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Assembling the Full Cast: Ritual Performance, Gender Transgression and Iconographic Innovation in Viking-Age Ribe

By PIETERJAN DECKERS¹, SARAH CROIX² and SØREN M SINDBÆK³

VIKING-AGE ICONOGRAPHY is mostly studied through stone sculpture and carvings and through metal dress accessories, which are often poorly contextualised finds. Here we present a new approach by studying an assemblage of casting moulds for figurative dress accessories from an early 9th-century workshop context in Ribe (Jutland, Denmark). We provide digital reconstructions of the fragmented moulds, including ‘Valkyrie’ pendants showing female figures bearing weapons. Comparable finds are mainly found in western Scandinavia, and the motifs demonstrate familiarity with images from Classical Antiquity and the Carolingian Renaissance. By highlighting iconographic and stylistic parallels with the tapestries of the Oseberg ship burial, we apply a novel perspective to the discussion of the armed woman motif and other Viking-Age figurative art. We argue that the common theme of the images is not the portrayal of heroic or mythological beings, but is instead ritual performance, in which women played a central role. We also consider the implications of the urban production context for this group of objects.

Viking-Age iconography has received much attention, for example through the study of Gotlandic and Anglo-Scandinavian stone sculpture, metalwork and the glimpses of preserved art on less durable materials, such as cloth and wood in the Oseberg ship burial (Norway).⁴ Numerous attempts have been made to decode these images and to relate them to myths, including those transmitted in the Eddic poems.⁵ In recent years, a growing corpus of metal ornaments have emerged through the steadily expanding practice of private metal detecting. This has revealed a number of previously rare or unknown figurative ornaments, often serving as pendants, which are commonly interpreted as amulets.⁶ Many show extraordinary iconographic detail in a naturalistic style that was long considered uncharacteristic of Viking-Age art,⁷ but their sheer number and wide distribution necessitate revising that assumption.

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⁴ Schetelig 1920; Bailey 1980; Lang 1984; Helmbrecht 2011; Wilson 2018; Oehrl 2019; Vedeler 2019.

⁵ Eg Price 2006.

⁶ Fuglesang 1989; Zeiten 1997; Gräslund 2007; Pedersen 2009; Jensen 2010.

⁷ Wicker 2003; Graham-Campbell 2013.

Particular interest has been stirred by female figures bearing weapons, conventionally labelled ‘Valkyries’. These images have been studied in the context of Old Norse religion and myth.⁸ Recently, the identification of the deceased in the Birka weapon grave Bj. 581 (Björkö, Sweden) as female has aroused debate on these and other representations of women with weapons in Viking-Age art.⁹ The corpus of metal finds, however, has offered little context to guide interpretation.¹⁰

This paper presents a new approach. Recent excavations in Ribe (SJM3 Posthustorvet, 2017–18) revealed an assemblage of casting moulds for two-dimensional figures similar to those known from detector finds, including an armed woman, a male figure, horses and miniature objects. The finds relate to a workshop that was active during a short period in the first half of the 9th century, thus offering an association and context for this otherwise weakly contextualised group of finds. In spite of the ‘Nordic’ appearance, we demonstrate that details link them to Classical imagery transmitted through coins and other Roman-period images, partly through the lens of Carolingian re-interpretations. This marks an example of cultural recycling, which would have complemented the intensive reuse of Roman materials such as glass and metals (largely imported from the Frankish Rhineland) documented in Ribe and similar early-medieval production sites. As meeting places for inspirations from Western Europe and Scandinavia, we suggest that emporia were quintessential loci for the cultural innovations seen in these images. Noting a particularly close correspondence with the Oseberg tapestry fragments, we further argue that the common theme of the images is ritual performance rather than heroic tales or mythological beings. We propose that the armed woman seen in these images is best understood as representing a transgression of gender roles performed in a ritual context. We can trace a counterpart in the figure of a man featuring the feminine gesture of gripping hair.

THE WORKSHOP CONTEXT

Over many years, excavations in Viking-Age Ribe have yielded numerous fragments of ceramic casting moulds that produced metal ornaments, a phenomenon well known from contemporary urban sites in Scandinavia.¹¹ Most are found in strata dating from the late 8th to mid-9th centuries and in some cases are associated with direct evidence for metalworking.¹² The 2017–18 excavations in Ribe, conducted as part of the Northern Emporium Project, unearthed a sequence of 8th-/9th-century workshops, with finds including over 7000 fragments of casting moulds.¹³ The finds hold major potential as contextual anchoring points for artefacts and designs in Viking-Age Scandinavia.

Most of the moulds discussed in this paper were found either associated with a workshop in Construction K23 or displaced in younger contexts and linked with the workshop through refitted glass and pottery sherds (Tab 1). They occurred together

⁸ Vang Petersen 2005; 2010; Plochov 2007; Pedersen 2009, 296; Helmbrecht 2011; Gardela 2013, 301–4; 2018, 402–8; Pentz 2018.

⁹ Price et al 2019.

¹⁰ Cf the critique by Callmer 2008, 185, 204; more strongly worded by Jensen 2010, ii, 26–9.

¹¹ Drescher 1983; Callmer 2002; Ambrosiani 2013; Pedersen 2016.

¹² Brinch Madsen 1984; Feveile 2002; Croix, Neiß et al 2019.

¹³ Croix, Deckers et al 2019; Croix, Deckers et al forthcoming.

TABLE 1
Overview of the casting moulds depicted and discussed in this article.

Mould impression	Site	Number of fragments	Minimum number of distinct moulds	Minimum number of distinct models	SOL* artefact nos	Associated construction (site phase)
Armed woman	SJM3 Posthustorvet	10	3 (one with double impression)	1	200303569, 200303572, 200303574	K23 (F11)
Hair-gripping man	SJM3 Posthustorvet	4	2	2	200300193, 200302087, 200302312, 200302353	K31 (F12)
Riderless steed	SJM3 Posthustorvet	8	6	1	200299911, 200299914, 200299922, 200302435, 200302441, 200302442, 200303466, 200304451	K23 (F11), K24 (F12)
	ASR 4M75 Kunstmuseets Have	3			200031070	N/A
Miniature shield	SJM3 Posthustorvet	2	2	2	200303523, 200304451	K23 (F11)
Miniature sword	SJM3 Posthustorvet	1	1	1	200304454	K23 (F11)
Miniature wheel	SJM3 Posthustorvet	1	1	1	200304937	K22 (F10)

*Referring to <sol.sydvestjyskemuseer.dk>.

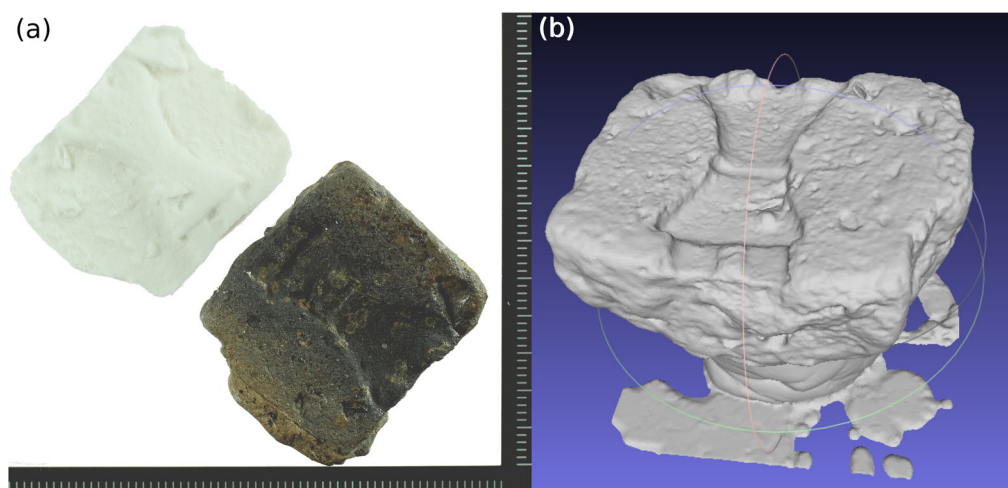


FIG 1

The process of 3D scanning and virtual reconstruction of mould impressions. (a) Mould fragment bearing an impression of a 'gripping man' and its silicone rubber cast (scale in mm); (b) screenshot of the unprocessed 3D model in MeshLab. *Image credits: (a) Sydvestjyske Museer, CC BY-SA 4.0; (b) Graphics by authors.*

with moulds for a range of common metal ornaments, including more than 40 mould fragments for oval brooches, a few for round, equal-armed and cross-shaped brooches and, possibly, dress pins. A few fragments bearing the partially preserved impressions for pendant lugs or catch plates were present in the same contexts as the figurative moulds. The building phase where these finds were concentrated is dated to the 810s and 820s AD and appears to have been a multifunctional structure used both as a dwelling and for craft production. Its inhabitants had international contacts, attested through segmented beads imported from the Middle East and numerous finds from the Middle Rhenish/Frankish regions, such as sherds of Tating and Badorf ware and glass beakers.

VIRTUAL RECONSTRUCTION USING 3D SCANNING

The metallurgical process employed at the workshops in Ribe involved single-use ceramic moulds from reusable models.¹⁴ Most moulds were broken up and discarded after one use; consequently, few moulds have survived in a complete state. In most cases, only small parts of each individual mould are preserved. However, as fragments from several castings of the same model often occur, digital 3D reconstruction has made it possible to virtually assemble relatively complete reconstructions of the models.

Methods employed in the past to reconstruct such objects include physical reconstruction of fragmented items, photographs, reconstruction drawings, wax and silicone rubber casts, and, most recently, 3D scanning.¹⁵ We adopted 3D scanning using a 3Shape D1000 Blue LED multi-line lab laser. The scans were processed to document the casting mould fragments and to combine fragments from different moulds in order

¹⁴ Brinch Madsen 1984.

¹⁵ Eg Nancke-Krogh 1978; Croix, Neiß et al 2019.

to compare and virtually reconstruct the images impressed on them (Fig 1).¹⁶ The 3D models enable virtual reconstructions of the mould impressions by collating the best-preserved sections of the image from the different fragments. Using this method, we reconstructed several models in high detail: a horse brooch, the so-called Valkyrie pendant and large sections of two different male figurines. In addition, we present single-mould fragments bearing impressions of three different miniature objects.

THE RIDERLESS STEED

DESCRIPTION

Eight mould fragments depict a saddled stallion without a rider. Most impressions show the legs of the animal, but a single mould features a clear impression of the horse's head and another of the hind parts. Refitted fragments of a single casting mould from an earlier, adjacent excavation (4M75 Kunstmuseets Have) retain large parts of the same image except the animal's lower legs and head.¹⁷ Combined with the new fragments, all originating from the same model, a near-complete image appears of a pacing horse with highly detailed tack: an empty saddle, saddle cloth, reins, breast strap, stirrup, haunch straps and breeching (Fig 2). The older mould was found in a context broadly dated to the 9th century, but it is undoubtedly contemporary with the finds from Posthustorvet.

TYPOLOGICAL CONTEXT

Comparable artefacts have been found in western Scandinavia (Fig 3, e–g; Appendix nos 94–105), although none can be identified as a product of the Ribe model. Similar ornaments presumably were produced at Kaupang (Vestfold, Norway), as a lead model of comparable shape and detailing was found there.¹⁸ The horse-shaped items are typically interpreted as brooches, although the Kaupang model features parallel lugs on the back similar to those of Class 3 'Valkyrie' pendants, suggesting that it served to cast mounts (as Unn Pedersen proposes) or pendants.

The horse harness depicted is of a widely used type. Breast straps and breechings are part of archaeological reconstructions of harnesses from across early-medieval north-western Europe, which have their origins in Celtic and Roman-period horse tack.¹⁹ In particular, depictions of horses and riders that show a knotted haunch junction are found across the same time frame in several artistic traditions, for instance on helmet plaques from Vendel (Upland, Sweden) and Valsgärde (Uppsala, Sweden),²⁰ the Oseberg tapestries and illuminations in Carolingian manuscripts, for example in the Golden Psalter of St Gallen and the Leiden I Maccabees manuscript.

As a metal ornament, the Ribe model and its comparanda are part of a long tradition in Scandinavia. Horse-shaped brooches have been subdivided into two classes: highly stylised horses with 'angled' legs, which could be interpreted as battling a snake,

¹⁶ Croix et al 2020.

¹⁷ Brinch Madsen 1984; Nancke-Krogh 1978, 78.

¹⁸ Pedersen 2016, 56.

¹⁹ Bishop 1988; Fern 2005; Stoumann 2009, 264, fig 148; Fabech and Näsman 2017, fig 5.

²⁰ Helmbrecht 2011, Abb 6, c–h.

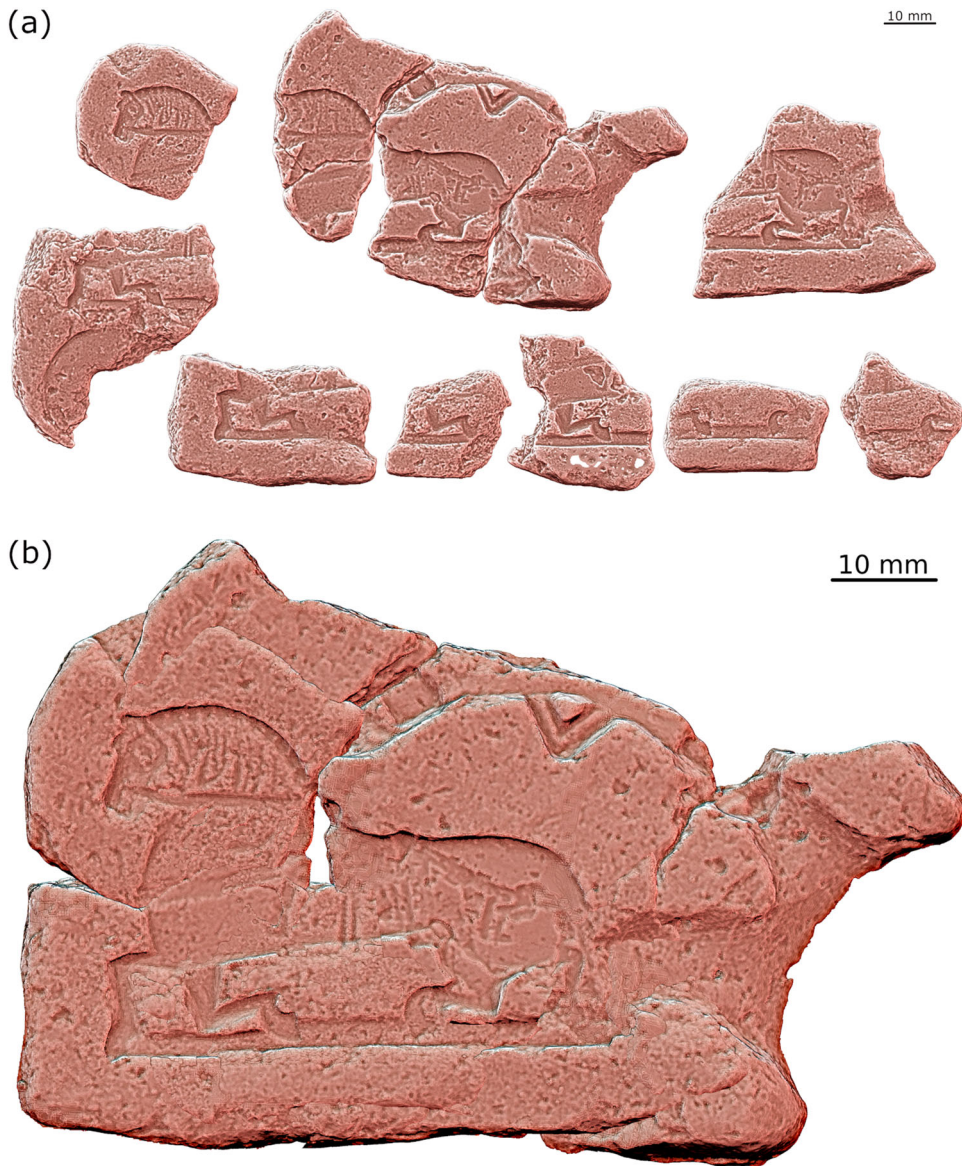


FIG 2

The casting moulds for the 'riderless steed' brooch. (a) 3D models of the casting mould fragments with impressions of the riderless steed; (b) virtual reconstruction of the riderless steed mould impression.

Graphics by authors.

and more naturalistic horse silhouettes with various forms of detailing.²¹ All feature a baseline marking a walking surface, which supports the openwork legs (Fig 3, a–c). The Ribe horses evidently belong to the second class, the pedigree of which can be traced to Roman-period and migration-period horse brooches in Western and Northern

²¹ Nancke-Krogh 1978; Kleingärtner 2003; Callmer 2008, 202.

Europe,²² although links to Sarmatian and Scythian art have been proposed as well.²³ On stylistic grounds, Scandinavian horse brooches are most often dated around AD 700,²⁴ but some items were evidently in use much later, as attested by the horses in the elaborate animal art of Style C, found in the 9th-century burial Bj. 854 in Birka. It is also not unlikely that some of the simpler forms continued to be produced into the 8th or 9th centuries. An example may be the brooch of a horse with reins (no saddle) and a simple geometric decoration on the neck that was found in a 9th-century burial near Kaupang.²⁵

ICONOGRAPHIC DISCUSSION

The horse carried long-standing symbolism in pre-Christian Europe. A range of cosmological functions have been attributed to it, including that of guardian, fertility symbol and guide of souls to the afterlife.²⁶ In pre-Viking Scandinavia, horses feature prominently on bracteates, presumably in reference to their role in shamanic travel.²⁷ Horse images also occur on Viking-Age artefacts that more obviously represent unique, purpose-made amulets.²⁸ The Ribe horse is thus firmly rooted in an existing ornamental and symbolic tradition. It departs from that tradition, however, in treating the subject in a naturalistic style with realistic anatomy and a highly detailed depiction of the harness, while also avoiding any hint of the animal ornament style seen in earlier versions of the horse motif. Depicting a saddle on the horse is a significant change; it marks the animal out specifically as a trained steed that, given its role in other depictions (see, eg the Vendel-Period helmet plaques), presumably signifies a warrior's horse.²⁹ The explicitly male gendering indicated by the genitals of the animal is consistent with recent genetic evidence showing a preference for the sacrifice of male steeds in Viking-Age burials: an association to which we will return.³⁰

In its naturalism and detail, the Ribe horse bears a particularly striking resemblance to other contemporary horse depictions, notably the Oseberg tapestries and Carolingian depictions, in particular an illumination of the mounted 'King of Kings' in the *Apocalypse of Valenciennes* (Fig 3, h–i). Despite the very different media, contexts and meanings of the images, the rendering of the harness is remarkably similar, including minute details like the decorative triplet straps dangling from the saddlecloth, which were derived from Roman-period tack.³¹ In a Scandinavian context, the Ribe mould thus represents a stylistic as well as an iconographic innovation that was widely adopted in metalwork and other crafts in the first half of the 9th century. While the stylistic similarities to contemporary Carolingian horse images might represent coincidental

²² Simpson and Blance 1998, 275; Wamers 1998, 93–4; Heeren and van der Feijst 2017, 153, 161, 216.

²³ Nancke-Krogh, 1978, 184.

²⁴ Olsén 1945, 79–83; Ørsnes 1966, 147; 1988; Kleingärtner 2003.

²⁵ Blindheim et al 1999, 35–6.

²⁶ Olsén 1945, 85, Anm 2; Kleingärtner 2003, 129; Ørsnes 1988, 98–9; Zeiten 1997, 14; Oma 2016; Vedeler 2019, 65–71.

²⁷ Hedeager 2011, 11.

²⁸ Eg a trefoil brooch fragment repurposed as pendant, with an engraved horse on the back, from Scheelenborg, Funen (Denmark) (Beck et al 2019, 72), or sheet-metal horse shapes found together with other amulets (Thunmark-Nylén 2006, 224).

²⁹ Helmbrecht 2011, 316–24.

³⁰ Nistelberger et al 2019.

³¹ Bishop 1988, 109.



FIG 3

Precursors and parallels for the 'riderless steed' motif from Ribe. Pre-Viking Age horse brooches with geometric detailing: (a) Tisso; (b) Vester Kærby; (c) Veggerslev. Horse brooches with detailed riding gear, including the Ribe image: (d) Ribe (reversed casting mould impression); (e) Kaupang (Appendix, no 105); (f) Tisso (Appendix, no 103). Other contemporary, detailed depictions of horse gear (not to scale): (g) Bjæverskov (Appendix, no 94); (h) King of Kings from the *Apocalypse of Valenciennes*; (i) Oseberg tapestry. Image credits: (a, f) National Museum of Denmark/Pia Brejnholt; (b) Beck et al 2019, fig 70; (c) National Museum of Denmark; (d) Image by authors; (e) Kulturhistorisk museum/Museum of Cultural History CC BY-SA 4.0; (g) Museum Sydøstdanmark/Kent Clausen; (h) *Apocalypse of Valenciennes*, fol. 35r. Médiathèque Simone Veil, Ville de Valenciennes; (i) Vedeler 2019, fig 43.

developments, the production context in Ribe, which had close ties to the Carolingian world, suggests common inspiration.

THE ARMED WOMAN

DESCRIPTION

Ten casting mould fragments from four individual impressions depict an armed woman (Fig 4). The figure wears a long dress and ornaments at the neck, which identify her as female by Viking-Age Scandinavian conventions (see discussion below). She carries a round shield with a central boss and a rim marked in double outline. Her lower arm and hand, clutching the hilt of a sword, can be seen at the right edge of the shield, and the tip of the sword, held obliquely behind the shield, emerges above her arm to the left. The elbow of the arm holding the shield is visible to the left of the shield, beneath the tip of the sword. She carries an elaborate helmet with cheek pieces and crest decoration. A spiral at the back of the helmet may indicate a hair knot. The image can be identified as a 'Valkyrie' pendant.³² It forms part of a category of Viking-Age artefacts depicting a female figure, seen from the side. The closest parallels for the Ribe figure are recent finds from Sønderup (Zealand, Denmark) and Rostock-Dierkow (Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Germany), displaying a woman holding shield and sword in a similar position (Appendix, nos 29, 33; Fig 7, c). A male figurine from Hedeby also strikes a comparable pose.³³

³² See eg sources cited in note 6.

³³ Helmbrecht 2011, 115, fig 17c.



FIG 4

Virtual reconstruction of the casting mould impression of the armed woman. *Image by authors.*

TYPOLOGICAL CONTEXT

Three classes can be identified among the wider group of likely pendants commonly described as ‘Valkyries’, depicting figures in female dress seen in profile (Fig 5).³⁴ Class 1) a single, standing unarmed woman, sometimes holding up a drinking horn (Appendix, nos 1–18);³⁵ Class 2) a single woman carrying a shield, helmet and weapon (including the Ribe figure, Appendix, nos 19–37); and Class 3) a scene in which a similarly equipped female figure presents a horn, with another figure with a feminine hair-style standing by or riding a horse (Appendix, nos 38–84).

The three classes are clearly part of the same semantic field. Elements of these images recur together, for example in a pendant from Tyskerbakken (Randers, Denmark) and a few others from Jutland that feature an armed woman holding a drinking horn in addition to a sword and shield (Fig 7, b). The juxtaposition of female figure and horse rider in Class 3 pendants is also encountered elsewhere in contemporary Scandinavian art, for instance in Birka burial Bj. 825, where a Class 1 pendant is combined with two horse-and-rider pendants or mounts as neck ornaments,³⁶ and in depictions of unarmed

³⁴ Based on a comprehensive study of the material then available, Helmbrecht describes these items consistently as ‘Anhänger’ (2011, 68 and 306–7). The photographic inventory performed for the present discussion confirms the presence of pierced lugs on the back of most ‘Valkyrie’ pendants (a single lug for Classes 1–2, parallel lugs for Class 3). The off-centre position of these lugs towards the top of most artefacts further supports that this category of finds, generally speaking, served as pendants.

³⁵ Further discussed and subdivided in Plochov 2007, 61–2.

³⁶ Arwidsson 1989a.



FIG 5

The three classes of so-called Valkyrie pendants. (a) single, unarmed woman (Class 1), Klinta (Appendix, no 12); (b) armed woman (Class 2), Skodsebølle (Appendix, no 23); (c) scene with armed woman and rider (Class 3), Tissø (Appendix, no 64). *Image credits: (a) Historiska museet/Gabriel Hildebrand, CC BY 2.5 SE; (b) National Museum of Denmark; (c) National Museum of Denmark/Pia Brejnholt.*

women offering a drinking horn to a (male) armed rider on 9th-/10th-century Gotlandic picture stones.³⁷ However, the geographic distributions of these classes differ (Fig 6). As Alexei Plochov observes, Class 1 is found in eastern and northern Scandinavia and the central and eastern Baltic, with a centre of gravity in Sweden.³⁸ Casting mould finds attest that Class 1 pendants were produced at Birka and Staraya Ladoga (Leningrad Oblast, Russia).³⁹ The westerly distributions of Classes 2 and 3 are markedly complementary to that of Class 1, covering Denmark, northern Germany and eastern England. They only co-occur with Class 1 in eastern Denmark and the trading site of Truso (Poland). For these classes as well, the find locations of casting moulds correspond with the distribution

³⁷ Ney 2012; date following Imer 2012.

³⁸ Plochov 2007, 61.

³⁹ Plochov 2007, 61; Ambrosiani 2013, 240.

area: the Ribe finds are the only moulds known so far for Class 2, while mould fragments for Class 3 pendants were reportedly found at Hedeby.⁴⁰

The current absence of relevant finds from Norway, other than two amber pendants depicting unarmed women,⁴¹ may be skewed by the greater intensity of detector use and finds recording in Denmark. However, in light of the high recognisability of these items, it is not likely that significant numbers of Norwegian ‘Valkyrie’ pendants remain unpublished or unnoticed in private collections. In Denmark, on the other hand, this type of artefact was widely distributed throughout all settled areas.⁴² This connection is strengthened by the pattern observable in Britain, where the finds distribution corresponds to the Danelaw. Several of these English finds appear to be peculiar variants, sometimes of crude craftsmanship and not necessarily serving the same purpose. Like the imitative Borre-style disc brooches produced in the Danelaw,⁴³ they are likely local products of the Danish diaspora.

Broadly speaking, ‘Valkyrie’ pendants can be dated between the early 9th and the mid-10th centuries. The corpus consists mostly of single (detector) finds, and as such, the Ribe moulds may be the earliest securely dated examples known. The Class 1 moulds from Birka and Staraya Ladoga are dated to the middle decades of the 9th (c 830–60) and the first half of the 10th centuries, respectively.⁴⁴ Finds of ‘Valkyrie’ pendants and similar items in England, including one from a Viking winter camp near York dated to the mid- to late 870s (Appendix, no 37), further indicate that Classes 2 and 3 lived on during and after Danish settlement in the late 9th century.

ICONOGRAPHIC DISCUSSION

Some details of the armed woman from Ribe correspond to traits known from earlier or contemporary finds. Precedents for the dress and hairstyle of the ‘Valkyrie’ pendants at large (along with the gesture of offering a drinking vessel seen in Class 1) are considered principal markers of femininity on 6th- to early 8th-century gold-foil figures, as well as on picture stones, the Oseberg tapestries and other media (Fig 7, e–f).⁴⁵ The lower dress and train, curving outwards at the back and with a straight border indicating an apron in the front, characterises many of the standing ‘Valkyrie’ figures.⁴⁶ Like in many other ‘Valkyrie’ pendants (especially of Class 1) and female gold-foil figures, small feet with slightly arched soles are visible beneath the hem of the dress of the Ribe figure.

The hair knot at the back of the head, another element encountered in the gold-foil figures, also marks many ‘Valkyrie’ pendants as female.⁴⁷ In the case of the Ribe figure, this interpretation is confounded by the unusual headdress, likely a helmet

⁴⁰ Jankuhn 1937, 123.

⁴¹ Blindheim 1960.

⁴² Compare with the mapped proxies for Viking-Age population density and the distribution of metal-detector find-spots in Denmark (Gammeltoft et al 2015; Feveile 2015a).

⁴³ Kershaw 2013.

⁴⁴ Eniosova 2007, 177.

⁴⁵ Simek 2002, 109–15; Watt 2002; Helmbrecht 2011, 120; Mannering 2016; Vedeler 2019.

⁴⁶ Bau 1982.

⁴⁷ Simek 2002, 97–9; Arwill-Nordbladh 2016. Unlike gold-foil figurines, the hair of the Ribe figure does not fall down from the knot, but this is true for some of the other female figurines from the Viking Age (eg Fig 9b, and the gaming piece from Trønninge: Mackeprang 1935, 242).

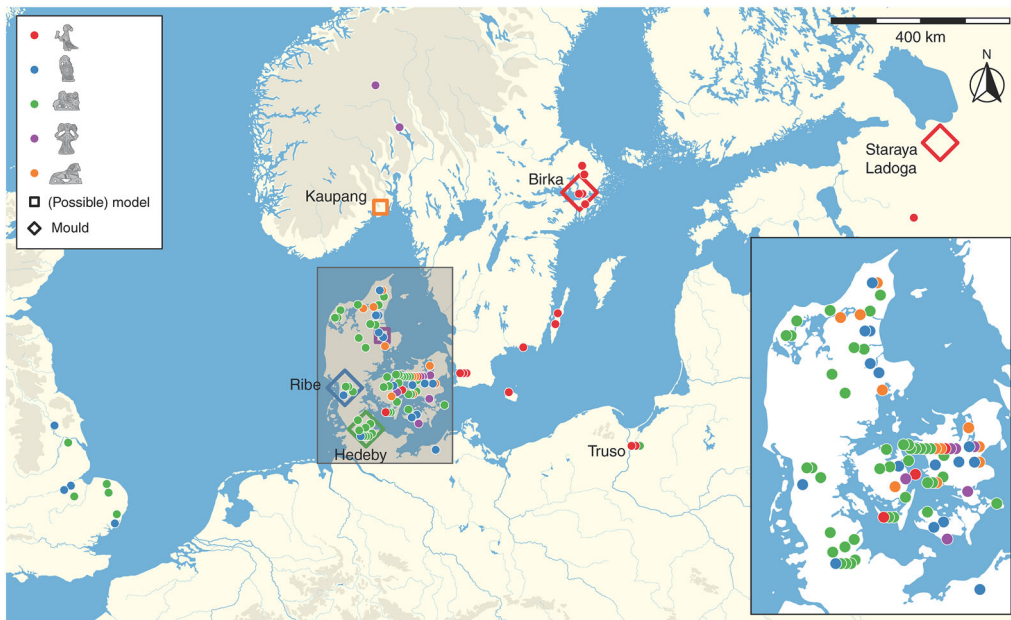


FIG 6

Distribution map of the main artefact classes discussed in the text. 'Valkyrie' pendants Classes 1-3; hair-pulling woman pendants; riderless steed brooches. See Appendix for the finds inventory underlying this map. *Map by authors/Louise Hilmar.*

(discussion below). At least one other example, found near Ribe, appears to combine a hair knot at the back of the head with a conical helmet or hat (Appendix, no 20). The circular indentations at the neck of the armed woman could represent a string of beads. This element is present on several contemporary female figures, including pendants from Aska (Östergötland, Sweden) and Tuna (Upland, Sweden), and figurines from Hårby, Revninge (both Funen, Denmark), Lejre, and Trønninge (both Zealand, Denmark) (Fig 9, a–b).⁴⁸ On the other hand, the number and irregular size and shape of the 'beads' are more consistent with a large disc-on-bow brooch, commonly associated with high-status female burials. The Ribe image was produced shortly after the time when these brooches saw their largest and most elaborate forms.⁴⁹ They are depicted on pre-Viking gold-foil figures and on Viking-Age artefacts, including pendants from Aska, Uppåkra (Scania, Sweden), and Havsmarken (Ærø, Denmark) (Appendix, nos 15, 3).⁵⁰

The helmet of the Ribe figure stands out amongst other depictions of armed women, which often feature a more stylised or ambiguous headdress. The closest comparisons are pre-Viking helmets with cheek pieces and a zoomorphic crest ornament, as well as the depictions of helmeted warriors on sheet-metal plates that

⁴⁸ Ibid; Henriksen and Vang Petersen 2013; Feveile 2015b; Mannering 2016.

⁴⁹ Olsen 2006; Callmer 2008; Glørstad and Røstad 2015; Heen-Petersen and Murray 2018, 57; Glørstad and Røstad 2021.

⁵⁰ Pre-Viking gold-foil figures from Helgö, Sweden: Axboe 1986, fig 3; from Gudme, Denmark: Vang Petersen 1988, 88; from Sorte Muld, Denmark: Watt 2008, 42.



FIG 7

The armed woman and its suggested pre-Viking and Classical iconographic context. 'Valkyrie' pendants of Class 2, including the Ribe image: (a) Vrejelev (Appendix, no 30); (b) Tyskerbakken (Appendix, no 21);

(c) Rostock-Dierkow (Appendix, no 33); (d) Ribe (reversed casting mould impression). Related Scandinavian imagery: (e) 6th- to 8th-century gold-foil figurine, Sorte Muld; (f) detail of the picture stone of Broa (Halla, Gotland). Roman coins featuring Minerva, and Roman cut gems found in Ribe showing comparable Classical imagery: (g) reverse of a bronze sesterlius of Antoninus Pius, Rome, AD 145, type: RIC III Antoninus Pius 1243 A/BMC 1776v; (h) reverse of a bronze of Septimius Severus, AD 194, type: RIC IV Septimius Severus 685/BMC 513 A; (i) Post Office, Ribe; (j) Kunstmuseets Have, Ribe. *Image credits:* (a, b) National Museum of Denmark; (c) German Archaeological Institute/Rebekka Küster; (d) Image by authors; (e) National Museum of Denmark, CC BY-SA 2.0; (f) Wikimedia Commons/W.carter, CC BY-SA 4.0; (g, h) Numismatics.org/American Numismatic Society, <numismatics.org/collection/1957.172.1745>, <numismatics.org/collection/1951.61.80>; (i, j) Sydvestjyske Museer, artefact nos 200056546, 200042137 <sol.sydvestjyskemuseer.dk>, CC BY-SA 4.0.

decorated crested helmets, for example from Vendel and Valsgärde. The youngest surviving instance of the type, albeit without crest ornament, is the Coppergate Helmet from York, dated to the third quarter of the 8th century.⁵¹ Comparable helmets with crest ornament are worn by figures on the Franks Casket, an early 8th-century Northumbrian product,⁵² and on the 8th-/9th-century rune stone from Sparlösa (Västergötland, Sweden).⁵³

No contemporary examples of helmets are known, and 10th-century helmets, most notably from Gjermundbu (Buskerud, Norway), no longer have cheek pieces or a zoomorphic crest ornament.⁵⁴ However, given the 8th-century examples, crested helmets with cheek pieces could still have been in use when the Ribe ‘Valkyrie’ was designed.⁵⁵ Furthermore, ancient helmets occasionally feature as heirlooms of a bygone, heroic-age figure in later skaldic poetry.⁵⁶ Like the possible disc-on-bow brooch, the armed woman’s helmet could be read as a deliberately archaic attribute denoting high status and referencing an idealised past. Neither swords nor shields are seen in depictions of women in earlier Scandinavian iconography. The rounded pommel of the sword of the Ribe figure conforms to contemporary 9th-century types.⁵⁷ The round shield is also a typical 9th-century form, as seen in the Gokstad ship burial (Vestfold, Norway).⁵⁸

While individual traits such as the antiquated helmet may have arisen in various ways, the general pose and composition of the image suggest Classical Roman imagery (Fig 7, g–j). Common types of *sestertii* and *asses* feature images of female deities such as Minerva and Roma on their reverse, standing or seated, wearing a crested helmet, holding up a shield and/or brandishing a spear or staff, an iconography copied from the Greek image of Athena as warrior maiden.

Roman coins have been found in Viking-Age contexts from Ribe and its immediate vicinity and at other North Sea trading sites.⁵⁹ They may have remained in circulation or have been extracted from Roman sites as raw material for crafting, together with glass and other metal artefacts.⁶⁰ Similar imagery could have been encountered in other categories of Roman artefacts attested in Ribe. These include cut gems, of which ten examples have been found so far (Fig 7, i–j), and copper-alloy statuettes, represented in Ribe by a single fragment of scrap.⁶¹

The crested helmet worn by the Ribe figure is strongly reminiscent of these Classical templates. The similarity is strengthened by the long dress and round shield common to both images. The influence of Classical motifs — often found on coins — in post-Roman Scandinavian art has been suggested in other instances. The figures on the Class 3 ‘Valkyrie’ pendants have been linked to the

⁵¹ Tweddle 1992.

⁵² Webster 2012.

⁵³ Norr 2009, 87.

⁵⁴ Tweddle 1992, 1125–8.

⁵⁵ It is also worth noting that the Coppergate helmet was deposited about a century after its production.

⁵⁶ Norr 2009.

⁵⁷ Petersen 1919.

⁵⁸ Nicolaysen 1882, pl VIII, 7.

⁵⁹ Ribe: Feveile 2006a, 284–5; Horsnæs forthcoming. Other sites: eg Dorestad, Netherlands: Van Es and Verwers 2009, 258; Hedeby, Germany: Wiechmann 2007, 200–1.

⁶⁰ Fleming 2012.

⁶¹ Melander 1991; 2001; Frandsen and Jensen 2006, 31–2.

Classical *adventus* motif depicting the ceremonial arrival of the emperor.⁶² The horn held by ‘Valkyrie’ figures could similarly relate to Classical female deities carrying a cornucopia.⁶³

Like the ‘riderless steed’, the armed woman belongs to an existing Scandinavian tradition but was executed in a more detailed, naturalistic style. While related to the image of a woman carrying a drinking vessel seen in earlier and contemporary eastern Scandinavian pictures, it represents a striking re-imagination of this theme inspired by Classical iconography. Whether we understand the figure as representing a mythological being or something else, this combination would imply a transgression of normative gender roles, as warfare is typically portrayed as a male pursuit in skaldic poetry and commemorative runic texts.⁶⁴ To contextualise the nature of this transgression, we must turn to the remaining items in the ensemble of casting moulds.

THE GRIPPING MAN

DESCRIPTION

Four further mould fragments from Ribe can be reconstructed as the impressions of two or three distinct but similar models (Fig 8). The depicted figure is male, based on its prominent, drooping moustache as well as its characteristic dress style consisting of breeches or narrow trousers and a tunic hanging down to the upper legs, constricted at the waist by a belt. The figure’s hands are raised to the sides of the head, gripping at lines protruding from his temples — likely his hair. The triangular head is further marked by large, round eyes and a rounded chin (beard/protruding tongue/dropping jaw?) without any detailing.

TYPOLOGICAL CONTEXT

There are no closely comparable images to this type among Scandinavian metal finds. The figure may have served as a pendant like the well-known hair-gripping ‘Freyja’ figurines and more singular (female) figurines from Hårby and Revninge (Fig 9). Few other finds provide parallels for the figure’s gesture. A detector find from Hedeby frontally depicts a man with hands raised to the temples of a large head tapering towards the chin.⁶⁵ The lower body of the figure is missing. A figurine from an uncertain location at Seljord (Telemarken, Norway) strikes a pose similar to the Hedeby figurine.⁶⁶

ICONOGRAPHIC DISCUSSION

From an iconographic standpoint, the gripping man from Ribe can be read as a combination of common pictorial features. These include frontally depicted figures with raised arms, horned figures and male faces with prominent moustaches, often beardless,

⁶² Vierck 2002; Lundin 2006.

⁶³ Arwidsson 1989a, 58.

⁶⁴ Jesch 2001.

⁶⁵ Helmbrecht 2011, 153, fig 34j.

⁶⁶ Anon 1930, 208.



FIG 8

Virtual reconstructions of the casting mould impression of the 'gripping man'. *Graphics by authors.*



FIG 9

Comparanda for the 'gripping man' pendant. Viking-Age pendants depicting frontal or (partly) three-dimensional human figures: (a) Hårby; (b) Revninge; (c) 'Freyja' figure, Hørning, (Appendix, no 88); (d) 'Freyja' figure, Tisso, (Appendix, no 89); (e) Ribe (reversed casting mould impression). *Image credits: (a, b) National Museum of Denmark; (c) Thirup Kastholm 2015, fig 4; (d) National Museum of Denmark/Pia Brejnholt; (e) Image by authors.*

all of which can be traced to at least the Late Iron Age.⁶⁷ The large eyes, moustache, beard and/or dropping jaw, meanwhile, are similar to 'mask' pendants and images, which are common in later Viking-Age art.⁶⁸ Strikingly, these facial features recur in other artistic products from Ribe (Fig 10, g–j): they closely resemble a lead model discovered as a stray find in Ribe and 16 moulds from an older phase at Sct Nicolajgade 8 in Ribe.⁶⁹ These figures are sometimes interpreted as Odin due to the horns or birds above his head. A wide-eyed, frontal face sporting a moustache also features on coins probably minted in Ribe (see below).

Situated within Viking-Age iconography, the most straightforward explanation of the figure's gesture appears to be that it is gripping strands of hair extending

⁶⁷ Helmbrecht 2011; Pesch 2017.

⁶⁸ Helmbrecht 2011, 223–9.

⁶⁹ Stray find: Jensen 1990. Sct Nicolajgade: Frandsen and Jensen 1987, 180–2; Croix, Neiß et al 2019, 7–9.



FIG 10

The 'gripping man' iconography in context (not to scale). Possible inspirations from Roman and Carolingian portable art for the distorted face: (a) Silver Denarius, Rome, 47 bc, type: S 959 b; (b) Oceanus, on the central medallion of the Mildenhall Great Dish. Possible inspirations for the hair-gripping gesture: (c) Roman Venus figurine from Courtrai (Belgium); (d) Roman gem depicting Venus riding a dolphin, Posthustorvet, Ribe; (e) Reverse of denarius of Commodus, AD 178–191, type: RIC III Commodus 286 A/BMC 44; (f) Mermaid, Psalter of St Riquier (the so-called Gallican Psalter of Charlemagne). Parallels for the male face in artwork produced in Ribe: (g) Sceatta of 'Wodan/Monster' type, Post Office, Ribe; (h) Coin of type KG 5/6, Damhus hoard, Ribe; (i) Virtual cast of a reconstructed mould found at Sct Nicolajgade 8, Ribe; (j) 'Odin from Ribe', lead model. *Image credits: (a, e) Numismatics.org/American Numismatic Society, <numismatics.org/collection/1944.100.50028>; (b) British Museum, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0; (c) Wikimedia/Romaine, CC BY-SA 4.0; (d, g, h, j) Sydvestjyske Museer, artefact nos 200297350, 200058619, 200297824, 200040991 <sol.sydvestjyskemuseer.dk>, CC BY-SA 4.0; (f) Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds lat., Ms. 13159, fol 13v; (i) Croix, Neiß et al 2019, fig 2.*

from the side of the head. The hair-gripping theme is best exemplified by the 'Freyja' pendants representing a frontally depicted woman with raised arms, holding up strands of knotted hair.⁷⁰ Several of these are shown with wide open mouth, parallel to the Ribe 'Odin' model, and, if we take into account that the mouth could be drilled open after casting, perhaps this was also done to the figure discussed here. The theme of gripping one's own hair, moustache or beard — or even biting it — appears to have been introduced in the Viking Age: the earliest dated instances of hair-gripping are from the 9th century (besides the Ribe examples, in Vendel burial IV).⁷¹

⁷⁰ Eg from Tissø, Denmark: Wamers 2017; Pentz 2018, 19–21.

⁷¹ Arwidsson 1989a, 59; Helmbrecht 2011, 138–40, 154–6; Thirup Kastholm 2015.

Casting the net wider, continental and Classical inspirations can be identified, as with the armed woman motif (Fig 10, a–f). Anna Gannon has suggested that the face on the 8th-century ‘Wodan/Monster’ sceattas, used and likely minted in Ribe, might be inspired by depictions of the god Oceanus’s bearded face and/or of the Gorgoneion (Medusa’s head) on Athena’s shield, as mediated through Roman and early-medieval tradition.⁷² A wide-eyed, frontal face with moustache and, arguably, open mouth are shared with the common group of the so-called mask images, for which a Classical origin has also been proposed.⁷³ Examples such as Fig 10j show the typical traits used to identify a mask since antiquity: large open eyes and mouth, both needed to perform with the mask. If the similarity to these objects is accepted, the gripping man may thus be seen as a prototype for a common motif in Viking-Age art. The hair-gripping gesture has been related to images of the goddess Venus, similarly depicted holding up her hair (Venus Anadyomene) or a veil as a symbol of femininity.⁷⁴ A version of this image is seen on a Roman gemstone found in Ribe (Fig 10, d). Venus’s seductive hair-gripping posture was cited by Insular and Carolingian depictions of mermaids, symbols of female temptation and vice in, for instance, the Psalter of St Riquier, dated to AD 795–800.⁷⁵

Like the armed woman, the gripping man appears to be a deliberately disguised, gender-transgressive image. This is borne out by the Classical and Carolingian associations of the image, but also by contemporary Scandinavian iconography, such as the more common female hair grippers (Appendix, nos 85–93), and the frontally depicted faces featuring both (male) moustaches and (female) knotted strands of hair seen on equal-armed brooches from southern Scandinavia.⁷⁶ In the wider context of the Ribe mould assemblage, then, the gripping man is not a singular figure, but part of a wider theme.

MINIATURE OBJECTS

Five mould fragments show fragmentary impressions of a miniature sword, shield and wheel (Fig 11). Early 9th-century sword miniatures are rare. In his catalogue of Viking-Age amulets from Scandinavia, Bo Jensen lists three or four that might belong in the first half of the 9th century on the grounds of sword typology, with three more that could be of similar date based on their context.⁷⁷ The cross-guard visible on the Ribe sword miniature (Fig 11, b) matches several sword types that were current in the early 9th century.⁷⁸

Shields are the most common form of Viking-Age miniature weapons, and are found in Scandinavia, northern Germany, further afield in the Baltic Sea region, and possibly in England.⁷⁹ Most are produced from silver sheet-metal and date to the 10th and early 11th centuries. The Ribe shields (Fig 11, c), one of which was impressed on a mould also featuring a riderless steed (see Fig 2, a), were likely cast in copper alloy.

⁷² Gannon 2015.

⁷³ Wamers 2018.

⁷⁴ *Venus Anadyomene*: Wamers 2017.

⁷⁵ Leclercq-Marx 2014, ch 3.

⁷⁶ Helmbrecht 2013, 20–1.

⁷⁷ Jensen 2010, 47–9.

⁷⁸ Petersen 1919; Peirce 2002.

⁷⁹ Duczko 1989; Zeiten 1997, 18–19; Jensen 2010, 49–51; Gardela and Odeäck 2018.

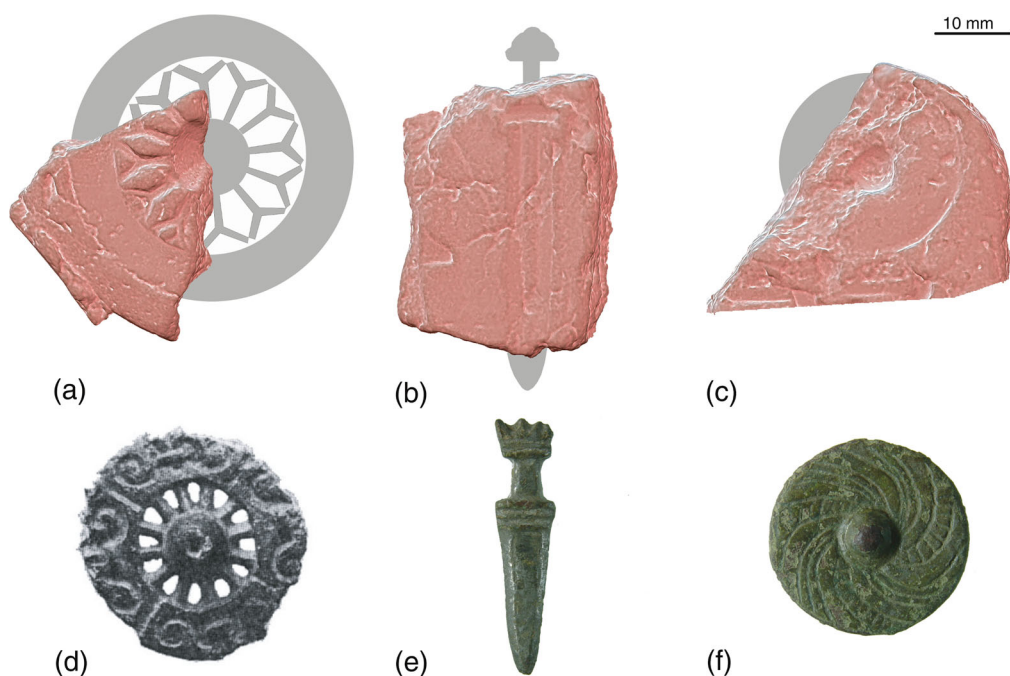


FIG 11

Casting moulds for miniature objects, and comparable finds. (a–c) 3D models of the casting mould fragments from Ribe. Comparable finds: (d) Furreby; (e, f) Tisso. *Image credits: (a–c) Images by authors; (d) Krogh 1970, fig 2; (e, f) National Museum of Denmark/Pia Brøjholt.*

Apart from the hub, the field furthermore lacks decoration such as the characteristic ‘running wheel’, although this could be added after casting. Miniature shields (and other weapons) have a long history in NW Europe, with finds attesting to their use before and during the Roman period and in the centuries before the Viking Age.⁸⁰ Together with a small number of Danish finds of miniature shields apparently cast in copper alloy,⁸¹ the Ribe shields thus form part of a long-standing and widespread tradition, which peaked in the 10th century.

A final casting mould impression preserves about one quarter of a disc shape, which in complete form featured 12 radial Y-shapes surrounding a prominent hub and set within a broad, flat rim (Fig 11, a). Similar pendants are found across Scandinavia, dating broadly from the mid-9th to the late 10th centuries.⁸² The Y-shape of the spokes and the lack of decoration of the Ribe mould impression are unusual among the dozen known other examples, but the consistent number of 12 spokes and the existence of at least one other example with a bare rim (Vindinge, Zealand, Denmark) allows us to identify this as a mould for a miniature wheel pendant.

⁸⁰ Meaney 1981, 149–62; Duczko 1989; Simpson and Blance 1998, 277; for swords, see Näsman 1973; Capelle 2003.

⁸¹ Two from Tisso: Gardela and Odebäck 2018, 126, nos 40–1; two from Ærø: DIME IDs 6285 and 38212; one from Hornum: Gardela and Odebäck 2018, 126, nos 35; one from Aggersborg: Pedersen et al 2014, 288–9; one from Hjørring: DIME ID 22049.

⁸² Jensen 2010, 63; also see Krogh 1970; Callmer 1989, 28; Zeiten 1997, 22–3.

Miniature weapons are widely considered to have amuletic significance.⁸³ They are typically (but not exclusively) found in female burials, and have been interpreted in a multitude of ways with reference to both pagan and Christian belief systems.⁸⁴ That miniature wheels were used as pendants is evident from finds in two female burials in Birka.⁸⁵ Like the weapons, no single satisfying possibility has been offered to explain their meaning (including as sun symbol, circle of life, a reference to funerary wagons).⁸⁶ As Jensen notes, known Nordic mythology contains no obvious references to wheels.⁸⁷ Its origin may stretch back to the Scandinavian Bronze Age, but wheel pendants were also used during the Early Middle Ages in Western and Eastern Europe.⁸⁸ Wheels, shields and swords occur widely in the same media as the human and horse figures discussed above. The examples from the Ribe moulds share the naturalistic style of the latter. While individually they give only limited clues for interpretation, we will argue that they share a broadly understood set of associations with the more elaborate figures of the assemblage.

DISCUSSION: THE FULL CAST

AN ICONOGRAPHIC ASSEMBLAGE

The casting moulds from Ribe are coherent in a physical sense; they originate from the same context, share stylistic similarities, and in some cases feature matching impressions of the same (types of) models across moulds. Regardless of their precise relation to Nordic or Christian beliefs, there is a consensus that an amuletic function can be attributed to the types of objects produced from these moulds. Furthermore, judging by the burial record across Scandinavia, typologically comparable finds, as well as amuletic items more generally, appear largely restricted to a use by (or at least deposition with) women, for example in Birka.⁸⁹ Sometimes, elements of the assemblage occur together, like the suspension rings combining horse-shaped pendants and miniature weapons from female burials in Gotland.⁹⁰ In addition to this consistent use context, several of the images are associated with others by their iconography. The miniature sword and shield recur with the armed woman. The riderless steed gains meaning through the recurring juxtaposition of horse(-rider) and (armed) woman in Viking-Age art.⁹¹

It stands to reason that the artisans of Ribe who produced and used these moulds considered the images as united by some overarching context or narrative. Other instances of Viking-Age art rarely offer such an opportunity to study a coherent set of imagery. Amongst the few other iconographic assemblages, the Oseberg tapestry fragments are of particular importance as a point of reference. The similarity in the iconographic range and detail between the Oseberg tapestries and the Ribe

⁸³ Gardela and Odebäck 2018, 82 and references.

⁸⁴ Zeiten 1997, 17–19; Jensen 2010, 45, 49–51; Gardela and Odebäck 2018, 87, 101–3 and references therein.

⁸⁵ Callmer 1989, 28.

⁸⁶ Zeiten 1997, 23.

⁸⁷ Jensen 2010, 63.

⁸⁸ Krogh 1970; Meaney 1981, 225; Werbart 1996, 205.

⁸⁹ More generally, see Zeiten 1997, 39; Jensen 2010, 106.

⁹⁰ Thunmark-Nylén 2006, 224.

⁹¹ Kleingärtner 2003, 129; also see Arwidsson 1989a, 58–9.



FIG 12

Details from the Oseberg tapestry fragments, showing the performance of rituals involving armed women and other visual elements represented in the mould fragments from Ribe. *Images by Stig Saxegaard in cooperation with M Vedeler, Museum of Cultural History UiO.*

moulds is striking (Fig 12) and incidentally forms a strong argument for the contemporaneity of both:⁹² the tapestries depict both women with weapons, masked figures and horses with riders and harnesses, the details of which match those of the riderless steed. In addition, we can point to the wagons depicted on the tapestries — to which the miniature wheel may allude. Furthermore, the tapestries include depictions of men with horned headdresses represented in Ribe moulds and metalwork finds from previous excavations. Other motifs on the tapestries, such as ‘weapon dancers’, are apparently not represented in the Ribe assemblage and occur only rarely in the wider corpus of Viking-Age ornamental metalwork.

While the picture stones from eastern Sweden and Gotland are important points of iconographic reference for Viking-Age art in general, they have less in common with the Ribe moulds. This observation might be explained by cultural heterogeneity within Scandinavia, as evident for instance from the distribution of pendants and other metalwork discussed here (see Fig 6). The contextualisation in the Oseberg tapestries suggests a new understanding of the meaning of the moulds’ imagery. On the tapestries, the armed women, weapon dancers, masked figures and other images appear in what has

⁹² Contra Vedeler (2019, 117–23), who suggested that due to the presence of seemingly archaic imagery, the Oseberg tapestries were included in the burial as an old heirloom. The Oseberg burial has a dendrochronological date of AD 834 (Bonde and Christensen 1993).

been interpreted as a large collective ritual, perhaps a ceremonial procession.⁹³ Symbolic inversions challenging and transgressing moral and social norms, for example through masking or cross-gender dressing, are known from communal rituals and festivals across historical and cultural contexts.⁹⁴ Therefore, as an assemblage, the mould images may not necessarily or primarily form direct reflections of mythological beings or concepts. Nor are they likely to simply depict social roles, such as that of female warrior, regardless if these existed. We suggest instead that they referred to practice and bodily performance in ritual contexts.⁹⁵

This interpretation aligns with an idea previously suggested by Neil Price with reference to Viking-Age figurative metalwork, noting that, ‘perhaps very few of these objects were religious at all, might they represent ordinary men and women in extraordinary situations that required unusual clothing or dress?’⁹⁶ A performative — as opposed to a purely mythological — explanation has been put forward for other forms of Scandinavian iconography, such as the Class 1 pendants depicting a female figure offering a drinking horn, or the weapon dancers and shape shifters found in pre-Viking imagery and in the Oseberg tapestries.⁹⁷ Gold-foil figurines may depict aspects of shamanic performance.⁹⁸ The grimaces and convulsive gripping seen on ‘Freyja’ figurines have been explained as physical expressions of shamanic trance.⁹⁹ More broadly speaking, the gender transgression and ambiguity seen in ‘Valkyrie’ imagery may have been linked to magical practices.¹⁰⁰

Many functions for such ritual reversal have been suggested, including magic, social catharsis, identity construction and re-affirmation of social order.¹⁰¹ That is not to say that the imagery was devoid of any narrative significance. Ritual performance is often woven into the recitation or re-enactment of mythological stories,¹⁰² and figurative artefacts could well serve as hooks for storytelling.¹⁰³ One instance, often invoked to explain the iconography of the woman-and-rider pendants and comparable meeting scenes on Gotlandic picture stones, is the meeting between Sigurd and the Valkyrie Sigrdrífa/Brynhildr, as recounted in *Sigrdrífumál* in the Poetic Edda: Sigurd assumes that she is a male warrior until he lifts her helmet and reveals her hair.¹⁰⁴

However, it is useful to detach iconography (as well as ritual) from the prevailing, largely mythological, framework of interpretation. The images produced in Ribe have no unambiguous counterparts in Norse mythology. It has proven difficult to reconcile the range of visual depictions of supposed ‘Valkyries’ with the textual descriptions.¹⁰⁵ Rather, their posture seems to mimic martial behaviour inaccurately, just as

⁹³ Gunnell 1995, 61–6; Murphy and Nygaard 2017; Vedeler 2019, 47–63.

⁹⁴ Eg Tokofsky 1999; Pandian 2001.

⁹⁵ Cf Bell 1992.

⁹⁶ Price 2006, 182.

⁹⁷ Holmqvist 1960; Gunnell 1995, 63–72.

⁹⁸ Back Danielsson 1999.

⁹⁹ Thirup Kastholm 2015, 87–8.

¹⁰⁰ Solli 2002; Hedeager 2011, especially 126–8.

¹⁰¹ Pandian 2001, 558–60; DeMaris 2017.

¹⁰² Cf ancient mystery cults, medieval passion plays, eg Petersen 2009.

¹⁰³ Neiß 2013.

¹⁰⁴ Staecker 2006; Ney 2009. Helmets are also a part of Valkyrie attire in *Hákonarmál* 11 (Fulk 2012).

¹⁰⁵ Eg Jesch 2015, 105–6; Gardela 2018, 406–8; Pentz 2018, 17–18; Price 2019, 280; Friðriksdóttir 2020, 68–9.

communal ritual performance may operate by transgressing ‘regular’ behaviour. On Class 2 pendants, the women in several cases carry their shield in an unusual fashion: inside-out, under the arm or in front of the sword, as if to emphasise that they are not meant to represent a use in combat (Fig 7, a–b).¹⁰⁶ It is also noteworthy that kennings (concise figurative descriptions in poetry) for ‘Valkyrie’, which include weapons as one of their components, do not imply that the Valkyrie is actually wielding them.¹⁰⁷ This is in sharp contrast to several examples of kennings for ‘warrior’, where a performative component in the kenning’s construction implies an actual use of the weapon.¹⁰⁸

It has been argued elsewhere that the fascination with the armed female figure in Old Norse poetry represents a symbolic transgression that served to reinforce, rather than challenge, a strict gender division in society.¹⁰⁹ The iconographic variety is easiest to understand by interpreting the armed woman not as the direct representation of a mythological figure with a fixed repertoire of attributes, but as an image rooted in (potentially) real, yet transgressive, behaviour. The varied and unconventional ways in which armed women hold their shields and swords could be read as emphasising their transgressive character, or representing different uses — for instance producing a clamour. In the perspective of rituals that were, indeed, out of the ordinary, the regional versions of the ‘Valkyrie’ as either carrying weapons or holding up a drinking horn make sense as both expressions of particular, prominent acts and gestures performed by women.

The horse could fit this performative interpretation as a possible reference to horse riding during communal ceremonies or to horse sacrifice. Archaeology, runic inscriptions and contemporary writers like al-Tartuschi, Ibn Fadlan and Thietmar of Merseburg show that sacrificing horses and other animals was a key element of Viking-Age communal rituals, including in Ribe.¹¹⁰ A trained stallion in particular must have been a most prestigious gift to the gods. Thus, brooches depicting the ‘riderless steed’ could symbolise this ideal or ultimate sacrifice.¹¹¹

That some women in Viking-Age society acted as ritual specialists is well attested in contemporary written and archaeological sources.¹¹² Prominent female members of the households were also involved in cult practices in domestic contexts. Some collective religious rituals, whether special events, cyclical festivities or embedded in day-to-day life, were closely related to sacrifice, feasting and hosting. By providing situations for the articulation of religious identities and group bonds, they were key in negotiating social relations and status.

We suggest that it is the roles performed in such rituals which are conveyed by the figurative pendants: figures depicting sometimes idealised, high-status performers, but — given their wide geographic distribution (see Fig 6) — likely worn by a broad group of women along with other ornaments and festive dress displayed on ceremonial occasions,

¹⁰⁶ Consider also that the Oseberg tapestry fragments 2 and 4, show women gripping swords just below the cross-guard, pointing downwards, in a distinctly non-martial gesture (Vedeler 2019, figs 68, 69).

¹⁰⁷ *Eg vífs odda* ‘of the woman of weapon-points’, 1. 18 (Marold 2012a, kenning 6).

¹⁰⁸ *Eg eiðvandr oddneytir* ‘the oath-true arrow-user’ 1. 18 (Marold 2012b, kenning 1).

¹⁰⁹ Murphy 2013, 147–8; Jesch 2015, 104.

¹¹⁰ Feveile and Jensen 2006, 78; Magnell 2019.

¹¹¹ Kaliff and Oestigaard 2020, 216–18.

¹¹² Ljungkvist 2011; Price 2019.

all of which would emphasise their role and status. Zanette Glørstad and Ingunn Røstad have suggested that by the 8th century and throughout the Viking Age, large disc-on-bow brooches, as worn by the armed-woman figure from Ribe, were only used on special occasions in which high-status women played a particularly prominent role.¹¹³ Glimpses of this role can be found in, for example, Ibn Fadlan's account of the funeral of a Rus' chieftain, with the figure of the 'Angel of Death' coordinating the ritual process, and in the *Volsa þáttir*, a short story relating the devotional practices of a pagan household under the leadership of its oldest female member — both examples, incidentally, involving horse sacrifice. The 'Valkyrie' pendants of Classes 1 and 2 aptly reflect two aspects of this ritual leadership,¹¹⁴ and Class 3 pendants might similarly represent a specific ritual performance.

The female hair grippers could readily fit this performative interpretation as depictions of shamanic trance, but also of formal acts of grief, attested throughout the world and often associated with women, such as described in the 13th-century Icelandic *Njáls Saga*.¹¹⁵ The male hair-gripping figure from Ribe, if interpreted correctly, performs an act that was gendered as female and may thus relate to the concept of 'ergi' as known from the Old Norse literary corpus: a form of gender transgression in ritual context, with men acting as women.¹¹⁶ A number of depictions of gender-ambiguous figures have also been cast in this light.¹¹⁷ Of particular interest as a potential parallel to the gripping man from Ribe as a gender-transgressive figure is a silver pendant in the shape of a bearded 'weapon dancer', wearing a long dress and a horned helmet, from a female burial in Birka.¹¹⁸ The similarity of the head of the 'gripping man' with 'mask' pendants and similar depictions in Viking-Age art could mark a further link with cult performance. In numerous cultures, including the Classical world, the mask was an iconic accessory of ritual performance, a commonly used symbol of inversion of order and identity. The popularity of the mask image in Viking-Age art is readily associated with cult performance.

This perspective also requires us to reconsider the purpose of these objects. There is little in the find contexts of the pendants and other items discussed here to indicate their use, except as part of female dress. Through their citation of ritual actions, they were imbued with religious but also social significance. The identity of the ritual attributes and gestures with those depicted on the figures may have enabled the pendants to act as amulets, thus prolonging the effect of the ritual beyond the moment of its happening, but also as markers of a social role.

URBAN AMULET PRODUCTION

A further dimension of interpretation is the role and impact of Ribe as a production centre for these amulets. The replication of the same models across multiple moulds suggests serial production at a certain scale. This implies that the ornaments were

¹¹³ Glørstad and Røstad 2015, 181.

¹¹⁴ Price 2019, 280 similarly suggests that 'Valkyrie' images might relate to social identities as much as religious belief.

¹¹⁵ Clover 1986, 162–9; quote from p 169.

¹¹⁶ Ström 1974.

¹¹⁷ Hedeager 2011, 126–7; Pesch 2018 and references therein.

¹¹⁸ Price 2019, 320.

produced as marketable commodities rather than individually commissioned products.¹¹⁹ It is remarkable that these figurative pendants and brooches, relating in some ways to rituals and the otherworldly, could be mass-produced alongside other, apparently more utilitarian female dress accessories, such as oval brooches. This suggests that there was no apparent segregation between the two spheres. On the contrary, as we see in burials, these items might have formed sets consisting of a pair of shoulder brooches connected by strings of beads, which were also traded in great numbers at Ribe. Pendants could be suspended from these strings or from the brooches themselves, which often feature a lug at the bottom for this purpose.¹²⁰ The Ribe workshop provided a range of high-quality metalwork ornaments associated with female formal dress in Scandinavia. If anything, this context of production highlights the connection of these pendants to the expression of personal roles and representation, beyond a more strictly religious significance.

As argued above, the casting mould imagery represents a combination of existing Scandinavian motifs and conventions, and iconographic inspirations from elsewhere, especially from motifs transmitted from Classical Antiquity. The naturalistic style and the hints of acquaintance with Roman imagery seen in the Ribe moulds point to cultural dynamics shared with, and arguably related to, the contemporary Carolingian Renaissance. Carolingian culture may have been an intermediary for the transmission of Classical images and ideas, transported to the north through trade with the Rhineland, in the form of looted church items, and by the mobility of craftspeople, diplomats and missionaries.

Ribe's workshops had a key role in harnessing post-Roman technologies, such as glass beadmaking or non-ferrous metalworking.¹²¹ As a large production site with multiple workshops, Ribe is likely to have hosted a community of artisans open to experimentation. Moreover, its role as a hub in a communication network enabled its innovations to spread across western Scandinavia. Consequently, Ribe was a likely place for imagery prevalent in eastern Denmark and southern Sweden to come together with depictions found on coins and other Roman-period artefacts circulating in the North Sea trade. Finds from Ribe show that artisans had access to images in Classical style, including the female deities oft-depicted on Roman coins. The emporium might furthermore have formed the context for the adoption of new religious ideas that in turn gave rise to novel forms of material culture.

CONCLUSION

When viewed as an ensemble, the images from the Ribe moulds suggest themes of ritual rather than mythology. This conclusion is sustained by the stylistic and iconographic correspondence to depictions like the Oseberg tapestries. It is in this light that we should understand the apparent inversions in the images: the man gripping locks of his hair and the woman bearing weapons and armour, along with the full cast of miniature accoutrements: swords, shields, steeds and wagon wheels. As amulets and as part of female formal dress, these trappings harnessed the potency of

¹¹⁹ Cf Pedersen 2016, 195–7; 2017.

¹²⁰ Kershaw 2013, 164–8.

¹²¹ Glass beadmaking: Andersen and Sode 2010. Non-ferrous metalworking: Feveile 2002.

ritual actions involving the transgression of social — especially gendered — norms. Depicting ‘ordinary men and women in extraordinary situations’,¹²² they highlight the central role of women in communal ritual and the importance of this prominence for female status and identity.

In remodelling inherited Nordic representations, the craftspeople of Ribe could draw inspiration from the heritage and visual culture of the Mediterranean past, which increasingly reached Northern Europe both in terms of the recycling of materials and in the re-appropriation of ideas borrowed from Classical myth, Christian legend and migration-period heroic tales. The urban networks of these emporia and the intersections between Scandinavia and the wider world of post-Roman Europe can be seen in the trade materials and adopted craft technologies arriving in Ribe. They were equally at the heart of the iconographic transformations revealed by the imagery of its amulet casting moulds.

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APPENDIX: FINDS LIST

This inventory contains locations, type designations, and references corresponding to the metalwork finds mapped in Fig 6. Danish place names in this inventory include the name of the parish and municipality as well as the conventional six-digit site code (‘stednummer’). Major archaeological sites are listed under the most commonly used name (eg Tissø, Hedeby). UK place names are as given in the literature, including the county name. A small number of finds could only be localised at a regional level. References to a published source are included wherever available. Unpublished finds are listed by museum accession number, or, if unknown, by reference to an online source. These online sources, such as the Detektor Danmark group on Facebook, might be restricted or otherwise unavailable. Care has been taken by the authors to verify the reliability of all records.

UNARMED WOMAN PENDANTS (‘VALKYRIE’ PENDANTS, CLASS 1)

Denmark

- 1 Avnslev, Nyborg [090601] (National Museum of Denmark C39716)
- 2 Klemensker, Bornholm [060104] (Helmbrecht 2011, no 86)
- 3 Rise, Årø [090704] (Claus Feveile pers comm)
- 4 Tissø [030106] (Helmbrecht 2011, no 185)

¹²² Price 2006, 182.

Poland

5–6 Truso (Gardela 2015)

Russia

7 Novgorod (Plochov 2007)

Sweden

- 8 Burial Bj 825, Birka (Helmbrecht 2011, no 552)
- 9 Burial Bj 968, Birka (Helmbrecht 2011, no 579)
- 10 Gamla Uppsala (Helmbrecht 2011, no 670)
- 11 Hjorthammar, Ronneby (Helmbrecht 2011, no 725)
- 12 Klinta, Köping (Helmbrecht 2011, no 803)
- 13 Sibble, Botkyrka (Helmbrecht 2011, no 905)
- 14 Tuna, Knivsta (Helmbrecht 2011, no 973)
- 15–17 Uppåkra (Helmbrecht 2011, nos 989–91)
- 18 Unknown location, Öland (Helmbrecht 2011, no 1173)

ARMED WOMAN PENDANTS ('VALKYRIE' PENDANTS, CLASS 2)

Denmark

- 19 Bjæverskov, Køge [050101] (National Museum of Denmark C49418)
- 20 Hviding, Esbjerg [210103] (Sol.sydvesjyskemuseer.dk Artefact No 200148346)
- 21 Hørning (Nørre) (Tyskerbakken locality), Randers [141006] (National Museum of Denmark C45178)
- 22 Kølstrup, Kerteminde [080106] (Beck et al 2019)
- 23 Landet (Skodsebølle locality), Lolland [070508] (National Museum of Denmark C40308)
- 24 Lejre [020601] (Baastrup 2015, Kat nr 149) — fragment identified as Class 2 based on stylistic correspondence with nos 26–7)
- 25 Lem, Randers [140906] (C Feveile pers comm)
- 26 Ringsted Ls, Ringsted [040213] (Trine Borake pers comm)
- 27–28 Skørping, Rebild [120310] (DIME 33651–2)
- 29 Sønderup, Slagelse [040318] (T Borake pers comm)
- 30 Vrejlev, Hjørring [100116] (Helmbrecht 2011, no 23)
- 31 Unknown location, Lolland (Facebook, Detektor Danmark, 17 November 2019)

Germany

- 32 Hedeby (Helmbrecht 2011, no 261)
- 33 Rostock-Dierkow (Messal 2019)

United Kingdom

- 34 Cawthorpe, Lincolnshire (Leahy and Paterson 2001)
- 35 Exton, Rutland (PAS LEIC-C58A13)
- 36 Wickham Market, Suffolk (PAS SF9305)
- 37 Unknown location near York (ARSNY) (Hall and Williams 2020, 58–9)

WOMAN-AND-RIDER PENDANTS ('VALKYRIE' PENDANTS, CLASS 3)

Denmark

- 38 Agedrup, Odense [080101] (Beck et al 2019)
- 39 Boeslunde, Slagelse [040301] (National Museum of Denmark C45055)
- 40 Boeslunde, Slagelse [040301] (National Museum of Denmark C44739)
- 41–42 Dalby, Kerteminde [080103] (DIME 8738; Malene Beck pers comm)
- 43 Dollerup, Viborg [130803] (National Museum of Denmark C42194)

- 44 Flakkebjerg, Slagelse [040403] (C Feveile pers comm)
- 45 Gram, Haderslev [200201] (Helmbrecht 2011, no 122)
- 46 Gudme, Svendborg [090104] (T Borake pers comm)
- 47 Gudum, Slagelse [040303] (National Museum of Denmark C44496)
- 48 Hellevad, Brønderslev [100205] (Helmbrecht 2011, no 174)
- 49 Hjadstrup, Nordfyns [080302] (Facebook, Detektor Danmark, 24 March 2019)
- 50 Ketrup, Jammerbugt [110704] (DIME 1541)
- 51 Magleby, Vordingborg [050507] (National Museum of Denmark C49589)
- 52 Mariager Landsogn, Mariagerfjord [140706] (Torben Trier Christiansen pers comm)
- 53 Odense, Odense [080407] (Runge and Henriksen 2018)
- 54–55 Ribe [190408/190409] (Helmbrecht 2011, no 105; Feveile 2006b)
- 56–57 Rise, Ærø [090704] (National Museum of Denmark C37408, C39145)
- 58 Rynkeby, Kerteminde [080111] (Runge and Henriksen 2018)
- 59 Rørbæk, Rebild [120210] (T Trier Christiansen pers comm)
- 60 Sønder Tranders, Aalborg [120113] (Beck et al 2019)
- 61–65 Tissø [030106] (Helmbrecht 2011, nos 195–7; National Museum of Denmark C32167/KN1828, C34048/FB1004)
- 66–67 Vestervig, Thisted [110612] (National Museum of Denmark C46607; Facebook, Danske Amatørkæologer, 7 January 2019)
- 68 Vindeby, Lolland [070413] (danefaeblog.wordpress.com, 13 February 2018, now defunct online blog)
- 69 Unknown location, near Silkeborg (Facebook, Detektor Danmark, 11 April 2019)
- 70 Unknown location, NW Jutland (Facebook, Detektor Danmark, 12 April 2020)

Germany

- 71 Dannewerk (Astrid Tummuscheit pers comm)
- 72 Ellingstedt (Majchczack 2016)
- 73 Föising, Schaalby (Dobat 2010, no 1311)
- 74 Grossenwiehe (A Tummuscheit pers comm)
- 75–77 Hedeby (Helmbrecht 2011, nos 256–8)
- 78 Selk (A Tummuscheit pers comm)

Poland

- 79 Truso (Gardela 2015)

United Kingdom

- 80 Bylaugh, Norfolk (Margeson 1997)
- 81 Fulmodstone, Norfolk (Margeson 1997)
- 82 Parham, Suffolk (PAS SF10754)
- 83 Peterborough, Northamptonshire (British Museum 1988,0407.1)
- 84 Winterton, Lincolnshire (Pestell 2015)

HAIR-PULLING WOMAN PENDANTS

Denmark

- 85 Allerslev, Lejre [020601] (Thirup Kastholm 2015)
- 86 Hammer, Næstved [050401] (DIME 22733)
- 87 Holeby, Lolland [070309] (National Museum of Denmark C46526)
- 88 Hørning (Nørre), Randers [141006] (possible model) (Helmbrecht 2011, no 172)
- 89–90 Tissø [030106] (Helmbrecht 2011, no 184; National Museum of Denmark C34048/FB1197)
- 91 Vindinge, Nyborg [090617] (Thirup Kastholm 2015)

Norway

- 92 Sør-Fron (Norges Metallsøkerforening [nmf.nu])
- 93 Østre Toten (Norges Metallsøkerforening [nmf.nu])

RIDERLESS STEED BROOCHES

Denmark

- 94 Bjæverskov, Køge [050101] (Wiuff Kristensen 2014)
 95 Boeslunde, Slagelse [040301] (National Museum of Denmark C36736)
 96 Egå, Århus [141102] (National Museum of Denmark C48293)
 97 Farstrup, Aalborg [120701] (DIME 13854)
 98 Hasseri (Budolfi Ls), Aalborg [120506] (Kleingärtner 2003)
 99 Krogstrup, Frederikssund [010204] (National Museum of Denmark C36674)
 100 Kværndrup, Faaborg-Midtfyn [090506] (Beck et al 2019)
 101 Lejre [020601] (Baastrup 2015, Kat nr 492)
 102–103 Tissø [030106] (Kleingärtner 2003)
 104 Vrejlev, Hjørring [100116] (National Museum of Denmark C35204)

Norway

- 105 Kaupang (possible model) (Pedersen 2016)

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Résumé

Recoller les morceaux : performance, rituelle, transgression du genre et innovation iconographique à Ribe pendant la période viking *par* Pieterjan Deckers, Sarah Croix *et* Søren Sindbæk

L'iconographie de la période viking est étudiée principalement à travers la sculpture et les bas-reliefs en pierre, ainsi que par le biais d'accessoires vestimentaires en métal, qui sont souvent mal contextualisés. Nous présentons une nouvelle approche se basant sur l'étude d'un assemblage de moules de fonderie pour accessoires vestimentaires figuratifs provenant d'un atelier du début du 9^e siècle à Ribe (Jutland, Danemark). Nous publions des reconstructions numériques des fragments de moules, notamment des pendentifs de type « valkyrie » montrant des figures féminines armées. Ce type se retrouve principalement dans l'ouest de la Scandinavie. Les motifs montrent une certaine familiarité avec les images de l'Antiquité classique et de la renaissance carolingienne. En soulignant les parallèles iconographiques et stylistiques avec les tentures de la tombe à navire d'Oseberg, nous appliquons une nouvelle perspective contribuant à l'interprétation du motif de la femme armée et d'autres représentations figurées de la période viking. Nous faisons valoir que le thème commun de ces images n'est pas celui de la représentation d'êtres héroïques ou mythologiques, mais plutôt de la performance d'un rituel, dans lequel les femmes occupaient un rôle central. Nous envisageons les implications de la production de ce type d'objets en du contexte urbain.

Zusammenfassung

Rekonstruierte Gussformen: Rituelle Handlungen, Überschreitung der Geschlechtergrenzen und ikonographische Innovation im Ribe der Wikingerzeit *von* Pieterjan Deckers, Sarah Croix *und* Søren Sindbæk

Die Ikonographie der Wikingerzeit wird meist anhand von Funden wie Steinskulpturen und Steinmetzarbeiten sowie metallenen Kleidungsaccessoires erforscht, die oft unzureichend kontextualisiert sind. Wir verfolgen mit der Erforschung einer Ansammlung von

Gussformen zur Herstellung figurativer Kleidungsaccessoires aus dem Kontext einer Werkstatt des frühen 9. Jahrhunderts in Ribe (Jütland, Dänemark) einen neuen Ansatz. Wir präsentieren digitale Rekonstruktionen der fragmentierten Gussformen, unter denen sich auch Formen für „Walküren“-Anhänger befinden, die waffentragende weibliche Figuren darstellen. Vergleichbare Funde treten in erster Linie im Westen Skandinaviens auf. Die Motive bezeugen die Vertrautheit mit Darstellungen aus der klassischen Antike und der Karolingischen Renaissance. Indem wir ikonographische und stilistische Parallelen zu den Wandteppichen der Oseberg-Schiffsbestattung ziehen, beleuchten wir die Auseinandersetzung mit dem Motiv der bewaffneten Frau und mit anderer figurativer Kunst der Wikingerzeit aus einer neuartigen Perspektive. Wir argumentieren, dass es sich beim gemeinsamen Thema der Bildnisse nicht um heldische oder mythologische Wesen handelt, sondern um rituelle Handlungen, bei denen Frauen eine zentrale Rolle spielten. Wir stellen Überlegungen zu den Auswirkungen des städtischen Herstellungskontextes auf diese Gruppe von Material an.

Riassunto

Ricomporre lo stampo completo: adempimento rituale, trasgressione di genere e innovazione iconografica nella Ribe di epoca vichinga *di* Pieterjan Deckers, Sarah Croix, *e* Søren Sindbæk

L'iconografia dell'epoca vichinga viene studiata principalmente attraverso sculture e intagli in pietra oltre che attraverso accessori di abbigliamento in metallo, reperti spesso scarsamente contestualizzati. Presentiamo qui un nuovo approccio attraverso lo studio di una raccolta di stampi per colata destinati ad accessori di abbigliamento provenienti dal contesto di un'officina di Ribe (Jutland, Danimarca) degli inizi del IX secolo. Forniamo le ricostruzioni digitali dei frammenti degli stampi, compresi i pendenti 'Valchiria' raffiguranti figure femminili armate. Ritrovamenti paragonabili avvengono soprattutto nella Scandinavia occidentale. I motivi dimostrano familiarità con immagini dell'antichità classica e della rinascita carolingia. Mettendo in evidenza i paralleli iconografici e stilistici con i cosiddetti

arazzi della nave funeraria di Oseberg, adottiamo una prospettiva nuova nella discussione del motivo della donna armata e di altri esempi di arte figurativa di epoca vichinga. Sosteniamo che il tema comune alle immagini non è il ritratto di figure

eroiche o mitologiche, ma che si tratta invece di un adempimento rituale in cui le donne rivestivano un ruolo centrale. Prendiamo in considerazione le implicazioni relative al contesto della produzione urbana di questo gruppo di materiali.