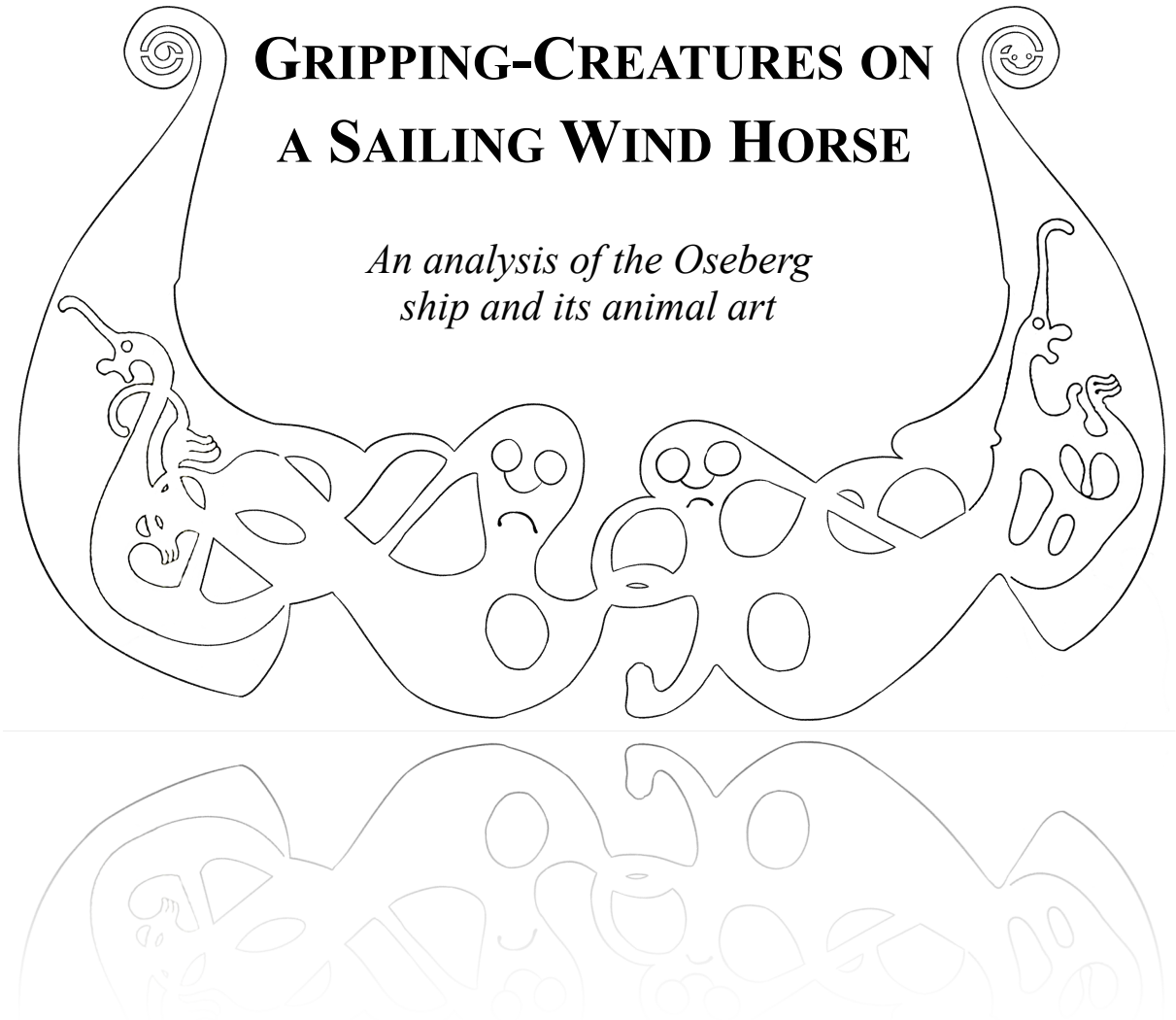
GRIPPING-CREATURES ON A SAILING WIND HORSE

An analysis of the Oseberg ship and its animal art



Master Thesis in Archaeology

Institute of Archaeology, History, and Conservation

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Spring 2019

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Front page illustration:

Artistic rendering of the outline of the Oseberg ship with some of the ship's animalistic and anthropomorphic motifs, by Ryan Florez.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I want to give huge thanks and gratitude to my supervisors Lotte Hedeager and Julie Lund. Thank you for challenging me, pushing me, and supporting me. Thank you for laughing with me, helping me feel at home with my thesis, and last but not least deserving of the project the once-scared master student decided to take on. To Arne Emil Christensen, who took the time to sit down with me and provide thorough information and answers to every single question I had. To Ellen Marie Næss and all my wonderful co-workers at the Viking Ship Museum, thank you for giving me a home at the world's best museum (objective opinion). To all you awesome B11-people who have been a part of my life since 2013. Thank you for every study group, laugh, party, discussion, advice and word of encouragement.

To my parents, Cathrine and Dag, and my sister, Anna: thank you for your unconditional support and encouragement. Thank you for the countless discussions and (pep)talks, even when you didn't understand half of what I was saying. I'm so grateful for all the emotional and academic support you've provided me with, especially all the long nights you've stayed up with a half-frantic student who was (and still is) convinced that the best time to write is from midnight to six in the morning. To Frida, without you this thesis wouldn't exist. This is for you, you are as much a part of this product as I am. To Øyvind, for putting up with and caring for me, always supporting, nudging, and challenging me. And thank you for giving me the inspiration to color in an academic setting. Without you many of the illustrations in this thesis would not have been half as interesting.

To Siri, for helping me keep myself afloat for the past four years, and to Ibsen, my furry sausage, who has also helped greatly in that regard.

To all the other wonderful, amazing people in my life, the list is long and you know who you are. I can't fully express how much I appreciate and love all of you, and how that's been of help to me during this process. A special thank you to Ryan and Allen for your incredible illustrations, and Hanne and Kristian for your thorough proof-reading, critique, and general words of encouragement.

Last but not least: a special shout-out to my D&D-gang. I'm utterly convinced that our intense, hilarious sessions have helped me keep my sanity throughout this process.

Oslo, May 9th
Margrethe K. H. Havgar

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Chapter 1. Introduction

> *The simple equipment along with planed edgings, this Oseberg has in common with other preserved vessels and boat remains from the Viking Age [...] However, the Oseberg ship stands out and presently alone with its rich and decidedly curious decoration on its sterns and closest supporting rails.*
>
> (Shetelig 1917:330, my translation)

The ship as a concept in Scandinavian contexts has been interpreted in archaeological research for decades, both as a functional and symbolic entity (see Brøgger and Shetelig 1950; Røstad 2003; Schjødt 1995; Østmo 2003 amongst others). In the same sense, the art form known as Scandinavian animal art is a well established research subject in archaeological studies (such as Hedeager 1999, 2011; Horn Fuglesang 1996; Kristoffersen 2010). With this thesis my aim is to connect the two, specifically within the period often referred to as the Viking Age, considered to have lasted from ca. mid 8th century to mid 11th century C.E. (Østmo and Hedeager 2005:435-442).

The Oseberg mound, located on Oseberg farm near Tønsberg in Vestfold, Norway, was excavated during the summers of 1903 and 1904 (Brøgger et al. 1917). The mound was a burial consisting of a ship with a grave chamber on its deck, inside of which the remains of two women were discovered. The preservation of the contents of the mound was in large part thanks to the clay it was buried in, in addition to the air-tight, vacuum-like state that existed inside the mound prior to its excavation. Amongst the contents of the mound were also animal remains, household items, vehicles of transport, and textiles, most of which were rich in both quality and quantity in addition to being extremely well preserved. Also, the ship displayed numerous carvings typical of a particular art form referred to as Scandinavian animal art. At the time of its excavation, it was the hitherto richest viking burial ever discovered (Holck 2006; Shetelig 1917; Sjøvold 1985). Although decorated ships are known from Old Norse sources (Christensen 1992; Jesch 2001; Shetelig 1920), the quote above by Shetelig still rings true, as the Oseberg ship is as of now the only ship dated to the Viking Age

exhibiting animal art (Christensen 1992:145-147). Through this thesis I aim to explore how these two subjects, animal art and the ship, are expressed within and on the Oseberg ship.

1.1 Problem Statement

The main problem statement for the thesis is therefore:

How can the interplay present on the Oseberg ship between animal art and the ship as a concept be interpreted? In what way is this interplay possibly connected to the mentality of Old Norse society?

Relevant questions that will also be explored are (1) What connotations were linked to animal art in Old Norse society? (2) What connotations were linked to the ship as a symbolic entity in Old Norse society? (3) What can the symbiosis of the Oseberg ship and its animal art indicate about the ship's position in its original social network(s)? (4) Does the mentality of Old Norse society embodied in the ship and animal art converge in the Oseberg ship, and if so, how?

1.2 The Influence of Objects

In order to do explore these questions I will be applying a combination of ontology and the theory of agency to my material, specifically the carvings on the Oseberg ship and the ship as a concept in Old Norse society. Agency concerns the idea of independent actions and agents, whilst ontology centers on the study of being (Gell 1998; Ingold 2008; Thomas 2015). Both, however, can be applied to studies of material culture, as will be further discussed in chapter 2. The social relations of the object in question are in such cases a focal point, particularly the object's influence on its social relations (Gell 1998; Olsen 2010). In its time of origin, the Oseberg ship has doubtlessly existed within a net of socials relations. To explore my problem statement, I will therefore use an interlaced version of agency and ontology in relation to material studies to build the theoretical framework for the thesis.

Objects have the potential to influence, affect, and engage us (Gell 1998; Olsen 2010). In their relation to us, with the inferences, thoughts, and emotions they provoke, it could almost seem like objects communicate. For example: a Viking Age ship decorated with intricate

animal art carvings not only represents the time-period of its origin but is a direct product of it. While the mound and burial the Oseberg ship was found in has been dated to 834 CE, the ship itself was likely built around 820 CE, thus having had at least a decade of social interaction before being buried (Bonde and Christensen 1993; Bonde and Stylegar 2009). In addition, as animal art has in several cases been linked to the cosmology and mentality of the Viking Age (Hedeager 2011; Kristoffersen 2010), one could claim that the animal art displayed on the ship adds another layer of complexity to the years of social interactions before the ship's internment in the mound.

As the only Viking Age ship found with animal art, the Oseberg ship holds layers of potential (Christensen 1992). Although much research has been done on the Oseberg burial and its contents (see Brøgger et al. 1917, 1920, 1928; Christensen et al. 2006; Gansum 2004; Holck 2006 amongst others), the ship seems almost forgotten as few studies besides the original publications treat it as a main research subject. With this thesis I aim to provide and open for alternative ways of interpreting the ship.

1.3 Layout of the Thesis

The thesis is organized into three parts. The first part is composed of the theoretical framework and method that will be applied, as well as the introduction of the material of the thesis. The second part consists of two analyses of the material, of the animal art in chapter 4 and the ship in Old Norse contexts in chapter 5, respectively. Lastly, the results of these analyses will be discussed in part three.

Chapter 2. Theoretical Framework and Method

Archaeology is in and of itself the study of objects (Renfrew and Bahn 2008:12). In combination with archaeology, material culture is what allows us to make connections, interpret, and piece together details about the past. The question is to what degree we are studying the objects themselves or the people we assume they represent. This tension between material culture and human relations is the baseline from which I draw my theoretical framework and method, presented in this chapter.

2.1 Theoretical Framework: Material Culture and Human Relations

An important point is made by anthropologist Philippe Descola (2013:132): when studying groups of people different from ourselves, it is difficult to ascribe a distinction between nature and culture similar to that of modern Western thought. This is due to the fact that the concepts of nature and culture integrate in completely different ways in non-Western perceptions of the world. In Western thought there is sometimes a clear notion of the division between nature and culture, which is not necessarily the case with other people's perception of the world (Descola 2013).

It should be stated that Descola's (2013) argument is based on current-day anthropological studies. However, one could claim that it is transferrable to our current-day study of, and relationship to, the different aspects of Old Norse culture. This is based on the fact that, just as with Descola's modern example, Old Norse perceptions of the world must have been entirely different from what ours is today (Hedeager 2011).

Agency: Objects and Inferences

The theory of agency deals with the concept of causal intent by so-called agents. These agents, or individuals, are not bound by the physical universe but by how they choose to act. As such, they themselves are the source through which they exert power or action (Gell 1998; Ingold 2008). In anthropology and archaeology in particular, this theory is often used in studies of human agency specifically. The theory is especially applicable when dealing with human capacity and consciousness in relation to choices they choose to make and the effects these actions will have (Dobres and Robb 2000; Gell 1998; Kristiansen 2004).

The question has been raised whether or not agency can be applied to material studies as well (see Boivin 2004; Dobres and Robb 2000; Hodder 2012; Olsen 2006a; 2006b amongst others). Following this the notion that it could, objects may then have served as agents representing the intentions of their makers or users (Gell 1998). In this sense, artifacts could potentially reveal much about past mentalities. The objects are not only representatives of the cultural traits of their own time, but actually inhabit them. As such, the objects transcend from a 'dead' thing, to an object 'alive' with not just purpose but given intent (Gell 1998:122-124).

In *Art and Agency* (1998), Alfred Gell presents an angle of agency based on the affect and influence of art. An important part of his theory is the understanding of inferences: thoughts and deductions based on a process of reasoning. Gell (1998:13-15) distinguishes between two types of inferences: causal and abductive. With causal inferences, he refers to inferences that are made through logical cause-and-effect thought. For example: rain makes the ground wet, wet ground therefore indicates that it has rained. Inferences of abduction, on the other hand, are harder to grasp. Gell (1998:13-15) specifies that this type of inference exists in the gray area between causal (cause-and-effect) and hypothetical thought. An example of this could be the Borre mounds in Vestfold: based on the logical reasoning of multiple excavated manmade grave-mounds in the same area, the conclusion is that it is most likely a burial ground. However, the inference that the mounds are <u>all</u> burials is hypothetical, as many but not all of them have been opened (Myhre 2015)**.** The conclusion that The Borre Park is a burial ground is therefore an abductive inference.

Following Gell's (1998:123) argumentation, the agency of an object is bound to its social relations. Based on the inferences an object can trigger, the given object's agency exists within the social network these inferences belong to. In this sense, inferences are similar to words in a language. Following the notion that relations are what create and uphold agency within objects, without the social or relational framework (language) in place, the inferences (words) and combinations thereof (sentences) are unlikely to be understood. As such, the network of social relations an object exists in is of utter importance. It is the culmination of

the different social relations within an object that is the central issue, not what an object is in and of itself.

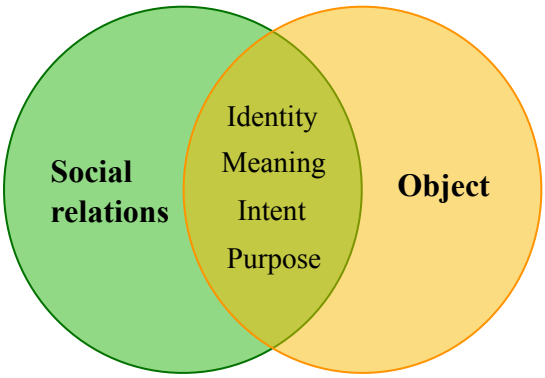

Figure 1. Visual representation of Gell's (1998) theory of an object's agency existing within its network of social relations (created by me).

This network, or environment, is essentially what creates the object's identity and intent, see figure 1. These are, however, changeable and variable as the people the object is in touch with moulds and adjusts its intent and meaning through their relation (Gell 1998). This could very well be the case with the Oseberg ship. The fact that it was constructed and likely in use for more than a decade before being placed in the mound, suggests that the ship's identity somehow changed with the burial. From this perspective, an understanding of the time-period and context surrounding the Oseberg ship and its ornamentation is critical in a study of the ship.

The Ontology of Objects

The study of being is the focal point ontology. In anthropology and archaeology it often appears in discussions on perceptions of the world. Ontology is central to studies of people's perceptions of the make-up of their surroundings and themselves, and how such perceptions can differ from various groups of people to others (Thomas 2015:1290). Similarly to agency, this theory is most often used in connection to humans and human relations.

In relation to ontology, objects are somewhat a neglected discussion matter (Olsen 2010). In *In Defense of Things* (2010) Bjørnar Olsen argues that fixation on human relations and meaning embodied in objects has led to a complete neglect of the objects themselves. Objects are too often studied or given attention only according to their human significance or usefulness. The objects themselves are never a focal point. However, all objects have an intended purpose of some sort, maybe even several, that incorporate them into social networks. As argued by Olsen (2010:157), instead of viewing objects simply as products of

relations, perhaps the objects themselves are what allow the relations to be possible in the first place. In this sense the theory of ontology is absolutely applicable to material studies.

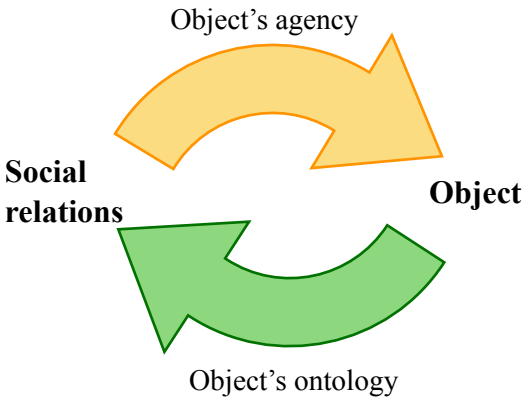

Figure 2. Visual representation of Gell's (1998) agency and Olsen's (2010) ontology merged: social relations hold the object's agency, as a result the object's ontology allows new social relations to form (created by me).

THE FRAMEWORK

One could claim that an object has the power, if you will, to affect through its social relations. It is from this angle I wish to approach the Oseberg ship. The groundwork laid by Gell (1998) and Olsen (2010) within agency and object-oriented ontology, respectively, will therefore be useful as a baseline for this study.

Gell (1998) holds that an object's agency is bound within its social relations, while Olsen (2010) argues that the object itself might allow social relations to be formed. At first glance these views seem to contradict, and in some ways they do. I, however, choose to view them as presenting a self-upholding structure, see figure 2. This structure should allow the Oseberg ship to be studied in its own right and will therefore of great use in the following discussions.

2.2 METHOD AND STRUCTURE

The theoretical framework will be used with two sets of data. The first consists of the carvings of the Oseberg ship, as well as three other artifact sets displaying the same style ornamentation as the ship, namely the Academic's head-post and sled-shaft, the Broa bridle fittings, and the Steinsvik sword. The other set of data is made up of archaeological and textual evidence that has been used in previous studies to interpret the ship as a concept in Old Norse society, including the Oseberg ship. These data sets will be further presented in chapter 3.

The first set of data pertaining to the Oseberg ship carvings and supporting material, will be approached by a comparative analysis mainly focusing on motifs, execution, and placement. The Oseberg carvings are analyzed first, the analysis concentrated on motif categorization and placement related to where these occur on different parts of the ship. In addition to the in-text analysis appendices 1-6 contain additional specific, in-depth results from my study of the ship parts. The analysis done on the Oseberg ship is then applied to the supporting material, where the aim of this is to find similarities and contrasts based on what motifs are present and where these are occur on the respective artifacts. The results of these analyses are later compared and discussed in relation to interpretations of animal art and what this might imply about the art form's social connotations.

The second set of data consists of both archaeological material and literary sources pertaining to the ship in Old Norse society, in addition to interpretations of these sources. These are analyzed by comparing the sources to each other, mainly based on how they have been used in different interpretations. These interpretations are then used as a baseline from which to analyze the Oseberg ship and its possible social connotations and inferences in its original context.

The main method applied to these sets of data is specifically an intensive comparative analysis, as described by Smith and Peregrine (2012:12). This entails that the study is based on small sample sizes with intensified focus on in-depth analysis and contextualization, also referred to as case-oriented. The method and structure described above will therefore be applied to the material in order to provide an alternative angle from which to interpret the Oseberg ship, as well as providing a baseline from which to explore the problem statement stated in chapter 1.

Chapter 3. Material and State of the Art

In order to get a conducive understanding of the reasoning behind the selection of my material, an outline and discussion on Scandinavian animal art is necessary. As such it is included below, making up the first part of this chapter. The main material of the thesis, the Oseberg ship, is then presented under, along with an additional presentation of the terminology for the ship parts that display animal art. Following this, I present my supporting material: the Academic's head-post and sled-shaft, the Broa bridle fittings, and the Steinsvik sword, explaining why this material is included in the thesis. As two parts of my supporting material — the Broa bridle fittings and Steinsvik sword — are made of metal and not wood, the final part of the chapter, consists of a discussion on the differences between wooden and metal artifacts and why these two types of materials can be compared.

3.1 Animal Art

Scandinavian animal art first blossomed in the Roman Iron Age and was a constant element in Scandinavian expression up until the Middle Ages, meaning from around the 4th to the 13th century C.E. (Domeij 2004). It has been a subject of research since the 19th century and earlier researchers have done a massive job of analyzing and typologically categorizing the art form into several distinct styles based on motifs, expression, and execution (such as Arwidsson 1942; Salin 1904; Ørsnes 1966; Åberg 1925).

When discussing the earliest styles, the categorizations made by Bernhard Salin (1904) are often used, known as styles I-III. These style categories are applicable to both Scandinavian and non-Scandinavian material, where especially styles I and II, dated to the 4th-7th centuries CE, bear clear connections to the continent (Salin 1904; Ørsnes 1966; Åberg 1925). During the 8th century however, a difference occurs in the Scandinavian material (Åberg 1925). In style III the expression becomes uniquely Scandinavian; while showing hints of some degree of outside influence and at times bearing similarities to Irish styles, the style mainly exhibits elements drawn from Scandinavian traits (Åberg 1925:108).

Style III first appears in the 8th century, as previously mentioned, and shows up in different archaeological material up until the 10th century (Åberg 1925). The style is described as having naturally evolved from style II, but in comparison to its predecessor, style III has no equivalent on the continent and is therefore considered a uniquely Scandinavian creation. Style III also breaks from its predecessor in exhibiting less variation in character and not implementing new elements into its expression. It is, in addition, an extremely stylized evolution of style II; its motifs become "restless" and its execution developing an overall more light and playful way of expression compared to earlier styles (see figure 3) (Åberg 1925:108-117).

Figure 3. Style II (right) vs. style III (left) (after Åberg 1925).

Though Salin's categories were a groundbreaking way of approaching Scandinavian animal art, the styles are so geographically wide-spread that regional variations became difficult to distinguish (Ørsnes 1966). Even Salin (1904) himself strived to differentiate between the earlier and late phases of his own style categories. This eventually lead to the categorizations known as the Vendel styles A-E, first suggested by Greta Arwidsson (1942), later thoroughly described, analyzed, and compared in Østnes (1966). These styles are in practice subcategories or specified periods of the original styles by Salin (1904), intended to show phase changes and regional differences (Ørsnes 1966).

While style II is split up into Vendel styles B, C, and D, only one Vendel style is categorized within style III, namely Vendel style E. It might perhaps seem strange that an already existing style category gets solely one subcategory. However, style E is specified within style III with good reason: it is particularly distinctive due to it seeming to be especially regionally limited to southern Scandinavia (Ørsnes 1966:21).

Style E's immediate predecessor, style D, is characterized as consisting of creatures with powerful thighs and heads, twisted in S or 8-shaped formations with narrow ribbon like bodies connecting the different limbs. Their feet vary from being forked or in the shape of a curled knot, or being thick with a set of toes on one side (Ørsnes 1966:46-50). In comparison, style E is described as among other elements having motifs with small, rounded heads displaying large, convex eyes. The motifs also often have round, narrow bodies where wings or tails in many cases are elongated in curling, entwined patterns (see figure 4). The creatures' feet within this style are described as usually having a set of toes on one side while being uncharacteristically thick, similar to one of the feet styles that are also present in style D (Ørsnes 1966:54-55).

Figure 4. Example of style D (top) vs. style E (bottom) (after Ørstnes 1966).

It is within style E that the Oseberg ship is often placed (Graham-Campbell 2013; Horn Fuglesang 1996; Müller-Wille 2001). This also applies to the Broa find and Steinsvik sword (Graham-Campbell 2013; Klæsøe 2002). Even though style III and E appear at the beginning of the Viking Age, there are two additional terms that have been employed when referring to early Viking Age animal art. Although they refer to finds with an almost identical style, the term "Broa style" — named after the Broa find on Gotland — has been used in relation to East Scandinavian material, while "Oseberg style" — named after the Oseberg burial — has been used when discussing West Scandinavian material (Klæsøe 2002:78-81).

It might seem logical, therefore, that the Oseberg ship belongs within the latter category. However, this is not the case. As described by Shetelig (1917, 1920) in the original Oseberg volumes, animal art from the Oseberg burial is more akin to an art complex rather than a specific style. Shetelig (1920) uses the term "masters" when describing aspects of the find's animal art carvings, arguing that the differences in style must be due to different master artisans executing their skills on separate artifacts. Although this interpretation has been criticized, several agree that the Oseberg find cannot be labelled as its own style, as it is in

fact a melting pot or conglomerate of several different styles and expressions (Klæsøe 2002:83). In an attempt to bridge and combine the eastern and western Scandinavian material, the term "style III/E" has therefore been increasingly used in later years (Klæsøe 2002:80-81).

Figure 5. Example of a style III/E gripping-creature motif on the Steinsvik sword (photo by me).

There is another new element that appears during the same period as style III/E (Graham-Campbell 2013; Klæsøe 2002). This element is a motif known as the "gripping-beast", which is characterized by a creature that twists into or around itself, while gripping its own limbs or the limbs of other motifs close to it (see figure 5). Though both its origin and exact time of appearanC.E. in Scandinavia has been debated, the motif appears in several finds categorized within style E (see Domeij 2004; Graham-Campbell 2013; Klæsøe 2002 amongst others). This motif appears in my own material (see chapter 4) and in order to avoid premature interpretation of my material, I will therefore from this point forward refer to the motif as "gripping-creature" in favor of "gripping-beast".

Earlier studies of animal art have provided an incredibly detailed, structured framework in which to analyze and study the art form. Beneficial in regard to both periodical and geographical changes, this framework, one could claim, has also allowed for other perspectives in animal art research to emerge. Newer studies seem to focus more on the social and mentality based aspects interwoven in the art form (see Hedeager 1999, 2010, 2011; Horn Fuglesang 1996; Kristoffersen 2000, 2010 amongst others). Studies such as Domeij (2004) have shown that not only are the motifs in animal art more than ornamental pieces, they in all likelihood contain complex symbolic and inference-based meaning. This edges closer to my own framework for this study, and will serve as a great foundation for me to build my later discussion on.

3.2 Main Material: The Oseberg Ship

Dendrochronology of the grave chamber dates the construction of the Oseberg mound to 834 C.E. (Bonde and Christensen 1993). The quick building manner of the grave chamber suggests it was most likely built and placed on deck a short time before the burial, implying that it is the youngest component of the burial prior to the mound being built around it (Bonde & Christensen 1993). The ship, however, was built approximately 10-15 years earlier, around 820 C.E. In addition to this, the oak the ship is constructed of matches a type only known to the western coast of Norway (Bonde and Stylegar 2009; Graham-Campbell 2013). It therefore seems likely that the ship was in use during the years between its construction and the burial and built on the West coast of Norway, not on the south-eastern coast where it was excavated.

The ship displays animal art several places, all characteristic of the previously discussed style III/E. When referring to the parts of the Oseberg ship that display animal art, mostly Old Norse terminology will be used. This is in attempt to for one, refer to the pieces with what are possibly their actual names from their time of origin, but also to avoid confusion between historical and modern ship-making labels and practices. For non-Norse, standard terminology that will be used to refer to different ship parts see figure 6.

The Old Norse terminology that will be used for the carved ship parts of the Oseberg ship is based on Haakon Shetelig's (1917, 1920) descriptions in *Osebergfundet Bind I* and *III*; Hjalmar Falk's (1912) *Altnordisches Seewesen*; and Judith Jesch's (2001) *Ships and Men in*

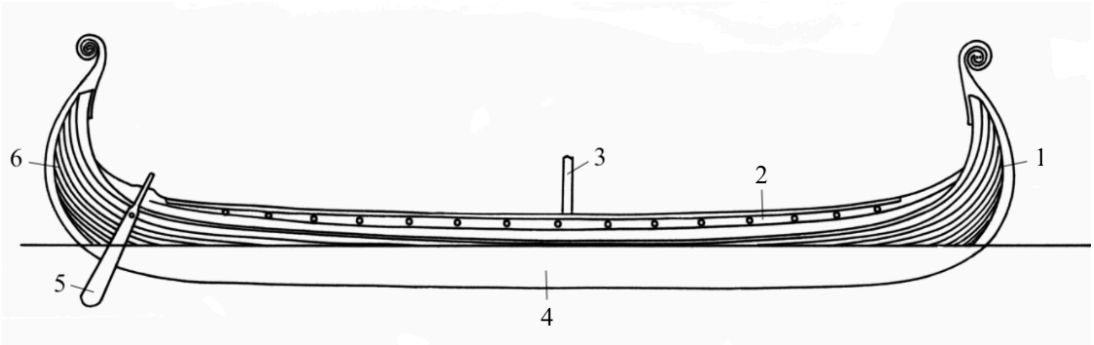

Figure 6. Illustration of the Oseberg ship from starboard (right) side, 1. Prow, 2. Bulwark, 3. Mast, 4. Hull, 5. Rudder, 6. Stern (Kulturhistorisk museum, Universitetet i Oslo; edits by me).

the Late Viking Age. The latter has done an extensive study to validate and specify the terms, many of them mentioned and interpreted by Falk (1912) in his time. Jesch (2001) uses Skaldic poetry as well as runic inscriptions, in favor Eddaic poetry which, according to the author represents the Old Norse written corpus better (Jesch 2001). Conveniently, many of these Old Norse terms match up well with the ones used in Shetelig's (1917:328-340) description of the placement of the Oseberg ship's carvings, and are therefore the terms that will be used in this thesis. These are explained in further detail below, and their placements illustrated in figure 7 and 8.

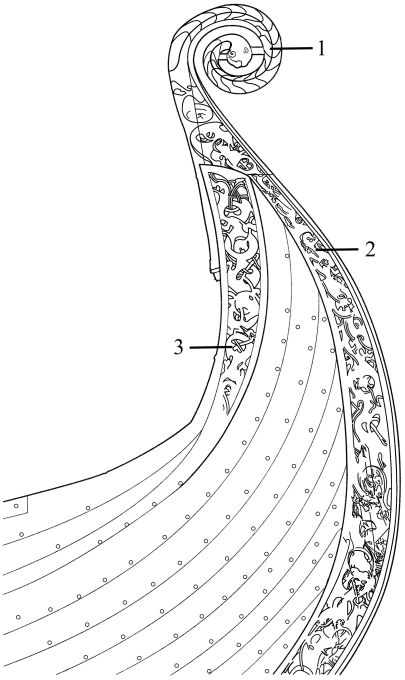

Figure 7. Illustration of the prow of the Oseberg ship from starboard side.
1. *hǫvuð*
2. *stafn*
3. *brandr*

(By Ryan Florez and Allen Robbins based on the ship as it is currently on display at the Viking Ship Museum, Oslo)

Fore and Aft

The terminology 'prow' and 'stern' can be misleading when referring to Viking ships. This is because there is no size or shape difference between the front part and back part of the ships (Jesch 2001:144). In connection to the Oseberg ship, the terms 'fore' and 'aft' will therefore be used henceforth to refer to the front and back parts of the ship, respectively.

Dragonhead: *HǪVUÐ*

In many ways the Oseberg grave and ship are unique, the fact that the ship is carved being one of them, but there is one particular element that is particularly distinctive: its so-called dragonhead, stretching upwards from the upper ends of the stems (see 1. *hǫvuð* in figure 7 and 8) . In Shetelig's (1917:332-334, 1920:24-26) descriptions of the ship and its carvings, the terms "dragonhead" and "wormhead" are mentioned at one point (Shetelig 1920:25), but the figurehead is mostly referred to simply as *stavnprydelse* (stem ornament, my translation). The term "dragon/wormhead" is likely derived from textual sources that mention *dreki* (dragon), *ormr* (worm, dragon), and *hǫvuð* (head); the first two as poetic or technical terms

for larger warships, the latter as one of several names connected to ships' figureheads; others being *skolptr* (the front of an animal's head), *hauss* (skull), and *gríma* (mask) (Brøgger and Shetelig 1950:159-162; Falk 1912:102; Jesch 2001:127-128, 145-147; Shetelig 1917:332-334, 1920:24-26). For the purpose of this thesis, both for the sake of not prematurely diluting my own perception of the material as well as for the sake of clarity, I will from this point on refer to the Oseberg figurehead as *hǫvuð*, meaning simply "head".

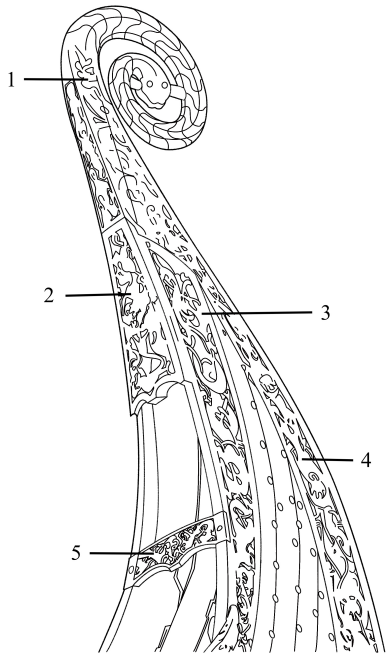

Figure 8. Illustration of the prow of the Oseberg ship from starboard side seen towards the fore of the ship.
1. *hǫvuð*
2. *tingl*
3. *brandr*
4. *stafn*
5. *spánn*

(By Ryan Florez and Allen Robbins based on the ship as it is currently on display at the Viking Ship Museum, Oslo)

STEMS: *STAFNAR*

Besides the *hǫvuð,* perhaps the most distinctive element of the Oseberg ship is its stems. These are the long, rounded beams stretching from the hull up to the neck of the *hǫvuð* both fore and aft on the ship (see 2. *stafn* in figure 7 and 4. *stafn* in figure 8). In *Osebergfundet Bind I*, these are referred to as *stavn* by Shetelig (1917:330), the modern Norwegian term for the stems. There is, however, an Old Norse term that bears similarities to the modern one: *stafn* (pl. *stafnar*). Jesch (2001:145) confirms the term, describing how it is used both in connection to the stems themselves as well as an extended term for "ship". It also appears in relation to the appearance of the stems or how they were produced (Jesch 2001:145). Even though it could be used as an extended term for "ship", I will use the Old Norse version of the term in favor of Shetelig's (1917:330) modern alternative.

THE "TONGS": *BRANDAR*

Shetelig (1917:330-331) uses the term *brandr* (pl. *brandar*) to refer to the curved, rectangular, carved pieces stretching from the just below the top of the gunwale (the side of the ship above the deck) to the *stafnar* of the Oseberg ship (see 3. *brandr* in figure 7 and 8).

According to Jesch (2001:147) the exact placement of the *brandr* (pl. *brandar*) is not clear from textual sources. However, etymologically it could be related to a homonym meaning "sword", as it has been interpreted by Falk (1912 in Jesch 2001:147). If so, visually speaking especially, it could very well be a term for the pieces Shetelig (1917:330-331) refers to. Falk (1912 in Jesch 2001:148) also interpreted them as some sort of "tongs" for the *tingl,* what I understand as the *brandar* somehow enclosing the *tingl* on each side. Although it is unclear what exactly the *tingl* was, (see The "Triangle": *Tingl* below), if we accept Falk's (1912) interpretation, this certainly fits visually in the case of the Oseberg ship, concerning both terms. Therefore, although the sources are unclear about where *brandar* were exactly, I shall in this case continue Shetelig's (1917:330-331) use of the term.

THE "TRIANGLE": *TINGL*

As mentioned above, it is unclear exactly what the *tingl* (pl. *tingl*) was or where it was located. That it was a piece of the ship, however, is confirmed by both Shetelig (1917) and Jesch (2001). Shetelig (1917:333, 338) uses it rather uncritically, simply stating that the triangular, carved piece found fore in the ship which was probably located between the *brandar,* is a *tingl* (see 2. *tingl* in figure 8). He backs this statement by referring to Falk (1912 in Shetelig 1917:338). However, describing the *spánn* (see *Spánn* below) in a later volume of *Osebergfundet,* (Shetelig 1920:8), refers to the *spánn* — which was found in the aft of the ship — as having been located beneath the *tingl*. Even though I've only been able to find illustrations of one, it seems to imply that two *tingls* found aboard the Oseberg ship — one fore and one aft —, although this is not explicitly stated either besides Shetelig's (1917:338, 1920:8)obscure mention of both. According to Arne Emil Christensen (personal communication, 2018), however, at the time of the excavation the top portion of the aft *stafn* had rotted away to beneath the point where an aft *tingl* would have been. This seems to indicate that there was only one surviving *tingl* at the time of the excavation, and that it would have been in the fore of the ship, where the carved, triangular piece Shetelig (1917:333, 338) mentions was found. Jesch (2001:148), on her end, points out that the use of the term *tingl* in textual sources is rather ambiguous and that it can be difficult to specify exactly what the piece might have been. However, as no one is sure of what the *tingl* was, she

continues, it might as well be used for the piece Shetelig (1917:333, 338) referred to. As such, I will continue Shetelig's (1917:333, 338) use of the term.

SPÁNN

Of the terms listed here, *spánn* (pl. *spœnir*) is the only one for which I have not found confirmation of in Jesch's (2001) study. Shetelig (1917:332), however, uses it to refer to a small wooden piece found on the inside of the Oseberg ship, connected between the *brandar* and below the *tingl* (see 5. *spánn* in figure 8). As with the *tingl* he backs this by referring to Falk (1912:43 in Shetelig 1917:332). Shetelig (1917:332) mentions how this piece was referred to as a *hǫfðafjǫl* ("head beam", loosely translated) during the excavation as it was located just above where the steerer's head would have been. The term *hǫfðafjǫl* however, had been contested by Falk (1912:43), claiming that the term *spánn* is what was used in the Old Norse texts when referring to this piece, where he in addition mentions that they are described in multiple cases as being decorated or gilded. Shetelig (1917:332, 1920:8, 19-21) therefore adopts the term *spánn* as well. Jesch (2001) does not mention this piece at all, and can therefore not confirm Falk's (1912) interpretation. However, since there are no clear reasons not to employ the term, I will continue using it in the same manner as Shetelig (1917:332, 1920:8, 19-21). It should be specified that although there are two modern copies of *spœnir* that are on display on the ship as it is exhibited at the Viking Ship Museum in Oslo today, the aft *spánn* is the only one that I have been able to find both textual and illustrative confirmation of actually having been excavated from the burial.

Figure 9. The Academic's head-post displaying animal art surrounding its face (after Shetelig 1920).

3.3 SUPPORTING MATERIAL

THE ACADEMIC'S HEAD-POST AND SLED-SHAFT

The Academic's head-post is one of five head-posts found in the burial chamber aboard the Oseberg ship (Brøgger et al. 1928:65). The head-posts all display animal art, though in different styles. All five also consisted of long pieces of

wood, each with a hollowed out piece near the bottom, all slightly curved towards the top and their top ends carved in the likeness of animal faces. What these hollow or the head-posts were intended for is unknown, but the accepted theory is that another piece of wood would be placed into the hollows (as illustrated in figure 9). This additional piece would then stick out perpendicularly from the head-posts like handles, which has led to the interpretation that the posts might have been carried in processions (Brøgger et al. 1928:65-66). This hypothesis seems likely as a similar scene is displayed on one of the recovered tapestries from the burial chamber (Shetelig 1920). Of these five, four survive to this day, the Academic's head-post among the surviving number (Braovac 2016).

Figure 10. The Academic's sled-shaft displaying animal art within a triangular panel (after Shetelig 1920).

As with many of the artifacts from the mound, the head-posts are named after which master artisan Shetelig categorized they were created by. The Academic's head-post, according to Shetelig (1920:70) is the product of a master artisan who was "conservatively academic" in their approach to the execution of the animal art on the artifact. He (1920) credits the same master artisan as being responsible for one other artifact from the mound, namely a sled-shaft.

The Academic's head-post displays animal art two places: surrounding its face and the topmost part of its neck (see figure 9). It is also carved around the bottom where it has been hollowed out, but these carvings bear no trace of animal art motifs. The sled-shaft is carved in its entirety. It only displays animal art within a triangular panel on its top side, however (see figure 10). The other carvings have, similarly to the head-post, no animal art characteristics.

As previously mentioned, Shetelig's concept of master artisans has been criticized (Klæsøe 2002). In addition, the mentioned head-post is often mentioned in comparison to the Oseberg ship when the ship's style has been discussed (Graham-Campbell 2013; Horn Fuglesang

1996), even though Shetelig (1920) argues that they are not stylistically a match. This I do not agree with, as the head-post and ship, as well as the sled-shaft, all have clear characteristics of style III/E. Even so, I agree with Shetelig (1920:70) that the motifs of both the Academic's head-post and sled-shaft typologically bear enough resemblance to one another to place them within the same style category (this will be further analyzed in chapter 4). When pieced together, this results in two additional artifacts from the Oseberg mound bearing similar stylistic characteristics to the ship. I will therefore include them in this thesis as supporting material from within the ship's excavation context. In addition, although I do not agree with his master artisan categorization as a whole, I will continue to use Shetelig's (1920) master artisan term "Academic's" for the artifacts in order to distinguish them from other artifacts from the Oseberg mound.

The Broa Bridle Fittings

The find known as the Broa find hails from Broa, Gotland and was discovered in 1899, consisting of a grave with several metal artifacts dated to the 8th century (Salin 1922; Thunmark-Nylén 1992). Amongst these were also a bronze and iron bridle and in total 22 cast gilded panels (Salin 1922).

These panels display varying forms of animal art with distinct style III/E characteristics and have been interpreted to be fittings belonging to the mentioned bridle (see figure 11). The fact that the majority of the panels were found around a horse cranium at the time of their discovery strengthens the interpretation of the them as bridle fittings (Thunmark-Nylén 1992:225). These fittings are what laid the foundation for the previously mentioned Broa style, now style III/E, and are quite often mentioned in relation to the Oseberg ship (Graham-Campbell 2013; Horn Fuglesang

Figure 11. A sample of the bridle fittings from Broa, all with animal art (Historiska museet, Stockholm).

1996). Even the first article published on the find (Salin 1922:193) draws comparisons to the Oseberg ship and overall grave.

Figure 12. The relative find locations of Oseberg, Broa, Steinsvik (Google Maps, locations by me).

Although Salin (1922) criticizes Shetelig's (1920) analysis of the animal art carvings within the Oseberg grave in relation to the overall evolution of animal art, he cannot deny the similarity between this find and the Broa bridle fittings. There are several stylistic similarities between the bridle fittings and the Oseberg ship and the bridle fittings will therefore be included in this thesis as comparative material to the Oseberg ship from an external context. However, the bridle fittings are of metal and not wood, in comparison to the ship, necessitating a pre-analysis of the possible differences between production techniques and preservation (see 3.4 Wood vs. Metal).

The Steinsvik Sword

Similarly to the Broa bridle fittings, the Steinsvik sword was a part of a grave find dated to the 8th century C.E. (Peirce 2002:32). Dissimilarly, this find hails from Lødingen, Nordland in Norway and is therefore quite distant from both the Broa and Oseberg finds geographically (see figure 12). The sword's blade was quite corroded at the time of its discovery, but the hilt and pommel were surprisingly well preserved (Graham-Campbell 1980:69).

Figure 13. One side of the Steinsvik sword, displaying bronze mounts with animal art (Kulturhistorisk museum, Universitetet i Oslo).

The sword is of interest as its hilt and pommel are inlaid with several twisted silver bands, along with 13 bronze mounts, 6 on each side with 1 mount wrapping itself over the top of the pommel over to the opposite side (Graham-

Campbell 1980; Pierce 2002). All these mounts display animal art with style III/E characteristics, although with as many variations in execution as there are mounts (see figure 13). The fact that the mounts on the sword display animal art has lead to it, as with the Broa bridle fittings, being mentioned in comparison to the Oseberg ship on several occasions (Graham-Campbell 2013; Horn Fuglesang 1996). Due to its stylistic similarity to the Oseberg ship, this sword will also therefore, along with the Broa bridle fittings, be included in the thesis as comparative material.

3.4 Wood vs. Metal

Whereas wood requires strict conditions — specifically anaerobic or oxygen free, waterlogged conservation conditions — in order to survive for long periods of time, metal can survive in more aerobic conditions. Even though the presence of oxygen causes metal to corrode, this process can last for varying amounts of time depending on the conditions where the metal object has been deposited (Bergersen 2012a, 2012b; Kaslegard 2010). This leads to many metal artifacts therefore not having reached the point of complete corrosion by their time of discovery and excavation. Thus potentially explaining why the amount of preserved Old Norse metal artifacts — objects of precious metals included — is so much larger than wooden artifacts from the same time-period.

The presence and quantity of highly decorated precious metal artifacts from the period — such as the Broa bridle fittings and the ornaments on the Steinsvik sword — has lead to the impression that a wide network of smiths with extraordinary skill existed (Duczko 1992). The presence of precious metals themselves indicate a trade network where the import of precious metals was an essential factor. The surviving carved wooden artifacts from the period, on the other hand, are in most cases either pine or oak and both tree types are readily available several places in Scandinavia (Hohler 1992). Based on this, Erla Hohler (1992) argues that Scandinavian artisans used wood as their main canvas on which to increase and develop an exceptional and distinctive craft, in comparison to artisans on the Continent who applied and developed their skills through manuscript artwork and stone sculptures. On one hand, based on the small amount of carved wooden artifacts that remain, Hohler's (1992) broad argument seems somewhat dubious. On the other hand, I believe Hohler's (1992) argument could be

strengthened by taking the surviving decorated metal artifacts from the period into consideration. The same craft and distinctive style the author bases the argument on, namely animal art, resonates in both material categories from the period.

With wood and precious metals being two completely different materials, the production process of artifacts made of these materials would naturally have been drastically different from each other. In both cases, however, many of the resulting artifacts share the fact that they display animal art, a trait which sets them out as being uniquely Scandinavian regardless of the production material. As previously mentioned, the Oseberg ship, Broa bridle fittings, and Steinsvik sword are compared to each other on several occasions, and on none of these occasions are their differences in material mentioned (Graham-Campbell 2013; Klæsøe 2002; Wilson 2008). The aim, instead, is to show three examples from three different places in Scandinavia that all display the same unique trait: in this case, animal art style III/E.

Finds such as the Mästermyr chest also indicate that although the production processes of wood and metal artifacts were different, they might not have been so distant from one another (Arwidsson and Berg 1983; Lund 2006). The Mästermyr chest is a Viking Age chest, discovered on Gotland when the bog from which it was named was drained. As the chest had been isolated within the anaerobic, waterlogged conservation conditions of the bog both the chest and its contents were extremely well preserved. The contents of the chest turned out to be tools for both smithing and carpentry. Although one of the only finds of its kind, the Mästermyr chest has been used to argue that some people during this period might have been skilled in several crafts (Arwidsson and Berg 1983; Lund 2006).

It should be noted that the Mästermyr chest is only a single, relatively isolated find. It is therefore not viable to be used as a representative example of the smithing and carpeting community/communities of Scandinavia in the Viking Age. What the find can indicate, however, is a person who was familiar and possibly skilled within both trades, or a group of craftspeople who in all likelihood were familiar with one another's crafts. This sheds light on the fact that trades might not have been as isolated or need-to-know based, as it might seem from a present day perspective over a thousand years removed from the period.

Chapter 4. The Animal Art

The ship displays animal art both on the outside and inside of the ship, specifically along its *stafnar* and *brandar*, as well as on its *tingl*, *spánn,* and *hǫvuð*, see figure 5. In order to analyze these carvings, I will need to place the material into a context. Therefore I will firstly discuss how animal art has been interpreted, then go on to describe each part of the Oseberg ship that displays animal art and analyze their motifs, placement, and texture, drawing on the interpretations and analyses from the previous parts of the chapter. Lastly, I will present the supporting material, the Academic's head-post and sled-shaft, the Broa bridle fittings, and the Steinsvik sword, also analyzing their motifs and placement on their respective artifacts.

4.1 Animal Art Interpreted

As shown in chapter 3, animal art has been classified and categorized into numerous style groups, sub-groups, and regional areas. The focus was for a long time solely style based which led to a perception of animal art as ornamentation in the modern sense: something decorative and pleasing to the eye, but ultimately superficial . However, as argued by several, (Domeij 2004; Hedeager 1999, 2010, 2011; Kristoffersen 1995, 2000, 2010) Scandinavian animal art seems to be laced with layers of meaning. Although the Old Norse context is impossible to restore in its full sense and some types of meaning therefore will always be out of reach, there are several indicators hinting as to how the art could have and would have been perceived at that time (Hedeager 2011).

An interpretation is that the motifs were an expression of myths and legends, and tightly interwoven with the cosmology of the time. It has therefore been speculated whether the art form could have been used as a tool in legitimization of power, a symbolic language wielded as a way of connecting and anchoring elite groups to deities (Hedeager 1999, 2011). Another interpretation concerns the embodiment of the art form and how concepts of politics, religion, and ideology could be embodied in and expressed through the style (Kristoffersen 2000). An argument is that this made the art form directly involved in social structures as it would be a way of signalizing status and identity. In this way, the execution of the art style, what motifs

were used and where they were placed were in themselves an expression of the mentality and world view of the period (Kristoffersen 2000).

The appearance of the previously mentioned gripping-creatures is an often occurring element of the art style. These gripping-creatures are defined by their literal gripping tendency — clasping themselves or other creatures around them — and while some are more naturalistic than others, some display fantastical or hybrid features, bearing similarities to several animals or animals and humans made into one (Hedeager 2010; Kristoffersen 2010). This has been linked to notions of violence and war. As well as having been interpreted as literal depictions of violence, the creatures have also been interpreted as an expression of a warrior elite or society, in addition to violence as a concept intertwined in the mentality of the period (Domeij 2004). They have also been linked to notions of transformation (Kristoffersen 2000). Based on ethnographic studies, this notion approaches the art style with a different mindset, one in which a drawing or design of an animal is not simply a representation of an animal, it is the animal — or rather, a creation of it. This, as argued by Kristoffersen (2000:270), could in turn explain why creatures and animals in pre-Christian animal art are hidden in complicated, twisting forms: as much as the object is a part of the animal, the animal is bound within and is not just part of the object it is designed on but contained within it.

This expression of dualism can also be linked to anthropomorphic hybrid-creatures that appear in the art form. The notion of *hamskifte* (change of skin) is a concept of the soul which is tightly intertwined in Old Norse mythology and surrounds the idea of changing form, literally shedding your skin and becoming another creature (Kristoffersen 2000; Steinsland 2005). This is exemplified in several Old Norse myths, and is closely linked to the concept of *seiðr*, a notion of magic that can be both good and evil, existing on the edges of society rather than as a part of an official cult (Steinsland 2005:307-309). Anthropomorphic hybrid-creatures have been interpreted as a physical version of this concept (Kristoffersen 2000). It adds another layer to the possible connotations of such motifs and the art form itself, as it opens for not only a notion of transforming creatures into and onto objects, but the idea that the separation of human and animal is unclear, ambiguous, and complex (Steinsland 2005).

4.2 THE OSEBERG SHIP ANIMAL ART

DESCRIPTION

Stafnar and *Brandar* (appendix 3&4)

The *stafnar* (see figure 14) and *brandar* (see figure 15) both fore and aft on the ship display similar, near-identical motifs. Gripping-creatures interlace and contort around each other from the top to the bottom of each *stafn* and *brandr,* carved in relief with a side view so only one side of their face is visible. Although the motifs themselves are near-identical, the execution of them varies as no *stafn* or *brandr* is identical to another.

Figure 14. a) Fore *stafn,* port side, b) fore *stafn*, starboard side (after Shetelig 1920).

The creatures themselves are characterized by long, slim bodies and necks; gripping feet with — in most cases — three digits; faces with large, round, pupil-less eyes; and gaping mouths that often either display long tongues or extend over or onto another creature's body part. On the main part of their bodies the creatures are textured, varying between brick or diamond-like patterns angled in different directions. In some instances the texturing pattern on a creature gradually changes along its body, such as in figure 14b. From their heads usually extend a long, slim limb that interweave with the next creature similarly to other limbs. In a few instances these "head-limbs" pierce another creature's body. This occurs both on the *stafnar* and *brandar*, as can be seen in

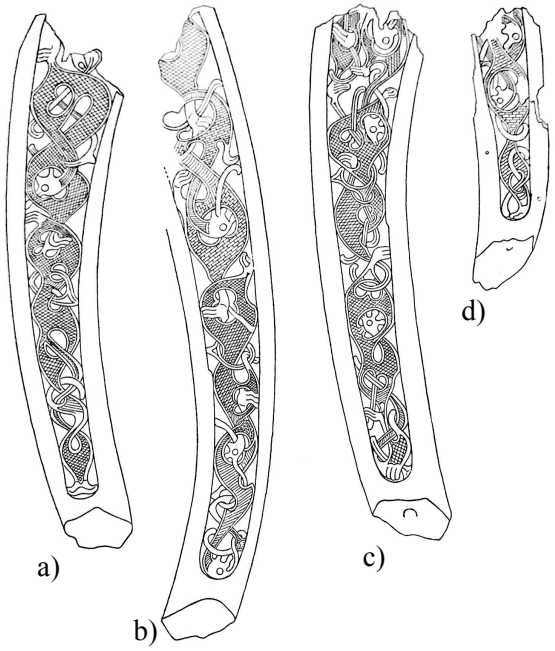

Figure 15. a) Aft *brandr*, starboard side, b) aft *brandr*, port side, c) fore *brandr*, portside, d) fore *brandr*, starboard side (after Shetelig 1920).

figures 14a and b, and 15b and c.

Tingl (appendix 5)

The *tingl* is, like the *stafnar* and *brandar*, made up of gripping-creature motifs. These, however, are anthropomorphic in style; resembling the previously mentioned gripping-creatures in their interlaced execution, but bearing clear human similarities. In addition, although they are also carved in relief, they are displayed with their faces outwards and not sideways, pointed forward towards the deck of the ship and so displaying their whole faces (see figure 16).

The tableau is made up of five creatures in total who are all clutching each other's limbs: three from the top town with rounder, four-limbed bodies, the other two in the bottom two corners of the *tingl* with three-limbed, elongated bodies, their heads pointed downwards (see figure 16). The creatures' bodies are all textured in a diamond pattern in slightly different angles, with less variation than the *stafnar* and *brandar* creatures.

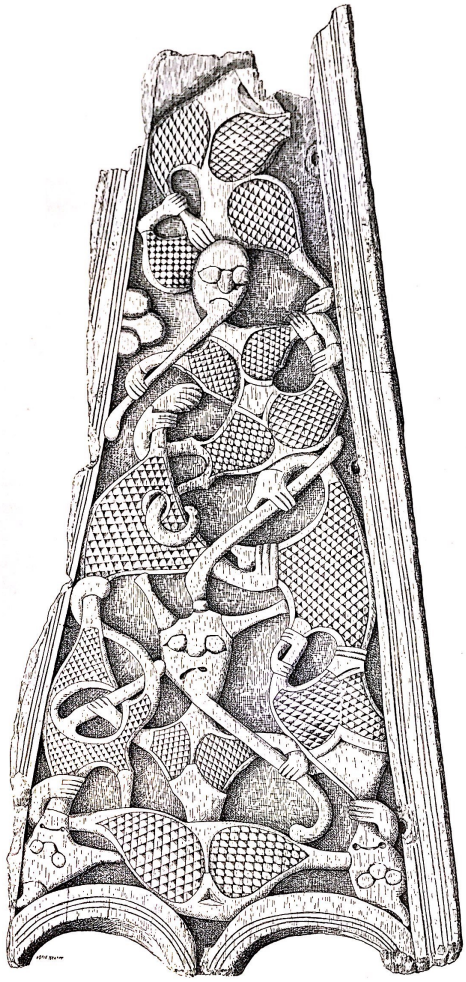

Figure 16. Anthropomorphic gripping-creatures displayed on the *tingl* (after Shetelig 1920).

All but the top motif, which is missing its head, have faces with large, round, pupil-less eyes, defined noses and downturned mouths. Both the middle and bottom creatures with their heads right side up are gripping long, beard-like limbs protruding from their chin. In addition, the bottom motif has three long limb-like structures protruding from its head, and is with its bottom limbs clutching the throats of the downturned corner-motifs. In comparison to the *stafnar* and *brandar* creatures, the number of digits on the *tingl* creatures vary between three to six, with an average of four.

Spánn (appendix 5)

The carvings on the *spánn* are composed of two anthropomorphic creatures, also carved in relief, their faces turned outwards. Although they are intertwined with each other, they are mostly intertwined around and into themselves. Both have large, round, pupil-less eyes, downturned mouths, and a limb stretching out of their heads into their respective bodies, as well as three-digited feet in opposite corners of the tableau. Their bodies are mostly covered in diamond shaped texturing, however the body of the creature on the right side of the tableau has lined texturing on the part of its body that is closest to the other creature, before it morphs into diamond shaped texturing. Independent of the creatures are three three-leafed motifs, each on the bottom of the tableau. They are placed underneath each of the creatures bodies as well as below the section where the creatures intertwine with each other (see figure 17).

Figure 17. Anthropomorphic gripping-creatures displayed on the *spánn* (after Shetelig 1920).

Hǫvuð (appendix 6)

The *hǫvuð* is composed of two parts: the actual head with the neck and face of a creature, and a tree-paneled stem that supported it. I will therefore refer to them collectively as "*hǫvuð*" and individually as head and stem, respectively. The head was broken when uncovered during the excavation in 1904 and only three semi-preserved pieces were found (Shetelig 1917:333) From those pieces, however, the basic shape and carving of the head was possible to discern: it was most likely

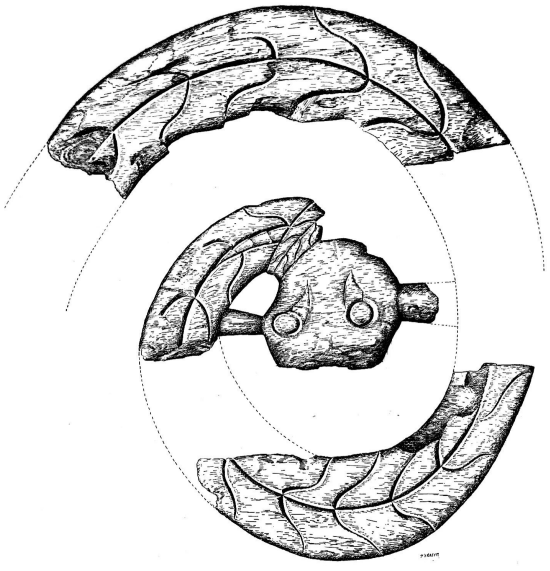

Figure 18. The three parts of the *hǫvuð* that were found during the excavation and preserved (after Shetelig 1920).

curled in on itself with the face of the creature making up the center part (see figure 18). The neck is carved simply with a line in the middle of it and evenly spaced curved lines crossing it. The face displays two round, pupil-less eyes with curved triangles stretching out on top of them. Only the top and middle part of the face was preserved, its bottom half broken off (Shetelig 1917:333), so other facial features have possibly been lost.

The stem, as mentioned above, consists of three panels, all carved in relief (see figure 19). Two of the panels correspond to the *stafnar* both in motifs and placement, as these stem panels melt into the *stafnar* on each side of the prow. These panels also consist of the gripping-creatures described on the *stafnar* and *brandar* and are almost identical in execution. The third panel of the stem faces inwards, towards the deck of the ship. This panel is, like the *tingl* and *spánn*, made up of anthropomorphic creatures although the creatures are different in execution than those on the *tingl* and *spánn*. The panel consists of three anthropomorphic creatures on top of another, all with human like faces consisting of round, pupil-less eyes; noses; and downturned mouths.

Figure 19. The three-paneled stem of the *hǫvuð*. The middle panel faces inwards towards the deck of the ship (after Shetelig 1920).

The top two have what look like beards stretching down from their chins, two arm-like limbs sticking out from a torso-like section beneath their faces, while the bottom of their bodies consist of a stretched reverse tear-shaped, leg-less section. The bottom creature has four limbs: two arm-like limbs sticking out of a torso-like section, like the other two, and two leg-like limbs sticking out of a pelvis-like section. The "legs" point upwards and are gripped by the creatures' "arms". Unlike the other two it has what looks like rings curling around its neck and midsection, as well as a limb stretching out of its head, which curls upwards, behind, and then around the middle creature. Besides this limb the creatures do not intertwine

with or into themselves or each other. The creatures' limbs vary between having three to four digits. The bottom parts of all three creatures' bodies are textured, albeit in different patterns: lined, small diamonds, and larger diamonds respectively; their "arms" are also textured, all in lined patterns.

Additional motif

In addition to the gripping-creatures, another motif occurs semi-regularly on the different carved parts of the ship. Consisting of two to three leaf-like pieces, the motif occurs on many of the already mentioned ship parts, such as the *stafnar*, *tingl*, and *spánn* (see figures 14, 16, and 17), and is particularly noticeable on the *spánn,* where three occur consecutively along the bottom border of the ship part (see figure 17). The motif always occurs close to a border of whatever ship part it appears on and stretches inwards towards the other motifs in a triangular shape (Shetelig 1920:13). However, there is one exception: located on the starboard side of the stem of the *hǫvuð*, the motif's outer pieces are shaped as the others in a leaf-like fashion; the middle, however, elongates and stretches inwards and between the gripping-creatures on the stem (see figure 19). That being said, why this motif in particular is executed in this manner there is no obvious explanation of. In general, there is no apparent rhyme or reason to how or where the motif occurs, leading Shetelig (1920:13) to speculate that it was used as a filler in certain places in order to avoid too much space between the different gripping-creatures. As the analysis has not given me any more answers to this particular question, I concur with Shetelig's (1920:13) interpretation of the motif.

Analysis

The animal art described above can be categorized into two main sets of motifs: animalistic and anthropomorphic (see appendix 1, table 1). All the motifs are carved in relief, in effect giving them depth whilst also making a clear distinction between the figures and their background. However, due to the reconstruction of the ship as it is on display, measuring the different motifs' exact relief depth became a challenge as many of the ship parts are either difficult or impossible to reach without potentially damaging the ship or the parts. This applies to all carved ship parts, but especially the *tingl*, *spánn*, and *hǫvuð.* as the two aforementioned are on display at the Viking Ship Museum but are extremely fragile and the

third being rehoused at the museum's new storage facilities. From eye measurement as well as some test-measurements of reachable parts however, there seems to be only slight a variation between the carving depths. For example, the carving depth on both sides of the lower part of the aft *stafn* is 8-13 mm, compared to both sides of the lower part of the fore *stafn* which is 3-10 mm. As the variation is so seemingly slight, it does not seem to indicate any intentional or conscious differences in techniques or skills used during the carving process.

Both of the two previously mentioned sets of motifs are textured, and all in all there are three main types of texturing patterns that occur: diamond, lined, and brick. There is also a small sub-group of a lined/diamond merge in addition to multiple patterns in several instances occur on the same creature (see figure 20). There are variations of and within these categories, however, they do not occur as often and are mostly limited to certain parts of the *stafnar* and *brandar*, not other ship parts. As going in-depth of the different patterns and variations thereof would stray from my aim with the thesis, I will use the aforementioned three patterns as so-called "executive" categories.

The texturing type varies from creature to creature, sometimes within a creature as well (see figure 20 and appendix 2, table 2). The same texture patterns occur in both the animalistic and anthropomorphic set and are seemingly random in how they occur, meaning that there is no apparent sequence in how the different types of texturing occur; i.e. diamond pattern is not always followed by brick pattern and so on. There are, however, two instances where the previous statement does not apply: the creatures on the *tingl* and *spánn* are all

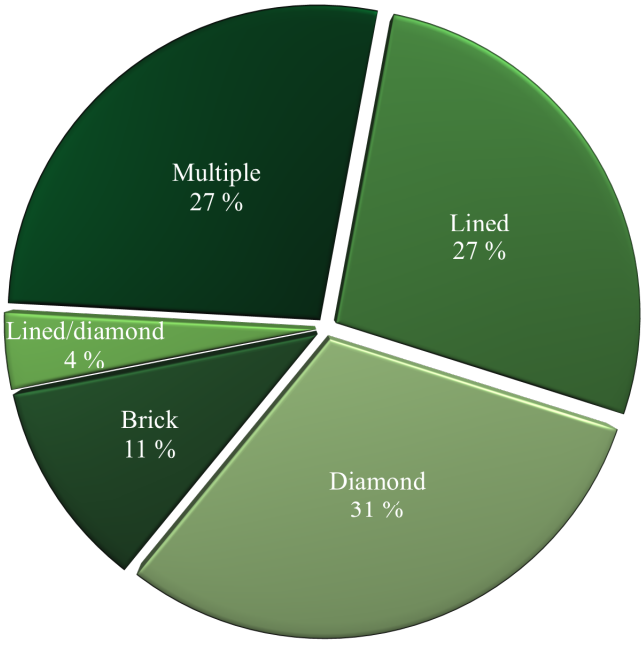

Figure 20. Texture patterns of the motifs on the Oseberg ship shown according to how often they occur (created by me).

textured in a diamond pattern, with no variations except in the size of the diamond pattern itself.

The animalistic motifs, as previously described, are exclusively the same motif in different executions: a gripping-creature with face in profile, with roughly the same features, although the number of limbs and features vary from creature to creature. This set of motifs appears solely on the *stafnar* and *brandar*, meaning that the only places the creatures occur are located on the outside of the ship. One example of the differences in execution is the aft *brandr* on starboard side, where the lower half is carved with a creature, seemingly without a head, that contorts itself into what Shetelig (1920:18) likens to a fish tail (see figure 15a). It is worth noting that Shetelig (1920:18) defines this as a headless creature, however, during my analysis there turned out to be no clear separation between this "fish tail" and the creature above, effectively making it one creature. This creature, though, is far larger and longer than others that appear on both the *stafnar* and *brandar*. Besides being the same creature executed in different ways, there seems to be little uniformity in how the creatures are woven into each other. This is not the case on the fore *stafn* on starboard side, however. On this side of the fore *stafn,* the gripping-creatures' heads are all located within the middle loop of the creature above, their necks behind the lower loop of the creature above them as well (see figure 14).

Similarly to the animalistic motifs, the anthropomorphic motifs vary in number of limbs and features. Dissimilarly, they are all of different types, meaning that in comparison to the animalistic motifs, they are not all based on one creature that is executed in different ways. In total I have identified anthropomorphic creatures on the ship, some displaying the same gripping tendencies as the animalistic motifs, some not. Although they are dissimilar to each other in several ways, all ten motifs of this set are anthropomorphic in the same way: the creatures all have human-like faces (besides one which seems to be missing its head, see description of the *tingl*), and all faces are pointed forwards. However, all the creatures are so distinctly different from one another that they could be referred to as being individuals/ individualistic. Even the creatures on the *spánn* (see figure 17) who display the same general features have enough differences that I would classify them as two separate individuals.

In comparison to the animalistic set, the anthropomorphic motifs only appear on the *tingl*, *spánn*, and the stem of the *hǫvuð*, all pointing towards the deck. As such, the anthropomorphic creatures solely appear on the ship's interior. This, in effect, creates a distinct line of separation between the two sets of motifs where each set becomes an element of the ship: animalistic creatures an element of the outside and anthropomorphic of the inside, respectively (see figure 21 and appendix 1, table 1). This will be discussed further in chapter 6.

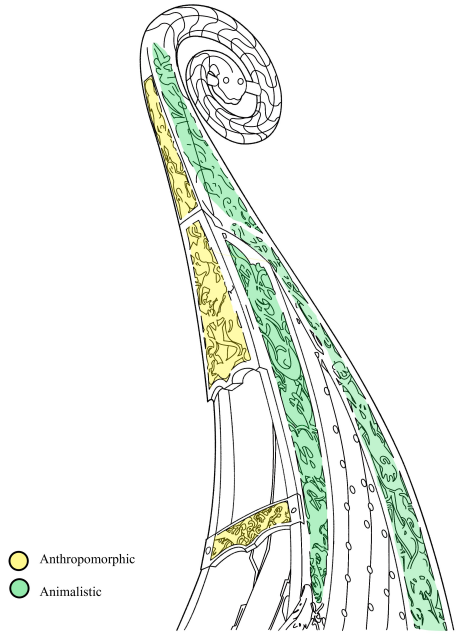

Figure 21. Illustration of the locations of animalistic vs. anthropomorphic motifs on the Oseberg ship shown in different colors. Representative for the ship as a whole (illustration by Ryan Florez and Allen Robbins; edits by me).

4.3 Supporting Material

The Academic's head-post and sled-shaft

The animal art on the Academic's head-post is constricted to its head, ending near the top part of its neck and organized within clear borders made up of neat bands. In return, the vast majority of the head is entirely covered, besides the creature's upper snout, eyes, ears, and mouth (see figure 22). An immediate impression is that the art is composed of a complicated and intricate, intertwined motif. However, on closer inspection the art becomes less intricate. The animal art on the head-post is in reality "only" made up of several versions of the same creature-motif, all versions similar in design and execution. The creatures are in profile and have long, elongated bodies, which twist and curl into and around themselves as well as other creatures. They are characterized in particular by heads with large, pupil-less eyes and long, beak-like mouths biting or holding on to another part of its body. Several features

Figure 22. Sample of the animal art on the Academic's head-post (after Shetelig 1920).

protrude from the creatures' bodies at different points, some bearing similarities to wings, others to feet.

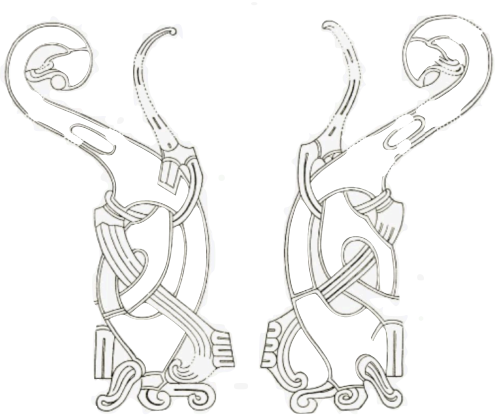

Figure 23. Sample of the animal art on the Academic's sled-shaft (after Shetelig 1920).

The animal art on the sled-shaft displays a similar, if not the same, creature executed three times with slight variations (see figure 23). The execution however, though strikingly akin to the head-post, varies as the carvings on the sled-shaft are constricted within a slightly triangular panel and not a spherical, curving surface like the head-post. The motifs on the sled-shaft are characterized by elongated, curling bodies with protruding limbs that twist into themselves, where two of the three creatures also twist through each other. Similarly to the creatures on the head-post, they are in profile with heads displaying large, pupil-less eyes and long, birdlike mouths; with two of the three holding on to protruding limbs with their mouths. In comparison to the head-post, the creatures on the sled-shaft do not curl and twist as excessively nor display the same amount of protruding limbs. In addition, the bodies of the creatures on the sled-shaft are somewhat thicker and seem less "stretched" than those on the head-post.

As previously mentioned, the function of the animal head-posts is somewhat unsure, though many support the hypothesis that they might have been carried and displayed in processions like the one illustrated on one of the Oseberg tapestries (Shetelig 1920). Following this notion, the head-posts — and their carvings by default — would have been intentionally visible and on display. They would most likely be carried via a handle, and as a result end up in front of, and almost parallel to, the people carrying them. Although they are not displayed in the same way, it seems the case would have been similar for the carvings on the sled-shaft. As the shaft is one of the parts connecting the sled to the animal(s) pulling it, the carvings on this particular shaft would in all likelihood have been clearly visible, especially to those sitting in the sled. The shaft would also have come before the sled itself, and although this might seem obvious to state, this in effect means that the shaft — and its carvings — would have come in front of people sitting in the sled, similarly to the head-posts being carried in

front the people holding them. It therefore seems quite likely that these motifs were not meant to be hidden away, rather the opposite: they were intended to be seen.

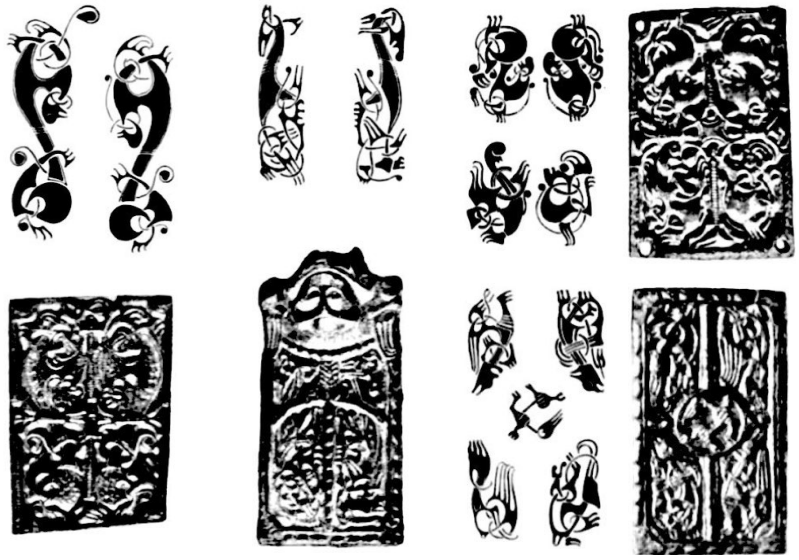

Figure 24. Sample of the Broa bridle fittings, with outlines of the animal art motifs displayed the respective bridle fittings (after Salin 1922).

The Broa Bridle Fittings

The Broa bridle fittings all have animal art covering what is assumed to be their top side, composed of elongated gripping-creatures twisting into themselves (see figure 24) (Salin 1922). All bridle fitting panels are separated into further panels on their respective surfaces with the gripping-creatures executed on a second layer beneath. Most of the creatures seem confined within these panels, twisting into and around themselves only. However, some seem to glide underneath the panel edges and appear again on the other side, as seen in figure 25. Even so, the creatures still seem to only grapple with themselves. Some fittings have three layers of ornamentation, however, where the elongated gripping-creatures make up the bottom layer and the panel walls on the top layer, whilst the middle layer consists of a larger creature on the topmost part of the fitting. This creature is executed *en face*, meaning it is displaying its whole face. It has a distinct mouth as well as round and pupil-less eyes, and two arm-like limbs extending downwards towards the rest of the panel. The creatures "paws" are fashioned in such a way that it seems to be gripping or

Figure 25. Some of the motifs seem to glide underneath the panel edges to appear on the other side (after Salin 1922).

surrounding the other motifs (see figure 25).

On a general basis, the gripping-creatures on the fittings have a varying number of limbs, with bodies so elongated and ribbon-like that different body parts are difficult to distinguish with certainty. The same applies for their faces, as not all the creatures have distinct or obviously outlined heads or faces. Those who do are displayed in profile, usually with large, round, pupil-less eyes, such as in figure 24.

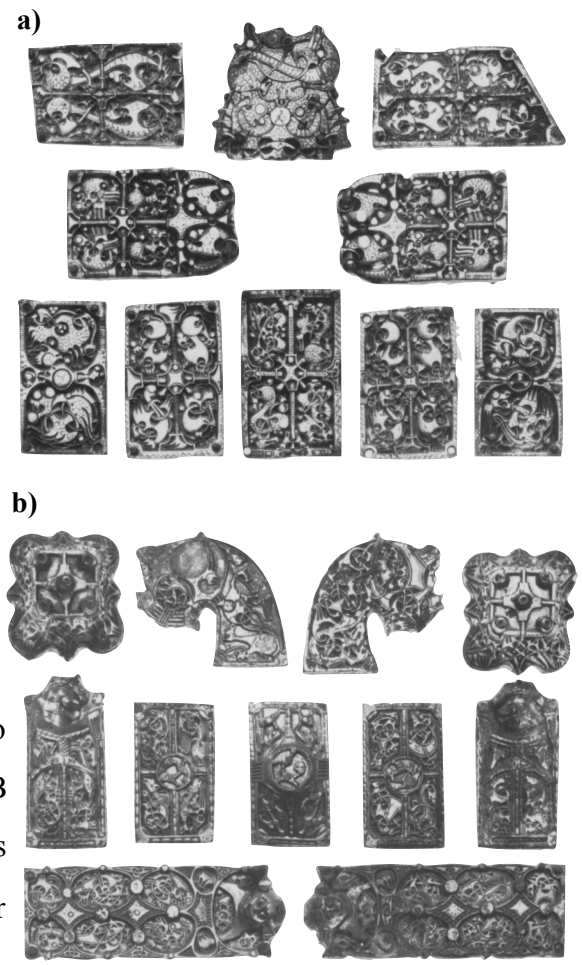

Figure 26. a) Group A of the fittings, believed to be reuse of a Christian artifact of some kind vs. b) group B of the fittings, interpreted as the main fittings of the bridle (after Thunmark-Nylén 1992).

The fittings have been categorized into two groups: primary and secondary fittings, or B and A, respectively (see figure 26). Group B is judged to be the primary bridle fittings as their overall shapes are ideal for bridle use. This group is in addition more heterogeneous both in the motifs used as well as their execution (Thunmark-Nylén 1992:227-332). Group A, on the other hand, are classified as secondary fittings as they show signs of repurposing; several of the fittings of this group displaying evidence of having been intentionally trimmed or cut. Although they are closely similar to group B, the animal art on these fittings vary more in how they are executed and displayed. A striking similarity of the majority of group A, however, is that the surface panels are organized in a cross-like fashion (Thunmark-Nylén 1992:230-332).

Thunmark-Nylén (1992) argues that the panels of group A originally stem from a different object than a bridle, and were later divided and repurposed to use as bridle fittings. Discussing earlier studies concerning Christian missions on Gotland in the 8th century, Thunmark-Nylén (1992:236-238) speculates whether the fittings of group A stem from a

Christian artifact; in which case the fittings were in all likelihood produced at least one generation apart, group A being the elder in this scenario.

Based on this, Thunmark-Nylén (1992:237-238) argues that the motifs displayed on the group A panels are in fact not gripping-creatures at all, but were defined as such by previous studies (such as Salin 1922) in order to place the whole bridle fitting set within the same context. Although I do not disagree with the hypothesis of group A originally stemming from a different object, possibly a Christian artifact, the motifs in this group are gripping-creatures. Even though not all motifs on the bridle fittings display heads, I identified at least two heads belonging to motifs displayed on panels from group A (see the left-most and bottom right panel of figure 24). In addition, Thunmark-Nylén (1992:238) concedes that there are no stylistic differences between the groups B and A other than the exact execution of the motifs themselves, leaving me unsure as to why the author argues against group A consisting of gripping-creatures.

That both groups were used as bridle fittings, however, is agreed upon (Salin 1922, Thunmark-Nylén 1992). Similarly to the Academic's head-post and sled-shaft, the gripping-creatures — at least those with discernible heads — are animalistic with faces displayed in profile. Being fitted on a bridle, the panels would then be on display whenever the bridle was in use. The panels would therefore enter all spaces before persons riding the horse on which the bridle was placed. Not unlike the previous scenarios discussed with the Academic's head-post and sled-shaft, it seems to suggest that the animal art on the panels was intended to be seen and on display.

The Steinsvik Sword

The Steinsvik sword displays animal art on both sides of its hilt, with similar types of motifs yet different in execution (Peirce 2002:32-33). For simplicity's sake I will refer to them as side 1 (figure 27) and side 2 (figure 28), respectively. The animal art is executed on small panels mounted on the sword's pommel as well as on the lowest part of the hilt, connected with the sword blade. Gripping-creatures are displayed on all the panels, some with distinguishable faces, 6 on side 1 and 5 on side 2. These are all *en face*, facing outwards with

few facial features except small eye-like grooves and shading like the bridge of a nose (see figure 29). Some also display curved, ear-like shapes on top of their heads. Besides the topmost panel on the pommel on side 2, it is difficult to ascertain whether there are more than one creature in each panel. As such, most of the creatures seem to be grappling with themselves; some clasping limbs, others tugging what seems like beards or hair (see figure 29).

Figure 27. The Steinsvik sword, side 1 (Kulturhistorisk museum, Universitetet i Oslo).

Figure 28. The Steinsvik sword, side 2 (Kulturhistorisk museum, Universitetet i Oslo).

The topmost panel on side 2, however, is made up of at least two creatures, as two different faces are possible to distinguish. These are formed in a column, one on top of the other. The topmost creature has a head, torso, and four distinguishable limbs, its right "hand" grasping a fifth limb stretching from its head while its lower left "foot" is grasped by the creature below it. The lower creature has a torso and two arm-like limbs, but a plasticized lower body which curls and twines into itself. Similarly to the creature above it, it is grasping a limb-like object stretching out of its head. Dissimilarly, this limb twists through its body and connects with a leg-like limb on its lower body. While the creatures are grasping each other, neither of them are intertwined with the other. It therefore seems that panels in which motifs are twisting into themselves are displaying one creature and not several.

Figure 29. The topmost panel of side 2 (photo by me).

The animal art is located, as previously mentioned, on the sword's hilt. As such, the art would have been close to the physical touch of a hand when it was use, the pommel pointing inwards towards the user

while the lower part of the hilt would possibly have been visible to an incoming foe. When the sword was worn, however, the animal art panels would have been clearly visible, at least the panels on the side facing outwards, as one side would always have pointed in towards the user/wearer. Although there are no apparent stylistic or motif changes between the panels, — from side 1 to side 2, or from pommel to lower hilt — the sword is crafted in a way that when in use, either in combat or worn, some of the animal art would always point inwards towards its user, whilst some would be on display, or at least visible to others.

SUMMARY

Though previous studies on Scandinavian animal art were primarily style based, leading to a perception of animal art as a form of superficial adornment or ornamentation, later research has focused on the possible intention and symbolism of the art style. A central point has been the perspective of the art form being laced with meaning, especially concerning the recurring gripping-creature motif. Different interpretations have linked animal art to notions of identity, legitimization of power, violence and war, as well as the overall mentality and cosmology of Old Norse society.

The animal art that appears on the Oseberg ship can be categorized into two groups: anthropomorphic gripping-creatures displayed *en face* and animalistic gripping-creatures displayed in profile. As the anthropomorphic gripping-creatures only occur on the inside of the ship, whilst the animalistic are only displayed on the outside, there seems to be a distinct separation between the notions of interior and exterior. Of the supporting material, the Academic's head-post and sled-shaft, and the Broa bridle fittings all display animalistic gripping-creatures portrayed in profile. These are all executed in a way where they would enter spaces before the people using the objects they appear on. The Steinsvik sword, however, displays anthropomorphic gripping-creatures. Many of the creatures would be visible to others but would always be close to the body of whoever was wielding or using the sword.

Chapter 5. The Ship

The ship appears in several, varying Old Norse contexts. In this chapter I will therefore analyze how the ship appears as a concept during this time-period. Firstly I will discuss in what contexts the ship appears and how they have been interpreted. My areas of interest are archaeological sources such as the Gotlandic picture stones, stone ship settings, and boat-graves, as well as literary sources such as Old Norse mythology and through the use of the literary device known as kennings. I will approach this discussion from the angle of my theoretical framework as outlined in chapter 2 (see figure 2). I will analyze how the ship as a concept has been influenced by and in turn influenced the people it has been in contact with. I will then apply this to the Oseberg ship. Firstly I will discuss how it has been interpreted, and then go on to applying the previous analysis to the ship. This will be done in order to study the role or social function the ship could have had during its time of origin before being buried.

5.1 The Ship as a Concept in the Old Norse Society

Archaeological Contexts

Ship appearances in archaeological material from the Old Norse contexts can largely be categorized into, but is not limited to, three groups: boat-graves, stone settings, and picture stones. Boat-graves have been found in several places in Northern and northwestern Europe, the earliest of these dated as far back as the Bronze Age. However, it is from 600-900 C.E. that the phenomenon blossoms, most notably in Norway and Sweden (Crumlin-Pedersen 1995:87; Müller-Wille 1995:101; Schönbäck 1980:108). Stone ship settings are also known as early as the time-period in question, some dating as far back as the Bronze Age (Capelle 1995; Skoglund 2008), though the largest quantity has been dated to the Viking Age (Müller-Wille 1970:14, 19 in Røstad 2003:38). Picture stones, on their end, are mostly known from Gotland. Similarly to the two previously mentioned groups they span several centuries, however, the stones displaying ship motifs are dated to between 800-1000 CE, meaning the Viking Age (Andrén 1989:291).

Though boat-graves in Scandinavia appear from the about 500 C.E. onwards, they increase in both frequency and size during the Viking Age (Andrén 1989; Müller-Wille 1974; Røstad 2003). Although such graves appear in several other countries as well, such as Russia and England, during this timeframe these have strong similarities to those found in Scandinavia, to the extent that it is considered to be a Scandinavian-related phenomenon (Crumlin-Pedersen 1995:87; Østmo and Hedeager 2005:439-440; Schönbäck 1980:108). Whether or not it could be considered a tradition or custom has been debated (see Crumlin-Pedersen 1995; Næss 1969), which is why I will refer to it as a phenomenon.

There are also discussions pertaining to the differences between boat-graves and ship-graves. These are mainly related to size, but vary in the exact measurements of when a sea-going vessel is large enough to be considered a ship (Müller-Wille 1974; Price 2010; Schönbäck 1980). For simplicity's sake, one could say that burials with larger vessels such as the Oseberg ship are to be considered ship-graves, while burials containing vessels roughly around the size of rowboats, such as those found at Kaupang (Crumlin-Pedersen 1995), would be labeled boat-graves. The discussions on the difference between the two are also related to the type of grave they indicate, however. In many cases, graves that fall within the ship-graves category display more grandeur and have been argued to indicate burials of higher status persons. This does not automatically imply that burials considered to be boat-graves indicate lower-status persons, however, as variations occur within both categories (Müller-Wille 1974; Røstad 2003).

The previous statement is one that can be easily applied to the burial patterns in Scandinavia during the Viking Age as a whole, as variation is an essential factor when analyzing these patterns in Scandinavia of this time (Røstad 2003). Ship stone-settings fall within this parameter. They are usually composed of large stones or boulders, set in an oval, ship-like formation. In some cases burials are found inside of or by the formations, sometimes also with traces of fireplaces and animal bones. This is often interpreted as being residue from a *blót*, or a feast. However, these settings are in other cases found with only traces of fire and animal bones, and in yet other cases with neither burials nor feasts, adding to the pattern of variation in burial customs, as previously mentioned (Røstad 2003; Skoglund 2008). The

settings can be challenging to date, as the dating of the formation must come from a secondary source, such as bone fragments from a burial or animal remains (Røstad 2003). From the datings that have been made, however, the amount of the stone ship settings seem to increase during the Viking Age (Müller-Wille 1970:14, 19 in Røstad 2003:38). The settings with burials have been interpreted as a variation of the ship-burials phenomenon, where the ship in this sense consists of a stone formation placed on ground level above the burial rather than an actual ship within the burial (Røstad 2003; Skoglund 2008).

Ship motifs also appears on several distinctive runestones from Gotland, known as the Gotlandic picture stones, which display varying motifs in addition to rune texts. That is not to say that all the Gotlandic picture stones display ship motifs (Burström 1996:22-23). As with the stone ship settings, the dating of the picture stones are uncertain. They have therefore been categorized into tentative periods based on the motifs they display. As shown by Anders Andrén (1989:306), the stones displaying ship motifs all fall within the Viking Age. This could be interpreted as a variation of the ship-burial custom found other places in Scandinavia (Andren 1989; Ellmers 1995).

It should be mentioned that the picture stones are not in themselves burial stones, in the sense that they do not mark specific burials. They do, however, serve as memory stones, meaning that they seem to have been raised in the memory of a person or persons (Ellmers 1995). The ship picture stones in this sense, Andrén (1989:306-310) argues, could serve as a Gotlandic version of the ship-burial tradition, as Gotland is known to have its own versions of other typical Scandinavian customs. The Gotlandic picture stones displaying ships do not only fall within the Viking Age. They also fall within the period when the ship-burial custom blossoms particularly other places in Scandinavia during the Viking Age. Andrén (1989) also argues that the stones function as a form of storytelling. As mentioned above, many of the stones display runes as well as motifs, and often the runes and motifs correlate. What Andrén (1989:311) points out, however, is that the pictures do not necessarily simply illustrate the texts, they seem themselves to tell a story. There therefore seems to be a correlation between the use of things, text, and pictures/motifs, in the sense that the motifs are not just illustrations of the texts but actual story-tellers themselves (Andrén 1989).

A perspective on the variations in burial customs in Late Iron Age Scandinavia is presented by Neil Price in his 2010 article *Passing into Poetry*. The author compares the findings from both archaeological material and textual evidence — which will be discussed further below — that show that both types of material exhibit typical traits of dramaturgy and the dramatic in general, which in turn display an apparent focus on storytelling during this period (Price 2010). What Price (Price 2010:137) argues is that burials and grave rituals could have been a furthering of this storytelling focus, in that they could have been literal executions of dramas. This would not be so unlike such stories and dramas depicted through aforementioned finds, and could also be the reason for the variations in burial customs as each burial's drama would set the stage — so to speak — for why and how things were done. As there is not evident reason for why the burial customs during the Late Scandinavian Iron age vary as much as they do (Røstad 2003), Price (2010) argues that the possibility of staged death plays could provide insight into why this dissimilarity occurs.

This perspective can be linked to ethnographic studies, such as Gilbert Lewis' (1980) *Day of shining red: an essay on understanding ritual*. In this article, the author presents a similar view to Price (2010), related to an anthropological study on the performance of rituals by the Papa New Guinean village of West Sepik. Although the study does not focus on burial customs, rituals are compared to theatrical plays. This is based on the fact that both are structured by a basic formula which contains multiple routines, and are then executed as performances (Lewis 1980). When applied to archaeological material such as funerary practices, the burial itself, the objects included in it, and the rituals performed during the funerary process are consequently all elements of a predetermined sequence of events structured by the death drama, or play, in question (Price 2010). Of course, as acknowledged by Price (2010), this is almost impossible to verify or find archaeological traces of. However, based on and strengthened by the evident focus on storytelling from numerous different Viking Age sources, this interpretation could provide new insight into the variations in funerary customs during the period; burials could be products of varying geographical areas with several different death dramas (Price 2010).

Literary Contexts

The ships from archaeological contexts dated to the time-period are also often interpreted in relation to ships known from Old Norse mythology. One of the biggest sources on Old Norse mythology are preserved literary works from later centuries. Most of these are dated to the 11th-13th centuries, when schools in the now Christianized Scandinavia were established to preserve stories, legends, and myths that had been passed on orally from pre-Christian, Old Norse times (Steinsland 2005:43). However, even though these works are written for a Christian audience and therefore have been influenced by that time-period, many of them show surprisingly little demonization of pre-Christian thoughts and customs (Steinsland 2005:43, 53-54). One of the earliest named poems of these sources is *Ragnarsdrápa* by Bragi "the Old" Boddason, also referred to as Bragi Gamli. This work has been dated to the 9th century C.E. (Birgisson 2007:4; Kristjánsson 2007:85; Poole 2007:277), effectively placing it within pre-Christianized in favor of Christianized Scandinavia, and alludes to myths later repeated in younger works (Steinsland 2005:49). Consequently, with works such as this in addition to the known oral tradition from pre-Christian into Christian times, literary sources on Old Norse mythology are in all likelihood strongly related to pre-Christian periods.

One similarity between the boat-graves, stone ship settings, and the Gotland picture stones is that they all often appear in connection to death (Andrén 1989; Røstad 2003). As previously mentioned, while boat-graves and many stone ship settings denote specific burials, the Gotlandic picture stones do not. However, as discussed above, Andrén (1989:306-308) argues that while boat-graves do not appear on Gotland these stones, specifically the ones bearing ship motifs, could signify a Gotlandic version of the boat-grave tradition found elsewhere in Scandinavia. The thought of the ship's relation to death and/or burials has been connected to several Old Norse myths concerning death and ships/boats. "The death of Baldr" is especially notable in this case, as the myth details how Baldr, the god of poetry, is placed on his ship after his death and sent out to sea to the realm of Hel (Schjødt 1995:23). Another is "Om Sinfjotles daude", where Sigurd, a man carrying his dead son Sinfjotl, encounters a man (believed to be Óðinn) who places Sinfjotl in his boat and disappears into the mist (Om Sinfjotles daude 2002). The ship *Naglfari* from Old Norse mythology has also been connected to this notion, as one of the translations of its name is literally "ship of the

dead" (Schjødt 1995:23). These examples have all been used to support the interpretation of the ship in Old Norse society having a strong connection to the concept of death and that the ship could act as a so-called death vessel (Røstad 2003; Schjødt 1995).

One of the few places *Naglfari* appears in the mythology, however, is in connection with Ragnarok. It is not clear whether or not it is owned by the god Loki or Hrýmr, but it has one specific purpose: to transport giants to the world of humans and gods (Røstad 2003:42; Schjødt 1995:22-23). This has been linked to Old Norse cosmology, and how the ship, through Naglfari, represents and is a baseline for how the world and life is structured (Røstad 2003). Ragnarok is often described as the Old Norse version of doomsday, and in one sense it is. However, it is not the end: after Ragnarok, the world begins anew (Steinsland 2005:121-127). *Naglfari*, and other ships by proxy, could therefore be interpreted to be intimately linked to the actual perception of time itself and the overall cosmology of Old Norse society. Whether or not there was a cyclical understanding of time during this period has been debated (Steinsland 2005:106), however, the notion of continuing after death appears several other places in Old Norse mythology and possibly in the archaeological material. Boat-graves and so-called chamber graves have been compared to ideas of "living corpses" from Old Norse mythology, where the inhabitants of the grave actually reside and live there, continuing to exist after their death (Kobyliński 1995:15; Røstad 2003:42). The structure and installation of the Osberg ship and burial in particular has been compared to that of an actual hall, giving the impression that the burial could have been intended as a residence for the deceased (Herschend 2000).

The ship has also been interpreted as an expression of a fertility cult. This notion is closely connected to the Old Norse gods Njǫrðr, Freyr, and Freyja (Røstad 2003). The god Njǫrðr, father of Freyr and Freyja, has been connected to the fertility goddess Nerthus, mentioned in Tacitus's Germania from the 1st century CE. Tacitus describes how this goddess is worshipped by a people around the North-Sea area, and that her symbol, according to him, is a ship. Etymologically, Nerthus and Njǫrðr are strikingly similar, in addition to Njǫrðr's home Noátun which literally translates to "ship field" (Røstad 2003:42). *Skíðblaðnir*, a ship that could sail over both water and land amongst other magical capabilities, belonged to Freyr

who was one of the gods of fertility (Steinsland 2005:152). His twin sister, Freyja, also a goddess of fertility, ruled in *Fólkvangr*, also known as *Sessrúmir*. As with many other gods linked to fertility, Freyja had ties to death; half of those who died in battle would go to Óðinn's hall *Valhǫll*, whilst the other half would go to Freyja's *Fólkvangr* (Steinsland 2005:156-160). An interpretation of Viking Age ships — especially buried ships or ships appearing in burial contexts — is therefore that they are evidence of a fertility cult belonging to the mentioned gods (Røstad 2003:42). This interpretation has been used to on several boat-grave complexes such as the Slusegård boat-graves (Crumlin-Pedersen 1995) and the Oseberg ship (Ingstad 1992, 1995) amongst others. It should be noted, however, that Freyja's hall also appears over a list of ships in *Skáldskaparmál* (verse 491), where other ships such as the aforementioned *Naglfari* and *Skíðblaðnir* also appear:

Nú mun ek skýra
of skipa heiti:
Qrk, árakló
askr, Sessrúmnir,
skeið, skúta, skip,
ok Skíðblaðnir,
nór, Naglfari,
nǫkkvi, snekkja.

(Jónsson 1931:208 in Hopkins and Þorgeirsson 2011:16; Sturluson 1998:127)

Now I will set forth the
names of ships:
Ark, oar-claw,
bark, Sessrúmnir,
longship, cutter, ship
and Skíðblaðnir,
vessel, Naglfari,
rowboat, smack.

(Hopkins and Þorgeirsson 2011:16)

Hopkins and Þorgeirsson (2011) discusses this conundrum, acknowledging that it might be an example of a misunderstanding: that *Sessrúmnir* originally was a hall, but was misunderstood as a ship, or that a misinterpretation of the ship became "hall". They do not find this likely, however, as they present another interpretation that combines *Sessrúmnir* and *Fólkvangr*, not as synonyms, but as two concepts co-existing with each other. What they propose is that *Sessrúmnir* and *Fólkvangr* actually refer to a ship in a field, or "the ship in the field" (*Sessrúmnir* = ship, [*Fólk*]*vangr* = field). Following this, they draw comparisons to known stone ship setting burials and debate whether or not this mythological realm of the dead is actually a reflection of burial customs at the time (Hopkins & Þorgeirsson 2011:16). In one sense, this adds weight to the fertility cult interpretation in that it strengthens our impression of Freyja's connection to both fertility (field) and death (place of the dead), while also tying yet another connection between the ship and death and the notion of living corpses, consequently adding to the interpretation of the ship as a death-vessel and the notion of living corpses residing in the graves.

In addition to the above-mentioned contexts, the ship also appears in a literary device known as kennings, known especially from Skaldic poetry as well as other forms of Old Norse literary sources (Steinsland 2005:49). Kennings can be simply defined as paraphrases, which are characterized by using mainly synonyms such as the kenning *örva drif* (arrows' snowstorm) for battle (Kristjánsson 2007:87) (Steinsland 2005:49). As can be seen in the example, kennings have two substantival elements: *örva* (arrows') and *drif* (snowstorm) which combined becomes the paraphrase for battle (Kristjánsson 2007:87).

However, the definition of the concept kenning slightly changes from older to newer studies (see Frank 1978, Kristjánsson 2007, Birgirsson 2007, and Schulte 2014 amongst others). This change is not of monumental scale, but does alter how kennings can be interpreted, which one could claim therefore makes it quite important to discuss. Roberta Frank (1978:42) defines a kenning as "a periphrasis, consisting of two or more substantive members, which takes the place of a noun", similarly to the definition and description above. However, several newer studies, such as Bergsveinn Birgirsson (2007) and Michael Schulte(2014), specifically

avoid defining the concept as a periphrasis. This is because they argue that defining the concept as consisting of periphrasis implies that it would constrict and limit interpretations of kennings, in the sense that they would be reduced to "a different way of saying something else". On one thing all the mentioned studies agree, however: kennings are association-based. Whether simply paraphrases for something else or a more complex linguistic system of concept metaphors, the defining characteristic of kennings is that they are association-based.

Schulte (2014:23) argues that the very essence of kennings is that they are a blend of metonyms and metaphors. A metonym is a word related to what it refers to (ex: "property of the crown", crown = monarch). A metaphor, on the other hand, is more abstract, resembling but not necessarily similar to what it is referring to (ex: "time flies", flies = passes quickly). While others have classified kennings as being either metonymic or metaphoric, Schulte (2014) contends that the unique element of Scandinavian kennings is that they are both. This implies that instead of being a relatively simple paraphrase for something else, a kenning is a much more complex literary device with two intertwined, yet separate parts, and that one cannot be understood without the other.

A criterium for these elements is that they both rely on a framework of understanding. This framework is based on recognition and association, also known as "metonymic and metaphoric mapping" as described by Lakoff (1987 in Schulte 2014:23). Based on their definitions, this means that while metonyms move within one domain of association, metaphors move between two: a source and target domain. As previously mentioned, a metonym is often closely related to the word it describes (crown = monarch). A metaphor, however, must not necessarily be similar to the word or concept it describes, hence source and target. Using my previous example of "time flies", "flies" is in this case the source, whilst its meaning "passes quickly" is the target domain.

This lays the groundwork for what Schulte (2014) labels the "decryption key" for kennings. In essence, he argues, a kenning (such as the previously mentioned *örva drif*) can be said to be made up of two parts: a deciding word and basis word. The deciding word is the metonym, usually introduced first. It gives an idea of the premise of the kenning and lays the foundation on which the basis word is placed. In a kenning such as *örva drif*, *örva* (arrows') is the

metonym, the deciding word: it gives the impression of weapons and violence. The basis word is the metaphor, acting as the last part of the kenning. It is of a more abstract nature, sometimes bizarrely so (Birgirsson 2007), but when added together with the deciding word, the metonym, the kenning bears meaning. In *örva drif*, *drif* (snowstorm) acts as the metaphor, the basis word: it is not a word closely related to arrows and can at first glance seem like a strange connection, however it gives the impression of a storm, many things happening at once, and things falling from the sky. Therefore, with the connotations and inferences of both "arrows" and "snowstorm", the kenning bears meaning: weapons, violence in a storm, all happening at once, falling from the sky = battle.

This model by Schulte (2014) can be applied to an often appearing kenning for ship: "the sea's horse" or variations it, such as *byrjar drösla* (sailing wind horse) from Bragi Gamli's *Ragnarsdrápa* (Krell 2013:26; Schulte 2014:17). The sea/sailing wind is associated with water, waves, wind, air, floating. The sea/sailing wind is the deciding word(s) (metonym) of the kenning, telling us that the kenning is in some manner related to water and traveling on water. The horse, on the other hand, bears resemblance to transportation, wealth, travel. This is the basis word (metaphor) of the kenning, which will give the meaning of the kenning when added to the deciding word. In this case the basis word gives the implication of travel and wealth. Horses do not typically float or travel on bodies of water, so taken literally the kenning can seem bizarre, as noted above. What the kenning does give however, is the premise of water, waves, and floating added with the concept of a means of transportation, wealth, and travel: effectively giving the impression of a ship.

Part of Schulte's (2014: 22-28) argument is related to a correlation between the previously mentioned "metonymic and metaphoric mapping" and the author's own presented "decryption key". In order to properly interpret and gain insight into poetic phrases from older languages, a frame of reference is sorely needed; a frame of reference based on the vernacular of the language in question. The way kennings appear and are used, they act as poetic riddles of a sort, however, as emphasized by Schulte (2014: 27), riddles are no fun or use if they are not obvious or at least possible to solve. Although thorough documentation of the Old Norse vernacular might be lacking, Schulte's (2014:28) argument indicates one

specific point: kennings were meant and intended for Old Norse speakers to understand, possibly almost instinctively, based on their linguistic frame of reference. Following the same line of argumentation, kennings appear to give insight into Old Norse mentality. This is done through the use of language and literary devices, both based on assumed inferences which, in turn, would lead to understanding (Gell 1998). My argument is therefore that the ship appearing as and through kennings, in addition to the aforementioned contexts, indicates how intertwined the ship most likely was with Old Norse mentality, adding yet another layer to the complex and varying role the ship played within Old Norse cosmology and mentality in general.

This is of consequence to ships found in burials, as it indicates that the inclusion of the ship in the funerary process was connected to several factors rather than a singular purpose-based factor, as in what is the ship supposed to do in the grave. When seen in connection with the "the sea's horse" kenning specifically, this becomes evident. As previously mentioned, the associations between horses and ships could include wealth and transport, however, similarly to the ship the horse also played a multidimensional role in Old Norse society. In comparison to other animals, who were either purely domesticated — such as dogs — or traveled between the domesticated and wild spheres a couple of times a year — such as sheep —, the horse seems to have belonged to several spheres at once (Loumand 2006). Horses were animals closely related to humans' social sphere, while at the same time surviving and thriving in the wilderness as well as having the ability to move across and between borders of different worlds or concentric circles, as witnessed in Old Norse mythology (see figure 30). This, as argued by Loumand (2006:132-133), indicates that the horse existed within its own category. The horse was a dynamic and active conciliator, not confined to mediate solely between two worlds or spheres, but rather possessing the ability and mobility to freely move

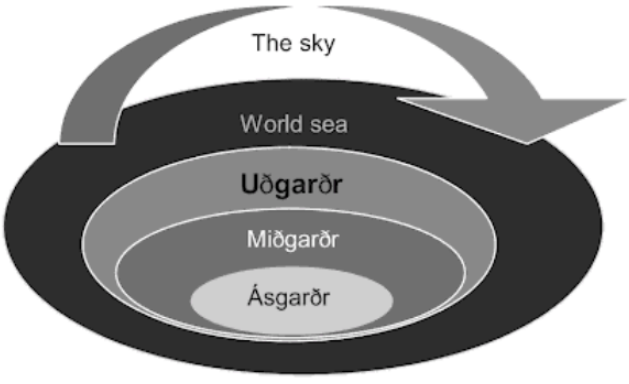

Figure 30. An illustration of the concentric circles as explained in Jens Peter Schjødt's article, "Horizontale und Vertikale Achsen in der vorchristlichen skandinavischen Kosmologie" (after Loumand 2006:132).

across and within all spheres.

With this in mind, the kenning "the sea's horse" gains several additional layers of understanding. In addition to the immediate connotations of wealth and travel, one could claim that the kenning draws a parallel between the ship and the horse's multidimensional nature. From this perspective, the ship is literally being described as the sea's equivalent of the horse. Furthermore, as there are no restrictions or specifications, the kenning thus implies that the ship is the exact equivalent of the horse, indicating that the ship would act as the same type of multidimensional agent, existing in its own category and inhabiting the ability to move between and within different spheres. This, consequently, has direct implications for ships found in graves as it indicates that the multidimensional nature of the ship does not necessarily end with the ship being buried, but rather continues to exist within the burial. Following this line of thought, it suggests that the inclusion of ships in burial contexts was not due to one specific purpose or function for the ship to serve, but rather based on a mentality in which the ship was a multidimensional entity inhabiting several, varying connotations, abilities, and purposes.

5.2 The Oseberg Ship

Technology and Function

Similarly as the Gokstad and Tune ships, the Oseberg ship is often categorized as a karfi, a ship type mentioned in several literary sources (e.g. Jesch 2001; Sayer 1996). What type of ship a karfi was, however, apparently depends on the author describing it. According to some (Sayer 1996:279; Sjøvold 1985:18) it was either a trader or personal vessel, while others (Jesch 2001:135) refer to it as an ambiguous term, leaving doubt as to what the function of the ship type was exactly. In the case of Oseberg, however, it is most often referred to as both a karfi and a personal vessel, considered to be well suited to river and close to shore travel, open sea less so (Brøgger and Shetelig 1950; Christensen 1992; Sjøvold 1985).

Since its reconstruction in the early 20th century, it has been believed that the Oseberg ship fit this description perfectly: a vessel intended for personal use, only suited for close to shore travel (Brøgger and Shetelig 1950; Christensen 1992; Sjøvold 1985). Although it is certainly

plausible that the Oseberg ship was indeed a personal vessel, its usage was not limited to shore-bound travel. This has recently been confirmed, as it turns out the reconstruction of the ship itself was not as accurate as previously believed (Paasche and Bischoff 2007).

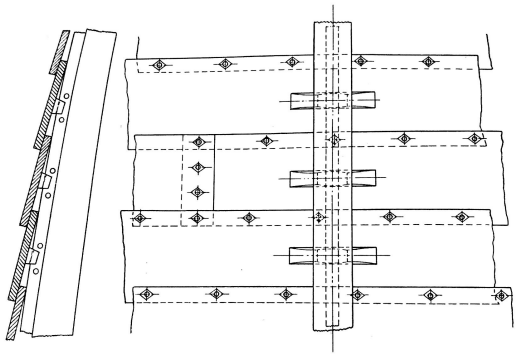

Figure 31. Illustration of the clinker technique used during construction of the Oseberg ship (after Shetelig 1917).

As with many viking ships, including the previously mentioned two, the Oseberg ship is a clinker-built ship. This construction technique involves layering the strakes (planks) in such a manner that the top part of each strake goes underneath the one above it, with the bottom part covering the top of the strake beneath it. These are then fastened with clinker-bolts, as illustrated in figure 31 (Bill 2008; Brøgger and Shetelig 1950; Sjøvold 1985). This technique was widely used in northern Europe in both the Viking Age and Medieval Period, the ships having the advantages of being sleek, light, and fast (Paasche and Rytter 1997:158).

In the 1980s "Dronningen" was built, a 1:1 reconstruction of the Oseberg ship based on Fredrik Johannessen's 1928 drawings of the original reconstruction (Paasche and Bischoff 2007:8). "Dronningen", however, capsized and finally sank in 1988, only a year after its completion. The problem was the shape of its prow: it was too narrow to keep itself on top of the waves. Consequently, water broke over the bulwark and the ship nose-dived into the sea (Christensen 1992:149; Paasche and Bischoff 2007:8-9). At the time, archaeologist Arne Emil Christensen supposedly said: "if the Oseberg ship is a badly constructed ship, it must remain so" (Paasche and Bischoff 2007:9, my translation). That, however, might not be the case. A survey of the ship's shape was done in 2006-2007 by a team composed of an archaeologist, a boat technician, and a shipbuilder. Their conclusion was that the hull of the original ship most likely had been wider and that the ship, as it is displayed today, is incorrectly pieced together (Paasche & Bischoff 2007:41). This, in turn, suggests that it was probably far more seaworthy than previously believed (Bill 2008; Paasche 2010). If this is the case, which I would argue it is, many interpretations of the Oseberg ship's function, such as the ones mentioned above,

have greatly underestimated the ship (see for example Brøgger and Shetelig 1950; Christensen 1992; Sjøvold 1985).

The Oseberg Ship Interpreted

In previous research, the Oseberg ship is seldom interpreted on its own. Rather, it mostly appears within interpretations of the burial as a whole or the position of the women buried in it (see Herschend 2000; Ingstad 1992, 1995; Shetelig 1917 amongst others). As these are all elements of the ship's latest known context, it could be argued that this is a natural consequence. However, I fear that it places the ship within what could be called an interpretive box. This implies that since the ship is rarely taken out of its burial context, hence never interpreted as a subject in its own right, aspects of the ship are unintentionally being ignored and disregarded.

Interpretations besides those of practical technological function do exist, however. Shetelig (1917) presents the previously mentioned death vessel interpretation and applies it to the Oseberg ship, where its presence in the burial serves as a way to transport the dead to the afterlife. Ingstad (1995:136-144) draws parallels between the Oseberg burial and previously mentioned fertility cult, in this case a cult specifically related to the goddess Freyja. This interpretation is initially based on interpretations of the modern place-names of the area surrounding the burial, which have all been interpreted to stem from Old Norse mythology, effectively making the area a holy place. In addition, Ingstad (1995:146) argues that the tapestry fragments found in the burial show a so-called *dísa*-ceremony celebrating a king and queen, in which the queen is a literal reincarnation and representative of Freyja. The Oseberg ship is also evidence of this cult as the fact that the animal art displayed on it indicates that the ship could have been used for cultic purposes (Ingstad 1995:144). Herschend (2000), on the other hand, discusses the similarities between the practical installations of the burial and other known halls from the same period, suggesting that the ship might be equipped as a high-status home in addition to being a vessel for passage for the deceased.

In one sense, these interpretations surrounding the Oseberg ship are similar to the practical function interpretations previously discussed. In both, the ship is treated as something which

serves a purpose: either as a functional ship for practical use, a death vessel which aims to transport the dead, as a part of a fertility cult where it serves cultic purposes, or an actual residence for the deceased (Herschend 2000; Ingstad 1995; Shetelig 1917). However, as described and discussed above, the ship appears in many varied contexts during this time-period. That in and of itself does not mean that it cannot serve a single purpose, but one could claim that it indicates how the ship was a more ingrained entity within the mentality of the period than the way it is treated in several of the already mentioned interpretations. This does not imply that the ship could not serve the functions mentioned. Rather, what it does imply is that those functions are related to, associated with the ship as an entity. Therefore, rather than simply serving a purpose or being a means to an end, the ship brings with it those associations. In this sense, the ship could be said to be almost as much as an agent in the choosing of its placement or purpose, as the humans handling it.

As illustrated in the theoretical framework, there is a dual sense of influence. People make and ascribe functions, symbolism, and meaning to the ship; the ship first becomes a container of all these elements. In turn, the elements then influences the people around it due to the connotations it brings with it. If this cycle is repeated enough times, it would appear that the ship no longer is simply a container of functions and connotations ascribed to it. Rather, these elements have become part of the ship, and the ship a part of them. In this sense, the previously mentioned interpretive box both does and does not exist. The burial is the latest known context of the ship and therefore contains crucial data for the ship has a part of a funeral, which in turn can indicate how it was perceived before it was buried. For this reason alone, as the context provides information about the ship rather than restraining it, it should not be disregarded. However, if the context becomes the sole perspective from which the ship is analyzed or interpreted, one can unintentionally create said interpretive box, by ascribing the latest known context as the only context of consequence.

As such, the ship as an entity — and the Oseberg ship specifically, in this case — exists within a complex framework of association-based inferences, most likely tightly interwoven with the mentality of Old Norse society. This implies that the Oseberg ship should not simply be viewed as a death vessel, an element of a fertility cult, or a home for the dead. Whilst also

inhabiting numerous other traits, the Oseberg ship is, effectively, all three of the mentioned interpretations and more. This discussion will be resumed in chapter 6.

SUMMARY

The ship appears in numerous contexts from the Old Norse society. These sources are both archaeological and literary, and contribute several indicators as to how the ship was integrated into Old Norse society, possibly also intwined in the actual mentality of the time-period. Especially from an archaeological perspective, the ship is often found in relation to death, be it as stone ship settings, boat/ship burials, or memory stones such as the Gotland picture stones (Andrén 1989; Ellmers 1995; Müller-Wille 1974; Røstad 2003; Skoglund 2008). The ship also appears in connection with the literary device known as kennings and is often referred to as a "the sea's horse" or "sailing wind horse". As kennings were in all likelihood meant to be understood by most, it stands to reason that this particular kenning and ones similar to it, are not simply comparing the ship to a horse, but implying that the ship is the horse's exact equal. This indicates that the ship might have been perceived to have been a multidimensional entity in the same manner as a horse (Loumand 2006; Schulte 2014). Based on the arguments presented in this chapter, one could therefore suspect that the Oseberg ship in all likelihood existed within a complex network of inferences which in turn would have influenced those in contact with the ship.

Chapter 6. The Symbiosis of Animal Art and Ship

This chapter consists of discussions based on the two previous analyses. Firstly, I will discuss the results of the analysis of chapter 4, the animal art, and compare and contrast the findings from the Oseberg ship with the supporting material. I will then go on to discuss the inferences associated with the ship as a concept in Old Norse society, as analyzed in chapter 5, and what consequences this could have on the Oseberg ship. The third and final part of the chapter consists of a merged, analytical discussion of the animal art and ship as concept specifically related to how they converge and are expressed in the Oseberg ship.

6.1 Animal Art and Spaces

The animal art on the Oseberg ship can be separated into two main categories: animalistic and anthropomorphic. As seen in the analysis in chapter 4, these categories also appear on different locations on the ship. While the animalistic motifs only appear on the outside of the ship, the anthropomorphic motifs appear solely on the interior of the ship (see figure 32). Taking this into consideration, when comparing the two motif categories and their locations to each other, it indicates that there exists a distinction between the exterior and interior of the ship.

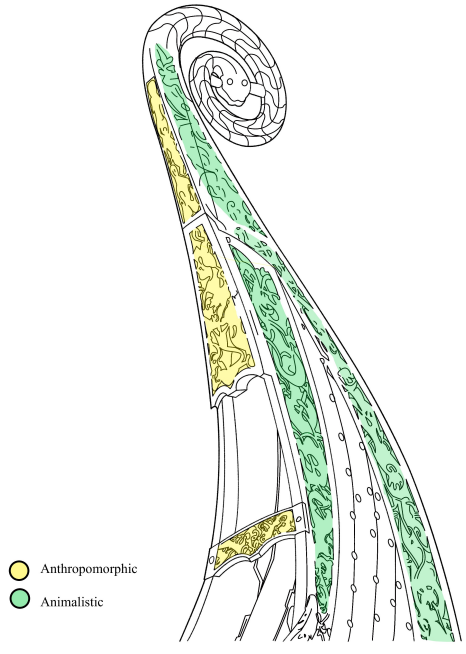

Figure 32. Illustration of the locations of animalistic vs. anthropomorphic motifs on the Oseberg ship shown in different colors. Representative for the ship as a whole (illustration by Ryan Florez and Allen Robbins; edits by me).

As mentioned in chapter 4 and above, the animalistic motifs appear on the outside of the ship, specifically on the *brandar* and *stafnar*. As illustrated in figure 32, the motifs on these ship parts are exclusively animalistic, just as the ship parts belonging to the interior of the ship (the *spánn*, *tingl*, and stem of the *hǫvuð*) are exclusively anthropomorphic. This, in effect, means that anyone viewing the ship's sides: starboard, port, fore, or aft (like visitors at the

Viking Ship Museum today) see the animalistic motifs. One could postulate that anyone viewing the ship from its sides would see only the animalistic motifs. I experienced this myself: even though I had worked at the museum and in the exhibit for three years, it was only after I analyzed the ship parts for this thesis and knew where they were that I realized that there actually were anthropomorphic motifs on the ship in the first place. Of course, even though I had this experience it is not in itself representative for everyone's perceptions and observations of the ship, past or present day.

However, there is nothing in particular that sets the anthropomorphic motifs apart from the animalistic ones when viewed from a distance, making it difficult to separate the two when viewing the ship from the outside. I have not found mention of paint traces or other visually stimulating enhancements of the carvings anywhere (see Brøgger et al. 1917, 1920, 1928; Christensen et al. 2006), meaning that they have most likely not been painted or made to stand out in such a way. It should be mentioned that the tannins in the mound where the ship was buried did contribute to the dark blackish-brown color that the ship has today, meaning that the ship was of a lighter color before being placed in the mound (Sjøvold 1985). One could therefore imagine that the carvings might have been easier to see and pick out, especially depending on the light available and what types of shadows would have been cast on and caused by the carvings. Even so, when viewing the ship from the outside, the details of the interior ship parts are not close at hand, meaning that the details of the *spánn*, *tingl*, and stem of the *hǫvuð* are not as clear as those on the *brandar* and *stafnar*. One can see that these ship parts are carved, but not necessarily what the carvings display or details of their execution.

Based on this line of reasoning it could be claimed that the carvings facing the interior of the ship are intended to be viewed from the inside of the ship. Although it is not possible during the present day to actually stand on the deck of the Oseberg ship — or what is left of it — the way the *spánn*, *tingl*, and stem of the *hǫvuð* face, it seems like anthropomorphic motifs are directing their attention to whatever is aboard the ship. Their whole faces are turned outwards and in a sense gaze towards the deck.

The faces of the anthropomorphic and animalistic motifs differ in one more aspect than belonging to different creatures and appearing on different parts of the ship. An important point to make is that they do not face the same way. The animalistic motifs are carved in profile, with only one side of their face visible. Which way they face varies and have, after my analysis, seemingly no obvious pattern besides them being in profile. From studying them, however, I am left with the impression that they all do seem to be staring outwards, as though they are keeping an eye on the sides of the ship. In comparison, the anthropomorphic motifs are carved *en face*, displaying their whole faces. This means that not only the ship parts they are carved on, but the motifs themselves are effectively facing the inside of the ship and whoever or whatever is on deck. Even though one might be able to partially make out the carvings from the outside of the ship, one could postulate that it would be like looking at someone who is observing something or someone else. It therefore stands to reason that the intended audience of the anthropomorphic motifs could be claimed to be those who find themselves aboard the ship. At the same time the case might be reversed, as one could speculate whether the anthropomorphic motifs is the intended audience of those aboard the ship.

The animalistic and anthropomorphic motifs can as such be said to have their separate domains; not only are they exclusively displayed on different ship parts belonging to two separate aspects of the ship, they define themselves by presenting themselves to two different audiences: the animalistic motifs are not just a part of the exterior of the ship, they direct their attention to the outside of the ship. In the same manner, the anthropomorphic motifs are not simply displayed on the interior of the ship, they observe the inside of the ship.

As noted in chapter 4, the motifs on the Academic's head-post, sled-shaft, and the Broa bridle fittings are all animalistic. Similarly to those on the Oseberg ship, they are in addition all executed in profile. The motifs appear on the head and upper neck of the Academic's head-post and although there are still questions surrounding what exactly the head-post might have been used for, a common interpretation, as discussed in chapter 4, is that it would have been carried (Shetelig 1920). This is due to the partially conserved handle sticking out perpendicularly at the lower part of the head-post. Following this line of thought, the motifs

would therefore have been on display in a certain manner. As such it seems that they are not intended to be hidden from view or conserved for anyone in particular. Presuming the previously mentioned interpretation is the case, the head-post would also in all likelihood have been carried in front of whoever was holding it; the head — and motifs by default — would therefore enter all spaces, places, and surroundings before the person carrying it.

The case is similar with the Academic's sled-shaft. Although it is unsure exactly how the shaft would have been fastened to the pull-animal, it would most likely either have been parallel to the ground or slanting slightly upwards towards the animal. The motifs appear on the upper side of the shaft, meaning the side that would face the sky, rather than the ground. This fact gives an indication that these motifs are not intended to be hidden from view either, rather the opposite. As this is the part of the sled that literally allows the pull-animal to pull the vehicle, these motifs would enter spaces, places, and environments before the persons using the sled, similarly to the head-post being held in front of its carrier, as noted in chapter 4. While being made of metal and not wood, the Broa bridle fittings also fit this interpretation. The motifs are displayed on small metal plates which would have been fitted on a bridle and used on a horse (Salin 1922; Thunmark-Nylen 1992). Being literally placed on the horse's head and neck, the motifs would have been situated in such a way that they would also have entered spaces, places, and environments before the person leading or riding the horse.

The motifs on the Steinsvik sword, however, do not immediately fit this interpretation. On this artifact, the animal art is located on the hilt of the sword (Graham-Campbell 1980; Peirce 2002). These motifs are anthropomorphic and are depicted *en face*, showing their whole faces. Both these aspects are similar to the motifs on the interior of the Oseberg ship. The way this sets it apart from the previously discussed material, is that there seems to be a more intimate, intended interaction between the wearer/user and the animal art; either they are in physical contact with the user when the sword is wielded (held) or when worn, which most likely would have been in a sheath fastened at the hip. In this case, the animal art is not entering any space, place, or environment before the person, rather it is existing in the same space with the person. At the same time, they do not seem to be hidden from view, as the

motifs would be visible to others close enough to the user, either when it was sheathed at the person's hip or held and wielded.

Analyzing the supporting material in comparison with the Oseberg ship, there seems to be a pattern emerging specifically surrounding the placement and display of animalistic versus anthropomorphic motifs. The animalistic motifs are displayed on objects that effectively look outward: they are portrayed in profile, looking to the sides and in some sense observing the spaces around them. They also enter into spaces before the persons using them/traveling with them do; as seen on the *stafnar* and *brandar* of the Oseberg ship, the Academic's head-post and sled-shaft, as well as the Broa bridle fittings. The anthropomorphic motifs, however, appear on objects in more intimate spaces to the persons in connection with them. They are portrayed *en face*, displaying their whole, human-like faces and usually gaze towards the persons in touch with them, as seen on the *tingl*, *hǫvuð*, and *spánn* on the Oseberg ship, as well as the Steinsvik sword. It is worth noting that they do not seem to be specifically hidden from anyone, especially the persons in close proximity to them, beyond being difficult to distinguished from a distance. It could be fathomed that the anthropomorphic carvings on the ship could possibly be seen from people outside of the ship, the same way the motifs on the Steinsvik sword would have been visible to others around the sword's user/wearer.

That being said, the pattern emerging from the different placements of animalistic and anthropomorphic motifs seems to indicate something along the lines of a boundary relating to non-human and human spaces. The boundary in question is displayed on the objects as outside/exterior = animalistic vs. inside/interior = anthropomorphic, particularly noticeable on the Oseberg ship as it displays both sets of motifs (as illustrated in figure 32 and 34).

6.2 The Ship Incorporated in Mentality

As previously discussed, often recurring interpretations of the ship from Old Norse contexts are the ship as a death vessel, physically transporting the deceased to an afterlife; a place of residence parallel to a hall, meaning an actual home for the deceased; and a part of a fertility cult related to the goddess Freyja or her brother Freyr (Herschend 2000; Røstad 2003; Schjødt 1995; Steinsland 2005). All of these interpretations have in some form or another

been applied to the Oseberg ship. However, similarly to the previously mentioned technologically focused interpretations of the ship, these interpretations do little for the ship besides attempting to give it a purpose or function for its inclusion in the burial. That is not to say that the above-mentioned interpretations are wrong or faulty, but that they interpret the Oseberg ship's supposed function rather than interpreting the actual ship. In one sense one can say that these interpretations propose answers to a question of why the Oseberg ship is in this given context, but not what the ship is.

What is becoming clear, however, is that the ship as a concept was in all likelihood not simply a tool serving a function — be it practical or symbolic — in Old Norse society, but rather a complex entity connected to multiple, different subject themes. According to literary sources on Old Norse mythology, half of those who died in battle would go to Freyja's hall (home), known as both *Fólkvangr* and *Sessrúmnir* (Steinsland 2005:156-160). As previously mentioned, *Sessrúmnir*, however, also appears on a list of ships in verse 491 of *Skáldskaparmál* (Sturluson 1998:127; Jónsson 1931:208 in Hopkins and Þorgeirsson 2011:16), and though this was believed to be either a mistake or misinterpretation/-translation, the interpretation presented by Hopkins and Þorgeirsson (2011) provides a new angle from which this conundrum becomes less confusing than previously believed. This interpretation is based on the hypothesis that *Fólkvangr*/*Sessrúmnir* might not be synonyms for the same place or object, but rather two separate things that coexist: *Fólkvangr* being the field on which *Sessrúmnir*, the home, is placed Hopkins and Þorgeirsson (2011:16). From this perspective, *Sessrúmnir* is a ship, hall, and home at the same time. Although this one example alone cannot be used to affirm a whole concept within a society's mentality, it does suggest that the ship was closely related to the notion of hall and home during this time-period.

The ship is also a recurring subject in the Old Norse linguistic tool known as kennings, as discussed in chapter 5. The kenning "the sea's horse" and variations thereof, is a particularly known kenning for ship and appears as early as "sailing wind horse" in Bragi Gamli's *Ragnarsdrápa,* dated to the 9th century, meaning the same century as the Oseberg burial (Birgisson 2007:4; Holck 2006:204; Krell 2013:26; Kristjánsson 2007:85; Poole 2007:277; Schulte 2014:17). Loumand (2006:132-133) argues that the horse as a concept within Norse

society was a multifaceted, multidimensional agent, inhabiting the ability to move across and within all spheres. The ship kennings where the ship is then being likened to the horse's equivalent on water, suggests that the same connotations and associations connected to the nature of horses applied to the nature of ships, as well. As previously discussed, it implies that the ship, in fact, was the horse's exact equal; consequentially, the ship as an entity was by default multidimensional by nature, inhabiting the ability to pass between and within all spheres. Following the theoretical framework outlined in chapter 2, these associations would no doubt have played a part when the ship interacted and was interacted with, including before, during, and after its burial.

It is worth noting that these arguments and examples can also be used to reaffirm some of the previously mentioned interpretations. While the argument of *Sessrúmnir* as both a ship and home (Hopkins and Þorgeirsson 2011), can lend weight to the interpretation of the ship as a home in the grave, the argument of the ship as a transgressor of spheres on the same line as the horse could be applied to the interpretation of the ship as a death-vessel. There is however, an essential difference between these arguments and the mentioned interpretations: while the interpretations are concerned with what the ship represents or functions as, the arguments shed light on different aspects of what the ship is. In this sense, the ship is not included in a burial in order to represent a home for the deceased, the ship already is a home; just as it will not be placed in a grave to simply function as a death-vessel as it already is a transgressor between spheres. Although this might seem like one sided discussion or two sides of the same coin, it is worth pointing out as it highlights the argument that the ship in Old Norse society was more than representational. The ship did not simply serve as a symbol or representation of something else, as it was an entity in and of itself with several, varying connotations, purposes, and abilities.

6.3 The Symbiosis of Animal Art and Ship

Animal art has been connected to several aspects related to Old Norse mentality. Whether it be as a symbolic tool to legitimize power or as a way of signaling identity and status, the art form is likely an expression of the world view of the period (Hedeager 1999, 2010, 2011; Kristoffersen 2000, 2010). It should be noted that not all studies which have interpreted the

art form concern animal art from the Viking Age specifically. However, it is reasonable to suggest that the interpretations are applicable to Viking Age material as well, as they concern concepts of identity and status based on material from the same geographical area (Hedeager 1999, 2010, 2011; Kristoffersen 2000, 2010). The recurring gripping-creature motif has been connected to general notions of violence and war as well as literal depictions of violence. Domeij (2004:148, 151-153) argues that this is mirrored in written material from the period, and that gripping-creatures can be interpreted as visual expressions of battle as they are described in literary sources as well as kennings related to violence and death.

The way creatures are expressed has also been linked to notions of binding or physically containing them within objects, as the creatures are literal creations, not simply depictions (Kristoffersen 2000:270). This implies that motifs used in animal art can be viewed as actual dynamic creatures present in whatever objects they are on, and not just static representations of animals or fantastical beasts. This applies to anthropomorphic motifs as well, which have been related to the concepts of *hamskifte* and *seiðr*; one a way of literally shedding and changing ones skin into other beings or creatures, the other an ambiguous source of power or magic present at the fringes of society (Kristoffersen 2000; Steinsland 2005). These factors indicate that animal art has had connections to concepts of both the known and unknown blending together; humans becoming animals, vice versa, or existing on a plane in-between, interacting with unclear, ambiguous sources of power. Seen all together, these interpretations all point toward a complex framework of references and inferences which animal art likely existed within (Domeij 2004:146).

As seen with the discussion on the duality of Freyja's home Fólkvangr/Sessrúmnir (Hopkins and Þorgeirsson 2011), as well as the basis on which the interpretation of living corpses in (ship) graves are based (Kobyliński 1995:15; Røstad 2003:42), the ship was likely intimately related to the notion of hall and home, in addition to death. The interpretation of the ship as a death-vessel, based on several sources such as Old Norse mythology, furthers the ship's tie to death as well (Røstad 2003; Schjødt 1995). At the same time, the connections between the horse as a concept and the ship as a concept through kennings such as "the sea's horse" and "sailing wind horse" (Birgisson 2007; Krell 2013:26; Kristjánsson 2007; Poole 2007; Schulte 2014) indicate how closely the ship possibly was associated with the same abilities and

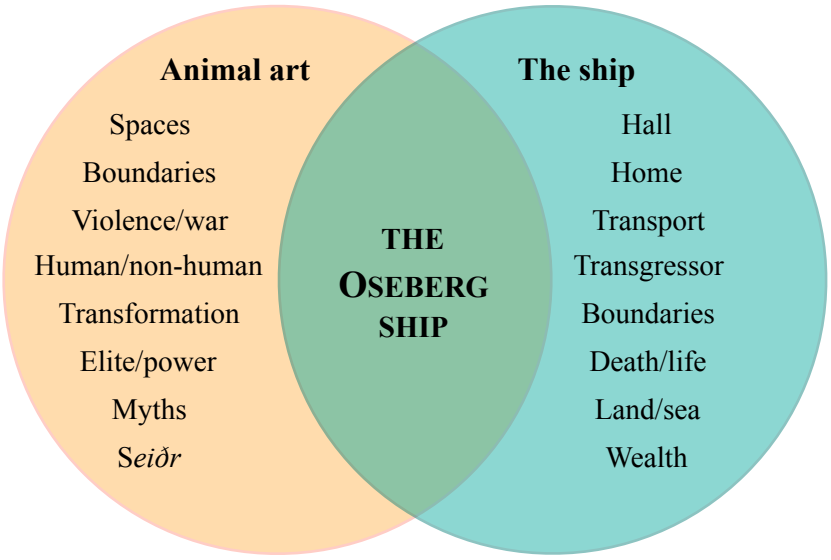

Figure 33. Visualization of some of the possible associations and inferences of both animal art and the ship as a concept, converging in the Oseberg ship (created by me).

connotations as the horse, such as the ability to move through and within different spheres of reality (see figure 30). As argued by Schulte (2014:27-28), since kennings are linguistic riddles of sorts and riddles are of no value unless they can be solved, kennings must have been based on a framework of associations that was naturally, if not instinctually, understandable to Old Norse speakers. This, in turn, indicates that the connection between ship and horse/horse and ship was likely interwoven with the mentality of the time-period, and as such was mirrored in their linguistic tools.

What the different aspects discussed above imply are that the Oseberg ship cannot be defined as being solely one thing. On and within it, both animal art and the ship as a concept converge, effectively making the Oseberg ship a melting pot or complex of inferences and associations (see figure 33). Following the theoretical framework for this thesis, the associations and inferences connected to animal art are integrated in the ship's carvings. The same applies to the inferences and connotations of the ship as a concept in Old Norse mentality, embodied in the Oseberg ship alongside those of the animal art. Considering the complexity and association-based nature of the mentality of the time-period as discussed above, these associations and inferences have in all likelihood influenced the people around the ship and in some form or another formed how they interacted with it. Some of these inferences have been outlined and discussed, but the sum total of the possible connotations

attached to Scandinavian animal art and the ship as a concept are likely impossible to attain for those who are not on the inside of the original frameworks of association — such as present day researchers or museum visitors.

The placement of the two sets of animal art motifs indicate a boundary on the ship, running along its bulwark: exclusively anthropomorphic on the interior, exclusively animalistic on the exterior. This boundary could be argued to be a literal separation of spheres; the interior of the ship being a known, human sphere, the exterior belonging to the unknown, a wild, animalistic sphere (see figure 34). Whether the interior sphere is exclusively human, however, is disputable. This is due to the nature of the motifs, as they are not actually human but anthropomorphic, a seeming blend of human and non-human. The presence of animals on the ship's deck in the burial (Brøgger et al. 1917; Ingstad 1992, 1995; Sjøvold 1985) can indicate that rather than being an exclusively human sphere, it was a sphere of the known, the familiar. The attention of the motifs seem to further strengthen this notion of spheres, as the anthropomorphic motifs on the ship's interior all face towards deck, directing their attention to whoever or whatever is onboard. The animalistic motifs of the exterior, however, show only one side of their faces, directing their attention either outwards or along the ship's sides.

Considering the connection between horse and ship as discussed above, this concept of spheres could possibly be connected to the ship and its mobility as well. Following the notion of the ship as a transgressor of spheres, the Oseberg ship could have been moored to a boulder in the burial for this exact reason (Christensen 1992; Sjøvold 1985). This may not

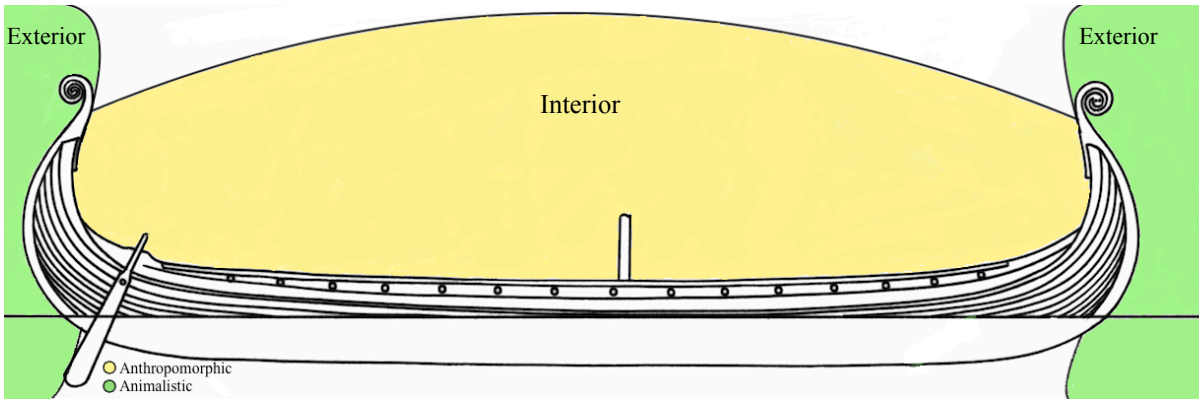

Figure 34. Visualization of the interior/exterior boundary of the Oseberg ship based on the placement of anthropomorphic vs. animalistic motifs (Kulturhistorisk museum, Universitetet i Oslo; edits by me).

necessarily have been to avoid the ship from moving between spheres, but to physically anchor it to the burial, potentially to make sure it would on some level always remain there. This gives a sense of the ship exhibiting a duality between the notion of home and travel. Not only was the ship furnished in the same manner as a hall, a typical home of the time-period (Herschend 2000), but the interpretation of Freyja's home *Fólkvangr/Sessrúmnir* implies that the ship is by nature a home, possibly a home in death by nature as well (Hopkins and Þorgeirsson 2011). The Oseberg ship can therefore be interpreted to consist of multiple aspects coexisting at once: a boundary separating an interior and exterior sphere, being a home, whilst also being a transgressor of spheres with the ability to travel between and within these spheres. One could in addition speculate if having passed over the sphere of living to the sphere of the dead, would have enabled those living in the ship to travel within and between such spheres aboard the ship after its placement in the burial mound.

Although a full understanding of the time-period might be unattainable, one aspect that could be claimed applies strongly to the Oseberg ship, is that it is more than representational. The ship does not represent anything else, so much as it is a multilayered, multidimensional, association-packed entity in and of itself. One could argue that interpreting the ship as one thing or another, a death-vessel vs. a home for example, serves little purpose. This is due to the fact that based on the numerous, varied, and complex associations connected to both animal art and the ship as a concept, and therefore the Oseberg ship by default, the ship is all of these things — at the same time.

Chapter 7. Concluding Remarks

Providing an answer to exactly how the Oseberg ship was perceived in its original burial context is challenging. However, it is composed of two essential elements: it is a ship dated to the Viking Age, a period when ship motifs appear in several, varied contexts, and also displays intricate animal art carvings, an art-form often connected to notions of the mythology and cosmology of the period (Hedeager 1999, 2011; Kristoffersen 2000, 2010; Røstad 2003; Schjødt 1995). As demonstrated, these two elements — the ship as a concept and the animal art — can when studied both individually and side by side give insight into possible links to the mentality of Old Norse society.

The analysis of the ship's carvings resulted in a distinction between the motifs on the interior and exterior on the ship. This distinction was echoed in the supporting material: animalistic motifs which occur on the exterior of the Oseberg ship also appeared on the objects that could be said to belong to an exterior sphere, namely the Academic's head-post and sled-shaft, as well as the Broa bridle fittings. Anthropomorphic motifs which occur on the interior of the Oseberg ship, however, only appeared on the Steinsvik sword, an item which, as previously discussed, would be in a more intimate sphere with the body of the user/wearer than the previously mentioned supporting material. The results of the analysis therefore indicated that there seems to be a clear separation of spheres regarding the Oseberg ship: the interior and anthropomorphic implies a sphere of the familiar/known, whilst the exterior and animalistic suggests a sphere of the unfamiliar/unknown.

The notion of spheres is echoed in interpretations of the ship from Old Norse contexts. Whereas the death-vessel involves literally transporting the deceased from one sphere (the living) to another (death), the ship as a hall or residence for the deceased illustrates that the ship could be considered as a familiar or known sphere. This is also reflected in the ship's connection to the horse, seen in kennings such as "the sea's horse". Due to the ship in these types of kennings are referred to as the horse's exact equal, it has been suggested that the notion of the horse existing as a complex, multidimensional character also applies to the ship (Loumand 2006).

As stated in chapter 1, my aim with this thesis has been to present an alternate way of approaching how the Oseberg ship is interpreted. When studied together, the analyses of chapter 4 and 5 provided a baseline for doing so, and so was further analyzed and discussed in chapter 6. The Oseberg ship has previously been mainly interpreted as a practical tool or component of the burial it was found in (Ingstad 1995; Shetelig 1920). Attempting to remove the ship from the burial, interpretation wise, is challenging as this is its last known context, however, this does not mean that the ship must be interpreted solely based on this given context. As shown through the analyses of both the animal art and how the ship appears as an entity in different Old Norse contexts, the Oseberg ship likely existed within an intricate framework of inferences and associations. Gell (1998) holds that objects exist within societal networks through inferences, and that the inferences objects can trigger in turn can influence those who are in contact with it. As argued by Olsen (2010) objects can also be viewed not just as parts of networks, but as agents that allow relations to be formed in the first place. Following these notions, when analyzing the possible inferences contained in both animal art and the ship as an entity, it indicates what a multilayered character the Oseberg ship in all likelihood was in its time of origin.

Several possible inferences have been discussed, and although a complete view of all the aspects of Old Norse society might be impossible to attain, what becomes clear is the complexity of the Oseberg ship. A straightforward answer to the problem statement of the thesis, as stated, is difficult to provide. However, the analyses and discussions indicate that the Oseberg ship is more than representational. One can hope that by providing this aspect, the ship's multilayered nature can be of interest and use for later studies on the subject.

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Appendices

APPENDIX 1

Motifs: Creatures						
	Animalistic	Anthropomorphic	With face	Without face	Missing face	Gripping creature
Stafn (fore starboard)	5 (?)	0	4	0	1 (?)	5 (?)
Stafn (fore portside)	5 (?)	0	4	0	1 (?)	5 (?)
Stafn (aft starboard)	6 (?)	0	5	0	1 (?)	6 (?)
Stafn (aft portside)	6 (?)	0	5	0	1 (?)	6 (?)
Brandr (fore starboard)	2	0	2	0	0	2
Brandr (fore portside)	5 (?)	0	2 (?)	1	1 (?)	5 (?)
Brandr (aft starboard)	2 (?)	0	1	0	1 (?)	2 (?)
Brandr (aft portside)	4	0	3	0	1	4
Hǫvuð (stem starboard)	1 (?)	0	1 (?)	0	0	1 (?)
Hǫvuð (stem portside)	1 (?)	0	1 (?)	0	0	1 (?)
Hǫvuð (interior stem)	0	3	3	0	0	1
Tingl	0	5	4	0	1	5
Spánn	0	1	2	0	0	2

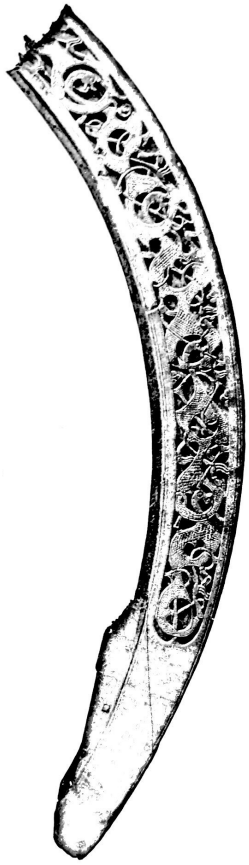
Table 1. The animal art motif creatures on the Oseberg ship. Question mark indicates a creature with an incomplete body, either missing its head or other parts of its body.

APPENDIX 2

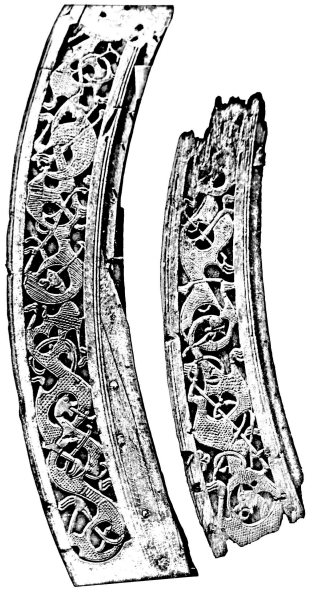
Motifs: Texturing patterns						
	Lined	Diamond	Brick	Lined/ diamond merge	Multiple	Total number of motifs
Stafn (fore starboard)	2	3	3	0	3	5 (?)
Stafn (fore portside)	2	2	2	1	2	5 (?)
Stafn (aft starboard)	5	4	1	1	4	6 (?)
Stafn (aft portside)	4	3	2	1	4	6 (?)
Brandr (fore starboard)	2	1	0	0	2	2
Brandr (fore portside)	3	4	0	0	3	5 (?)
Brandr (aft starboard)	1	1	0	0	1	2 (?)
Brandr (aft portside)	2	2	1	1	3	4
Hǫvuð (stem starboard)	1	0	0	0	0	1 (?)
Hǫvuð (stem portside)	1	1	0	0	1	1 (?)
Hǫvuð (interior stem)	3	3	2	0	3	1
Tingl	0	5	0	0	0	5
Spánn	1	2	0	0	1	2

Table 2. Texturing patterns of the animal art motifs on the Oseberg ship. Question mark indicates a creature with an incomplete body, either missing its head or other parts of its body.

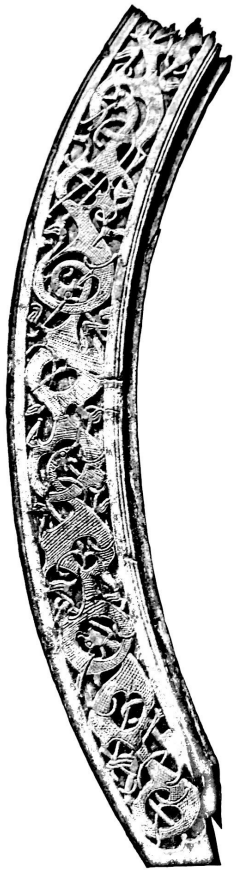
APPENDIX 3



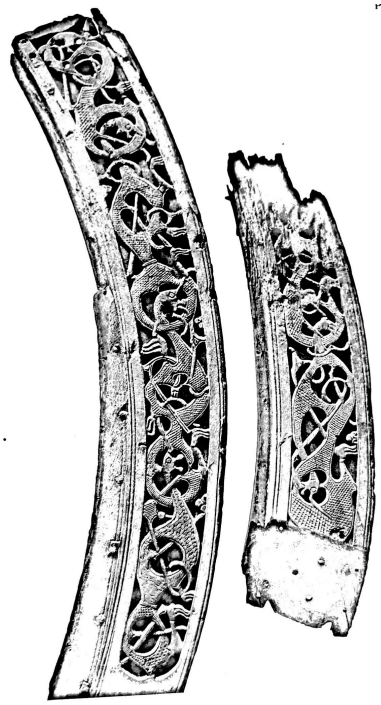
Motifs: Fore *stafn*, starboard (Figure 12b)	
Animalistic	5 (?)
With face	4
Without face	0
Face missing	1 (?)
Diamant pattern	3
Lined pattern	2
Brick pattern	3
Multiple patterns	3
Total amount of motifs	5 (?)



Motifs: Aft *stafn*, starboard	
Animalistic	6 (?)
With face	5
Without face	0
Face missing	1 (?)
Diamant pattern	5
Lined pattern	4
Brick pattern	1
Multiple patterns	4
Total amount of motifs	6 (?)

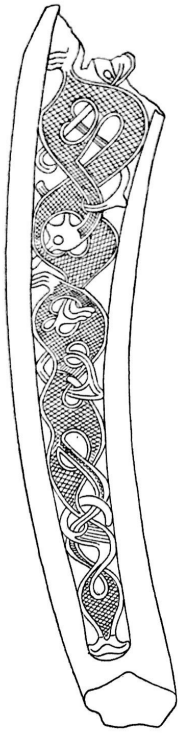


Motifs: Fore *stafn*, portside (Figure 12a)	
Animalistic	5 (?)
With face	4
Without face	0
Face missing	1 (?)
Diamant pattern	2
Lined pattern	2
Brick pattern	2
Multiple patterns	5
Total amount of motifs	5 (?)

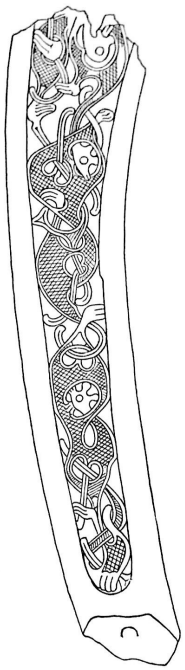


Motifs: Aft *stafn*, portside	
Animalistic	6 (?)
With face	5
Without face	0
Face missing	1 (?)
Diamant pattern	4
Lined pattern	3
Brick pattern	2
Multiple patterns	4
Total amount of motifs	6 (?)

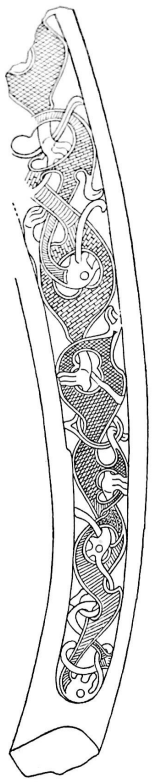
APPENDIX 4



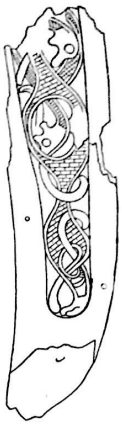
Motifs: Aft *brandr*, starboard (Figure 13a)	
Animalistic	2 (?)
With face	1
Without face	0
Face missing	1 (?)
Diamant pattern	1
Lined pattern	1
Brick pattern	0
Multiple patterns	1
Total amount of motifs	2 (?)



Motifs: Fore *brandr*, portside (Figure 13c)	
Animalistic	5 (?)
With face	2 (?)
Without face	1
Face missing	1 (?)
Diamant pattern	4
Lined pattern	3
Brick pattern	0
Multiple patterns	3
Total amount of motifs	5 (?)

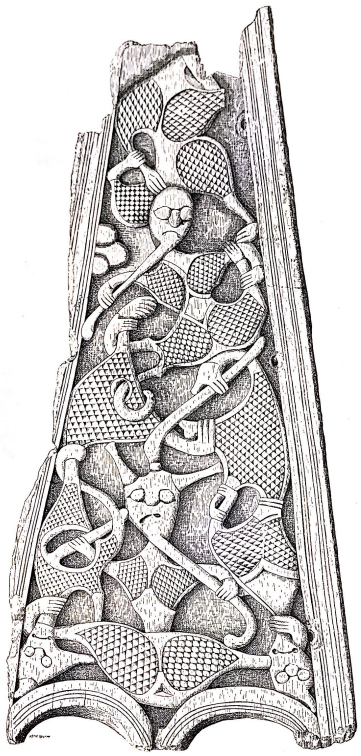


Motifs: Aft *brandr*, portside (Figure 13b)	
Animalistic	4
With face	3
Without face	0
Face missing	1
Diamant pattern	2
Lined pattern	2
Brick pattern	1
Merged lined and diamond pattern	1
Multiple patterns	3
Total amount of motifs	4

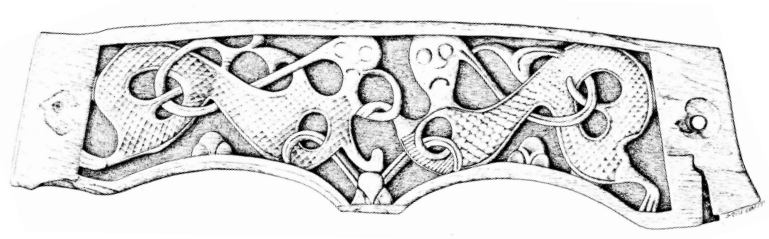


Motifs: Fore *brandr*, starboard (Figure 13d)	
Animalistic	2
With face	2
Without face	0
Face missing	0
Diamant pattern	1
Lined pattern	2
Brick pattern	1
Multiple patterns	2
Total amount of motifs	2

APPENDIX 5

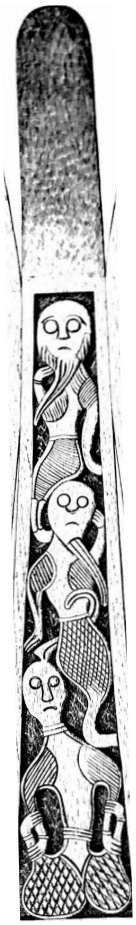


Motifs: *Tingl* (Figure 14)	
Anthropomorphic	5
With face	4
Without face	0
Face missing	1
Diamant pattern	5
Lined pattern	0
Brick pattern	0
Multiple patterns	0
Total amount of motifs	5



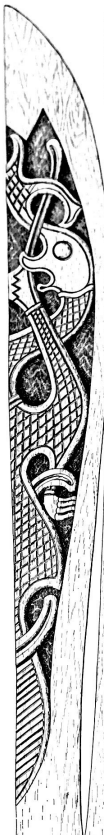
Motifs: *Spánn* (Figure 15)	
Anthropomorphic	2
With face	2
Without face	0
Face missing	0
Diamant pattern	2
Lined pattern	1
Brick pattern	0
Multiple patterns	1
Total amount of motifs	2

APPENDIX 6



Motifs: *Hǫvuð*, interior stem (Figure 17)	
Anthropomorphic	3
With face	3
Without face	0
Face missing	0
Diamant pattern	2
Lined pattern	3
Brick pattern	0
Multiple patterns	2
Total amount of motifs	3

Motifs: *Hǫvuð*, stem portside (Figure 17)	
Animalistic	1
With face	1
Without face	0
Face missing	0
Diamant pattern	1
Lined pattern	1
Brick pattern	0
Multiple patterns	1
Total amount of motifs	1



Motifs: *Hǫvuð*, stem starboard (Figure 17)	
Animalistic	1
With face	1
Without face	0
Face missing	0
Diamant pattern	0
Lined pattern	1
Brick pattern	0
Multiple patterns	0
Total amount of motifs	1