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Chapter 6

Disc-on-bow and penannular brooches: exploring aesthetics, traditions and political change in the Early Viking Age

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Introduction

The Viking Age (790–1050 CE) represents a period of fundamental changes in Scandinavia, with far-reaching political, cultural, and social transformations taking place internally as well as affecting other regions through expansion and settlement. Yet, it is claimed that Viking Age society was extraordinarily fixated on the past, with the social elite in particular concerned with creating an intricate referential mosaic of memories and mythologies (Lund and Arwill-Nordbladh 2016; Williams 2016). Both runic inscriptions and the reuse of monuments and landscapes indicate a ‘deep-felt need to create memory’ (Lund and Arwill-Nordbladh 2016), made manifest in ongoing curating and engaging with past objects, landscapes and narratives (Andrén 2013; Arwill-Nordbladh 2007; Thäte 2007). This dialogue between continuation and change, between old and new, emerges as a fulcrum within Norse communities, feeding into how authority and belonging was legitimized, challenged and embodied.

The purpose of this paper is to explore this ambivalence by considering the use and ideological connotations of two selected groups of female jewellery found within the western region of the Norse homelands, *i.e.* today’s Norway; the Vendel period (550–790 CE) disc-on bow brooches and brooches and reworked mounts imported from Britain and Ireland (‘Insular’ items) during the Early Viking Age. Although distinctly different and associated with two separate chronological periods and contexts, they were being used partly during the same time, in a period between the late 8th into the 9th century. This paper suggests that a constructive approach for interpreting this phenomenon is to view these forms of jewellery as expressions of social mobility and new political networks, and that these changes included references to different pasts. First, a brief outline of concepts relevant for exploring this perspective is presented, emphasising how narrating the past is essential for

how social structures are legitimized as well as challenged, and furthermore that narratives of the past are communicated through, among other things, perceptions and use of aesthetics. Second, central qualities and characteristics of the two forms of brooches are outlined, focusing on their contexts, depictions and aesthetic communication. The presentation of the material in question draws on in-depth examinations of their typology, and social and political contexts (Aannestad 2015; Glørstad 2012; Glørstad and Røstad 2015; in print). Finally, the differences and similarities between the two forms of jewellery are discussed with a special focus on their aesthetic affect and significance, suggesting that the imported items in the Early Viking Age must be understood in the context of the role that the costume as embodied political structure, had in contemporary society.

Time, embodied communication and aesthetics

An extensive and varied academic discourse has explored perceptions on time and of the past as social constructs, with phenomenological as well as sociological approaches (*e.g.* Bergson 1990; Connerton 1989; Gell 1992; Halbwachs 1992). In archaeology, these perspectives are closely related to ‘the ontological turn’ from the 1990s, exploring the intertwined nature of human and material agency with an emphasis on how landscapes, monuments and objects are dynamically integrated in social relations, continuously being reused and reinterpreted, affecting and affected by social agents. Studies exploring the intersection between individual and collective memory, including transmissions of collective narratives or origin stories also underline how memories as such are not conservatively preserved but rather re-created and continuously redefined, through interpretations and adjustments of the material world (Assmann 2011; Van Dyke and Alcock 2003; Williams 2006). A crucial point is that material culture and landscapes constantly move within different frames of interpretation and contextualization. In result, citations of the past through material culture and practice can be interpreted by participants and spectators in many diverging terms and be associated with various, even conflicting, narratives (Innes 2000). In the following, this perspective is applied specifically to the materiality of style and embodied communication, and to how social identities and structured social practices are communicated and maintained, through formulaic designs of costume and bodily practices. The perspective traces back to notions on ‘front stage’ behaviour (Goffman 1959) on how presentation of internalized social norms and expectations are communicated through elements of the dress, in manners, language, and bodily movements. Recent approaches highlight the active practice of constructing identities and the body as locus of embodied agency, moving away from more fixed notions of the body as a public, legible surface. Yet, addressing the visibility of the dress items as aspects of ‘the public legibility of a

personal history remains a productive part of contemporary archaeological analysis' (Joyce 2005, 143).

In North European medieval research, this perspective is productively pursued within several studies of dress and ornaments, many focusing on visual, bodily communication offered through the complex 'Germanic Animal Style'—Salin's style II—, seen on a variety of personal dress items from the 4th to the 7th century CE. The style is unquestionably associated with elite environments stretching from Northern Italy to Scandinavia (Wamers 2009). The richly ornamented objects were likely highly symbolic and ideological statements; being active components in social and political contexts (Hedeager 2011; Høilund-Nielsen 1997; Kristoffersen 1995; 2000) as well as reflecting how the body was perceived of as fluid and transformative (Hedeager 2010). The brooches from this period are often characterized by superb metalworking, decorated with mythological motifs and tropes, including abstracted animals in dense and tangled patterns and ambiguous representations of humans and animals forming a rich and complex visual language (Hedeager 2011; Kristoffersen 1995; 2010). During the 7th century this specific aesthetic expression changes character in Britain and Ireland; twisted and fragmented animals continues as an element of especially Anglo-Saxon art, while Celtic art now includes whirling spirals, interlaces and meandering layouts, playing on Christian allegories and symbolism (Wamers 2009; Webster 2012). In Scandinavia, however, traditional patterns of intricate and fragmented animals continued, gradually turning into the characteristic Viking Animal Styles. One plausible reason for this is that the animal styles became representative of a pagan, Norse worldview, forming a clear ideological and cultural statement in an expanding Christian world (Hedeager 2011, 58). Addressing the aesthetic ornamental style involves reflecting on how the interpretation of dress items depended on distance, and the scales of interaction between wearer and spectator. The brooches encompassed several layers of narratives and tropes, depending on the different stages of closeness and intimacy. From a distance, the shape of the objects would be evident as part of the overall costume, and the play of light caused by the rich ornamentation would suggest the complexity of the decor. The careful arrangement of aesthetic details with figures and narratives would often only become apparent at close hand. This tension between proximity and distance, between recognition and wonder, has probably also been essential in how different types of objects have been understood as expressions of identities and of collective narratives.

Drawing on these perspectives, the paper will examine how the coinciding and partly overlapping use of disc-on-bow brooches and Insular items may be seen in relation to their aesthetic appearance and to the social and political structures in which they were involved (Fig. 6.1). This includes not only how they conveyed political narratives and praxis, but also how those narratives were made meaningful relative to changing social conditions.



Figure 6.1. Map of Northern Europe, indicating places referred to in the text and figures.

Disc-on-bow brooches: tradition, fragments and ritualisation

The disc-on-bow brooch is perhaps the most spectacular female jewellery type Early Medieval Scandinavia (Plate 6.1). They are usually made of gilded copper alloy and the surface is covered with red semi-precious stones, garnets, in so-called cloisonné technique, building on continental craft traditions. Garnets cloisonné is most commonly associated with exclusive items from Continental Europe in the 4th to 7th centuries. They were *unica* most likely produced for political and military

elites, exchanged as diplomatic gifts and used for bolstering socio-political alliances (Arrhenius 1985, 193, 196–198).

As garnet inlays gradually went out of fashion on the Continent it became increasingly popular at the northern fringes of the Frankish Empire, in Scandinavia and Anglo-Saxon England (Hamerow 2017). In Scandinavia, the cloisonné technique is particularly linked to the disc-on-bow brooches from the 7th and 8th centuries. The disc-on-bow brooch is considered a defining artefact for the Scandinavian Vendel period (c. 550–800 CE) but it changes significantly during this period.

The earliest types are modest in size with sparingly applied ornamentation. During especially the 8th century, their length and height increase significantly, with some late brooches being up to 25 to 30 cm long and 10 to 15 cm in height. At the same time, both bow and outer brims are extended and elaborately decorated with dense interlace and animal patterns, and with meticulous garnet patterns covering the surface of the brooch. These late brooches' front is usually gilded, while the reverse side is often fully or partially covered by silver or tinfoil. In Norway, the brooch-type goes out of production around 800 CE, at the time when they were as largest and most conspicuous. The remains of 69 disc-on-bow brooches are found within today's Norway, with the large majority dating to the period between 650 and 800 CE (Glørstad and Røstad 2015). A noticeable proportion, 29 brooches, is recorded as stray finds or has no context information, and one fragment is found at the urban Viking Age settlement at Kaupang. The remaining 39 brooches are all found in burials. In Norway, human remains from inhumation burials are exceedingly rare, but based on assumed gender based grave goods, like other brooches and/or dress pins, arm rings, beads and textile implements all of the gender assigned burials with disc-on bow brooches are considered female burials.

Based on brooches' dating, context and preservation, two features of the collected corpus are prominent; first, that several brooches, or brooch-fragments, were in use for a considerable period of time, suggesting an intention to curate and maintain them over several generations (Glørstad and Røstad 2015). Second, the late brooches seem to have been subjected to rampant fragmentation, some being reused as separate brooches long into the Viking Age. At least seven brooches and brooch-fragments produced during the Vendel period are documented in female burials with characteristic Viking Age jewellery. This could in many cases indicate a mature woman carrying fragments or brooches acquired in youth, but there are also noticeable time gaps, for example an 8th-century brooch found in a late 10th-century burial, possibly close to the turn of the millennium, from Fonnås, Rendalen (C8156), which means it was at least 150 years old at the time of burial. A similar phenomenon has been noted by several Scandinavian scholars addressing disc-on-bow brooches in other parts of Scandinavia (Åberg 1924, 77–80; Gjessing 1934, 139–140; Ørsnes 1966, 111; Thunmark-Nylén 2006, 51–52, 57). In addition, some brooches produced at the end of the Vendel period have been partially ornamented with distinct older stylistic features, underlining the impression that the brooch-type was considered

a conservative costume element, associated with ideas of tradition and time-depth. In several cases, the fragments display signs of deliberate partition and reuse, with some detached parts having processed edges; others are refitted with a needle and catch plate to form a separate brooch, or perforated for secondary use (Glørstad and Røstad 2015; in print). The deliberate fragmentation seems to be particularly directed towards the bow and the discs placed on top of the bow, indicating that these specific features were attributed extra significance. Different reason may be suggested for this: the disc represents a unique feature for this particular brooch type, and would most likely have been readily understood as representative of the complete brooch. On the other hand, the bow on the 8th-century brooches is largely used as a canvas for elaborate animal decoration, and this aesthetic aspect might have amplified the value of the fragment (Fig. 6.2).

The placement of the brooch is known in a few cases, and they seem all to have been worn horizontally on the upper chest, right under the chin. The massive size of the 8th-century variants suggests that were not part of an everyday costume. Instead, their size, lavish decoration and bodily placement mean that they should rather be seen as a form of insignia, ideal for public display and as potent carriers of narratives and ideologies at communal gatherings and events (Magnus 2001; Røstad 2018). The concern for preserving and continuously curating the narratives and identities associated with these particular objects thus seems to have intensified among the elite from the early 8th century. The brooches' characteristic features,



Figure 6.2. Bow fragment from a disc-on-bow brooch, with processed edges. Front, and reverse with secondary needle/catch plate. From a female burial Melø, Vestfold County, Norway (C11898). © 2019 Kulturhistorisk museum UiO, K. Helgeland/CC BY-SA 4.0

such as their size and the complex garnet patterns and animal ornamentations, are increasingly amplified, transforming them into visual statements of tradition, stability and cosmological authenticity.

Insular brooches and fragments: new stories and networks

The onset of the Viking Age is commonly dated to c. 790 CE, with the first Norse seaborne attacks on monasteries and communities in Britain. The extended contact with Britain and Ireland through trade, colonization and raids is evident through a large number of imported metalwork from around 800 CE often referred to as ‘Insular’ objects (Wamers 1985). At present, more than 500 such objects are found in Scandinavia in Viking Age contexts, the vast majority from Norway. They include jewellery, strap ends and book mounts, reliquary shrines, decorated containers/buckets, weight equipment, coins, and weapons (Aannestad 2018; Bastrup 2014; Glørstad 2012; Heen Petersen 2018; Wamers 1985). Many items clearly originate from ecclesiastical milieus, while others seem to have had a secular background. In Norway, regional studies suggest that c. 80% of these objects are from female burials where they are incorporated as brooches and dress ornaments, although these burials only represent 6 to 8% of female burials in total (Jåtten 2006). Apparently, Insular material was mainly included as part of female practice and appearances, yet available to only a small segment of the population. The collected corpus is thus highly heterogeneous, yet demonstrating signs of standardised categories and of socially exclusive implementation.

The large proportion of ornamental, Insular metalwork used as dress ornaments in female burials fall into two main groups: Brooches and reworked fragments of mounts from a range of different objects. The brooches, so-called penannular brooches, stand out as mostly intact and implemented as a central element of dress consistent with their original use and intention. They are circular, highly decorative, gilded brooches fastened with an extended pin (Plate 6.3). The penannular brooches were in use from c. late 7th–early 9th century within today’s Ireland and Scotland (Ryan 1987; Stevenson 1987), with a number of variants ranging from small and simple shapes to ostentatious and lavish pieces of art, mirroring the status and wealth of the owner and the complex political dynamics of the region (Nieke 1993; Whitfield 2001). Many items were thus produced before the Viking invasions, and were sometimes of considerable age at the Vikings’ arrival. In Norway, 22 complete penannular brooches are known, and 14 of these are from burial contexts. These are almost exclusively female burials dating to the 9th century, and a majority of these are situated along the west coast of Norway facing the North Sea, in Rogaland, Sogn and Fjordane and Trøndelag counties (Glørstad 2012). Most of them represent elaborate and decorative brooch variants, made of silver often with gilded sections and with insets for gem stones, now largely lost. The few preserved insets are made of amber or glass. The brooches must have appeared as eye-catching and exclusive jewellery, clearly associated with the Insular world from which they originated. In addition to these, four secure fragments of

penannular brooches are known, of which two are reworked into separate brooches, with needle holders and pins added on the reverse sides. This corresponds with the overall use of Insular objects, with more than a 100 mounts or fragment frequently reworked into brooches or other decorative elements of the dress (Fig. 6.3; Aannestad 2018; Heen-Pettersen 2014; Wamers 1985). Regional studies show that 80% of such objects in female burials were reworked with secondary needles or hinges (Aannestad 2015, 131).

The placement of the penannular brooch can be more or less securely identified in only four female burials in Norway; in all cases, the brooch was placed centered on the chest or right under the chin (Glørstad 2010, 120). The few well-documented burials with adapted fragments show the same placement (Aannestad 2018). The Insular objects thus appear to have been appropriated as equivalent forms of jewellery within the established costume tradition and, like the other forms of jewellery, integrated as expressions of women's identity, social group, and class. In order to explore the social significance and symbolic value of Insular objects, the symbolic system in which these objects circulated as complementary objects should also be considered. Significantly, the penannular brooches undergo another change in context and aesthetic appearance in the second half of the 9th century; new variants occur in Britain and Ireland, and copies of these brooches are produced in Norway although almost exclusively in copper alloy. These copies are found almost entirely in well-equipped male burials, characterized by having a distinctly high proportion of high-quality weapons, horse gear, and tools (Glørstad 2012). The transformation of penannular brooches and their integration in the male dress indicate that they became poignant political symbols in



Figure 6.3. Insular mount, probably produced in Northumbria in the 8th century (Aannestad 2018). Secondary attachments with pin-lug and catch plate. From a female burial, Komnes, Buskerud County (C20519a), Norway. © Kulturhistorisk museum, University of Oslo. Photo: A. Icajic/CC BY-SA 4.0.

a period characterized by another set of political conflict. The visual transformations and change in gender association from the mid-9th century are striking, and indicate that the brooches were assigned with new or added significance within a new social and cultural framework.

Affect and tradition: iconographic depictions of disc-on-bow and penannular brooches

Naturalistic portrayals of people occur in the archaeological record in Scandinavia and in Britain and Ireland during this period (Brundle 2019), particularly on Scandinavian gold-foils and on Irish, Scottish, and Gotlandic stone monuments. They depict humans apparently representing a selection of formalized social roles, high status persons or cosmological figures, or in what appear to be key mythological motifs, indicating that the motifs were integral in the dissemination and negotiation of political and cosmological structures. The figures are often depicted through a set repertoire of bodily expressions, types of clothes, hairstyles, and items (Andrén 1993; Fitzgerald 1997; Hedeager 2015; Watt 2004). It is highly significant then, that both disc-on-bow and penannular brooches appear as highlighted features of the costumes worn by the human figures in these depictions. Their formal representation indicate that they do not necessarily reflect the variety of actual dress expressions, nor the flexibility in how the brooches may have been incorporated and interpreted in praxis. The overall motifs as well as level of detail nevertheless suggest the social and political milieu in which the brooches were used. Moreover, it indicates that the brooches were deemed particularly significant as representations of certain social and cosmological roles.

For the disc-on-bow brooches, an important auxiliary source is the so-called gold foils, perhaps the most enigmatic group of objects from Early Medieval Scandinavia. They are small figures of wafer-thin gold sheets, ranging from between c. 1 to 2 cm in length. They were mainly in use between the 6th to 8th century CE, although some could be earlier, and others are likely produced and deposited in the 9th century, *i.e.* the early Viking Age (Helmbrecht 2013; Watt 2004, 214–216). The majority of gold foils depict human figures, either as singles or as a man and female facing each other. Despite their minute proportions, the humans are depicted in astonishing detail, and the images accentuate specific postures and objects associated with authority, gender and cosmological narratives (Hedeager 2015). It is claimed that most likely ‘the figures’ body positions, gestures and conspicuously enhanced details were the most significant part of the pictorial messages’ (Helmbrecht 2013, 11).

On several gold foils, the woman is wearing a disc-on-bow brooch, clearly distinguishable and highlighted as a crucial element of female appearance (Plate 6.2; Mannering 2006; Watt 2004). The depicted disc-on-bow brooches reinforces the impression obtained from archaeological contexts; that they were worn as part of a ritual costume or formal attire used by selected women, perhaps during certain celebrations, memorials or religious events. A large number of gold foils are found

at central places combining political, economic, and cultic functions, and they have presumably been deposited mainly during ritual events or communal gatherings. Interpretations differ as to whom the figures represent, and their specific use and meaning is still open to debate. The figures are often interpreted as gods or mythological characters who are clothed in aristocratic symbols of power (Hauck 1992; Watt 2004), while they could also be idealized depictions of members of the social elite (Ratke and Simek 2006). In either case, the disc-on-bow brooch is shown as an accentuated focal point of dress, suggesting that it represented a tangible symbol related to a specific social and ideological practice. The considerable increase in the brooches' size during the 8th century thus suggests that these events and ideas were becoming more important, and the brooches' inherent associations became increasingly highlighted among the existing elite.

Similarly, the penannular brooch appear as a prominent dress element worn by men and women on several depictions on stone crosses and erected stones in the regions where they originate, today's Ireland and Scotland. The brooches appear on representations of both men and women (Alcock 1993; Fitzgerald 1997; Nieke 1993; Trench-Jellicoe 1999; Whitfield 2001) of apparently high religious or secular status. The representations include Christ in a motif on the Muiredach's High Cross from County Louth, Ireland (Nieke 1993), and possibly representations of the Holy Virgin, *e.g.* at a cross from Hilton, Cadboll (Fig. 6.5; Whitfield 2001). Their dating is debated, but they are



Figure 6.4. Gold foil from Klepp, Rogaland County, (B5392), Norway, depicting a man wearing a circular brooch, assumed to be a penannular brooch. Drawing by Egil Bakka. ©Bergen University Museum. Photo: A-M. Olsen/CC BY-NC-ND 3.0.



Figure 6.5. Picture stone from Hilton, Cadboll, Scotland. Photo: *dun_deagh*/CC BY-SA 2.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=47040651>

commonly suggested to have been erected within the 8th–10th centuries (Nieke 1993; Trench-Jellicoe 1999; Whitfield 2001). Several references in Irish law tracts, *e.g.* *Senchus Mór* and *Críth Gablach* (Charles-Edwards 1986) underline how the brooches may have acted as articulate symbols communicating authority and hierarchical structures. The law tracts imply that different types of penannular brooches were assigned to different groups in a hierarchical system (Nieke 1993). By controlling how these brooches were produced, obtained and used, they became political symbols through which they could reinforce and legitimize social structures and authority during the 7th and 8th centuries; and the brooches may even have been used as a form of regalia connected to royal offices (Nieke 1993). On several of the penannular brooches, Christian motifs and inscriptions are integrated into the decor (Stevenson 1974; Whitfield 2001), likely reflecting the close ties between the political and religious elite in Ireland in the period. This implies that the penannular brooches could be seen as versatile and multifaceted symbols

of influence and status by members of both the ecclesiastical and secular elite.

The question, of course, is to what extent the brooches' social and political connotations in Britain and Ireland were relevant to how they were perceived in the Norse communities, and how this affected the manner in which the brooches were incorporated in the female costume along the coast of Norway? No doubt, the many fragmented objects made from ecclesiastical items show a definite break in both functional use as well their assigned meaning. Although many items could have been perceived of as 'loot'—trophies from successful overseas raids—they could nevertheless have been incorporated into the stories of distant places and cultural others (Aannestad 2018; Glørstad 2014). The items would possibly serve as manifest evidence of dramatic events and experiences, which were retold and perhaps even reacted on social occasions and thus taking an active role in the gradual shaping of communal narratives (Heen-Pettersen and Murray 2018). Moreover, by combining stylistic analysis and written sources it has been suggested that Insular items reflect

close political ties between Rogaland and Dublin (Bakka 1963; 1965; Wamers 1998), as well as between elite environments in Mid-England and the Trondheim-area (Heen-Pettersen 2014). The Insular metalwork could as such be seen as symbols of regional alliances among groups within the upper social class, either among different Norse communities on both sides of the North Sea or between Norse and local milieus in the colonies. Several items apparently retained their original function: for example, sets of Insular horse harness deposited in West Norwegian horse burials suggest they were used according to their original intent. However, many items were old with complex biographies when brought to Norway, and they were integrated into to new circles of interpretation, use and deposition within a Norse social framework. The context and containment of the complete reliquary from Melhus in Trondheim suggests that the previous religious provenance of the shrine was well known and maintained in Norway, although then possibly incorporated into non-Christian rituals. In the latter case, the reliquary's adaption in Norway indicates not only that its original function and overall context was sustained, but also that the object biography was likely emphasized as an added value of the reliquary (Heen-Pettersen and Murray 2018).

The Insular brooches and reworked ornaments found in female burials in Norway would not have been attributed value and meaning within a vacuum. Many fragments are detached from their original function, yet they were largely incorporated into the female dress according to the existing dress traditions at the time. This suggests that the imported metalwork was appropriated according to existing perceptions in Norse communities on aesthetics, metalwork and materiality. The complete preservation in Norway of the ornate penannular brooches and their continued use as central brooches, also suggests that their original context and function were known and reformulated in Norse contexts (Glørstad 2012). As the adapted reliquary from Melhus indicates, the biography and original ritual context of the brooches may have been sustained, yet reformulated in the way they were perceived and used in Norway. Insular metalwork, including the penannular brooches, may have served as symbolic capital that was integrated into ongoing negotiations of status and identity. The question of why, and by whom, the penannular brooches were used originally could thus provide a background for interpreting their significance when incorporated as part of Norse female costume.

Interestingly, the only likely iconographic representations in Scandinavia of penannular brooches are on a small selection of gold-foils from Klepp in Rogaland in southwestern Norway (Fig. 6.4). Rogaland is regarded as one of the core areas from which the raids toward Ireland and Britain were organized, based partly on the large amount of Insular objects in the region as well as its geographical proximity to Britain and Ireland. The male figure on the gold foils is wearing a long cloak, held together by a circular accessory on his right shoulder, apparently a penannular brooch. As it is worn by the male figure on these specific gold-foils, it is likely that the image reflects the use of later copies. Yet, the inclusion of a likely penannular brooch on the ritually complex gold foils—some of which also depict disc-on-bow brooches

worn by women—is noteworthy. It suggests that the brooch was incorporated as a ritual object after it was introduced within the Norse dress, and demonstrates that the political and ideological value of penannular brooches was acknowledged at an early stage. As penannular brooches became associated with both men and women in political and social negotiations, the Rogaland foils indicate that the political symbols associated with the Insular world transcended gender associations and shifted with social, political and cultural contexts.

Aesthetics and social change: similarities and differences

From the end of the 8th century and into the 9th, these two distinctive forms of jewellery circulated simultaneously, as complete brooches or as brooch fragments or fragments of Insular objects. They represent two discrete aesthetic traditions, yet have several noticeable similarities that distinguish them from the majority of other types of jewellery during this time. Both types of brooches were primarily worn by only a limited group of women but in a similar manner; centrally placed on the upper chest or under the chin as part of an outer garment where they appear as distinct, visual elements of the costume. Also, both represent types of jewellery that were maintained over long stretches of time, in some cases for generations. Several disc-on-bow brooches, and fragments of these, were produced during the 7th and 8th centuries, but appear in 9th-century burials (Glørstad and Røstad 2015). Some of these incorporate stylistic elements known from typologically earlier brooches. Their extended use, the deliberate use of ‘old fashioned’ decorative features as well as the frequent use of fragments, suggests that disc-on-bow brooches were active, communicative objects, reflecting but also initiating an ongoing concern for traditions and continuity. Similarly, the metalwork reaching Norway were likely manufactured in monastic, as well as secular, workshops in Ireland and Scotland during the 7th and 8th centuries, pre-dating the Viking invasions. As argued above, the original function and context of Insular items may have been significant for how they were perceived and adapted, as the biographical properties of many items were acknowledged and assigned meaning within a Norse context. Additionally, both forms of brooches apparently constitute affective objects closely linked to legitimation and negotiation of political hierarchies, cosmological representation and religious practice.

Despite the apparent similarities in practical function and time-authenticated use, the two forms of brooches are nevertheless based on two fundamentally different processes of how they are embedded in time and acquired. The superficial similarities can therefore also be said to communicate fundamentally different premises on their use and connotations, associated with widely different origins and networks. The disc-on-bow brooch had protracted regional use, with gradual changes indicating an ever-stronger emphasis on formalized female roles. This could explain the accentuated brooches on the gold-foils, apparently visualising idealized aristocratic or mythological characters. During the 8th century in particular, the brooches’ biography

and significance seem to become more important, as they increase in size, become noticeably fragmented, and are increasingly decorated with late Germanic animal styles in combination with the cloisonné technique as an aesthetic expression. In contrast, the penannular brooch represented a completely new type of conspicuous jewellery when introduced in Norway in the beginning of the Viking Age. Its large, circular form presented a novel aesthetic expression and striking contrast to the cross-shaped outline that characterizes the Scandinavian brooches from the Roman Iron Age and into the Viking Age. In addition to obvious economic and political consequences, the westward expansion had conceptual ramifications concerning identity and belonging. Changes in how distant landscapes were used and perceived in the Viking Age not only concern the intensification and restructuring of settlement patterns and communication routes, but also how objects associated with physical and imagined landscapes were actively used as an arena to manipulate and consolidate new narratives of lineage and authority. The penannular brooches thus represented a new aesthetic and visual form of communication, interlinked with new types of social networks and of political logic.

The design of the various brooches can thus be assessed in the context of the similarities but also differences between them. The highly affective properties of the intricate design as a narrative method, central in retelling and creating political and cosmological perceptions (Hedeager 2011; Kristoffersen 1995; 2010) were likely vital for their value and impact. Precisely because of this, the aesthetic properties of the two jewellery types emerge as particularly significant as the designs seem to transgress the ambiguous message of similarity and difference, of tradition and novelty. The Insular art styles are distinctive, yet share an overall visual likeness and history with the Germanic Animal styles. The penannular brooches are richly decorated with interlace, triskeles, and intricate spirals and geometric patterns, and are closely linked to a Christian cultural sphere. The Insular style still included animal elements derived from the Germanic Animal Style, which was created around interwoven, abstract animals, interlace, and images representing figures combining or transgressing human and animal features. From a distance, this style would evoke associations with familiar as well as novel forms of ornamentation. Both types of brooches were often fully or partially gilded, with elaborate, meandering decor covering the surface, and with gems or coloured stones integrated into the overall aesthetic design. In this way they stood out compared to objects associated with the more widespread practice in the Viking Age of using silver or producing jewellery with tinned or silvered surfaces. The brass brooches of the Viking Age would have appeared 'gold-like' when new, yet in most cases with a clearly different lustre than gilded surfaces. The aesthetic impression of the Insular metalwork was thus distinctly different from the lavish disc-on-bow brooches and Early Viking Age jewellery, providing a unique visual imprint, yet with noticeable recognizable elements. One might assume that these 'familiar' aspects of the penannular brooch and imported fragments resonated with existing perceptions in Norse communities, and influenced their use and reinterpretation. In this way,

the aesthetic properties of the brooches contributed to the continuous negotiation between recognition and strangeness.

The Insular brooches seem ideal, then, for combining two powerful logics of authority: one referring to the symbolic and economic resources following from maritime expansion and external networks, and the other appealing to a sense of continuation and recognition through mimicking essential features of traditional, ritualized brooches. In this way, they would combine the aura and authority of older and fragmented brooches while framing them within novel networks and changing social legitimation. Following this line of argument, the Insular brooches and reworked fragments did not only signal novel networks and social expansion, but offered a 'new shape to old ideas', being significant agents in reinventing tradition itself.

Concluding thoughts

A key point for the study of how narratives of the past were negotiated in the Viking Age is that it was a dynamic, social practice. There is never a constant or homogeneous understanding of the past or a singular method of how it is communicated within a society. Multiple and sometimes conflicting narratives of the past will exist within the same society, depending on differences over time, space and social position (Innes 2000). This implies that in the Viking Age, the past would be cited and communicated to achieve a variety of outcomes, and to anchor different groups with varying prospects for the future. It has been demonstrated that artistic objects and concepts of aesthetics mediate and create social identities, interactions, and are integrated in negotiations of power structures (DeMarrais and Robb 2013). An essential part of making economic as well as symbolic wealth visible to others to secure status is through the negotiation of aesthetic taste (Trigg 2001).

In his analysis of the ritual dimension of politics, the anthropologist David Kertznor contends that cultural conflicts and redefinitions largely revolve around who is to control and manage central political symbols; in-group conflicts entail struggles for symbolic hegemony (Kertznor 1988, 43, 170, 175). Following these approaches, the decorative objects reaching Norway from the beginning of the Viking Age, represent not just an assortment of new forms of visually pleasing artefacts introduced into everyday life. On one level, they were surely appreciated as exotic and aesthetic novelties. However, they also offered creative variations of traditional and formulaic animal styles, implying a break with, or reformulation of, the inherent political and ideological statements in existing tradition. Hence, the use of disc-on-bow brooches and their fragments versus jewellery of Insular origin may indicate diverging and contradictory manners of perceiving and curating the past by different social groups. This would imply that in this case, women were active participants in complex social negotiations around authority and cultural capital. The two sets of distinct brooches highlighted here can both be understood as aesthetic expressions of political and cosmological structures. Through evaluating the two forms of jewellery up against each other, with an eye for their similarities as well as distinctive features, it is

possible to understand them as complementary opposites associated with different yet equivalent, identities. Accessing or reformulating, artistic and aesthetic expressions is as such central to social and political change. The brooches' aesthetics and inherent narratives could be interpreted and incorporated in divergent stories; about belonging, about different landscapes, and about the past.

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