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Wearing a Banner: Cloak Pins with Miniature Weathervanes

Tomáš Vlasatý

The material culture of north-east Europe of the ninth–tenth century includes, among other things, at least eight interesting and relatively uniform copper alloy objects that could be interpreted as miniature flags or weathervanes. Most of the examples come from archeological excavations of the nineteenth and twentieth century, and although they are often-quoted objects, their meaning has until recently been a mystery for researchers. This chapter presents an updated list of finds and discusses their different forms and current interpretations. Moreover, it places this type of artefact in the context of full-sized banners, flags, and weathervanes used in the Viking Age.

Miniature Weathervanes: A Presentation of the Find Corpus

At the moment, we are aware of at least eight miniature weathervanes, originating from seven localities. The oldest example comes from the site of Tingsgården, Åland, found in a barrow on the land of a local landlord most likely in 1881 (Fig. 35.1:a).[1]1 Inside the barrow, the landlord found a wooden riveted coffin with remnants of coal, bones, and an iron object. An archaeological survey was conducted in the summer of 1903 by Björn Cederhvarf from the National Museum of Finland, who documented the find and transported it to the museum in Helsinki. Soon, the landlord's son made yet another discovery in the barrow– a damaged bronze item with stylised animal ornamentation – a miniature weathervane which was 52 mm long, 37.5 mm wide and weighed 17.6 g. The variant of the weathervane is typical by its two pole sockets and no animal on the yard. Today, the object is stored in the National Museum of Finland,[2] and the Åland Art Museum in Mariehamn displays a very successful replica together with a pole.

Another similar miniature weathervane was excavated in the Black Earth (Svarta jorden) on the island of Björko, Sweden, during the excavations led by archaeologist Hjalmar Stolpe at the end of the nineteenth century (Fig. 35.1:b).[3] It is 45 mm long and 35 mm wide. The material is gilded copper alloy. Currently, the item is stored in the Swedish History Museum together with an 85 mm long pole.[4]

The third almost identical miniature was excavated in Menzlin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Germany, in 1999 (Fig. 35.1:c).[5] As far as we can judge, it is about 50 mm long and 38 mm wide. The vane is stored in the Archaeological State Museum Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.[6]

A miniature of a slightly different shape, with three pole sockets and a yard ending with an animal head terminal, was discovered during the excavation of a Viking Age marketplace near Häffinds, Bandlunde, Gotland, Sweden in 1984 (Fig. 35.1:d).[7] The object is made of copper alloy, measures 53 mm × 42 mm or 54 mm × 43 mm[8] and weighs 26 g.[9] At the time of excavation, this particular weathervane brought interest mainly due to having been the first one that differs from the previously mentioned examples. The object is now stored in the Gotland Museum, Visby.[10]

A completely shape-identical copper alloy weathervane was found in 2002 during excavations in Söderby, Uppland, Sweden, lead by Bo Petré (Fig. 35.1:e).[11] It was unearthed in a particularly interesting cremation grave A 37 dated to the tenth century.[12] It seems the grave was deliberately dug within a Bronze Age barrow. Prior to the act of cremation and subsequent burial, the dead (presumably a man) was laid on a bear fur along with dogs, a horse, a chest, a long knife, a silver-passamenterie decorated piece of clothing, two oriental silver coins from the ninth century, a comb, a whetstone, two ceramic cups, and an iron necklace with a hammer pendant. The miniature weathervane that

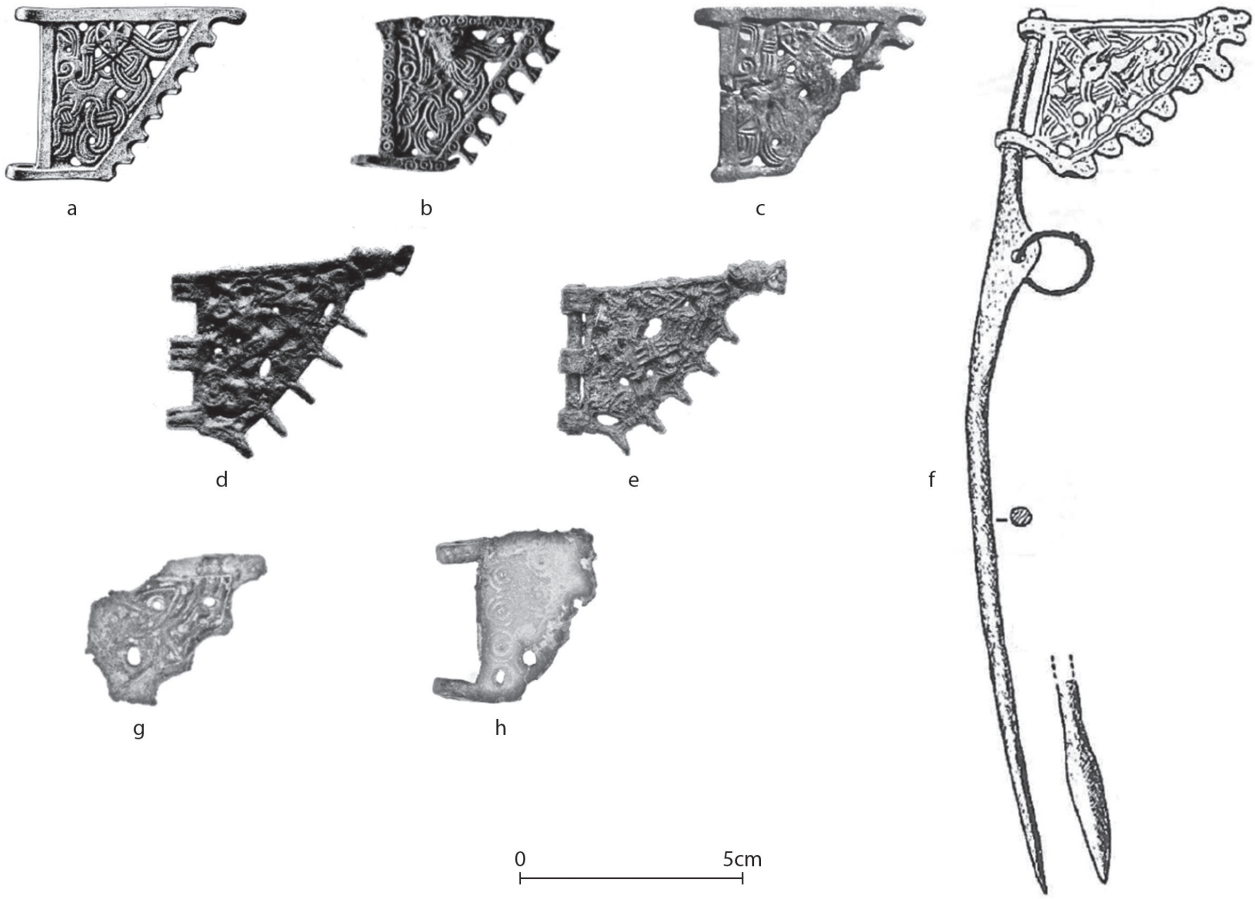

Figure 35.1 Finds of miniature weathervanes: a) Tingsgården; b) Birka; c) Menzlin; d) Häffinds; e) Söderby; f) Novoselki; g–h) Gropstad. Based on Lamm 2002: Bild 4; 2004: fig. 3; Shmidt 2005: il. 11:2.

accompanied this person is 48 mm long, 37 mm wide, and weighs 19.9 g. Three pole sockets hold a copper alloy circular shaft, which is broken on both ends. The grave has been dated to the tenth century. Currently, the weathervane is stored in the Swedish History Museum, Stockholm.[13]

After the publication of the Söderby weathervane, Jan Peder Lamm received a message of yet another object from Russian archaeologist Kirill Mikhailov, researcher at the Institute for the History of Material Culture, St. Petersburg. The miniature weathervane was excavated in Novoselki village, Smolensk area (Fig. 35.1:f). The message also included a drawing, produced by Mikhailov himself after the discovery was made in 1996. The drawing showed that the item was of the same type as the Häffinds and Söderby finds, though with a different number of pole sockets – only two instead of three and mounted on an iron shaft. Lamm stated that the find originated from grave no. 4.[14] However, this was marked as incorrect after the publication of E.A. Schmidt's article in 2005. Schmidt claims that the miniature weathervane was actually found in grave no. 6, along with a spearhead, a knife, and a ceramic cup.[15] The miniature weathervane was depicted with a long needle and a ring in the form of a clothing pin. Personal interviews conducted with archaeologists Sergei Kainov (State Historical Museum of Moscow), Kirill Mikhailov, and jeweller Vasily Maisky indicate that Schmidt's drawing is a reconstruction, the weathervane is actually broken to pieces and lacks the central part with the ring. Regardless of this, there is no reason not to trust Schmidt's reconstruction. The artefact is stored in the Smolensk State Museum-Preserve.[16]

Supposedly in 1971, a highly damaged cremation burial was uncovered near Gropstad at Dala-Floda, Sweden, containing two fragmentary castings of miniature weathervanes of a different shape than the previously known specimens.[17] Both were made of copper alloy and vary in shape, level of preservation, and decoration. One of them does not show any trace of pole sockets, has more significant tassels, and is of Borre-style design (Fig. 35.1:g).[18] By contrast, the other one has pole sockets, but lacks the tassels – instead, it has a perforation, which could have been used for tassel attachment – and is decorated with simple concentric circles (Fig. 35.1:h).[19] Currently, the weathervanes are stored in Dalarnas Museum in Falun, Sweden.

For the sake of clarity and to ensure that the catalogue of finds is as complete as possible, we can add that one of the artefacts from the Kvarnbacken burial ground resembles a

vane, but it is probably a remnant of a brooch or pendant.[20] Furthermore, at least one unpublished object, similar to one of the Gropstad vanes, was obtained by metal detector activity in Denmark.[21] Finally, it is necessary to note that one weathervane appeared in the form of a pendant in Hermann Historica auction house, but it is most likely a fake.[22]

Looking at the finds, we can clearly isolate two relatively standardised types of miniature weathervanes – the 'Birka type' (Fig. 35.1:a–c) and the 'Häffinds type' (Fig. 35.1:d–f) – along with the unusual and atypical pieces represented by the Gropstad examples (Fig. 35.1:g–h).[23] Next, we will take a closer look at the presumed function of these objects.

The Functional Aspects of Miniature Weathervanes

Speaking of the function of miniature weathervanes, Jan Peder Lamm had three theories. According to him, they were mainly status symbols and pieces of artistic value. At the same time, he held the opinion of the objects being a part of boat-models, similar to ship-shaped candlesticks that we know from Norwegian churches of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.[24] The third supposed function was a seafaring navigation tool. Lamm suggested the weathervanes could have been used to help with determining the angular height of astronomical objects. This theory was pursued before Lamm by Engström and Nykänen but was evaluated as improbable and inconclusive.[25]

When revised, the theory of boat models does not fit most of the finds listed above. The boat-shaped candlestick platforms are at least two centuries younger and we only know one 'pair-find' of the weathervanes from Gropstad. A more convincing theory would be to view these miniatures as analogies to horse gear flag-shaped fittings that we know from Borre, Norway and Gnězdovo, Russia.[26] Thus, the most probable option is that the Viking Age socketed miniature weathervanes were parts of clothing pins, as the aforementioned example from Novoselki implies. It seems that the poles were tapered in the socket part, while having the tip widened and flattened. Below the weathervane, there was an eyelet for attaching a textile string, which was used for fixing the pin. The resulting pin was probably meant to fasten cloaks, similarly to the widely-used ringed pins (Fig. 35.3).[27] The geographical distribution of miniature weathervanes spans the Baltic Sea and the territory of Old Rus (Fig. 35.2). In terms of construction as well as geographical distribution, the most similar group of objects are so-called dragonhead pins, which were summarised by

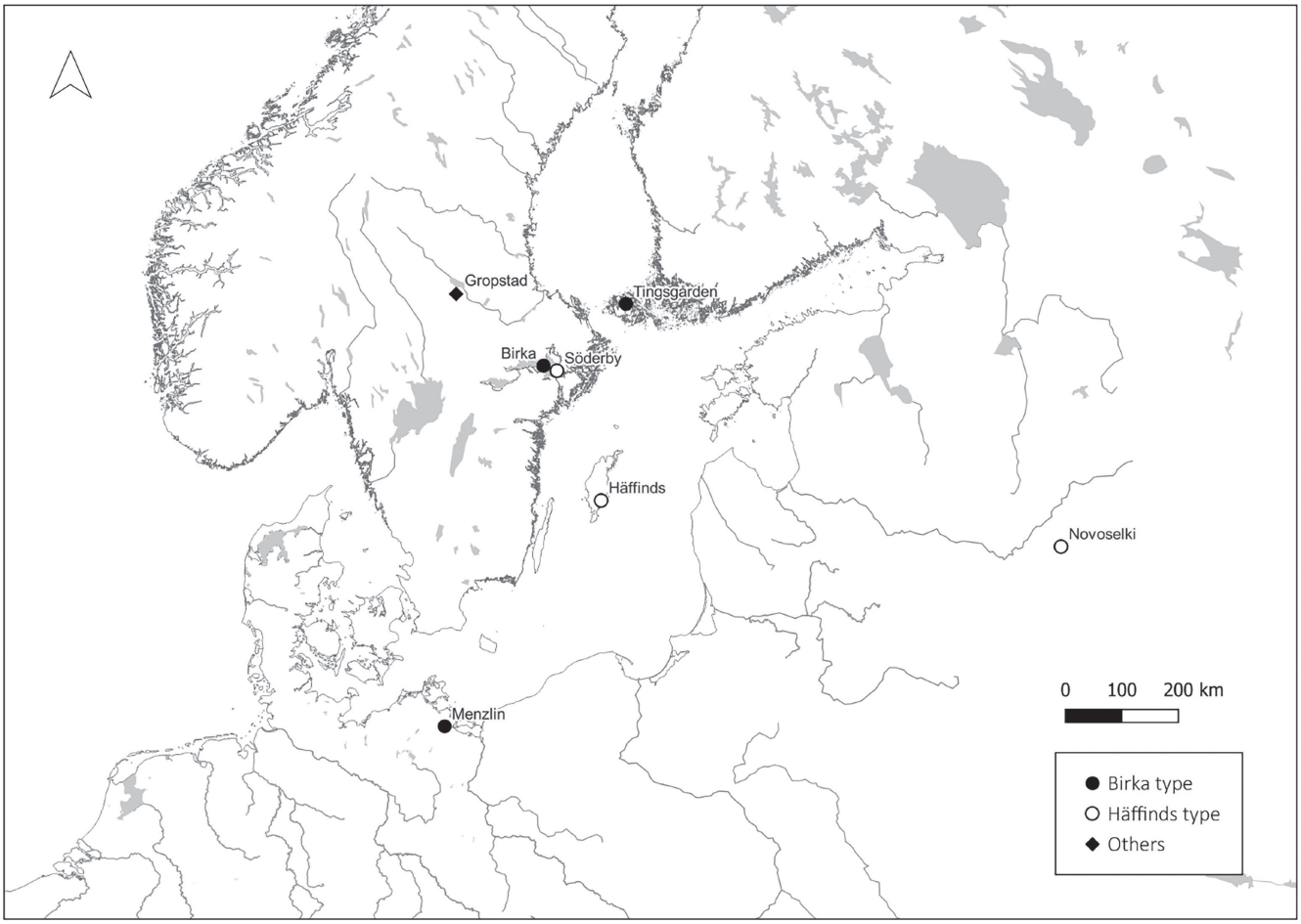

Figure 35.2 Geographical distribution of objects positively identified as miniature weathervanes. Image by Kristián Jócsik, Tomáš Vlasatý.

Figure 35.3 A modern reproduction of the miniature weatherwane from Birka. Photo by Christopher Kunz.

Kalmring and Holmquist.[28] Dragonhead and weathervane pins can thus be understood as one formally diverse group of objects that symbolise ship parts, bows, or masts. Both types of artefacts suggest a centralised manufacture, leading to the conclusion that they were distributed (for instance as gifts) among people belonging to high social strata.[29]

When it comes to chronological aspects of miniature weathervanes, some authors advocate dating them the ninth century, which is based on conventional dates for the Borre-style rather than on the broader archaeological contexts from which the specimens stem.[30] As mentioned above, the find from Söderby is generally dated to the tenth century. Contextually, the grave of Novoselki can be dated in a similar way. The Birka finds most likely date to before the last quarter of the tenth century. It is not unlikely that all of the abovementioned examples of both main types date to the tenth century, especially its first three quarters. Interestingly, some dragonhead pins have a similar date.[31]

Flags and Weathervanes in the Wider Viking World

From Anglo-Saxon England, Viking Age Scandinavia, and Old Rus we have a limited but relatively uniform body of information about flags and weathervanes. Due to issues of preservation of organic material, usually finds made of metal (especially sheet metal) survive in the archaeological record – such finds have been recorded in present-day Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and the Baltics.[32] From a craftsmanship point of view, these are extremely laborious and expensive items that resemble miniatures in many aspects. They are always quarter-circle or triangular in shape and are usually made of gilded copper alloy and occasionally of silver. Zoomorphic and other figural ornaments or crosses dominate their décor which is either hammered or in openwork style. Three-dimensional animals are sometimes placed on top of the weathervanes, as in the case of the miniatures belonging to the 'Häffinds type'. Tassels, apparently made of organic material, were attached to the prepared holes. This archaeological overview of Viking Age weathervanes can be concluded by mentioning spearheads that have a wire wrapped around the socket, probably originally intended for attaching a linen pennon.[33]

Another valuable source of information concerning weathervanes and their different shapes, variants, and materials is iconography, usually preserved in manuscripts as well as on tapestries, coins, and carvings in stone or wood. The fact that the flags and vanes are depicted in such 'formal' sources and that they sometimes appear on coins indicates their importance.[34] In summary, Viking Age weathervanes can take the form of simple ribbons tied in half, rectangles without tails or with up to five tails, or they can have quarter-circle or triangular shapes without or with tassels, and finally they can resemble three-dimensional dragon banners. The depicted material is undoubtedly a fine textile or sheet metal. When the depicted objects show some decoration, it often contains bird motifs, crosses, or geometric shapes. Flags and vanes are often depicted in such a way that we do not see their exact location, but sometimes they are in the hands of infantry, cavalry, or attached to ships' parts. In this context, it is crucial to emphasise that weathervane miniatures most likely show vanes mounted on ship masts or ship bows. In general, iconography of the eighth-tenth centuries shows sheet metal vanes on masts (e.g. the Karlby, Sparlösa runestone and the Stenkyrka Smiss I),[35] while pictorial sources of the eleventh-thirteenth centuries show vanes attached to ship bows.[36] The Gotland stone from Stenkyrka Smiss I, which corresponds in shape to the 'Birka type' vanes, shows a significant resemblance to the weathervane miniatures.[37] In the latest academic literature, the stone is dated to the tenth century.[38]

Weathervanes in Textual Sources and their Rich Symbolism

All that was said above is in compliance with textual sources that speak of weathervanes resembling textile flags (Old Norse: *merki*), usually used by footmen, and metal sheet weathervanes (Old Norse: *veðrviti*), which are employed in naval contexts.[39] In extant texts, textile flags are afforded much more attention than their metal counterparts. It is beyond doubt that they were extremely valuable items, and some even had their own names. Clearly, they were personal symbols of nobles and were professionally made of excellent

fabrics, usually silk. The decorations, often depicting a raven symbol, were embroidered into the fabric.[40] A member of the ruler's court was entrusted with the supervision of the flag – this person presumably stored, cleaned, and erected the flag on command (Old Norse: *merkismaðr*). Prominent people stayed around the flag on the battlefield, which was why the armies always focused primarily on gaining enemy's flags.

The symbolism associated with the flags is remarkable – they were treated as living objects that were capable of independent decisions and had the capacity to bring victory or defeat to the bearers. *Encomium Emmae Reginae* says that the embroidered raven symbol appears spontaneously on the flag at the time of the declaration of war.[41] *The Annals of St Neots*, on the other hand, add that if the army was to win, the raven would flutter its wings, while in the case of an impending defeat, the raven stayed inactive.[42] In *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar,* the king trusts his flag blindly, claiming that the banner always brings victory to the bearer.[43]

The gilded weathervanes, unlike the textile flags, seem to be the equipment of the flagships of Viking Age magnates. The only other information we have about them based on written sources is that they are symbols of supreme luxury, that they could be removed and re-deployed, that they were shining, made a distinct sound, and that they helped determine the direction of the wind.[44] It is not possible to determine whether the same symbolism was associated with the textile flags. We can only speculate that the vanes functioned similarly to detachable wooden animal heads on ship's bows, i.e. the animals depicted on them were meant to frighten any chaotic agents dwelling along the journey.[45] At the very least we can say that during the Viking Age the weathervane was perceived as a property of the ship's owner and as a precious symbol referring to naval activity and personal reputation. Not every ship owner could afford such an accessory though. The weathervane was undoubtedly affordable only to a relatively small and elite group of people who owned massive and lavishly equipped vessels.

What does all this suggest about the use of weathervane miniatures? Their owners and bearers seem to have formed a small, closed, privileged group of people who moved in the Baltic Sea area and up the extensive river systems all the way to the Old Rus. In general, travelling by sea could be typical for this group of people, which is one of the possible reasons for the shape of the miniatures, which refers to the banners used on ship masts. Production of miniature weathervanes in present-day Sweden, including Gotland, can be expected sometime during the tenth century, and it cannot be ruled out that this was the official fashion of royal courts in Sweden. Based on our current knowledge of the distribution and manner of wearing of analogous pins, it is most likely that miniature weathervanes were also worn on the right shoulder and probably served as cloak fasteners.[46] At the same time, these remarkable miniatures served as material markers of prestige and privileged lifestyle.

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36

The Magic of the Mask

Terry Gunnell

There can be little question that the discovery of a mask in an archaeological dig (like those masks found in Hedeby in 1979–1980 and Stóra-Borg in southern Iceland in 1978; Figs 36.1 and 36.2) has to be one of the most revealing finds that can be made with regard to the information it provides about the culture it originally belonged to. As I have previously noted in an article from 2012,[1] if it has eye holes, we can assume not only that the mask was worn by someone but also that it was almost certainly observed by others, something that implies that a performance of some kind took place. This performance involved a performer; the observers (who are naturally participators in the

Figure 36.1 Animal mask from Hedeby (tenth century). Photo by Matthias S. Toplak, Viking Museum Haithabu.

Figure 36.2 Wooden mask from Stóra-Borg, Iceland (sixteenth century?). Courtesy of Þjóðminjasafn, Reykjavík, Iceland.

Figure 36.3 Later Nordic masking. A Julbock *and* Julgeit *(Christmas goats, male and female) from Vemdalen, Härjedalen, Sweden. Courtesy of Nordiska museet, Stockholm, Sweden.*

Figure 36.4 Later Nordic masking. Image of Lussia *and a* jolesvein*, Forsand, Rogaland, Norway. Courtesy of Norsk Etnologisk Gransking.*

performance); a performance space with borders (something that is immediately created the moment the performance starts); a performance period (with a clear start and finish) that must have been planned in some way beforehand; and a recognised story or activity involving recognised characters, with socially bound associations.[2] The adoption of the mask in front of others would have also immediately meant a new balance of power as new social dynamics temporarily entered the performance space, if only because the loss of facial contact means that the audience would have felt itself to be at a disadvantage, somewhat vulnerable and uncertain: while they are unable to see the masker's face, the audience members are aware that they themselves can observed by the masker who has become a hybrid being, part human and part object, the loss of the ability to show facial expression meaning that gestures and movement have to be larger, while the texture of the mask itself means that the voice of the wearer will have changed (Figs 36.3 and 36.4). At the same time, what was once a static object (the mask) has suddenly come to life. In short, new rules have entered the space, the performer being well-aware that they have more freedom and less need for inhibition than before. With regard to the way the mask itself is understood, comparative folkloristic and anthropological research has shown that traditional masks are often kept out of sight when they are not used for performances (adding a degree of secrecy and 'return' or 'arrival' to their re-appearance), and commonly have particular 'owners'/'performers'. On other occasions, they are specially made/ remade for the

performance (by particular, recognised mask-makers using particular materials, sometimes working only at a particular times) and then destroyed afterwards (sometimes as part of particular ritual traditions). This means that as objects, they demand respect, not least because they contain power and freedom, something that in turn implies that the bringing out and the putting away of the mask itself will often involve a degree of ritual and a link with the past, ancient, reused masks also carrying within them a sense of connection to the forefathers or other previous wearers. Most important of all, like all forms of drama,[3] the masked performance as a whole always introduces a sense of liminality and double reality to the space, something that Lars Lönnroth has called 'den dubbla scenen' (the double scene).[4] In terms of ritualistic activities, if it is connected to the mythological world or ancient history, it can introduce a degree of what Eliade called 'sacred time',[5] something that is likely to add a greater degree of 'performativity' to the words stated and the actions carried out during the performance.[6]

Masks (which can include the use of heavy make-up) can naturally be worn on as a form of play,[7] but their effects on those watching (see above) naturally remain the same. For logical reasons, they commonly form part of ritual activities, ranging from the political to the religious, and not least because of their effects on both the performer and the audience. There is logically a close connection between masking and shamanistic activities (such as those of the *vǫlur* and *seiðmenn*),[8] something most clearly seen in the horned costume worn by the Mesolithic female 'shaman', whose remains were found in Bad Dürrenberg in Germany in 1934, and were relatively recently re-examined (Fig. 36.5).[9]

As Neil Price has noted, however, the physical archaeological evidence of masks that were definitely related to religious activities in the Nordic countries and the Nordic diaspora are near non-existent. They are essentially limited to the implications of the potential white make-up and veil found with the woman in the Fyrkat 4 grave, a figure who is regularly interpreted as having been a *vǫlva*.[10] It is difficult to interpret how the earlier-noted tenth-century masks from Hedeby (and those later twelfth- and thirteenth-century leather masks later found in Novgorod, Riga, Kampen and Ghent) might have used, since material that might provide context for them is lacking (considering the role of the latter masks,[11] their dating suggests that they, like the mask from Stóra-Borg [see above] were related in some way to folkloristic tradition and/ or entertainment). With regard to the use of masks in the Old Nordic world, we are thus, for the main part, limited to pointing out images, and essentially 'images of humans doing something that is comparatively inhuman, or abnormal.'[12] As I note in my earlier article, because of their dating and form:

> Such images naturally lack evidence of *stages* or obvious marked off acting spaces and audiences, making it impossible to differentiate between images of people who are engaged in daily activities and images of people who might be *acting* someone else – like a god – that might be engaged in a daily activity. Furthermore, images always raise the question of whether real life is being depicted, or activities in another (supernatural) world.[13]

Figure 36.5 Reconstruction of the costume of a Mesolithic female 'shaman' from Bad Dürrenberg, Germany (c. 7000 BC). Karol Schauer. Courtesy of Landesamt für Denkmalpflege und Archäologie Sachsen-Anhalt, Halle, Germany.

What will nonetheless become clear in the following brief review is that the depictions in question all appear to reflect real-life practices (if not events). Most have roots in totemistic belief of some kind and the idea that the wearing of the mask (commonly associated with animals of some kind) bestows the wearer with the power of the animal in question. For logical reasons, one can see associations (if distant) with shamanistic practices. None of the examples given appear to have pure entertainment value. Each, in some way or another, appears to have close connections with the world of religious belief and practice.

The earliest example from the Nordic area takes us right back to the earlier-mentioned 'shaman' of Bad Dürrenberg and underlines immediately the aforementioned links suggested as existing between the mask and shamanistic activities. It takes the form of a petroglyph from Amtmanness in Finnmark in the northern part of Norway dating to between

2700 and 1700 BC showing a figure with bent legs and legs wearing a horned animal mask and what appears to be an animal skin (Fig. 36.6). One of comparatively few human figures in the petroglyphs from this area (most images are of wild animals), there is good reason to place this figure alongside other images from the same area showing another horned figure and a group of figures standing on a boat that appear to be wearing bird masks.[14] Our knowledge of masking traditions practised by the Sámi and Finno-Ugric peoples living in these parts in much later times[15] provides valuable context for these petroglyphs, suggesting they should be associated with the sound of drums and *joik*-like chants (all of which suggest further movement),[16] something supported by the fact that neither of the two horned figures appears to be standing still.

Large-scale evidence drawn from the numerous Bronze Age petroglyphs of southern Sweden and Norway in the period between 1,500 and 500 BC underlines that masking (involving among other things the continued use of horns, and then winged bird costumes, much like those still worn in eagle dances by the Native Americans of New Mexico) still formed a central part of religious activities (Figs 36.7 and 36.8).[17] As I have noted earlier, even if the images in question are supposed to depict activities in a mythological world, then that is evidently a world that reflects the reality that the petroglyph carvers knew and experienced.[18] Most scholars today believe that the images in question are based on ritual activities that took place around certain sacred sites,[19] something supported by the fact that numerous *lurer* horns like those depicted on the petroglyphs been found in the ground.[20] Further support for this idea comes in the shape of the small images found at Grevensvænge and Fardal in Sjælland and Jylland, Denmark, of a female acrobat in a corded skirt, in a bent pose very similar to that of various acrobats shown leaping over ships depicted in the Swedish petroglyphs; another kneeling female figure

Figure 36.6 Petroglyph of a 'shamanic' figure from Amtmanness, Finnmark, Norway (2700–1700 BC). Courtesy of Knut Helskog.

Figure 36.7 Petroglyph of a horned dancer from Vilhelmsberg, Simris, Skåne, Sweden (Bronze Age). After Gunnell 1995.

Figure 36.8 Petroglyph of masked winged figures from Kallsängen, Bottna, Kvilla, Bohuslän, Sweden (Bronze Age). After Gunnell 1995.

wearing a corded skirt; and the well-preserved remains of a female body wearing a similar corded skirt found in a Bronze Age mound near Århus.[21] The horned figures on the petroglyphs are meanwhile echoed in the shape of another small figure found at Grevensvænge in the same context, wearing a helmet with horns of a similar shape to those found on many of the petroglyphs.[22]

The evidence noted above underlines that a very similar religious culture existed in both southern Sweden and Denmark at the time, and that elements of totemism remained within this religion. While the horned helmets of Grevensvænge do not cover the face, the suggestion that they were still connected with changing role in some way and also drawing on the power of the animal is backed up by a pair of other Bronze Age horned helmet-masks found in Viksø, Sjælland, in Denmark which are decorated with eyes and what seems to be a beak, and appear to have covered at least part of the face.[23] Horned helmets of this kind would naturally have been somewhat impractical in battle. The probability must be that they too had a religious purpose that was associated not only with power, but also performances involving music (reflected by the *lurer*), dance, and acrobatics.

That humans (and especially women) in the Bronze Age occasionally took on the role of birds as part of funerary rituals in the Bronze Age is meanwhile given support by several images carved onto two of the large standing stones found in the Bronze Age grave at Kivik, in Skåne in south-east Sweden. The images in question (which were evidently only meant to be seen by a few chosen people) show female figures in long dresses and wearing bird headdresses or masks of some kind.[24] Their bird-like headwear is echoed in a small bronze object from Glasbacka, Halland, also in southern Sweden which is designed to go on top of a staff.[25] As I have earlier noted,[26] one can perhaps see here early manifestations of the later Nordic *valkyrjur* (sometimes associated with ravens);[27] and not least the figure of the winged 'Angel of Death' who apparently officiated at a Viking funeral on the Volga described in some detail by Ibn Faḍlān (→ **Chapter 13**).[28] Also worth considering with regard to the bird costumes noted above are the account of how Óðinn (also referred to in one place as 'Arnhöfði' or Eagle-head) transforms himself into an eagle in *Snorra Edda*; and those telling of how the goddesses Freyja and Frigg are said to own falcon skin/ costumes, Freyja's being borrowed on two occasions by Loki to fly between worlds (→ **Chapter 16**).[29]

While radical cultural change appears to have taken place in Scandinavia at the end of the Bronze Age, some continuation of tradition evidently existed in the field of religious activities, and not least with regard to the horned figure and the use of animal costumes as part of ritual performance. One notes images of fighting animal-headed men, another horned man, and an apparently bearded woman on the now-lost golden horns sacrificially deposited at Gallehus in Jylland, Denmark in about 400 AD;[30] and from the Age of Migrations (around 500 AD), the tiny, potentially masked figures depicted on the golden Ålleberg neck ring from Västergötland, Sweden;[31] and several helmet masks with clear facial features from Vendel and Valsgärde in Uppland, Sweden, and Sutton Hoo in Anglo-Saxon England.[32] Indeed, the latter of these masks stresses that an unclear line between mask and helmet seems to have existed during in this period, something perhaps reflected in the fact that the same word (ON *gríma*) was used for both.[33] Regarding the helmet from Sutton Hoo, it has been pointed out that when the helmet is worn, the sound of the wearer's voice changes notably,[34] and in shadow, the eyes of the wearer would not have been visible.[35] In firelight, however, one of the ruby-circled eyes would have been lit up (due to gold foil having been deliberately placed behind the stones), drawing logical comparisons with the one-eyed figure of Óðinn. All in all, the implication is that like the Viksø helmets, helmets of this kind would have had a ceremonial role which would have involved changing the sound, appearance and nature of the wearer in the ears and eyes of observers, introducing a strong degree of liminality into the performance space,

Figure 36.9 Bronze helmet plate dies, showing masked figure from Torslunda, Öland, Sweden (sixth–eighth century). Courtesy of Swedish History Museum, Stockholm, Sweden.

simultaneously having influence not only on the wearer and observers but also the performative power of everything the wearer did or said.

With regard to the connections between helmets, masks, gods and performativity, further context is provided by a sixth-seventh century helmet-plate from Torslunda, Öland in Sweden (Fig. 36.9), which comes from the same general period as the helmets noted above.[36] The helmet plate in question depicts a masked man in an animal costume holding a spear accompanied by another figure, one-eyed[37] and wearing a horned helmet (with bird heads on the end of the horns). This latter figure appears to be dancing and carries two spears. As Nicolai Lanz has shown in his recent wide-ranging MA thesis,[38] this figure, whoever they are meant to be (perhaps Óðinn – or more likely someone performing the role of a god), was evidently well-known across a wide area of Germanic and Nordic territory during the Migration period: they reappear as a pair on helmet plates found on earlier-noted Sutton Hoo helmet; and in solo form on the Anglo Saxon Finglesham belt buckle and other objects from several Germanic sites (bracteates from Pleizhausen, Gutenstein and Obrigheim).[39] With regard to the animal-man figure beside the horned man/woman, a very similar image appears alone on a stone from Källby, Västergötland.[40] More intriguing, however, is that both figures also appear together in two other places in finds associated with the Viking period: first of all in a grave from Ekhammar, southern Sweden, where both figures appeared individually in amulet form;[41] and then on the famous tapestry found with the Oseberg ship burial from south-east Norway, from the mid-ninth century.[42] The fragmentary tapestry appears to depict a ritual procession of some kind and human sacrifice. Among the numerous other figures that appear on the tapestry are dancers, adorants, and what seem to be a number of women wearing bird and boar masks.[43] The horned figure with two weapons appears twice here: once in trousers beside a similar masked animal figure,[44] and then once wearing what seems to be a long dress in front of a number of masked female figures (Fig. 36.10).[45] As with the earlier-noted petroglyphs, all the evidence here seems to suggest that the tapestry reflects activities known in real life, something that would seem to be supported by the later written accounts describing the large religious festivals that apparently took place regularly at Gamla Uppsala during the Viking period. Based on an eyewitness account from around 1050 (before Sweden was converted), Adam of Bremen describes how a man recounts having observed pagan rituals (including song) taking place here, as in a 'theatrum'.[46] Over two hundred years later (in the early thirteenth century), the Danish historian Saxo Grammaticus, perhaps influenced by Adam's work and perhaps by oral tradition, also talks of 'mimetic' performers dancing and playing music at the same gatherings.[47] Both accounts lend support to the idea noted above that masks still formed part of ritual 'performance' in Scandinavia even in the Viking period.

Of course, there is good reason to believe that the figure in the animal costume on the Torslunda helmet places, on the Källby stone, in the Ekhammar grave and on the Oseberg tapestry was meant to depict one of those warriors referred to as *berserkir* and *úlfheðnir* in the Viking Age poem *Haraldskvæði*, sts 20–21,[48] and later Icelandic sagas. If this is so, it would certainly add weight to the idea that the totemistic animal mask was still seen as giving its wearer additional supernatural power. (Indeed, all the evidence suggests that these warriors lost control of themselves as they entered battle.[49])

As noted at the start, the evidence of the felt animal masks dating to c. AD 1000 found in Hedeby adds further support to the ida that animal masks were still being used during the Viking period, although as has been stressed earlier, the background of these particular masks is unknown.[50] The idea that they could played a role in connection with festival ritual and martial activities nonetheless gains some support from a historical account recorded by the Byzantine emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus in his *Book of Ceremonies* from c. 953. The account in question describes an intertwining circle dance involving weapons which the Germanic Varangian Guard (at this time predominantly made up of Scandinavians) apparently presented for the Byzantine emperor in Constantinople at Christmas time.[51] Constantine notes that several of the dancers were wearing animal masks. He also calls the dance the 'Gothikon', which implies the involvement of Nordic warriors from Gotland or Öster- or Västergotland in Sweden. The probability is that the performance was a traditional ritual dance warrior of some kind, and there is good reason to assume that it might be reflected in a near contemporary wall fresco

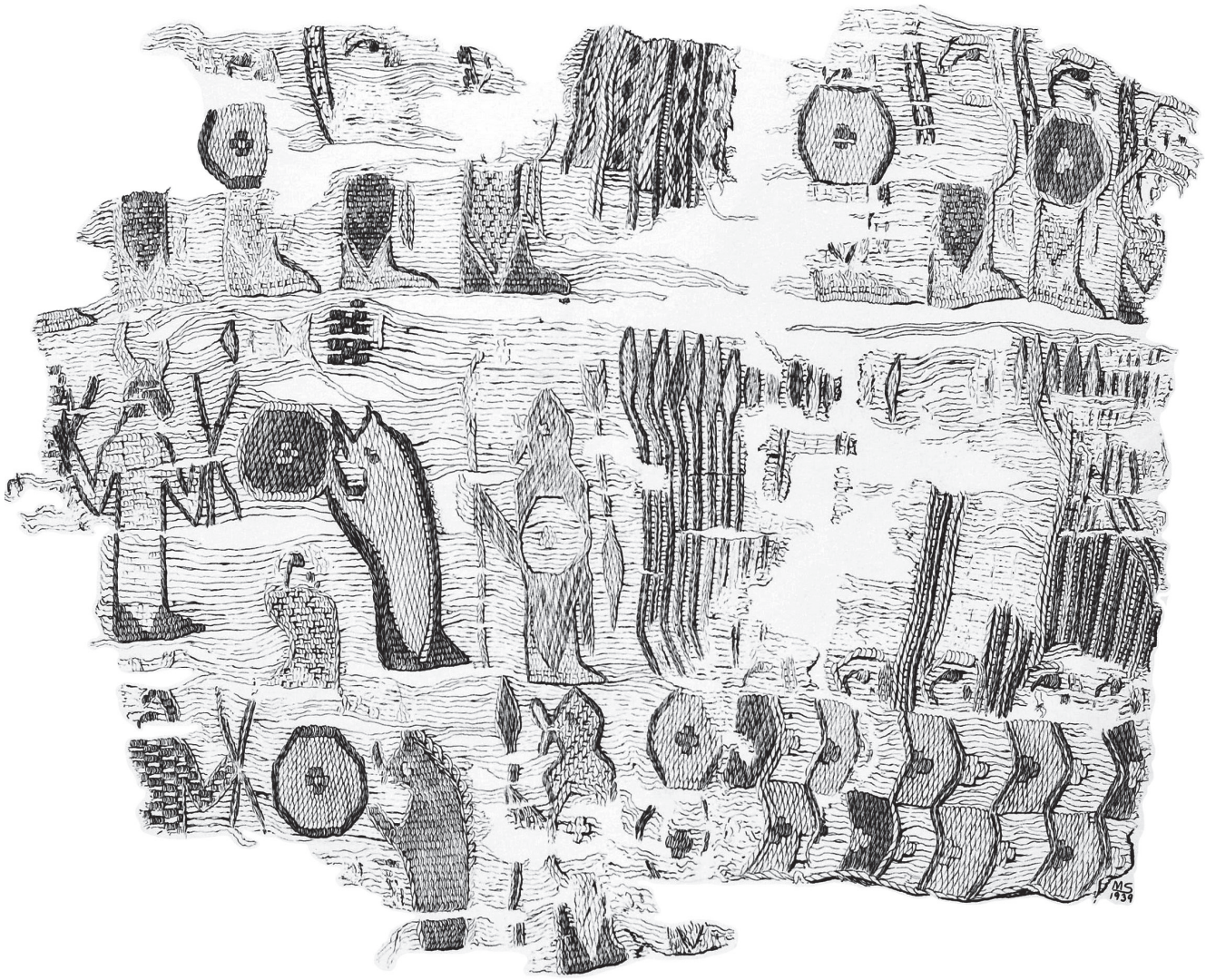

Figure 36.10 Masked female figures from the Oseberg tapestry (mid-ninth century). Image: Mary Storm. Courtesy of Marianne Vedeler and the Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo.

found in the Cathedral of Hagia Soffia in Kiev.[52] Placed in the context of images of entertainments presented at the Hippodrome in Constantinople for the emperor, it shows two warriors, one wearing a mask (with an open-mouth which would make it an impractical helmet), while the other bears an axe, the traditional weapon of the Nordic Varangian Guard.

All in all, on the basis of the evidence noted above, it appears evident not only that masks (and dramatic activities of one kind or another) played a role in various ritual activities in the north from the late Stone Age until the arrival of Christianity, but also that they were seen as providing a connection to the supernatural world. It would not come as a surprise for one to be found in the grave of someone who had the role of a *vǫlva* or seeress.

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