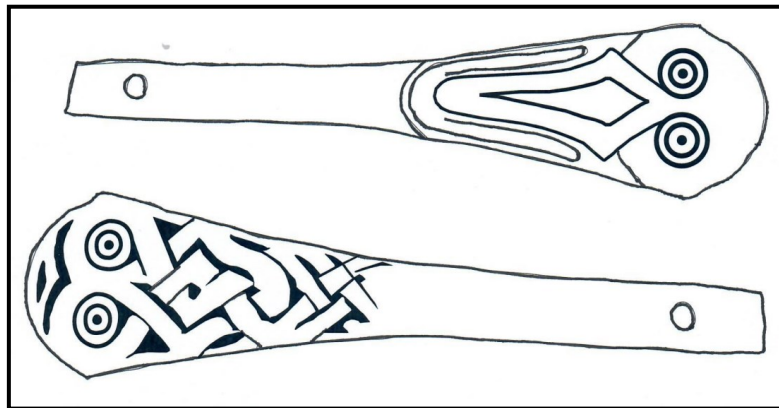


The 75<sup>th</sup> International

# Sachsensymposion

Copenhagen, Denmark 14<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> September 2024



## Performing Rituals

Cult and Behaviour in the Iron & Viking Age



# ORGANISERS & INSTITUTIONS

## *Organising committee*

### **The National Museum**

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Mads Dingsø Jessen  
Laurine Albris  
Anne Nørgård Jørgensen  
Anne Pedersen

### **Moesgaard Museum**

Xenia Pauli Jensen

## *Reference group*

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### **University of Copenhagen**

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### **University of Lund**

Bertil Helgesson

## *Assistants*

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## *Financial support*

### **Dronning Margrethe II's Arkæologiske Fond**

**Advokat Axel Ernst og frøken Alfrida Ernsts Legat til fremme af numismatisk forskning i Danmark**

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**Conference logo:** *Tuning pin for stringed instrument found in the Great Hall at Fugledegård, Tissø, late 7<sup>th</sup> to early 8<sup>th</sup> century CE.*

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# PERFORMING RITUALS

## THEME OF THE 75<sup>th</sup> INTERNATIONAL SACHSENSYMPIOSIUM

**Performing rituals. Cult and behaviour in the Iron Age and Viking Age. The National Museum, Copenhagen**

A prerequisite for understanding the lived life of people of the past is to take their religious life seriously. While it earlier was considered almost impossible to observe religious phenomena through archaeological material, it has in recent decades become a fully accepted part of archaeological interpretations. Today, cult and ritual are recurring focus areas for many excavation activities and research environments, and the organisation behind the 75<sup>th</sup> International Sachsensymposium have chosen *Performing Rituals* as the main topic for the conference.

Cult and rituals are complex subjects, and although they have been covered in previous symposia, there are several reasons why these subjects should be taken up again. In the past 15 years, archaeological surveying and excavation activities have escalated, and with them new discoveries have been made of objects, cult sites, structures and buildings from the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium CE that can be related to religious phenomena. Within religious studies, there has been a new focus on material and performative aspects of the pre-Christian cults. This research field will benefit from renewed and invigorated dialogue and exchange between institutions and disciplines.

The purpose of the meeting is thus to take stock of research into the ritual and cultic aspects of life itself, patterns of behaviour around belief and ritual, and to update our understanding of old and new finds and perspectives on both paganism as well as the Christian conversion of European societies. Although archaeology brings us forward, we are still faced with methodological and theoretical issues. We therefore also invite renewed discussions concerning the recognition and definitions of cultic phenomena as well as the social and spatial aspects of religious activities: the multiple facets of religious life, relations between various social levels and networks, emotions in relation to religious experience and individual/collective attachments to traditions. The main topics of the symposium are the following:

- Ritual and rulership – sites, power, and practices
- Between the realms of the dead and the living
- Ritual at settlements
- Rituals, written sources, and iconography
- Ritual depositions
- Rituals of war and violence
- Rituals at the transition from paganism to Christianity
- Re-tracing ritual practices

In addition, the conference will include

- A visit to the Kings Hall in Old Lejre to be inspired by the physical and non-physical environment
- A workshop about the Vølve/Sorceress and a visit to the new temporary exhibition “The Viking Sorceress” at the National Museum.

We will also celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Sachsensymposium with a dinner on the 17<sup>th</sup> of September. There really is something to celebrate! The Sachsensymposium has been the driving force in a progressive research process since 1949 for the benefit of European archaeological research. The National Museum and the organisers welcome you all to Copenhagen – 132 participants from 10 countries - and we wish you a very good conference in an inspiring atmosphere.

# GENERAL INFORMATION

## Conference venue

The National Museum. Ny Vestergade 10, DK-1471 Copenhagen K

## Contact information

Information about the programme: Anne Nørgård Jørgensen [ang@natmus.dk](mailto:ang@natmus.dk) and Mads Dengsø Jessen [mads.dengso.iessen@natmus.dk](mailto:mads.dengso.iessen@natmus.dk)

## Transport

Metro M2 (the yellow line) every 4-6 minutes from **Copenhagen Airport** to Copenhagen. Change at **Kongens Nytorv** to Metro M3 (the red line) or M4 (the blue line) which will take you to the stations close to *the National Museum*: eg. the stations **Gammel Strand** or **Rådhuspladsen** or **Københavns Hovedbanegård** (Copenhagen Central Station).

You can also go by train from **Copenhagen Airport** to **Københavns Hovedbanegård** (Copenhagen Central Station).



# CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

## **Conference venue**

The National Museum. Ny Vestergade 10, DK-1471 Copenhagen K

The **speakers have 20 minutes available including 3 minutes for questions and shift – we will stop you at 17 minutes.** In addition, there is a collective discussion after each session.

Throughout the conference there are POSTERS in **Room U1** close to the conference room. Visit the POSTERS section at the end of the lunch break, on Sunday 12.00-13.00 and Tuesday 12.00-13.00 posters will be staffed by the exhibitors (ca. 12.30).

You are the National Museum's guest during the conference, and you can visit the exhibitions by showing your name badge within the museum's opening hours. You can also connect to the museum's Wi-Fi as a guest (NATMUS\_Guest).

The Conference, coffee breaks and reception are in **Festsalen**, and Lunch and Dinner are in **Glassalen**.

There will be assistants in the auditorium to help presenters with uploading presentations and other technical issues. We kindly request all speakers to upload their presentations on the computer in **Festsalen** before the start of the programme on their respective presentation days.

## SATURDAY, 14<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER

### REGISTRATION AND WORKSHOP

**13.00-14.00 Registration at the National Museum in *Festsalen*.**

The Main Entrance of the National Museum is Ny Vestergade 10, Copenhagen

**14.00-16.00 Workshop at the National Museum in *Festsalen* with introduction and access to the new temporary exhibition "The Viking Sorceress" (Coffee and Sandwich)**

**14.00 The Völve and her ritual repertoire**

Sophie Bønding (University of Stockholm, Sweden/Denmark)

**14.20 Merging modern-day life with ancient practice**

Maria Lisette Jacobsen (Gundsømagle, Roskilde, Denmark)

**14.40 Information about the Viking Sorceress-exhibition**

Peter Pentz (The National Museum, Denmark)

**15.00 Entrance to the Viking Sorceress-exhibition (in groups)**

**16.00-18.00 BREAK** (possibility to see the city or find your hotel etc.)

## **OPENING AND RECEPTION**

**18.00-20.00 Opening of the 75<sup>th</sup> Sachsensymposium and reception with wine and light refreshments at the National Museum**

**18.15 Official opening of the conference**

Deputy Director Lars Højer (The National Museum, Denmark)

**18.30-19.00 Keynote: Performing rituals – or – The ritual turn as an archaeological challenge**

Anders Andrén (University of Stockholm, Sweden)

**19.00 Deputy-Chair of the International Sachsensymposion Adam Cieśliński,**  
(Uniwersyte Warszawski, Poland)

**20.00 End of Reception**

## **SUNDAY, 15<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER**

**09.00-16.20 Lectures in *Festsalen* at the National Museum**

**08.30 REGISTRATION OPENS**

**09.00 General information from the Sachsensymposium**

Deputy-Chair of the International Sachsensymposion Adam Cieśliński,  
(Uniwersyte Warszawski, Poland)

**Words of remembrance**

## **SESSION I: RITUAL AND RULERSHIP – SITES, POWER, AND PRACTICES**

**Chairperson: Håkon Reiersen**

**09.15 The research status on ritual and rulership in southern Scandinavia**

Mads Dengsø Jessen & Laurine Albris (The National Museum, Denmark)

**09.40 Rendlesham, Suffolk: Belief in Practice at a 7th-century Royal Centre**

Christopher Scull (Rendlesham Revealed Suffolk, England)

**10.00 Ritualized rulership, royal residences, and roads – Aspects of an itinerant kingship in Viking Age Denmark**

Thorsten Lemm (Zentrum für Baltische & Skandinavische Archäologie Schleswig, Germany)

**10.20-10.40 BREAK**

**10.40 In the shadow of Old Uppsala. Östra Aros: folkland assembly and cult site 800-1200 AD**

Torun Zachrisson (The Museum of Uppsala, Sweden)

**11.00 Performing for community and rulers – creating ritual space in Iron Age Uppåkra**

Mats Roslund (University of Lund, Sweden)

**11.20 Hoby revisited – one hundred years of „beißende Tierköpfe“ from Hoby, Lolland**

Ruth Blankenfeldt and Jan Schuster (Zentrum für Baltische & Skandinavische Archäologie Schleswig, Germany and Uniwersytet Łódź, Poland)

**11.40-12.00 Discussion**

**12.00-13.00 LUNCH IN GLASSALEN AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM**

## **SESSION II BETWEEN THE REALMS OF THE DEAD AND THE LIVING**

**Chairperson: Claus v. Carnap-Bornheim**

**13.00 Large, circular stones in royal burial mounds. Høgr altars in late Iron Age Western Norway**

Håkon Reiersen (University of Stavanger, Norway)

**13.20 Human skulls in Scandinavian Viking Period ritual contexts**

Martin Rundkvist (Uniwersytet Łódź, Poland)

**13.40 A Revolving Door. A Ritual for Entering Another World**

Peter Pentz (The National Museum, Denmark)

**14.00 Feasting with the dead: Activities above ground at the Grønhøjgård burial ground, Northern Jutland**

Torben Trier (Museum of Northern Jutland, Denmark)

**14.20-14.40 BREAK**

**14.40 Preparing for the Otherworld? Considerations on the manipulation of grave goods in Early Roman Iron Age contexts**

Melanie Augstein (Lower Saxony Institute for Historical Coastal Research, Wilhelmshaven, Germany)

**15.00-15.20 Discussion**

## **SESSION III: RITUAL AT SETTLEMENTS**

**Chairperson: Mats Roslund**

**15.20 Creating society. Rituals at Fienstedt, Thuringia**

Christoph G. Schmidt (Nordfriisk Instituut, Bräist, Germany)

**15.40 Strange waterholes at the Iron Age site Hoby**

Peter Steen Henriksen (The National Museum, Denmark)

**16.00-16.20 Discussion**

**16.20 Practical information about the reception in Rundetårn**

## **SUNDAY EVENING, 15<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER: 18.45-21.00**

### **RECEPTION AND VISIT TO RUNDETÅRN (ROUND TOWER 1642) IN THE OLD CITY**

You can choose to join a group from the National Museum at 18.15

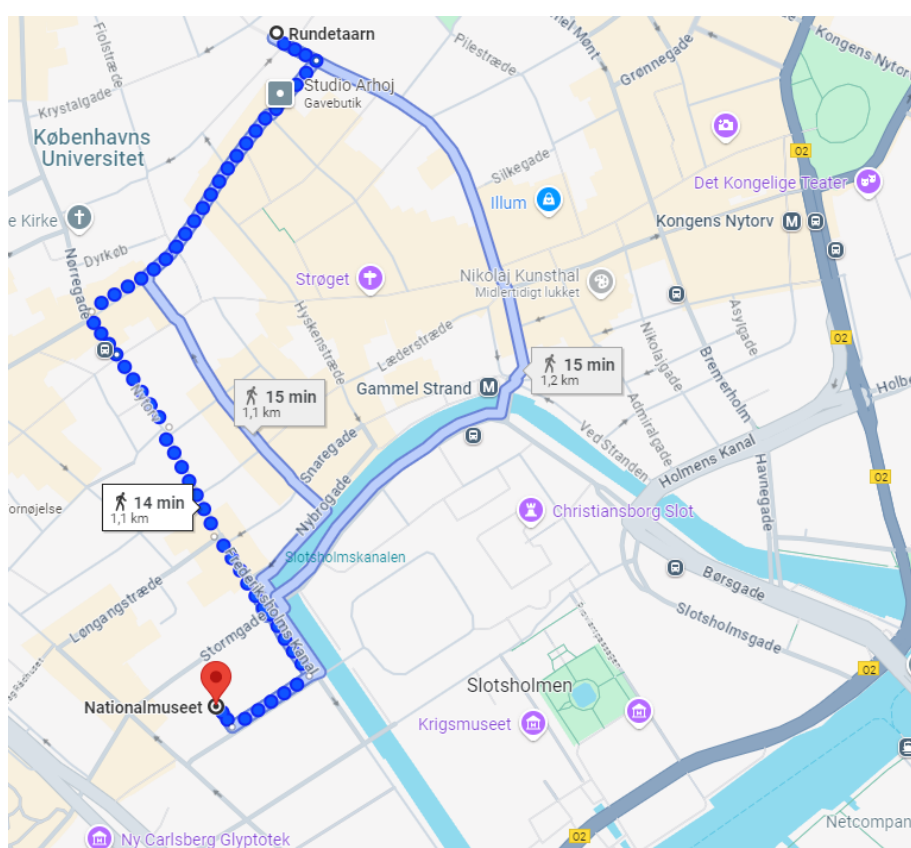
Meeting place in front of the Main Entrance of the National Museum – or you can go by yourself.

**The Tower will be open for us from 18.30**

**19.00 It all started here – on the origin of the Danish National Museum**

Welcome speech by Per Kristian Madsen (former director of The National Museum, Denmark)

Copenhagen's observation tower built 1637-1642 (Christian IV). Europe's oldest functioning observatory. Located in **Købmagergade 52A**. The tower has a spiral corridor from bottom to top and it was possible to ascend by horse carriage. The tower was built along with Trinitatis Church, which housed the antiquities collection before the National Museum.



**Route to Rundetårn on foot**

## **MONDAY, 16<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER – EXCURSION DAY**

### **EXCURSION TO LEJRE, ROSKILDE**

**09.00-17.30** Excursion goes to Old Lejre, where there will be a museum visit and a walk to the burial mounds and settlement. The tour continues, on foot or by bus, to the experimental

archaeological centre Lejre Land of Legends/Sagnlandet Lejre. There will be lecture and performance, as well as lunch in the reconstructed 8<sup>th</sup>-century Hall (see description of the Lejre Area below).

**09.00 Departure by bus from the National Museum, Copenhagen**

Meeting Place: **Dantes Plads** ca. 100 m from the Main Entrance of the National Museum

**10.00 Arrival at Old Lejre** Museum and Lejre location:

Halls and ship-settings (Inside and outside. Be prepared for walks and rain)

**11.30 Joint walk or by bus to Lejre Land of Legends (Sagnlandet Lejre)** with Laurine Albris og Arne Anderson Stamnes

**11.45/12.00 Arrival Lejre Land of Legends (Sagnlandet Lejre)**

Walk to the King's Hall (mostly inside, a little outside)

**13.00 Lunch in the Hall**

**14.00 The hall as a symbol of power**

Director general Lars Holten

**14.40 BREAK outside the Hall**

**15.00 Coffee**

**15.20 Beowulf – The King's Skald**

**16.00 Departure Lejre for Copenhagen**

Ca. **17.30 Arrival at the National Museum, Copenhagen**

**17.30 End of today's program**

**MONDAY EVENING, 16<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER: 18.00-21.00**

**MEETING, COORDINATING COMMITTEE AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM**

**18.00-21.00 Room U2** (c. 20 pers.) (Sandwiches – coffee etc.)

## TUESDAY, 17<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER

09.00–17.40 Lectures in *Festsalen* at the National Museum

09.00 Practical information about tonight's dinner

09.05 Information on selections for the Sachsersymposium

Adam Cieśliński, (Uniwersyte Warszawski, Poland)

### SESSION IV: RITUALS, WRITTEN SOURCES, AND ICONOGRAPHY

Chairperson: Torun Zachrisson

09.10 Keynote: Performance, Poetry, and Ritual in the Viking-Age Hall

Simon Nygaard (Aarhus University, Denmark)

09.40 Revisiting the Lady with the Mead Cup in Old Norse Literature: Oral Performances and real-life Ritual Specialists

Frida Antonia Weise Arlon, (University of Groningen, Netherlands)

10.00 Strengthening Bonds: Rituals and Power Dynamics in the Kievan Rus' and Byzantine Empire

Anna-Theres Andersen (University of Kiel, Germany)

10.20-10.40 BREAK

10.40 'No one enters except bound' – Depicting reverence and taboo on Scandinavian gold foil figures

Kent Otte Laursen (Museum of Vejle, Denmark)

11.00 The image of the emperor in the eyes of the barbarians. The case of Lida finds

Tomasz Nowakiewicz (University of Warsaw, Poland), Aleksandra Rzeszotarska-Nowakiewicz (Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology PAS) and Vital Sidarovich (University of Warsaw, Poland)

11.20 Procession – laying out – deathbed: aspects of burial processes in the archaeological record?

Nina Lau (Zentrum für Baltische & Skandinavische Archäologie Schleswig, Germany)

11.40-12.00 Discussion

12.00-13.00 LUNCH IN *GLASSALEN* AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM

## **SESSION V: RITUAL DEPOSITIONS**

**Chairperson: Christopher Scull**

### **13.00 The Ritual Gold of Västra Vång**

Svante Fischer (University of Stockholm, Sweden)

### **13.20 Careless barbarians or ritual performances? A question of interpretation**

Helle Horsnæs (The National Museum, Denmark)

### **13.40 Animals: sacral agents and profane beasts**

Pernille Pantmann (Museum of Northern Zealand, Denmark)

### **14.00 Depositions at monuments in the landscape**

Lars Grundvad (Museum of Sønderkov, Denmark)

### **14.20 Ritual Destruktion**

Alexandra Pesch (Zentrum für Baltische & Skandinavische Archäologie Schleswig, Germany)

### **14.40 Approaching Iron Age rituals**

Karin Johannesen (Museum of Northern Jutland, Denmark)

### **15.00-15.20 Discussion**

### **15.20-15.40 BREAK**

## **SESSION VI: RITUALS OF WAR AND VIOLENCE**

**Chairperson: Xenia Pauli Jensen**

### **15.40 Kalkriese and the Varus Battle – Historical truth, archaeological model or methodological aberration?**

Stefan Burmeister & Claus v. Carnap-Bornheim (Kalkriese-Varusschlacht, Osnabrück, Germany)

### **16.00 Weapons as ritual expressions and practices**

Trine Louise Borake (Museum of Western Zealand, Denmark)

### **16.20 Ritualized warrior burials in 7th century graves of Southern Germany**

Benjamin Höke (Landesamt für Denkmalpflege, Esslingen, Germany)

**16.40 Reconsolidation of Heathen Battle Axes in the late Viking Age**

Gustav Hejlesen Solberg (The National Museum, Denmark)

**17.00 Ritual behaviour in the ringfort of Sandby borg, Öland**

Helena Victor (Museum of Kalmar, Sweden)

**17.20-17.40 Discussion**

**TUESDAY EVENING, 17<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER: 18.30-22.30**

**BANQUET/FORMAL 75<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY DINNER AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM**

18.30-22.30 Meeting place in the Main Hall – Dinner in *Glassalen*

**WEDNESDAY, 18<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER**

09.00-13.00 Lectures in *Festsalen* at the National Museum

09.00 Practical information

**SESSION VII: RITUALS AT THE TRANSITION FROM PAGANISM TO CHRISTIANITY**

Chairperson: Sophie Bønding

**09.05 Pre-Christian belief systems and their adaption by Christianity seen from the perspective of the archaeology and cultural traditions behind the *Indiculus superstitionem et paganiarum*, Northern Francia, mid-8th c.**

Dries Tys (Heritage Merode Region, Belgium) & Rica Annaert (Independent Researcher, Belgium)

**09.25 A tent as a church? The problem of the (un)materiality of the first churches in Scandinavia (9th century)**

Angela Baranes (Université Côte d'Azur, France)

**09.45 Transforming crafts – A bottom-up perspective on religious change**

Michael Neiß (University of Lund, Sweden)

**10.05 Religious change in local communities: new analysis of Gotland's first churchyard burials**

Cecilia Ljung, Alison Klevnäs, and Astrid A. Noterman (University of Uppsala, Sweden)

**10.25-10.45 Discussion**

**10.45-11.05 BREAK**

## **SESSION VIII: RE-TRACING RITUAL PRACTICES**

**Chairperson: Laurine Albris**

**11.05 Invisible rituals: the unburied dead in early medieval England**

Alison Klevnäs (Uppsala University, Sweden) & Emma Brownlee (University of Cambridge, England)

**11.25 Hints on ritual behaviour and ritual waste in a Viking-age settlement at Tinum on Sylt, North Frisian Islands**

Martin Segschneider (Lower Saxony Institute for Historical Coastal Research, Wilhelmshaven, Germany)

**11.45 Re-enchanting the early Middle Ages**

Britt Claes & Femke Lippok (Mero-Jewel Project, KMKG/MRAH Brussels, Belgium)

**12.05 Glimpses of a ritual practice**

Søren Diinhoff (University Museum of Bergen, Norway)

**12.25 Symposium summery**

Andreas Rau (Zentrum für Baltische & Skandinavische Archäologie Schleswig, Germany)

**12.45 Invitation to the 76<sup>th</sup> Sachsensymposium (Oldenburg, Germany)**

**13.05 End of symposium – (Sandwich “To Go”)**

## **POSTERS**

**Posters are in *Room U1* at the National Museum**

Visit the POSTERS section at the end of the lunch break.

Sunday 12.00-13.00 and Tuesday 12.00-13.00 Posters will be staffed by the exhibitors (ca. 12.30).

**1. Gotlandic Picture Stones – The online edition**

Michaela Helmbrecht (Archaeotex, München, Germany) & Sigmund Oehrl (University Stavanger, Norway)

**2. A new sight on old objects- research and the inventarisation of finds storage**

Annette Siegmüller (Landesmuseum Natur und Mensch in Oldenburg, Germany)

**3. An extraordinary insight into the life and death of a burial community from the Late Roman Iron Age and Migration Period.**

Christina Peek & Melanie Augstein (Lower Saxony Institute for Historical Coastal Research, Wilhelmshaven. Germany)

**4. Pottery traditions of Early Medieval shell-tempered ware in north-western Central Europe**

Hauke Jöns & Katrin Struckmeyer (Lower Saxony Institute for Historical Coastal Research, Wilhelmshaven, Germany)

**5. A clearance cairn field at Farstorp, Sweden. Cultivation, grazing, burials, rituals and land rights**

Maria Petersson (Statens historiska museer, Linköping, Sweden)

**6. Under Pressure – militarisation and visualisation of power in the centuries around the birth of Christ**

Xenia Pauli Jensen (Moesgaard Museum, Denmark)

**7. The equal-armed ‘Dreirundel’ brooches – a trace of cross-cultural interactions?**

Karen Høilund Nielsen, Mathias Holch Kaas & Poul Hounsvad (Aarhus University, Denmark)

**8. „Friesische“ Gräberfelder im nördlichen Niedersachsen. Variantenreicher Bestattungskult oder pragmatische Grablegen?**

Frank Both & Kara Schmidt (Archäologie Vor- und Frühgeschichte, Niedersächsische Landesmuseen Oldenburg, Germany)

**9. Forgotten cemeteries – unknown death rituals. 11-12<sup>th</sup> century rectangular mounds in Pomerania (Northern Poland) in the light of recent research**

Sławomir Wadył (Faculty of Archaeology, University of Warsaw, Poland) & Paweł Szczepanik (Institute of Archaeology, Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, Poland)

**10. Sharing a bed but nothing else. Bed burial practices in first millennium Europe**

Astrid A. Noterman (Dept. of History, Stockholm University, Uppsala University, Sweden)

**11. Erwitte-Eikeloh - an unusual Ottonian deserted church next to a spring on the Hellweg**

Eva Cichy (LWL-Archäologie für Westfalen, Germany)

**12. High quality forging – A pattern welded seax from Schieder in Westphalia**

Ulrich Lehmann (LWL-Archäologie für Westfalen, Germany)

**13. Remains of Arable Fields or Ritual Activities? Two Concepts for the Interpretation of Ploughing Marks Found Under Barrow Mounds of the Roman Period in Poland**

Adam Cieśliński (Faculty of Archaeology, University of Warsaw), Andrzej Kasprzak (Museum in Koszalin)

## EXCURSION

### DESCRIPTION OF THE LEJRE AREA

#### **Lejre, residential area, halls and burial site, Central Zealand, c. 500-1050 CE**

The village of Gl. Lejre (Old Lejre) is located in Lejre river valley, c. four kilometres from Roskilde Fjord. Lejre is one of the few Late Iron Age centres in Scandinavia known from written sources. It is mentioned in 13<sup>th</sup>-century texts such as *Saxo* and the *Icelandic sagas* as the former royal centre of the Skjoldunge-family, among these the famous legendary king Rolf Krake. The legendary Danish King Hrothgar and his hall Heorot mentioned in the Old English poem *Beowulf* have also been related to this place. As early as the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the German bishop *Thietmar of Merseburg* (c. 975-1018) described Lejre as an important political and cultic centre where the Danes gathered every nine years to sacrifice animals and humans to the gods.

#### **The Lejre settlements and halls**

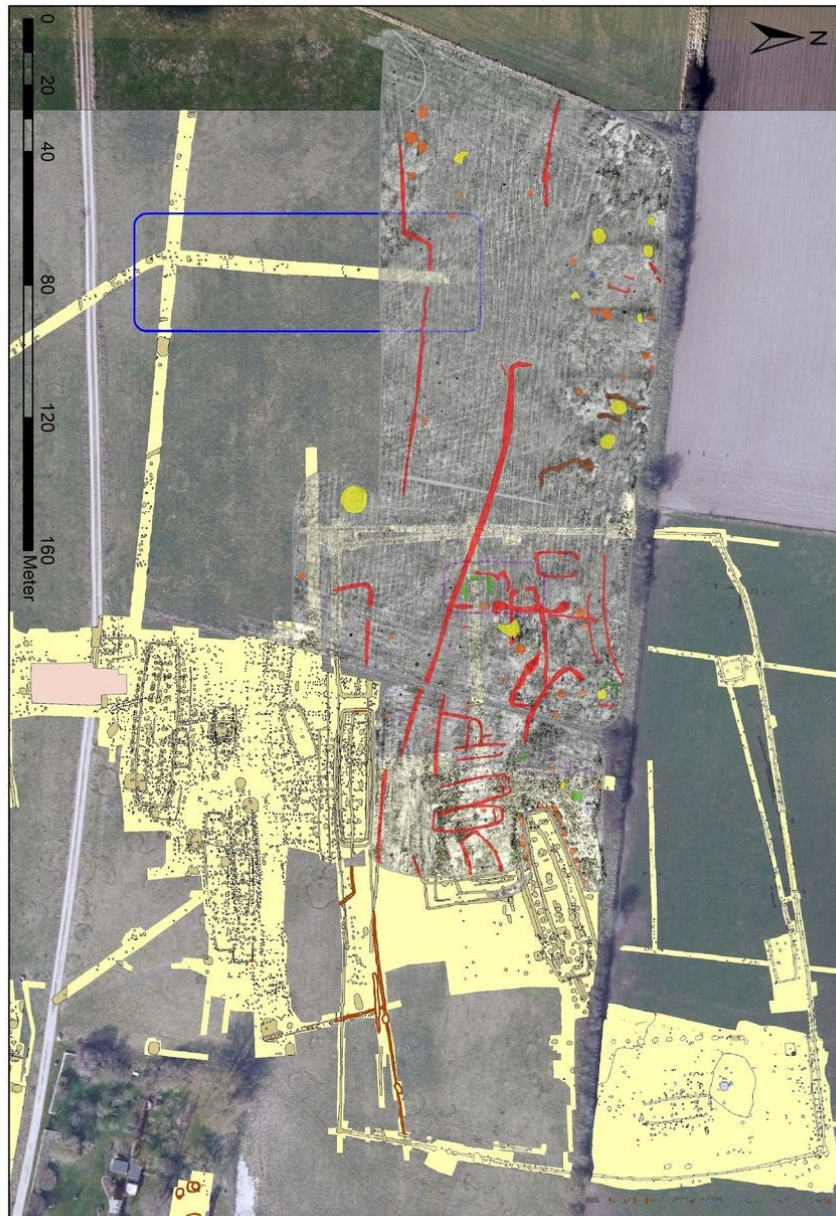
Through historical times, Lejre was only known as a small village and not even the parish centre. It was believed that the Medieval texts reflected only myths. Archaeological excavations in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century revealed that Lejre in the period ca. 500-1050 CE was a very rich settlement centred on a residential area, with rich and powerful inhabitants. Two main phases of residential areas, Fredshøj ca. 500-600 CE and Mysselhøjgård, ca. 700-1050 CE, have been identified on the western side of the river valley. The Fredshøj settlement north of the present-day village consisted of at least seven house foundations from different phases, with the largest building reaching c. 47 meters. Finds from Fredshøj can be seen at Lejre Museum. There are mainly fibulae and jewellery, weights and even ceramics imported from England and the Frankish kingdom. While Fredshøj is on private property, Mysselhøjgård west of the village can be visited and several of the excavated buildings from the settlement are marked in the terrain. The Mysselhøjgård residential area is larger and more complex than Fredshøj, seemingly with two enclosed areas situated next to each other covering an area of approx. 40,000 m<sup>2</sup>. At least six phases of hall buildings placed on elevated ground can be identified as well as several smaller buildings. Excavations have revealed that other settlement areas are hidden under the present village of Gl. Lejre. The finds material from Mysselhøjgård is very rich with evidence of crafts and trade and can also be seen at Lejre Museum. Most famous is probably the little figurine of an individual possibly wearing female dress, on a throne with ravens, perhaps an Odinic reference. Recently, GPR- and detector surveys have showed that the settlement reaches farther west.



*Excavations in the Area of Gammel Lejre, The Ship-Setting in Blue (after Christensen (2016) p. 34, Fig. 2.7)*

### Fire-cracked stones at Fredshøj and Mysselhøjgård

A common trait between Fredshøj and Mysselhøjgård is giant heaps of fire-cracked stones placed at the residential areas. The stone-heap at Fredshøj was c. 1 meter tall and 15-20 meters wide, while the one at Mysselhøjgård was c. 1.5 meters high with a diameter of c. 37 meters. The size and placing of the stone piles suggest they were important, and they may have been a product of or playing a part in religious practices.



*Mysselhøjgård, Ground-penetrating Radar (after Kastholm et al. (2024) p. 83, Fig. 4)*

### **The burial sites**

On a promontory in the river valley east of Gl. Lejre, traces of a large, monumental burial ground can be seen. In the burial mound Grydehøj were traces of a cremation, gold threads from textiles and remains from animal sacrifices. Carbon 14 dating suggests that Grydehøj was built in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. Several other burial mounds in the area have not been excavated. Under and next to the ship-setting south-east of Grydehøj 50 Viking Age graves have been investigated. This is the best preserved of at least four ship-settings known at the site.



*Excavation Field of The National Museum, Inhumation Graves in Red (after Christensen (2016) p. 35, Fig. 2.9)*

### **Lejre Land of Legends (Sagnlandet)**

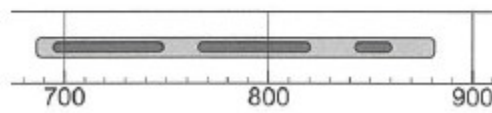
Lejre Land of Legends is a non-profit organization that communicates, researches and teaches about the past. It was founded in 1964 with the aim to create new knowledge about the past through experimentation. The purpose of Lejre Land of Legends is to run a research center for conducting ethnological, historical and archaeological experiments, the implementation of related research tasks and to pass on the results through scientific channels and through active dissemination and teaching (read more at [Sagnlandet.dk](http://Sagnlandet.dk)).

# Hus XLI

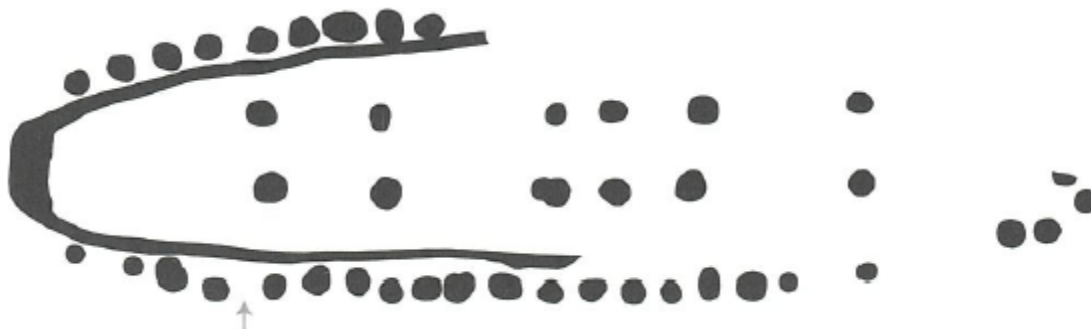
Mysselhøjgård  
Husgruppe XL-XLII

Type	Treskibet langhus, støttestolper
Orientering	Ønø-vsv
Længde	61 m
Bredde, midt	12 m
Bredde, gavl	6 m vest
Stratigrafi	Ældre end hus XLII, yngre end hus XL

C-14  
1235±35 BP, Poz-36182,  
A1895, dyreknogle



(after Christensen (2016) p. 441)



(after Christensen (2016) p. 443)



*The Reconstructed Hall at Lejre Land of Legends. Photo: Krister Vasshus.*

### **Walk from Mysselhøjgård to Lejre Land of Legends**

A small track road leads from the Mysselhøjgård site through Ledreborg Castle Forest to the entrance of Lejre Land of Legends. The walk takes about 30 min. We will walk together from Mysselhøjgård at 11:30.

Read more about Lejre in the book by Tom Christensen, *Lejre bag myten – de arkæologiske udgravninger* (Jysk Arkæologisk Selskabs Skrifter 87), Højbjerg 2016.

# ABSTRACTS

## **Keynote:**

### **Performing rituals – or – The ritual turn as an archaeological challenge**

Anders Andrén

This paper will be an introduction to the conference. Problems and prospects when studying rituals in archaeology will be discussed. Strategies to overcome the problems will be presented, by discussing ritual space, ritual time, rituals props, and ritual performers. Finally, the relation to written sources will be touched upon.

### **The research status on ritual and rulership in southern Scandinavia**

Mads Dingsø Jessen & Laurine Albris

The dynamic relationship between rulership and religious practices in the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium CE has been a focus of research at the National Museum through the last 15 years. Various excavations, projects and networks have allowed us to gain a deeper insight into the various ways and scales on which religion could be articulated at centres of power. Especially research on the sites Gudme, Tissø and their counterparts has revealed how religion played a key part as a driving force of their development but has also shown fundamental differences between the so-called 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation sites. The Tissø tuning peg – the SaSy 2024 logo – found in the wall-trench of one of the large Fugledgård halls and decorated with a style II mask motif, illustrates the intricate relationship between visual and oral art and the ruler's sites, and thus bear witness to the socio-religious practices that can be found at these sites. The paper wishes to make an overview of the ritual sites in South Scandinavia and couple the possible ritual activities with our current understanding of the archaeological assemblages found here.

### **Rendlesham, Suffolk: Belief in Practice at a 7th-century Royal Centre**

Christopher Scull

Between 2007 and 2017 field survey, remote sensing and targeted evaluation identified a major central place of the 5th to 8th centuries at Rendlesham in Suffolk. The extent of the activity area, at 50ha, and the size and quality of the metal-detected assemblage from the ploughsoil make this the largest and materially the wealthiest settlement of its time known from England (Scull *et al* forthcoming 2024). It can be confidently identified with the East Anglian royal centre recorded by Bede at *Rendlæsham* (Colgrave and Mynors 1969: HE iii, 22).

Between 2021 and 2023, larger-scale excavation has tested key aspects of interpretation based on the survey data. It is now possible to refine the sequence of development, and to identify zonation by activity and social character within the settlement complex. The excavated material culture assemblage complements and contextualises the metalwork from the ploughsoil, and an

exceptional faunal assemblage sheds light not only on animal husbandry and provisioning, but also on social behaviour and aspects of belief.

Bede records that this was the place of a royal baptism in the middle of the 7th century, and the 300-year sequence of activity spans both the pre-Christian and early Christian centuries. There is, therefore, potential to interrogate how belief was expressed and embedded in social practice at this place, and how this may have changed over time. Are there changes that might be associated with kingdom building in the late 6th century? Are there changes that might be associated with Christianisation in the earlier 7th century? And is Christianity apparent in the archaeology of what we know to have been the arena for a royal baptism?

Colgrave, B and Mynors, R (eds) 1969. *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Scull, C, Brookes, S and Williamson, T (eds), 2024. *Lordship and Landscape in East Anglia AD 400–800. The Royal Centre at Rendlesham, Suffolk, and its Contexts*, Soc Antiqs London Res Rep 84, London: Society of Antiquaries of London.

## **Ritualized rulership, royal residences and roads – Aspects of an itinerant kingship in Viking Age Denmark**

Thorsten Lemm

Itinerant kingship was a crucial element of rulership practice in medieval Europe (c. 500–1500). Kings moved periodically or constantly throughout their domains and made their presence felt by gathering people, by taking part in solemnities, by conferring gifts and honours, by pronouncing justice, by fighting enemies, and by ensuring general security. In doing so, the itinerant king embodied the society's centre of power, and through his travels he took symbolic as well as actual possession of the realm. Consequently, the annual royal progress represented a ritual cycle in itself.

The study of royal itineraries is heavily dependent on the place and date information in the written sources. Due to the fact that written documentation (in particular royal charters) only began later in Denmark, this paper will inevitably have to take its starting point in the High Middle Ages. It will be proposed that routes frequently used by kings and their entourage can be identified by linking the documented royal places of stay (AD 1042–1259) on the basis of the reconstructed medieval road network; these routes will be considered as 'royal roads'. The vast majority of these places belonged to the *kununglef* (crown estate) and *patrimonium* (royal private property) according to King Valdemar II's survey from c. 1230, which in general show clear connections to the medieval roads; the latter is also true for the royal husebyer established in the 11th century.

As will be shown, many later royal estates feature outstanding archaeological monuments and findings, which may characterise them already as special places of the Viking Age (e.g. Aggersborg, Hedeby, Boeslunde); in theory they could have represented royal possessions since the unification of the Danish Kingdom under the Jelling-dynasty. Moreover, it is striking that other 'central

places', also have strong connections to the reconstructed road network, especially to the 'royal roads'.

This opens up the possibility of a Viking Age itinerant kingship, with kings visiting certain 'places of power' for reasons connected with them, such as e.g. religious feasts, thing assemblies, royal court meetings, or commemorations at royal burial sites. By combining all the above aspects, the paper intends to show that several sites archaeologically interpreted as potential temporary royal residences (e.g. Erritsø, Tissø, Uppåkra) should be considered linked together by the overarching context of a Viking Age itinerant kingship.

### **In the shadow of Old Uppsala. Östra Aros: folkland assembly and cult site 800-1200 AD**

Torun Zachrisson

Östra Aros (now Uppsala) in Mid-Sweden is undeservedly overshadowed by its legendary neighbour, the royal seat Old Uppsala. The site's early history is rather unknown, considered as a relatively insignificant harbour downstream Old Uppsala, without independent status and agency. Its real growth only began in the 1270s when the archbishop's seat was moved here, and a new cathedral began to be built.

The setting of Östra Aros is a spectacular junction where the water route – river Fyris – crosses the land route – the Kasåsen ridge. Here, by the last rapids, the site grew that was called Aros, river mouth. However, already before urbanization took off, the place stands out through various exceptional features. One of them is the ritual offerings of weapons and humans in the calm waters of the river at "Islandet". Spears, axes and swords (some with inlays of gold and silver) together with humans were deposited there from the ninth to thirteenth centuries. Islandet is known in the historical sources as site for the winter market "Distingen" – the assemblies of the *disir* – *dísir* being the pre-Christian female supernatural beings surrounding the goddess Freyja. Islandet was set at the intersecting borders of two administrative *hundare* (hundred) districts. Ulleråker (the god Ull's field) at the ridge above was in the Middle Ages known as the assembly site of the larger unit, the *folkland*. Thus, Östra Aros was placed at the top level of the administrative organisation. In this paper, the cultic and judicial responsibilities of the royal power and the collectives are explored in the light of the administrative organisation of a realm.

### **Performing for community and rulers- creating ritual space in Iron Age Uppåkra**

Mats Roslund

To hold a community together, gathering places were needed where rituals regularly strengthened its members. However, rituals should have been both open and closed to the collective in relation to the ruling dynasty. Open collective performances combined with secret rites allowed the rulers to balance their own power ambitions with the need for the communities acceptance. Based on the study of roads, the demarcation of the residence area, the hall and the cult house in Uppåkra, a hypothetical picture of the site's ritual space is presented".

## **Hoby revisited – one hundred years of „beißende Tierköpfe“ from Hoby, Lolland**

Ruth Blankenfeldt & Jan Schuster

In 1920, during drainage work in Hoby on the island of Lolland, a richly furnished grave from the Early Roman Iron Age was discovered. The burial site, one of the rich graves of the so-called "Lübsow Group", contained high-quality objects of Roman origin as well as equally high-quality artefacts from local production. The finds were soon presented in a publication. This article by Friis Johansen from 1923 became the primary literature on this extraordinary grave for a century. At the beginning of the 21st century, amateur archaeologists discovered a settlement site chronologically comparable to the grave, just 250 meters away. Initiated by the „Danish National Museum“ and the „Museum Lolland-Falster“, a project was developed in collaboration with the „Zentrum für Baltische und Skandinavische Archäologie, Schleswig“ (now LEIZA/ZBSA). The aim of this cooperation was to conduct excavation campaigns and geophysical investigations at the new site, as well as to process the finds discovered 100 years ago. The project idea and targeted topics were first presented to a larger audience at the 61st Sachsensymposium in Haderslev in 2010. This paper will present the results of antiquarian investigations into the local grave goods from the princely grave and comparative analyses of the composition of the imported vessels.

## **Large, circular stones in royal burial mounds. *Hqrgr* altars in late Iron Age western Norway**

Håkon Reiersen

In the Storhaug and Salhusaugen mounds near Avaldsnes in southwestern Norway, large, circular stone slabs were found. Measuring 1,5-2 metres in diameter, the circular stones were placed on top of cobblestones like tables. The same practice is documented in Gloppen in northwestern Norway. Here, at least four similar stones have been found in burial mounds. One of these was found during ploughing in the edge of the large, unexcavated Karnilshaugen mound. The mounds from Avaldsnes are related to regional kingship emerging in the late **8th century**. Storhaug and Salhusaugen measured between 40-50 metres in diameter, and Karnilshaugen 50-55 metres. These are the largest burial mounds in western Norway. Mounds of these sizes are often characterised as *kongshauger*, royal burial mounds. The elevated circular stones give associations to how the term *hqrgr* is used in *Hyndluljóð*, when describing a king sacrificing animals to Freyja on a stone altar. This is one variation of the use of the term *hqrgr*, which could also describe sacred mountains, cairns, mounds, and cult buildings. Having received sacrifices on the *hqrgr* altar, Freyja helped the king legitimising his claim to kingship. For similar reasons, the circular stones might have been used as *hqrgr* altars by kings in western Norway.

Horse remains in Storhaug indicate the performance of animal sacrifices during the burial ritual, where the *høgr* altar played an essential role. In Salhusaugen and Karnilshaugen, the altar stones were found just beneath the turf in the edge of the mounds. Being easily available for secondary uses, these *høgr* altars might have been used in rituals aimed at legitimising kingship for later descendants. In Gloppen, the stone altars were not restricted to the largest mounds but gained a wider use.

### **Human skulls in Scandinavian Viking Period ritual contexts**

Martin Rundkvist

Rituals centered on detached human heads are a famous feature of the La Tène era and Medieval Celtic literature. In Viking Period studies though, scholars are not familiar with many curated and modified human skulls. The most well-known one is the fragment from Ribe with its long runic inscription. But human skulls occur selectively in quite many Viking Period bone assemblages. This contribution offers a survey of finds and find contexts, including Old Uppsala, Aska in Hagebyhöga, Ströja in Kvillinge and Herrebro in Borg. Some ideas of how to formulate and test interpretations are put forward.

### **A Revolving Door. A Ritual for Entering Another World**

Peter Pentz

Ten years ago, the Norwegian archaeologist Marianne Hem Eriksen suggested that the door as an architectural element of Viking Age houses was a metaphor for transition and liminality. This paper is about a ritual conjuring up a 'false' doorway to another world. This doorway epitomizes passage from one state and world to another, in this case specifically the living and the dead and hence also between the natural and supernatural. Several archaeological finds and monuments are interpreted in the light of the 'false' doorway established through the ritual, linking the living to the dead, and some Viking iconographic representations are suggested to be figuratively inscribed as the entrance into the realm of the dead.

### **Feasting with the dead: Activities above ground at the Grønhøjgård burial ground, Northern Jutland**

Torben Trier

While Iron Age burial rituals likely included a wide range of activities beyond the actual disposal of the deceased, the archaeological evidence of these is often confined to the modest discoveries within the graves. In several instances, investigations at the Grønhøjgård burial ground, however, revealed evidence of ritual activities outside the graves. Roman silver coins and small pieces of gold had been deposited at the outskirts of the site, and in the northern part of the burial ground, the largest and richest graves were arranged around a three-aisled longhouse.

In a depression near the building, there were remains of a rubbish layer dominated by large quantities of animal bones and fire-cracked stones. The extraordinary activity level was also reflected in the graves. The filling of many graves contained animal bones, and almost three out of four graves had been reopened. This paper discusses the evidence of rituals that occurred both outside and inside the graves at the Grønhøj burial ground. Some of these activities seem to resemble those found at several early central places in Scandinavia, but here, they took place at the resting place of the ancestors.

### **Preparing for the Otherworld? Considerations on the manipulation of grave goods in Early Roman Iron Age contexts**

Melanie Augstein

In Prehistoric Archaeology, grave goods play an important role in reconstructing mortuary rituals, concepts of the afterlife and social relations. Indeed, many of these objects regularly show traces of mechanical influence that can be assumed to be intentional. These range from deformation and destruction to practices such as fragmentation and the arrangement of fragments.

Graves should be understood as spaces of symbolic and ritual communication, and accordingly the handling of objects in burial ritual is assumed to be highly communicative, symbolic and meaningful. The manipulation of grave goods – mainly weapons and other status indicators – is an integral part of the burial ritual, but it has often been either neglected or indiscriminately subsumed in the archaeological literature and is generally interpreted as ›ritual destruction‹.

On the basis of selected case studies from the Early Roman Iron Age, especially from the Lower Elbe region, this over-generalised interpretation is to be examined in a more differentiated way, since in each case there is evidence of different systematic treatments, of concept-driven actions, of a ›logic‹ of its own. In this sense, it is necessary to analyse the different practices and the reasons for the conspicuous treatment of the objects. Behind the manipulation of grave goods lie complex (ancient) object concepts that are displayed as part of the funerary ritual.

### **Creating society. Rituals at Frienstedt, Thuringia**

Christoph G. Schmidt

The late Roman Iron Age site of Frienstedt (Thuringia) is well known for its wealth of metal fragments of Roman origin and for the oldest runic inscription discovered up to now south of Scandinavia. The site was founded in the middle of the 3rd century and follows a striking structure, which shall be highlighted within this paper.

The most eye-catching feature is an open area in the centre of the settlement, which in turn is surrounded by a ring of inhumation graves. Based on genetic and trace element analyses, it was possible to determine a widespread origin of the buried individuals, which extended as far as probably Norway and in one case the Middle East. It was clearly not a family association, but a very heterogeneous group that presumably shaped this site as a new established centre of society.

On the one hand, the open space shows traces of extensive market and craft activities; there is evidence of metalworking and the use of tents. On the other hand the Roman Iron Age graves surrounding this area are aligned radially towards Bronze Age graves in the centre. Immediately in front of these much older burials are narrow but deep shafts arranged in concentric circles, which contain an extremely large number of animal bones. These shafts can be clearly distinguished in their construction and backfilling from wells for water supply. The animal bones they contain distinctly differ from those found at the actual settlement area.

This ground plan structure can be interpreted as an economic centre at least for the region nearby, but simultaneously as a place of veneration of ancestors in the sense of an "invented tradition" and also of contemporary founder figures. Both may have served to legitimise newly within a short period of time created social power structures. The treatment and final deposition of the animal bones suggests ritualised procedures after large meals. Parallels to the reference of ritual shafts and / or graves to sometimes far older burial sites or founder graves and the ritualised handling of food remains can be found above all in the veneration of heroes in Roman Gaul.

### **Strange waterholes at the Iron Age site Hoby**

Peter Steen Henriksen

The locality of Hoby is primarily known for the extremely rich grave from the beginning of the Roman Iron Age. The settlement, to which the grave belonged, has been excavated nearby, and immediately north of the houses, two unexpected water holes were found.

It turned out that the water holes, which were 20 meters in diameter and one and a half meters deep, were man made. In 2015, a 2-meter-wide section was excavated through one of the water holes to find an explanation for the function of the water holes.

It turned out that the water hole was divided by several wattled fences under the water, and in the middle of the water hole, two sturdy posts with twigs at the end appeared.

On the east side of the water hole, a series of fire pits were found, and in front of them, there were massive layers of stone and bones at the bottom of the water hole. Subsequently, a large number of scientific investigations were conducted, but the function of the water hole has not yet been clarified. Both practical purposes and ritual functions of the water holes can be pointed out, so the lecture will lead to a discussion of the possibilities.

### **Performance, Poetry, and Ritual in the Viking-Age Hall**

Simon Nygaard

It is often stated by researchers of the Viking Age that Old Norse poetry stems from an oral, Viking-Age tradition. This statement is often part of an argument for why we are able to use these poems as sources for Viking-Age religion, ritual, mythology, and mentality. This is all well and good and not by any means wrong. However, the implications and consequences of the oral provenance of Old Norse poetry are seldomly treated in any detail.

In this keynote lecture, I will explore some of these potential consequences by presenting a performance-led approach to Old Norse poetry that will try to answer some of the following questions: If Old Norse poems were originally meant to be performed orally, how would such a performance have taken place and what would its function have been? How would it have affected the performer? How would it have affected and used the space in which the performance presumably took place? How would it have been experienced by a contemporary audience? How would it have engaged with contemporary material culture? I will give analytical examples from a selection of Old Norse poems in order to present plausible answers to some of the questions above. By doing so, I will argue for their role as oral-poetic ritual performance that would have been a key part of the religion of a hall-based, Viking-Age warrior elite.

### **Revisiting the Lady with the Mead Cup in Old Norse Literature: Oral Performances and real-life Ritual Specialists**

Frida Antonia Weise

**Abstract:** This article examines the motif of the lady with the mead cup in Old Norse sources, notably the Poetic Edda, which might indicate the existence of actual mead serving rituals performed by aristocratic women as means of initiation into religious mysteries, as consecration to kingship, or the establishment of hierarchy in the king's war band. The poems depict a god or hero receiving a mead cup from a giantess, Valkyrie, or goddess in what appears to be the proceedings of the rite of marriage. This suggests that Scandinavian and other North European societies of the time may have practiced *hieros gamos*, a sacred marriage between a ruler and a female deity to legitimise his reign and to achieve otherworldly knowledge. This article is informed by Simon Nygaard's (2017-18 and 2019) assessment of the role of Eddaic poems as scripts for ritualized oral performances. It employs memory theories, the analysis of poetry metrics, and a comparison with the ritual formulaic present in runestones to build a case for the archetype of the lady with the mead cup as both a retelling of old myths and ritual script. Moreover, this article analyses the role of female ritual specialists and practitioners as attested in Old Norse sources and the archaeological record to verify how they relate to possible real-life mead-serving rituals. Finally, there is a study of gender in Viking Age society and to which extent the interpretation of sacred marriage is dependent on patriarchal social constructs or whether it simply reflects the well-attested capacity of Norse women as mediators to the spiritual world.

### **Strengthening Bonds: Rituals and Power Dynamics in the Kievan Rus' and Byzantine Empire**

Anna-Theres Andersen

This paper delves into the pivotal role of rituals in negotiating and managing conflicts within the ambivalent relationship between the Kievan Rus' and Byzantine Empire during the 9th and 11th centuries AD. In this context, rituals are considered highly symbolic and consciously performed actions, integral to the political etiquette observed at the highest echelons of political authority.

These courtly rituals, intricately interwoven with each other, tend to serve dual purposes: regulating disputes or potential conflicts and aiming to strengthen political alliances. Encompassing a diverse spectrum of ritualistic practices such as reciprocal gift exchange of prestigious luxury goods, negotiations about dynastic marriages, and opulent royal feasts and banquets, these rituals exemplify mechanisms utilized within the political landscape of the time. Of particular interest is the development of power dynamics during the reign of Vladimir from 980 to 1015 AD, characterized by the stabilization of the previously ambiguous relationship with the Byzantine Empire. Central to the cultivation of stable diplomatic ties was the baptism of Vladimir in 988 AD, and the society's adoption and incorporation of Christianity during this era. By examining rituals as strategic tools for navigating and mitigating conflicts, this paper illuminates the complex interplay between religious, political, and social dynamics during early medieval times. It underscores the contemporary significance of rituals as mechanisms for managing conflicts and regulating societal norms.

Keywords: *diplomatic negotiations, military alliance, gift exchange, Christianization, baptism, early medieval times*

### **'No one enters except bound' – Depicting reverence and taboo on Scandinavian gold foil figures**

Kent Otte Laursen

The Scandinavian gold foil figures, ca. 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> centuries AD, has been interpreted variously as depictions of deities known from later Norse Mythology, or as depictions of humans carrying out religious observances of a kind deemed largely inaccessible to modern interpreters. That the use and deposition of gold foils in themselves reflect some sort of religious behavior is, however, common consensus.

This paper will focus on a specific class of gold foils depicting figures clad in a sort of shaggy fur coat, with the arms totally obscured. Around the chest and shoulders is seen a band or rope. It is argued that this is an element carrying symbolic value, comparing it to the Old Norse concept of *vébönd* – hallowed bonds – and related concepts in Nordic pre-Christian, as well as traditional Roman religion in a comparative perspective.

Only once are one of these figures shown with an arm out – carrying an enigmatic object previously suggested to be either the magical mythological boat *Skiðblaðnir*, a quiver for arrows, or an unusually large cup. This paper will present a new interpretation that this element represents a reflection of the *fascēs*, bound rods, carried by the Roman *lictores* as instruments of corporal punishment and symbols of authority.

Drawing on Tacitus' description in *Germania* of the religious observances in the sanctuary of the *semnones* – where 'no one enters except bound' – a picture is drawn of the importance of different symbols of subjugation under religious rule, as inscribed on the bodies depicted on the gold foil figures: special restrictive clothing, bindings and insignia of authority and punishment.

### **The image of the emperor in the eyes of the barbarians. The case of Lida find**

Tomasz Nowakiewicz, Aleksandra Rzeszotarska-Nowakiewicz & Vital Sidarovich

The increasing intensity of contact between barbarians and representatives of imperial Rome at the end of antiquity is manifested by various types of archaeological sources. In particularly significant cases, they bring new quality to the recognition of phenomena not illuminated by the written sources, the best example being the recently identified numismatic phenomenon associated with the secondary use of Roman mint stamps by the Goths. Recent research has indicated that the perceived fascination in this milieu with aureuses - presumably seen in terms of symbols of Roman power - took on the characteristics of a popular solution in eastern Goth society, traced by a series of thousands of self-made coins operating outside the economic system of commodity exchange.

On the fringe of this phenomenon is a find from north-eastern periphery of ancient Barbaricum, which should be considered the region of present-day Lida. The recently discovered deposit from there contains, among other things, the destructs of a silver and partially gilded Roman vessel, bearing the clear mark of barbarian aesthetics and behaviour, and showing, among other things, the figure of the emperor with the attributes of his power, made by the hand of a barbarian craftsman. It is significant that this content, surprisingly rich in detail, although executed rather clumsily, did not draw on the space of *licentia poetica*, but on the contrary, was a reproduction of original Roman motifs, enriched with barbarian themes. Arguably, it can also be considered that, by its explicit reference to imperial splendour, it was a manifestation of the aspirations of a local chieftain, stimulated by the imagery of the familiar coinage but still abstract figure of a distant, powerful ruler. The barbarian craftsman, however, ensured that the image of this ruler was comprehensible to his people, equipping it with features valued in local communities, and creating an object unique in its expression in the process.

### **Procession - laying out - deathbed: aspects of burial processes in the archaeological record?**

Nina Lau

Essential aspects of burial-accompanying rites and pre-burial rites are always assumed for grave finds, but are hardly detectable in the material culture. However, the lecture will present selected archaeological (often organic) diachronic evidence from grave finds from the Roman imperial period in the Barbaricum as well as the Roman Empire and the provinces, which could provide indications of the aspects of procession and laying out of the dead. On the one hand, these are the remains of deathbeds, but also processional stretchers as well as objects that could possibly originate from the context of the ritual acts surrounding the washing and laying out of the corpse, such as lighting or the remains of the funeral banquet. These artefacts and, above all, the situation in which they were found originate from grave finds from the early Imperial period up to the early Migration Period and will be discussed in the context of written and pictorial records.

Finally, it can be seen that these ephemeral aspects of burial rites are also reflected in material grave finds - beyond the (traditionally assumed) grave furnishings with grave goods for the buried person. This indicates that (special) graves were constructed as spaces in which several aspects of the ephemeral burial rites were materialised and thus visible and tangible for the burial community.

### **The Ritual Gold of Västra Vång**

Svante Fischer

This paper discusses the highly unusual gold deposit from Area H in Västra Vång in central Blekinge, Sweden. Area H has been interpreted as a *hearg*, a sacred enclosure, where important sacrificial rituals were conducted in the first half of the sixth century. The find material from Area H includes several large Roman bronze vessels, the fragment of an early to mid-fifth century West Roman solidus, spiral gold, and many freshly struck gold foil figures which are die-linked to Sorte Muld on Bornholm and Eketorp II on Öland. The Västra Vång ritual deposition is in terms of materiality and chronology a missing link between the mid fifth century hoard from Målen on the island of Tjurkö in eastern Blekinge which includes intact late fourth century solidi and early fifth century gold bracteates, and the recent find of a mid-sixth century gold hoard from the magnate farm of Knästorp in southern Scania which includes parts of a high status sword pommel, but only one old, folded gold foil figure. The Västra Vång gold has been transformed for new purposes to suit a new form of ideology that nevertheless appears to have been a short-lived phenomenon.

### **Careless barbarians or ritual performances? A question of interpretation**

Helle Horsnæs

Since the 1980s metal detector surveys have changed the not just the volume of small finds, but also the composition of finds. We can, to a certain degree, study finds from the same field as a contextual unit, but practically all detector finds have one important feature in common: They were deprived of their primary archaeological context long before they were found.

How then do we interpret the many new finds? In the world of numismatics there is a clear methodological distinction between hoards (many objects found together) and single finds. It is often assumed that hoards were most often the result of conscious depositions, while single finds were most often accidentally lost. And old habits die hard.

However, it seems to me that the interpretation of single finds of Roman denarii as the result of casual losses is inadequate and unsatisfactory. Roman denarii are coins with a weight of c. 3 gr and made of high-quality silver, and the almost contemporary gold coins – aurei and solidi – are even heavier. They have a high intrinsic as well as symbolic value. In a review of finds of Roman coins and their derivatives (for example coin imitations and Nordic bracteates) I would argue that it is quite possible that the majority of the finds stems from conscious depositions in connection with rituals.

## **Animals: sacral agents *and* profane beasts**

Pernille Pantmann

The interdependency between humans and animals in all aspects of prehistoric daily life is today beyond fully comprehension.

Thus, we sometimes turn to written sources to establish the symbolic meaning of animals, even if some of the answers might be found in the physical remains of the deposited animals, if looked for. Animals are addressed as the most common of all prehistoric depositions, yet they have received too little attention. Perceiving the sacred and the profane as each other's continuum rather than mutually exclusive, enables an acknowledgement of the meaning and status of animals as sacral agents because their importance and meaningfulness in all aspects of life is emphasized. But labelling deposited animals as expressions of fertility cult is perhaps too simplistic. Studies of animal deposits have indicated careful selections regarding sex, age, species, body parts and combination of animals as well as with other items. Exploring and identifying patterns is embedded in the archaeological method, often to create typologies and chronologies. But what if the pattern is more complex and encompass several different aspects such as specific *and* non-specific species, specific body-parts *and* non-specific sorts, sometimes only one animal *and* sometimes complex combinations of animals. Sometimes in wet contexts *and* sometimes in dry contexts. Traditionally we have associated sacral practices to the wet environments often in the understanding that this context was particular sacred. But given that there are also finds from dry contexts, we should abandon the idea of dividing between wet- or dryland or between the "profane or sacral places". The omnipresent impression of animals as sacral agents in various contexts propose a discussion of sacred moments rather than sacred places and it illustrates the significance of the "*and*" rather than the "*or*".

## **Depositions at monuments in the landscape**

Lars Grundvad

Over the last decade, several depositions dating to the first millennium have been discovered in a large presumed sacred landscape near Fæsted and Harreby in Southern Jutland, Denmark – a landscape that will represent the setting for this case study. The depositions are numerous and consisted of many different types of artefacts reflecting both prosperity but also a wide range of dates. In the period between 100 BC to AD 550, most of the depositions are situated at a limited number of small locations north and west of Fæsted, mostly in relation to a few large sacred houses and a recently investigated Iron Age cemetery.

However, from around AD 550 until AD 975, the picture changes, and at first glance, the deposition seem to be randomly moved out into the open landscape. However, recent archaeological excavations and map analyses have shown that the location of deposition practices were not random, but rather closely connected to monuments such as dykes, burial mounds, and enclosure ports.

With this presentation, I aim to present these later depositions, which are linked to monuments, and I also wish to discuss the significance of the relationship between the depositions and the ancient monuments their associated with; are they sacred or secular acts, and in the case of the former, can we perhaps attribute a more precise pre-Christian religious beliefs to these depositions?

### **Ritual destruction**

Alexandra Pesch

From the Roman to the Viking Age, the deliberate destruction of several kinds of objects that carry images has been documented in the North. The question arises as to whether these are evidence of ritual acts. In principle, pictorial representations are rich sources for researching and reconstructing the rites and philosophies of past cultures: they reflect political, religious or cultural conditions and visualise and propagate cultural norms, world views and rules. However, the archaeological material not only preserves the actual images, but also traces of the handling of the objects: We detect manipulations and destructions, which may indicate the alteration or rejection of the values and norms conveyed by the images. Throughout history, there are numerous examples of the deliberate destruction of images. If such incidents occur regularly (keyword: iconoclasm), political and religious motives can often be recognised, although the two cannot necessarily be separated from each other. In the North, e.g. gold bracteates, gold foil figures and figurines were pierced with sharp objects, scratched, folded, torn and in some cases even ritually buried. A practice of individual image destruction is conceivable here. Methodologically, however, this is particularly difficult to grasp, and researching the rituals and beliefs on which such manipulations may have been based is extremely challenging. The paper examines selected examples of deliberate image destruction from the first millennium and explores the theoretical possibilities of reconstructing ritual acts.

### **Approaching Iron Age rituals**

Karin Johannesen

This paper addresses some of the issues when studying rituals in the early and late Iron Age. When studying rituals there is tendency to focus on the type of material remains, by which they are represented in specific periods. Material remains of a prehistoric period are interpreted according to their specific characteristics, rather than regarding rituals in a long-term perspective, where gradual changes take place. This leads to varying focal points in different periods, for example the worship of the sun in the bronze age due to the iconography, while the lack of iconography in the early iron age leads to a rather vague fertility cult, and during the late iron age the focus turn towards weapons and war, while there is almost no emphasis on the beliefs behind the large weapon deposits. Furthermore, neither of these rituals exist in a vacuum. We tend to study religion and rituals apart from other aspects of society, although evidence of rituals is found not only in bogs and wetlands, but also at settlements, by roads and river crossings.

According to ritual theory rituals were both reproducing and reflecting the society in which they took place. When studying rituals and belief systems of the Iron Age it is necessary to regard them as a continuous process and simultaneously in the context of their contemporary society to approach not only rituals, but also the Iron Age societies they were part of.

### **Kalkriese and the Varus Battle - Historical truth, archaeological model or methodological aberration?**

Stefan Burmeister & Claus v. Carnap-Bornheim

The location of the clades Variana, the defeat of Varus by the forces of Arminius in 9 AD, plays a decisive role in Central European history and archaeology for the early phase of the Roman occupation and presence in Northwest Europe. The historical record offers some reliable facts, but also topoi of Roman historiography, which are not always easy to distinguish. The clades Variana became a fundamental archaeological problem with the discovery of the Kalkriese-Niewedder Senke site. The massive Roman finds, the numerous traces of so-called post-battle processes and Germanic victory rituals reflect the devastating defeat of Roman troops. The question of the historical record and the associated interpretation of the archaeological and numismatic findings once again confronts researchers with the comprehensive methodological problem of comparing complex archaeological evidence with the historical record. For Kalkriese, this means, on the one hand, reliably distinguishing between different time slices of the presence of Roman troops in the years AD 9 and AD 15 and, on the other hand, analysing the processes that form the archaeological record after the actual battle. Battlefields are not only sites of fighting, but also usually places of ritual acts and cultic charges. This is where Kalkriese fits into the broad horizon of Iron Age post-battle ritual sites.

### **Weapons as ritual expressions and practices**

Trine Louise Borake

Studies of weapons from an accumulated body of detector material from Denmark demonstrate a complex composition. It is characterised by a majority of refined and exclusive parade weapons; a dispersed distribution including rural locations as well as ritual sites and depositions; typological transformation and transgression i.e. as jewellery; and a deviating warrior symbolism as seen in the use of ringknobs found in Denmark lately. Although the body of detector material has vastly accumulated in the past decades, weapons and weapon parts suffer from an apparent scarcity. Furthermore, there is an ambiguous lack of defence weapons such as helmets, shields and mails. Although studies, arguments and discussions on this topic are multiple, it still calls for exploration, especially including the accumulated detector material.

This presentation will suggest that weapons predominately served as a symbolic expression and as a component in ritualised functions more so than as a means of aggression, violence, or threat of violence. I will present the character and development of weapons and their distribution in the first millennium with a special focus on weapons and weapon parts from metal detector material from western Zealand, Denmark and discuss the expression and handling of weapons in the late Iron Age as a potential indicator of symbolic and ritualised practices.

### **Ritualized warrior burials in 7th century graves of Southern Germany**

Benjamin Höke

The selection of grave goods in 7th-century burials followed certain rules or customs that were determined by the gender, age, social rank and role of the deceased. Accordingly, the dead were staged in front of the mourners. The deposition of the grave goods, which was obviously carried out with great care, was an important part of the funeral ritual. It can therefore be assumed - regardless of whether this was done in a small group or in full view of the entire congregation - that the order and manner in which the clothed corpse and the grave goods were placed in the tomb could not have been without significance. This is particularly evident in the case of weapons. The spatha, once wrapped in the sword belt, found on or next to the skeleton of a warrior, evokes the impressive image of it being placed during the ceremony, which in turn recalls how a young warrior is presented with a weapon by his master or father. In it, ritual actions appear that go beyond the mere care of death, especially as the sword itself is of great symbolic power. It is probably a question of what makes a man a warrior or a leader - beyond the presence of a more or less complete armament and the attributes of a horseman. The lecture will consider whether the burial practice itself may have been an expression of a kind of warrior cult that shaped society. The topic of possible warrior allegiances will also be discussed in this context, and thus the phenomenon of multiple burials of armed men. Due to its large number of 7th century graves containing weapons the cemetery at Lauchheim is particularly suitable for identifying regularities and differences in the way weapons were deposited and for drawing conclusions about the ritualized procedure of a warrior burial.

### **Reconsolidation of Heathen Battle Axes in the late Viking Age**

Gustav Hejlesen Solberg

*"Alas, o holy Patrick that your prayers did not protect it when the foreigners with their axes were smiting your oratory!"*

Such is the description of the heathen invaders in the Irish annals of Ulster in the year 895. Here, an interesting connection is made between the foreigners and their choice of weapons, e.g., battle axes. This paper explores the relationship between heathendom and weapon choices in the Scandinavian Viking Age, specifically how ideas about weapons associated with a pagan past are reconsolidated to adhere to Christian doctrines during the Christianization of Scandinavia.

The incorporation of Christendom into Scandinavian culture was highly impactful and included a new set of symbols. This incorporation of new symbols is materialized in a number of perforated battle axes from the 10th century, which form the basis of this analysis. These have been argued to be for ceremonial purposes, but an experimental archaeological approach and metalwork wear analysis have been used to gain new insight into these axes, which problematize this prior assessment. Furthermore, this paper shows how metalwork wear analysis can be a useful tool in the discussion about the symbolic, ritual, or ceremonial use of weapons.

### **Ritual behaviour in the ringfort of Sandby borg, Öland**

Helena Victor

Excavations at Sandby borg ringfort, on the island of Öland in south-east Sweden, have revealed unique traces of a Migration Period (400—550 AD) massacre. About 10% (490 m<sup>2</sup> of 5000 m<sup>2</sup>) of the ringfort where three whole houses and parts of streets and houses has been excavated. Human remains from about 29 individuals, several of whom display lethal traumatic injuries have been found in the streets and inside houses. The dead individuals span all age groups, but are gender-biased towards males. The site provides a snapshot of the moment of both the massacre and everyday life that was brutally halted. Osteological, contextual and artefactual evidence strongly suggest that the fort was abandoned immediately following the attack and was left undisturbed for at least 100 years. Ritual behaviour has been identified both in connection to the massacre but also in the aftermath. Some examples can be mentioned. During the massacre the possible chieftain seem to have been desecrated in his own Hall. All the weapon and belts have been removed from the site possibly to be sacrificed in a nearby lake or such. A hundred years after the massacre it seems like the walls of the ringfort have started to be torn down and destroyed. The ringfort was never reused like some of the other ringforts on Öland, but just demolished.

Another example is that underneath one of the houses remains from an older cremation burial site were found. A large standing lime slab, presumably marking the burials, had been destroyed. The burial site had been deliberately covered up by gravel which constituted the floor level in the chieftain's house built on top of it.

Can the traces of ritual behaviour in Sandby borg give some clues to the motive and the perpetrators of the massacre in Sandby borg?

**Pre-Christian belief systems and their adaption by Christianity seen from the perspective of the archaeology and cultural traditions behind the *Indiculus superstitionem et paganiarum*, Northern Francia, mid-8<sup>th</sup> c.**

Dries Tys & Rica Annaert

The *Indiculus superstitionem et paganiarum* is a rather well known and very interesting source for pre-Christian belief systems from the middle of the 8<sup>th</sup> century. The source is the Table of Contents of a report by an influential bishop or missionary close to the Carolingian Court about erratic rituals and ceremonies that were still in use in that period. Notwithstanding many scholars have tried to connect the source to their respective research regions, the consensus is that the report is actually about one of the core regions of the Frankish realm and not a newly conquered region, namely the region of North Francia. A comparison between the issues raised in the *Indiculus* and a wide diversity of sources about medieval rituals, including archaeological sources relating to burial rites and ritual meeting places, indicate that the practices that are referred to in this source can indeed be situated in the region of the (current) Low Countries.

For it is striking that several folkloric and religious customs are currently still performed according to ancient traditions in these regions. It cannot be a coincidence that many of these traditions correspond to the forbidden 'pagan' rituals mentioned in the *Indiculus*. The *Indiculus* thus clearly shows that in the 8<sup>th</sup> Century, Christianity was not yet widely accepted in these northern regions of the Austrasian Kingdom. The pre-Christian rituals, tied to the cosmological worldview of the peasant population, were too strong to disappear quickly under the influence of the actions of missionaries such as Amandus and Eligius. On the contrary, it turned out to be a very long struggle that never came to an end entirely, since many of the 'pagan' rituals were eventually accepted in a Christianized form by the Church and some are even performed to this day.

**A tent as a church? The problem of the (un)materiality of the first churches in Scandinavia (9<sup>th</sup> century)**

Angela Baranes

Topics: Sources and methodology; time and place. As part of my PhD thesis about the Christianisation of the Danish landscape (8<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> c.), defended on the 9<sup>th</sup> of January 2024 at Nice University (France), I have rediscussed the problem of missionary churches by crossing texts and archaeology. These churches were founded in the 9<sup>th</sup> century at Hedeby, Ribe and Birka by the Frankish monks Anschaire, Erimbert and Gautbert, and are known from the *Vita Anskarii* (9<sup>th</sup> c.). Despite a large number of archaeological surveys and discussions, they have not yet been identified. While the traditional interpretation is that of a conservation problem, since the churches were assumed to be made of wood or destroyed by later stone churches or burials, I have proposed new hypotheses to understand the first Christian places of worship in the light of their specific context: a primitive one determined by the little resources of the clerics, the unstable context of their stays (evictions) and the Carolingian conception of the mission based on flexibility.

By looking back to the Latin text, I reviewed the narrative and semantic of the passages related to these churches and noted that the buildings founded by the monks were perhaps not fixed buildings but temporary and multi-purpose places of worship, notably tents, huts or houses. Other narratives and pictures from manuscripts show us that it was also the case in the contemporary or earlier Christianisations of other regions (Roman Empire, England, Frisia, Germany). These churches served as places of meeting and prayer, i.e. the primary function of the churches. For this reason, we would have to rethink archaeological research and not look for buildings, baptismal structures or proximity with the burials. These mobile places of worship would leave no trace apart from possible portable altars and bells, consecrated objects that were, in fact, discovered on these missionary sites.

### **Transforming crafts - A bottom-up perspective on religious change**

Michael Neiß

Thanks to new possibilities in natural and digital sciences, Viking Age scholarship is experiencing an unparalleled renaissance in material research. But when it comes to the question of cultural transformation, some important aspects of ancient metal crafting remain to be explored. The Viking Age saw many “tribal” societies transform into heterogeneous Christian realms with urban centres which sometimes would grow further on into medieval towns. This transformation can be likened to interlocking chains of events that involved a plenitude of agents with different incentives. But the key contributions of the craftspeople to this ideological transformation have long been bound to eschew our grasp – due to some outdated dichotomies that need to be overcome! Although, the scholarly debate on the Viking Era urbanisation process is gravitating towards the significance of different groups of craftspeople, it still remains to be connected with the similarly important debate on urban centres as meeting points for ideologies and religions. What sets Viking Age towns apart from antedating Iron Age central places is the ever increasing output in standardized utility goods that conveyed pictorial messages. Nowadays, artisans are envisioned as active creators of the cultural universe they inhabit. Many choices within the manufacturing process are culturally conditioned and express a mentality. Thus, an analysis of operational sequences might offer a key to the inner workings of Viking Period society. Certain changes in the artisan habitus that facilitated standardization were not likely caused by new selling opportunities alone, but also by the very gradual mental shifts that contributed to the emergence of a novel ideological superstructure that transformed Scandinavia into Christian realms. It is therefore imperative to analyze the interplay between this cultural change and the habitus of Viking Period artisans, their pictorial messages and how their output was received at different stages of the process.

## **Religious change in local communities: new analysis of Gotland's first churchyard burials**

Cecilia Ljung, Alison Klevnäs & Astrid A. Noterman

This paper discusses the locations and forms of the first burials at the earliest churchyards on the Baltic Island of Gotland and presents initial findings from new biomolecular analyses of the human remains. Understanding the decisions made by the early adopters of these new places about where and how to care for their dead gives a route into the complexities of a period of rapid and fundamental transformation in socio-religious life.

Gotland offers a unique archaeological resource in form of the so-called churchyard finds (Sw. *kyrkogårdsfynd*): the remains of east-west oriented, elaborately clothed burials placed around early churches and apparently segregated according to sex, with women in the north and men in the south. Archaeological research has largely focused on the artefacts retrieved from the churchyards, which suggest a dating from around the mid-eleventh century, whereas the skeletal material has until now remained unstudied in museum storage.

Many of the earliest churchyard burials still use customs which mirror traditional practices, notably dressing the dead in late Viking Age costume. Other aspects show more complete rupture with the past. The spatial segregation of sexes suggests a radical change in the conceptualization of persons, bodies and group belonging. The placement of churches on Gotland also broke with landscape traditions, with locations close to significant farms rather than in conjunction with ancient grave fields.

Current dating suggests a considerable period during which the dead were divided between markedly different landscape and social settings, with burial continuing in both ancient burial grounds as well as other rural locations and at early churchyards. This paper presents preliminary results from a pair of projects investigating the bioarcheology and ritual treatment of the early adopters of churchyard burial and asking how they related genetically and socially to the community members who maintained the old ways of death.

## **Invisible rituals: the unburied dead in early medieval England**

Alison Klevnäs & Emma Brownlee

The fifth to seventh centuries in eastern and southern England are usually seen as characterised by cremation and inhumation cemeteries in which the dead were buried in costume and with other artefacts. The dominance of formal cemeteries means that archaeologists have rarely considered other forms of funerary ritual which may have been practised. Yet a scarcity of mortuary material, especially from the beginning of the period, has long been noted. Some regions, for example Kent and Essex, have very small numbers of cemeteries and graves datable to the fifth century, particularly its first half. Inadequate chronologies, or possibly a phase of unfurnished inhumation, probably contribute to this apparent absence. That said, this paper suggests that many of the dead are truly missing from the archaeological record.

Corpse disposal methods which leave little or no archaeological trace are well established as a component of mortuary pathways in Iron Age Britain, but until recently were thought to come to an end with prehistory. This picture has changed: we now know that the rural population under Roman rule never substantially adopted the urban custom of gathering the dead in cemeteries, but instead continued their earlier near-invisible funerary rites. Here we present a series of disarticulated human remains radiocarbon-dated to the first millennium AD, all from contexts outside formal burial places, primarily caves and rivers, which point to a range of disposal practices persisting well into the early medieval period.

We suggest that the low levels of visible burial in the century after the collapse of Roman rule should be explained at least in part in the same way as the underrepresentation of Romano-British funerary remains. Local populations in all likelihood maintained their non-burial mortuary customs for some time, making their dead invisible or hard to see during and after the post-Roman transition.

### **Hints on ritual behaviour and ritual waste in a Viking-age settlement at Tinnum on Sylt, North Frisian Islands**

Martin Segschneider

The partial excavation of a settlement in Tinnum with several pit-house remains revealed extensive traces of crafts like loom weaving and production of amber pendants and beads, as well as glass beads made from cullet. Anyhow, several features within these pit-houses do not seem to have a practical purpose, but rather a ritual one. Depositions of a glass bead chain, spindle whorls and pots in and around the pit-houses as well as fired pits with amber fragments are peculiar. Moreover, a hearth contained a loom-weight with the impression of a hand, various pot fragments and an uncountable number of charred weed-seeds as well as small barley grains, presumably residue from cleaning the harvest with sieves. Moreover, a pit occurred with a large amount of heavily burned animal bones, representing a whole cow and bones of sheep, pig and red deer, most of them deriving from skulls and feet. Finally yet importantly, water sieving of the filling of three house-pits produced around 3.5 kilogram raw and roughly cut amber, with even large pieces deliberately discarded in the pit fillings.

In my eyes, these features are remains of daily-life rituals, which once seem to have taken place on a regular basis. Discarding kilograms of amber might be some form of ritual waste offering, maybe at the end of the market season or the like. It seems, that profane and religious sphere were not separate, as it is now often thought to be the case in a strict scientific approach, but rather deeply embedded within each other in a natural way once so typical.

## **Re-enchanting the early Middle Ages**

Britt Claes & Femke Lippok

Rituals can be small and intimate affairs, immediate family remembering a loved one who passed away, but also grand-scale performances like feasts and festivals that bring together a community. We may have been tempted in the past to view these performances as separate from the 'day-to-day' world, guided by our own worldviews. But it may not be feasible to divide past people's experiences into sacred and profane. Rituals should be considered an integral part of society; rituals help navigate the social world to a significant degree, which would have included gods, spirits, ancestors as well as humans and also animals.

This paper considers the role rituals play in society; it aims to explore the concept of a ritual economy in Northern Gaul during the early Middle Ages. Ritual economies are characterised by expenditures towards feasts, festivals, sacrifices, gift-circulation and life-cycle rituals that do not result in any immediate economic gain. They may be seen as 'heavy-duty wastefulness' by those who do not see their function in society. We will explore this theme by considering the role of depositing jewellery in early medieval graves. For our period and research area, graves are the most numerous manifestations of ritual we can find through archaeological means. Their study has been extensive, but considering them in the light of a ritual economy offers insights into the development of community and local agency in the performance of rituals that helped navigate the social world of the early Middle Ages.

## **Glimpses of a ritual practice**

Søren Diinhoff

In November 2001 the Museum of Cultural History in Oslo hosted the seminar "*The enigmatic cooking pits*" (my translation). Several Scandinavian researchers presented papers based on excavations of cooking pits. My contribution consisted of a presentation and an article in the following publication.

Cooking pits are found within many archaeological contexts and through all time periods. They are a very common feature in Northern European archaeology and have traditionally been interpreted as merely a way to prepare food for everyday life. However, in the decades prior to the seminar several excavations had shown that these features could be found in clusters and in landscapes implying they might warrant a more complex conceptual contextualization. Among the researchers attending the seminar, the general consensus was that sites with clusters of cooking pits should be interpreted as part of pre-Christian cult sites and/or connected to large assembly places. Even the individually spread-out cooking pits within settlements could not be fully explained by the profane daily household, as they too seem to have been for special occasions. Some twenty years have passed by since the meeting in Oslo and many new sites have been excavated. I find it timely to test the seminar's assumptions in a regional study of the cooking pit sites of Western Norway. This study aims to analyse the inter-site composition.

That is - how the cooking pit sites are composed (pits, huts, palisades etc.) and if this shows any regional variation or change over time. A topographical analysis will map the topographical relationship between the ritual site, settlement, and landscape.

It is an open question whether the cooking pit sites form a homogeneous type of find or if we are being misled by the simplicity of the sites. Does the context make it difficult to distinguish chronological, regional, and functional differences? The study will address this question.

### **Gotlandic Picture Stones – The online edition**

Michaela Helmbrecht & Sigmund Oehrl

The Gotlandic picture stones are among the most famous archaeological monuments of Scandinavian history. The particularly rich imagery of the Gotlandic picture stones, dating to ca. 400 to 1100 AD, offers a unique source for studies of Late Iron Age material culture – e.g. male and female dress, architecture, ship technology as well as carriages, weaponry and combat, hunting and fishing. The picture stones from Gotland are an unparalleled source for information on Scandinavian pre-Christian religions and Old Norse myths, as they depict ritual and cultic acts like horse fights, drinking ceremonies, human sacrifices, and funeral rites. Nearly 700 picture stones are known today.

From 2018 to 2024, a project aiming for a complete 3D digitisation of Gotland's picture stones and creation of a database was conducted at the University of Stockholm and Gotland's Museum in Visby: *ANCIENT IMAGES 2.0 – A digital edition of the Gotlandic picture stones*.

This edition, fully accessible online, will contain all available information about each Gotlandic picture stone, including high-resolution 3D models, photos, archival material, and a full bibliography.

With our poster, we would like to draw attention to the upcoming launch of the website.

### **A new sight on old objects- research and the inventarisation of finds storage**

Annette Siegmüller

The ongoing digitization and inventorying of museum repositories offers the opportunity to re-evaluate long-known find complexes. Particularly in the case of old finds from the early 20th century, the combined inventory and digitization of objects in depots and paper archives, together with new analysis methods, means that objects can be classified chronologically and functionally together with their find context. New finds from the activities of the State Office for Archaeological Monument Conservation, which are newly integrated into the archives considerably expand the spectrum available in the archives and must also be processed. Old and new collection items together form the starting point for new research on spaces and cultures. This is because the collection material is not only an important starting point for the chronological classification of sites, it is also the key to making more detailed statements about the society that once occupied a site. Fashions, techniques and contacts can thus be deciphered.

New methods of analysis considerably expand the range of possible statements and help to record individual sites and regions as part of a supra-regional network through large-scale, sometimes international projects.

The Landesmuseum Natur und Mensch in Oldenburg has launched a project funded by the Ministry of Science and Culture that aims to address precisely these issues. In the course of the inventory and digitization of the extensive storage inventory as well as the integration of large complexes from the preservation of monuments, selected objects and complexes are to be evaluated and serve as a starting point for further research.

### **An extraordinary insight into the life and death of a burial community from the Late Roman Iron Age and Migration Period**

Christina Peek & Melanie Augstein

At the Wurt Fallward, district of Cuxhaven, around 200 cremation burials and 60 inhumation graves, dated in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> century, were uncovered and documented between 1993 and 1998. They belong to a burial site, which was established on the natural levee of the River Weser. Some grave pits were dug into the fossil marshland. Here the anaerobic sediment provided optimal conditions for the conservation of organic materials. In these burials, in addition to the bones, wooden grave constructions, complete wooden and textile contents as well as plant remains were almost completely preserved. These graves have already been in the focus of international research. A child's grave with a precious fibula, the large boat grave with a richly decorated chair, but also the grave of the so-called archer has attracted surely particular attention.

Other graves, however, such as the comparatively ›simple‹ cremation burials, have largely led a shadowy existence, although they make up the vast majority of the graves. Previous investigations indicate that the cremated remains were very frequently buried in containers made of organic material, but less frequently in ceramic urns. The urns, as well as occasional ceramic vessels, are richly decorated. From an archaeological point of view, most cremation burials must be attributed to women. However, anthropological analyses will provide further information.

The completely preserved contents of graves on the one hand and the differentiated handling of bodies and objects on the same burial site on the other open up unique perspectives for the reconstruction of late antique burial traditions of today's north-west Germany. It remains to be checked whether the supra-regional contacts postulated for simultaneous sites in the Elbe-Weser triangle have actually influenced society in such a way that they are also reflected in local burial rites. These and other questions are currently being investigated as part of a project funded by the DFG. The methodological conception and the first results of this interdisciplinary project are presented here.

## **Pottery traditions of Early Medieval shell-tempered ware in north-western Central Europe**

Hauke Jöns & Katrin Struckmeyer

The pottery inventories of Early Medieval sites along the southern North Sea are clearly dominated by shell-tempered pottery (Muschelgrusware). But also outside this area, shell-tempered pottery can be found in many Early Medieval trading centres in the North and Baltic Sea region. In general, the occurrence of shell-tempered pottery is considered to be connected with the presence of Frisian traders.

In archaeological research into shell-tempered pottery, technological investigations so far have only been done in single cases. In order to close this research desideratum, a new project on Early Medieval shell-tempered pottery has started at the NIhK in Wilhelmshaven, that is funded by the DFG. The focus of the project is to gain detailed knowledge of the raw materials and technologies used with the help of various scientific analysis techniques.

In the starting phase of the project the focus is on analyses of pottery in the southern North Sea coast region, aiming the identification and characterisation of workshop areas. In a next step, the collected data shall be used as reference for the analysis of shell-tempered pottery found on trading places along the North and Baltic Sea coasts. The main question to be discussed is to what extent there are similarities between the “imported” pottery from these sites and the locally produced ware from the southern North Sea coast, so that a detailed determination of the provenance of the widespread shell-tempered pottery can be made. It may be expected, that the project will give important indications of different flows of goods and trade routes of traders. The project team will be happy to draw the attention of the SaSy-community to shell-tempered pottery from their working areas and will be grateful for the possibility to include samples from numerous sites into the study.

## **A clearance cairn field at Farstorp, Sweden. Cultivation, grazing, burials, rituals and land rights**

Maria Petersson

Around 200 – 550 AD a multi-faceted landscape of clearance cairns was created and in use at Farstorp, in the highland area of southern Sweden. Manured fields with a limited time of use (ca. 25 years has been suggested) were circulated within a large area. Reuse of stone-cleared areas was part of the strategy. Over time cattle grazing was the main trait in the area. Among the clearance cairns were scattered graves, built of clearance stones. Some contained burnt human remains, others were empty. Some of the clearance cairns were well built and grave-like. These sometimes contained burial-like features, but no human remains. The building material was clearance stones from surrounding arable land, sometimes with a surface layer of fire-cracked stones. Inside and adjacent to these, burnt animal bones, intact pots, single beads, a tweezer etc had been deposited. This find material has parallels in small ritual places of limited local importance.

Fire-cracked stones and burnt animal bones are interpreted as waste from ritual meals, consumed during spring and autumn farm work. Depositions of grinding stones support the assumption that fertility of the land was an important ritual theme. Participants of these meals might be members of the household that held the land rights.

A few human bones were deposited in each grave (but one), possibly from deceased members of the owner family who might be expected to act in favour of their living descendants, to enhance fertility in general. Such deposits may also have demonstrated and consolidated land rights.

### **Under Pressure – militarisation and visualisation of power in the centuries around the birth of Christ**

Xenia Pauli Jensen

This poster aims to link the increasing militarisation identified in Scandinavia from the late Pre-Roman Iron Age and onwards with the foundation of the Hedegård site in Middle Jutland, Denmark.

Hedegård is a spectacular site excavated in 1986-1993. It is Scandinavia's richest burial ground placed directly beside the largest settlement of the period. The 203 graves of the cemetery stand out with their rich grave goods including bronze vessels from Capua, and a strikingly high percentage of weapon graves (most famous is the Roman dagger, a pugio, and Scandinavia's oldest mail coat made from local iron but in Gallo-Roman style).

Newly obtained geophysics show signs of a large, fortified farm in the middle of the settlement. This unit is interpreted as a representative hall rather than a normal farmhouse, and the religious and cultic centre of the settlement.

Targeted excavations of the fortified farm and the production site will be conducted during the summer of 2024, and the poster will present preliminary results from these excavations.

The excavations are part of a new research project conducted as a collaboration between Museum Midtjylland, Horsens Museum and Moesgaard Museum and supported by the Augustinus fond.

### **The equal-armed 'Dreirundel' brooches – a trace of cross-cultural interactions?**

Karen Højlund Nielsen, Mathias Holch Kaas & Poul Hounsvad

For a long time, the *Dreirundel* brooch was only found on the Continent and was generally considered a Continental type. However, a few scholars suggested that an especially large brooch from Farsleben was Scandinavian. In the late 1990s, a number of *Dreirundel* brooches turned up at Uppåkra, and a discussion of the cultural affiliation was initiated. Since then, the number of *Dreirundel* brooches in Scandinavia has increased greatly. Clearly, the large *Dreirundel* brooch with a pronounced bow dominates in Scandinavia, whereas the small ones with hardly any bow are only found on the Continent and in Kent in Britain.

The amount of Scandinavian *Dreirundel* brooches in Scandinavia is now so large that it gives meaning to analysing the type, concerning typology and chronology as well as distribution, and discussing its relationship with the Continental *Dreirundel* brooch. The two main groups seem to overlap in the Thuringian area and farther northwards. Actually, the same areas in which a number of Scandinavian brooch types are common, such as small equal-armed brooches and beak brooches, thus indicating a Scandinavian influence in this area.

### **„Friesische“ Gräberfelder im nördlichen Niedersachsen. Variantenreicher Bestattungskult oder pragmatische Grablegen?**

Frank Both & Kara Schmidt

Die zumeist als „friesisch“ angesprochenen frühmittelalterlichen Bestattungsplätze im nordwestlichen Küstenraum Niedersachsens wirken auf den ersten Blick außerordentlich homogen. Die metallenen Trachtbestandteile zeigen relativ wenig Varianz, Ausreißer sind nur selten und wenn, dann eher im ältesten Belegungshorizont zu finden. Für diesen ist auch eine Biritualität zu konstatieren. Brandbestattungen und Körpergräber liegen nebeneinander. Erstere oft unter Grabhügel und umgeben von Pfostenstellungen, die häufig als „Totenhäuser“ begriffen werden. In den meisten bekannten Plätzen, wie Zetel, Cleverns oder Schortens sind in den jüngsten Belegungsphasen keine, oder kaum Beigaben zu finden und die Ausrichtung der Gräber wechselt zu einer ostwestlichen Richtung. Üblicherweise wird dies als Hinweis auf die zunehmende Christianisierung, bzw. auf die neue rechtliche Situation unter der Herrschaft der Franken gesehen.

Anhand detaillierter Untersuchungen an einzelnen Bestattungsplätzen, wie z.B. Schortens, zeigt sich nun jedoch, dass die scheinbare Homogenität vielfach durch Einzellösungen und Sonderwege aufgebrochen wurde. Die Flexibilität im Grabbrauch, die durch die birituellen Niederlegungen bereits angedeutet wurde, setzt sich in vielen Details fort.

Häufig ist zu beobachten, dass offenbar ausrangierte Behältnisse für die Bestattungen genutzt wurden. Dabei zeigen die Leichenbehältnisse der Körperbestattungen genauso viel Varianz, wie die Urnen. Verwendung fanden ausrangierte Tröge, halbierte Einbäume und klassische Baumsärge. Auch Kastensärge treten auf. Im Inneren sind Matratzen, Leichentücher, vegetative Packungen und Federstreuungen nachgewiesen. Ein buntes Spektrum, bei dem Beigabe nur schwer von Ritus zu trennen ist. Als Urnen wurden vielfach einfache, auch defekte Kochgefäße, teils mit dick eingebrannten Speisekrusten verwendet, die den Eindruck einer sehr pragmatischen Lösung erwecken. Aber auch „wertvolle“ Importgefäße treten auf. Die Beispiele lassen sich immer weiterführen und zeigen auf, dass die frühmittelalterliche Gesellschaft an der Nordseeküste eine Vielzahl von Praktiken ausübte, die vielleicht auf persönliche Vorlieben oder verschiedenste Impulse zurückgehen. Im Detail zeigt sich so eine auf den zweiten Blick sehr offene Gesellschaft deren Differenzierung sich nicht unbedingt in den Beigaben spiegelt, wohl aber in den erfassbaren Handlungen im Grabkontext.

## **Forgotten cemeteries – unknown death rituals. 11-12<sup>th</sup> century rectangular mounds in Pomerania (Northern Poland) in the light of recent research**

Sławomir Wadył & Paweł Szczepanik

One of the most intriguing problems of early medieval archaeology in Pomerania are the Orzeszkowo type mounds. The term was given after the cemetery in Orzeszkowo in Łobez County, excavated in 1921-24. In their classic form, they occur only in Pomerania. Orzeszkowo-type mounds are basically rectangular, and they have various types of stone settings inside and outside of the grave (kerbs, burial chambers, pavements, grave markers). They are usually the burial place of several people. Their characteristic feature is biritualism - in addition to the prevailing inhumation, cremation was also used. The grave goods are usually very poor. The appearance of this type of "funeral architecture" at a time when nominally Christian cemeteries were established throughout Pomerania is surprising.

Although the Orzeszkowo-type graves are intriguing category of funerary objects, they have not been studied in recent decades. Several dozen burial mounds of this type were examined before World War II, and the last examinations of objects of this type were carried out in 1966-68. In 2022, research was initiated on the cemetery in Nowy Chorów, Słupsk County. There are 16 mounds at the site. They form two clusters – the larger (Western) consisting of 10 and the smaller (Eastern) with six barrows. The excavations included mound K8, inside which eight burials, both inhumation and cremation, were discovered. In the next season (2023), research covered two smaller graves (K9 and K10). In the first one, two inhumation burials were discovered, and in the second one, one cremation grave. The results of research on the necropolises in Nowy Chorów provided new perspectives for understanding the key problems related to this category of cemeteries, namely the issues of their genesis, chronology, and relationships with individual people buried in the same burial mounds.

Two of the discovered graves were unique. They were "opened" in the early Middle Ages, the remains of the deceased were taken out, cremated, and the remains of the deceased were buried in the same place, but above the original inhumation grave. The phenomenon has not been recorded yet.

## **Sharing a bed but nothing else. Bed burial practices in first millennium Europe**

Astrid A. Noterman

In the vicinity of the village of Harpole (Northamptonshire), the Museum of London Archaeology excavated in 2022 what was immediately described as one of the most significant early-medieval female burials ever found in Britain. The reason for this is the exceptional furnishings uncovered, including a necklace made of gold, garnet and glass pendants, and a large crucifix. There is, however, another reason why this burial is exceptional, and that is the preservation of evidence that the woman was buried on a bed.

It is not unusual to see the furniture approached as an almost anecdotal feature of the grave. The archaeological remains of funerary beds were found in only around 60 graves from southern Germany to southern Scandinavia, England and present-day Slovakia, and from the 6th to the early 10th centuries CE.

An important question that needs to be addressed is whether or not it is a single practice expressed with some variations, or several practices sharing common points. Graves from the early Middle Ages were an arena for creativity, resulting in a variety of rites that are increasingly recognised by researchers, and not only on a regional scale but also within cemeteries themselves. It is this diversity in mortuary gestures and decisions that a current research project on early medieval bed inhumations is exploring. By investigating the nuances within the practice, this poster aims to show that funerary beds are more than just a support for the dead body. Although bed graves share similarities in terms of burial practices, they also share a number of differences that influence the interpretation of the rite. In other words, there is variety in similarity.

### **Erwitte-Eikeloh - an unusual Ottonian deserted church next to a spring on the Hellweg**

Eva Cichy

Over the past three years, the Olpe branch of the LWL Archaeology Department for Westphalia has been investigating a site on the Westphalian Hellweg that was endangered by deep plowing. Surprisingly, the foundations of a 30 m long church built around 900 came to light. It is a hall church with a rectangular choir and an adjoining choir aisle to the east. The oldest documentary sources on the site date back to the 11th century and only mention a hamlet of "Asthem", but no church building. The stone foundations overlay an older settlement that existed from the imperial period until the 9th century. The adjacent freshwater springs are an important location factor. A particularly impressive one, the approx. 10 m diameter, circular and up to 5 m deep spring pot of the so-called Blaue Kolk, is still accessible. The rich springs feed the Gieseler, which supplied water to the Hof zur Osten mill just 200 m to the north.

The situation is reminiscent of the Soest "Quellteich Ardey" site a few kilometers away: there, too, a contemporary settlement site was excavated next to a spring pot. During cleaning work in 1826/27, antler and bone fragments of animals were recovered from the Soest pond alongside pottery and a few metal finds. Wooden substructures on a headland were also discovered. The selection of finds and the wooden constructions are discussed as signs of possible use as a sacrificial site. Was the Blaue Kolk also used as a sacrificial site? Was a Germanic spring sanctuary to be demonstratively?

Adam Cieśliński (Faculty of Archaeology, University of Warsaw), Andrzej Kasprzak (Museum in Koszalin)

### **Remains of Arable Fields or Ritual Activities? Two Concepts for the Interpretation of Ploughing Marks Found Under Barrow Mounds of the Roman Period in Poland**

Adam Cieśliński (Faculty of Archaeology, University of Warsaw), Andrzej Kasprzak (Museum in Koszalin)

Plough marks from the Roman period are very rare in Central Europe. In northern Poland, they have been observed under the mounds of barrows in three cemeteries of the Wielbark culture in Pomerania (Nowy Łowicz and Gronowo, both in the Drawsko Pomorskie district, and Odry in the Chojnice district), as well as in a graveyard of the Przeworsk culture in the northern part of Greater Poland (Przywóz, Wieluń district). All of these sites are dated to the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD.

In Polish literature, there are two conflicting views on the interpretation of these traces. The plough marks from Gronowo were interpreted as the remains of a field that was cultivated before the necropolis was founded at the turn of the millennium. A similar interpretation was proposed for the discoveries from Odry, which were also incorrectly dated to the early Iron Age.

The field observations in Nowy Łowicz have provided the most reliable interpretations. The plough marks at this site were made at a time when the area was already being used as a burial ground, as indicated by stratification findings. Some of the graves under mound 30 were disturbed by ploughing. Therefore, the plough marks from Nowy Łowicz should be interpreted more ritually. They can be seen as traces of a complex burial custom, perhaps connected with the marking of a place before the construction of a burial mound.

### **High quality forging – A pattern welded seax from Schieder in Westphalia**

Ulrich Lehmann

When it comes to high-quality weapons and their manufacture in the early Middle Ages, the focus is usually on the double-edged sword, the spatha. However, seaxes, somewhat shorter single-edged swords, could also be remarkable forged products. This is the case, for example, with a find from Schieder in East Westphalia (Lippe district, Germany). In 2022, an early medieval burial ground was excavated there, which is rather unusual in the region because of the large distance from the Frankish Empire. Among altogether seven weapon graves was a burial containing, among other things, a longseax from the 8th century. Subsequent examinations using 3D X-ray computed tomography revealed the structure of the blade. In addition to a separately produced cutting edge and the back material, the blade had a total of four fully twisted composite rods, each consisting of strips of different iron alloys. They were welded together in two layers of two rods each and ground down to half their original thickness, so that semi-circular patterns appeared in a limited area along almost the entire length of the blade. The find from Schieder thus provides

evidence that seax blades could comprise very complex constructions and need not be inferior to spatha blades in terms of craftsmanship.

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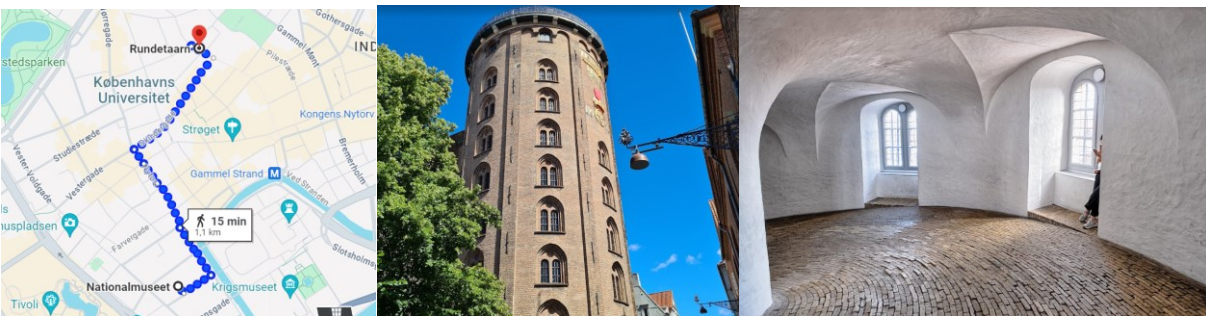
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## THE NATIONAL MUSEUM



## RUNDE TÅRN (THE ROUND TOWER)



## LEJRE, ROSKILDE

