can suggest that they symbolise dressed power, and that they need not signal ambiguity by this at all. Their mixing of assumed 'gendered' traits may be no more than the natural conflation of symbols of power that together created potent messages. Asking what gender they really are therefore, may miss a different reading where gender is not in fact the salient point.

Abstract

It may be a truism that we seek relatable stories when confronted with the past, yet it remains pertinent, not least in the ways in which we create past identities in our own image. In modern, Eurocentric thought, gender is one of the primary aspects through which a person is understood. This is reflected in archaeological practice, seen in the way in which burials are categorised according to gender, in how labour is often assumed divided, in how the past is recreated in reconstruction drawings and museum displays. The idea of binary gender as embedded in bodies however, is culturally specific and recent in date. Here we approach one particular area where the pre-assumed binary nature of gender may impact interpretations; namely Late Iron Age human figurines. It is largely assumed that such figures communicated gender through characteristics of hair or dress, and indeed many seem to conform to expected male or female forms. However, there are several that also quite distinctly display a mixture of assumed male and female signs. These are habitually read as one gender wearing the insignia of the other, with an interpretative emphasis placed on finding out what gender they 'really' are. We wish to query whether or not they may be usefully seen as communicating roles rather than fixed identities, and that instead of seeing mixed gendered signals, we can here see relational symbolism in action.

Bibliography

Amundsen, M. D. 2021 *Glimrende gull. En utforskende studie av gull fra folkevandringstid i Rogaland, Vestfold og Østfold.* PhD thesis, University of Oslo.

Arnold, B. 2006 Gender and Archaeological Mortuary Analysis. In Nelson, S. M. (ed.) *Handbook of Gender in Archaeology.* AltaMira Press, Lanham.

Arnold, B. and Nancy L., W. 2001 Introduction. In *Gender and the Archaeology of Death,* Arnold, B. and Nancy L., W. (eds.), pp. 0-0. Alta Mira Press, Walnut Creek.

Arrhenius, B. 2009 Brissingamen and the Menet Necklace. In *Glaube, Kult und Herrschaft*, U. von Freeden, H. Friesinger and E. Wamers (eds.), pp. 219-230. Bonn.

Arwill-Nordbladh, E. 1998 *Genuskonstruktioner i nordisk vikingatid: förr och nu.* GOTARC, series B no. 9, Göteborgs Universitet.

Arwill-Nordbladh, E. 2008 Aske och Rök - om minne och materiell kultur i nordisk vikingatid. In *Arkeologi och Identitet,* Petersen, B. and Skoglund, P. (eds.), pp. 169-188. Institutionen för arkeology och antikkens historia, Lunds Universitet, Lund.

Arwill-Nordbladh, E. 2012 Ability and Disability. On Bodily Variations and Bodily Possibilities in Viking Age Myth and Image. In *To Tender Gender: The Past and Future of Gender Research in Archaeology,* Danielsson, I.-M. B. and Thedeén, S. (eds.), pp. 33-59. Stockholm University, Stockholm.

Arwill-Nordbladh, E. 2014 Negotiating normativities–'Odin from Lejre'as challenger of hegemonic orders. *Danish Journal of Archaeology,* 2**,** 87-93.

Arwill-Nordbladh, E. 2016 Viking Age Hair. *Internet Archaeology* 42.

Ashby, S. 2014 Technologies of Appearance: Hair Behaviour in Early Medieval Europe. *Archaeological Journal* 171**:**151-184.

Christensen, T. 2010 Odin fra Lejre. *ROMU* 2009:219-230.

Crass, B. A. 2001 Gender and Mortuary Analysis: What Can Grave Goods Really Tell Us? In *Gender and the*

Archaeology of Death, Arnold, B. and Wicker, N. L. (eds.), pp. 105-118. Alta Mira Press, Walnut Creek.

Croix, S. Forthcoming The Land of the Genderless: Mortuary archaeology beyond grave-goods. In *Gendering the Nordic Past: Dialogues between Perspectives,* Pedersen, U., Moen, M. and Skogstrand, L. (eds.). Brepols, Turnhout.

Danielsson, I.-M. B. 2007 *Masking moments : the transitions of bodies and beings in late Iron Age Scandinavia.* 40 PhD, Stockholms Universitet.

Danielsson, I.-M. B. 2010 Liten lurifax i Lejre. *Arkæologisk Forum* 22**:**30-33.

Delanda, M. 2006 *A new philosophy of society : assemblage theory and social complexity.* Continuum, London.

Dommasnes, L. H. 1982 Late Iron Age in Western Norway. Female Roles and Ranks as Deduced from an Analysis of Burial Customs. *Norwegian Archaeological Review* 15**:**70-84.

Fausto-Sterling, A. 1993 The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female are not enough. *The Sciences***:**20-24.

Gardeła, L. 2017 Amazons of the Viking World. *Medieval Warfare* VIII**:**8-15.

Glørstad, Z. T. and Røstad, I. M. 2021 Echoes of the Past: Women, Memories and Disc-on-Bow Brooches in Vendel- and Viking-period Scandinavia. *European Journal of Archaeology* 24**:**89-107.

Haraway, D. [1988] 2013 Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective. In *Feminist Theory Reader: local and global perspectives,* Mccann, C. R. & Kim, S.-K. (eds.), pp. 391-403. Routledge, New York.

Haraway, D. J. 1991 *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women. The Reinvention of Nature.* Free Association Books, London.

Hillerdal, C. 2009 På mannens kärlek vilar kvinnans värde. Kvinnliga artefakter bland mannliga aktörer i det vikingatida Ryssland. In *Tankar om ursprung. Forntiden och medeltiden i nordisk historieänvending,* Edquist, S., Hermanson, L. and Johansson, S. (eds.), pp. 269-290. Statens historiska museum, Stockholm.

Joel, D., Bermanb, Z., Tavorc, I., Wexlerd, N., Gabera, O., Steind, Y., Shefia, N., Poole, J., Urchse, S., Marguliese, D. S., Lieme, F., Hänggif, J., Jänckef, L. & Assafb, Y. 2015 Sex beyond the genitalia: The human brain mosaic. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences Of the United States of America* 112**:**15468-15473.

Kristoffersen, S. 1999 Swords and Brooches. Constructing Social Identity. In *Grave Matters. Eight studies of first millenium burials in Crimea, England and Southern Scandinavia: papers from a session held at the European Association of Archaeologists Fourth Annual Meeting in Göteborg,* Rundkvist, M. (ed.), pp. 94-114. Archeopress, Oxford.

Lowenthal, D. 1985 *The past is a foreign country.* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Lykke, N. 2016 Time to move from gender to gender*? *Tidsskrift for genusvetenskap* 37**:**68-91.

Mannering, U. 2013 Man or woman? - perception of gender through costume. *Danish Journal of Archaeology* 2**:**79-86.

Moen, M. 2019 *Challenging Gender: a reconsideration of gender in the Viking Age using the mortuary landscape.* PhD thesis, University of Oslo.

Moen, M. Forthcoming *The Spaces in Between: exploring the interpretative potential of ungendered graves.* In *Gendering the Nordic Past: Dialogues between Perspectives,* Pedersen, U., Moen, M. and Skogstrand, L. (eds.). Brepols, Turnhout.

Olivier, L. 2011 *The Dark Abyss of Time. Archaeology and Memory.* AltaMira, Rowman & Littlefield, Maryland.

Pedersen, U. 2008 Dumme menn og troll til kjerringer. In *Facets of Archaeology: Essays in honour of Lotte Hedeager on her 60th birthday,* Childis, K., Lund, J. & Prescott, C. (eds.), pp. 585-595. Oslo Arkeologiske Serie vol 10, Unipub, Oslo.

Pedersen, U. 2017 Vikingtidskvinner i maktens innerste sirkel. In *Dronningen i vikingtid og middelalder,* Løkka, N. og Kjesrud, K. (eds.). Spartacus, Oslo.

Pétursdóttir, Þ. 2012 Small Things Forgotten Now Included, or What Else Do Things Deserve? *International journal of historical archaeology* 16**:**577-603.

Pétursdóttir, Þ. 2017 Climate change? Archaeology and Anthropocene. *Archaeological Dialogues* 24**:**175–205.

Pétursdóttir, Þ. 2020 Anticipated futures? Knowing the heritage of drift matter. *International journal of heritage studies* 26**:**87-103.

Rundkvist, M. 2009 Odin from Lejre? No, it's Freya! Available from: https://aardvarchaeology.wordpress.com/2009/11/13/odin-from-lejre-no-its-freya/ [read 25.08.2023].

Sigurðsson, J. V. 2010 *Den vennlige vikingen: vennskapets makt i Norge og på Island ca. 900-1300.* Pax, Oslo.

Solberg, B. 2003. *Jernalderen i Norge: ca. 500 f.Kr.-1030 e.Kr.* Cappelen akademisk forlag, Oslo.

Solli, B. 1998. Odin the "queer"? Om det skeive i norrøn mytologi. *Universitetets Oldsaksamlings årbok 1997/1998***:**7-42.

Sommer, B. and Warmind, M. 2015. Óðinn from Lejre — or? *Numen* 62:627–638.

Stalsberg, A. 1991 Tradeswomen during the Viking Age. Umeå. University of Umeå, Department of Archaeology, 1991.

Stalsberg, A. 2001 Visible Women Made Invisible: Interpreting Varangian Women in Old Russia. In *Gender and the Archaeology of Death,* Arnold, B. and Nancy L., W. (eds.), pp. 65-80. Alta Mira Press, Walnut Creek.

Stylegar, F.-A. H. and Børsheim, R. L. 2021 Gjermundbufunnet – en småkonges grav med østlig tilsnitt på Ringerike. *Viking* 85:89-122.

Vedeler, M. 2019 *The Oseberg Tapestries.* Scandinavian Academic Press, Oslo.