

The Gift to Men and the Gift to the Gods: eapon sacrifices and the circulation of swords in Viking Age society

Fedir Androshchuk
Stockholm

It is characteristic of Danish swords that many of them are of an unusually high quality. But one find exceeds all the others in quality. In this paper I will try to set this find in the context of a range of important issues such as the manufacture, circulation and role of swords in ritual practice.

Description of the find from the Lake Hjerminsø

The find is a lower guard kept in the National Museum of Denmark (NM 1613). It was broken into two pieces which were found by different finders. The find circumstances of one piece are uncertain while the other part is registered as found during the turf digging in Lake Hjerminsø in 1876. Since both pieces fit to each other it is possible to conclude that they come from the same place.

The length of the straight, oval-shaped guard is 12.1 cm, the width 2.8–2.3 cm and the thickness 1.6 cm (Fig. 1–3). The guard is cast in bronze around a core of iron which is only partly preserved. The length of the hole for the tang is 3.3 cm, the length of the hole for the blade 6.5 cm. Judging by the smooth surface around the hole for the tang, the size of the grip was 4.3 x 2.0 cm. On each of the lateral sides of the hilt there are three circular bronze pits for semispherical stones. Two amethyst stones, 0.5 cm in diameter, are preserved. The fields between the stones are ornamented with inlaid vertical copper strips. Both the upper and lower side and inlaid surfaces on the lateral sides are decorated with interlacing in Borre style. The closest parallels to such decorated details as the paws and the beaded bodies of beasts, scrolls and knots can be seen in decoration of some types of trefoil brooches (Maixner 2005 Taf. 24 A–C; Taf. 51,1.4) and scabbard chapes (Arbman 1940 Taf. 5,8; Paulsen 1955, I,4b). The interlacing on the lower side of the guard, around the hole for the blade, is similar to the decoration on artefacts from the Vendel Period (Ørsnes 1966 Tav. 5i). The only known analogy for the shape of the guard and the details of the ornamentation is the hilt from the boat-grave excavated on Ile de Groix in Brittany (Arbman/Nilsson 1968 Fig.19; Müller-Wille 1978 Abb. 3,1). Judging by these parallels the guard from Hjerminsø should be dated to the 10th century.

The Hejemindsjø guard and the problem of the manufacture of Viking Age swords

The find from the Hjerminsø Lake should undoubtedly be viewed in the context of other sword finds that have come to light in the territory of Denmark. In a row of publications, Anne Pedersen has attempted to

collect and interpret grave finds with weaponry from all historical regions of Denmark (Pedersen 1995; 1997a; 1997b; 2002; 2003). To this we must of course add stray finds, single fragments and details of swords, which were not included in her research. As a supplement to this article there is a catalogue of sword finds based on my personal studies of the collections in the National Museum of Denmark, Lund Universitets Historiska Museum, Kulturen in Lund and publications.

According to all collected evidence, finds of swords are mainly known in the following regions of Denmark: Jutland including the area of Hedeby, Zealand, Langeland and Lolland (Fig. 4). Here, according to my calculation 91 swords of the Viking Age have been found. 19 swords from Swedish Scania should also be quoted. The topography of the sword finds is not compact. Apart from three areas with the largest concentrations, there is a large number of finds from different places located far away from each other.

One area with a concentration of sword finds is the northern part of Jutland, particularly the territory of medieval Middelsom herred (Jørgensen 1991), the borders of which are situated between the rivers Gudenå and Nørreå, and the Randers fiord. Here swords dated to the 9th–10th centuries came to light. The Lake Hjerminsø is also situated here. 16 rune-stones from the late Viking Age are known within Middelsom herred. Three of them are erected in commemoration of *drengs*, three more were erected for *thegn*s and one for a *styrman* (Stoklund 1991). Two of the stones with the name *dreng* come from Hjermind (Jacobsen/Moltke 1942, 77 f.). *Thegn* and *dreng* are usually associated with men of high rank in the service of a king or a chieftain (Strid 1985).

Another area with a large number of sword finds is Hedeby. Both early Carolingian swords and late Viking Age types characteristic of Southern Scandinavia are present here. Hedeby is interpreted as a trade centre controlled by the royal power (Müller-Wille 1984). The well-known boat-chamber grave found here contained two swords and is considered by some scholars to be a royal burial (Wamers 1994). From the area of Hedeby there are three rune-stones mentioning the captain of a ship (*sturi/matr*), *dreng* (*tregr*) (Jacobsen/Moltke 1942, 1) and kings (ibid.1, 3, 4).

On the island of Zealand a large concentration of weaponry is associated with Lake Tissø. A large settlement or manor was excavated here. During the 6th–7th centuries a residence with long houses and workshops was established. A number of exclusive finds, for example, a Byzantine seal from 9th century of exactly the same



Fig. 1. Lower guard of a sword from Lake Hjerminsø (© The National Museum of Denmark).



Fig. 2. Lower guard of a sword from Lake Hjerminsø (© The National Museum of Denmark).

type as seals from Ribe and Hedeby, was found in the settlement. The whole site is considered to be a royal residence. The excavation of the site has shown that the ritual offering of weapons took place in the lake. The name of the lake is interpreted as 'Tyr's lake' that is, the lake of the war god Tyr (Jørgensen 2003).

In this context it is certainly not without significance that the topography of sword finds in Denmark differs from the distribution pattern that we know in Sweden and Norway. In Denmark, the concentrations of finds, are as a rule connected to residences of the elite or trading centres controlled by the elite. Judging by the large number of finds in Norway and Sweden, the swords were here the weapons of free men (Androshchuk 2004; 2007). Only single, exceptional swords can be considered as elite objects. A comparison between the numbers of different types of weapon shows that the axe was the most common weapon in Denmark during the Viking Age (Näsman 1991). In Iceland, as can be seen from the graves, the spear was the most common weapon in the same time (Androshchuk et al. 2004). It seems that these two regions point out the existence of certain local peculiarities in the circulation of different types of weaponry. Also local preferences to certain hilt designs can be seen when sword finds in different regions of Scandinavia are compared (Androshchuk 2004; 2009).

Apart from two single-edged swords of Petersen's type H (Petersen 1919; Peirce 2002, 48; 50), swords with double-edged blades dominate in Denmark. To my mind, these two single-edged swords as well as the sparse types of swords M, O and R may be considered as evidence of connections with certain regions of Norway where they are common. At the same time, the high percentage of Carolingian swords from the 9th century (for instance the "special types 1 and 2" as well as type K according to Petersen) testify close contacts with the Franks. Of the 91 swords known from Denmark (of which 27 are of unrecognisable type), only 14 can be referred to the 9th century. On the basis of certain find associations from Sweden and Eastern Europe, the most common Danish swords, the types S and V, should be dated to the second half and end of the 10th century. Swords of these types form 18 % and 20 % respectively of the total sword finds. The sword finds from Scania are characterised by a scarcity of type S,

which is replaced here by the contemporary type Z, which is not common in Denmark.

A common trait of most South Scandinavian swords is the exceptionally rich decoration on their hilts. Among them there are many quite unique specimens and one of them was the sword, the guard of which was found in Lake Hjerminsø.

First of all, it should be noted that the decoration of the Hjerminsø hilt with precious stones is a unique feature for the whole Viking Age. The only parallel coming to my mind is the 'Imperial sword' of Otto IV (1198–1218). The rounded pommel of this sword and also the straight and long lower guard are decorated with engraved Latin inscriptions on the sides. The sheath of the sword is ornamented along the edges with long gold plates with oval pits for garnets. Both sides of the sheath are decorated with enamelled plates between 14 figures representing kings from Charlemagne (768–814) to Henry III (1039–1056; Schulze-Dörrlamm 1995). Undoubtedly, the sword is not only a weapon but also an outstanding piece of jewellery art produced at the end of the 11th century with the aim of symbolising the grandeur and continuous line of royal power. A comparison of the Hjerminsø guard with swords from early periods shows that sword hilts combining of bronze and iron elements with decoration with amethysts, garnets or enamel are most common in the Vendel Period (Behmer 1939 Taf. XL,1-2; XLII; XLVIII; Arrhenius 1985, 36). It is worth noting that there are cases when garnets from old objects were reused on new objects (Arrhenius 1985, 98).

Other examples testifying participation of jewellers in the production of the Viking Age swords should be quoted. First of all, pommels and guards of swords from Kalundborg in Holmbæk amt in Denmark, Falkenberg in the Swedish province of Halland, Vrångeback and Dybäck in Scania as well as Rostock-Dierkow in northern Germany (Geibig 1992/93). Also the bronze details of hilts of swords of types O, W and some other types should be included to this group (Petersen 1919). Two distinctive swords from Eastern Europe, namely from Gnezdovo in Russia and Hvoshcheva in Ukraine are good examples of Scandinavian jewellers' work (Thunmark-Nylén 2001; Androshchuk 2003). The most convincing evidence of the participation of jewellers in making sword hilts is a brooch found in Gammel



Fig. 3. Lower guard of a sword from Lake Hjerminsdø (© The National Museum of Denmark).

Hviding in Jutland (Skibsted Klæsøe 2005, Fig. 2). The shape and ornamentation of the brooch has close parallels in the bronze hilt of the sword from Lake Oppmanasjön in Scania (Strömberg 1961 Taf. 64,1).

The role of jewellers in the production of prestigious swords and in weaponry generally complements the traditional view on this subject. This is quite in accordance with the information in the written sources. For example, in the list of items in the will of King Ethelred's son Æthelstan (Æthelstan Ætheling) from 1015 AD, mention is made of "the sword with the silver hilt and the gold belt and the armlet which Wulfric made" (Whitelock 1930, 57).

There is no doubt that smiths were able to make all parts of swords including decoration of the hilts by incrustation both in Scandinavia and in the Carolingian Empire. At the same time, there is no evidence from the Viking Age which confirms the existence of special weapon workshops. It would be a simplification to suggest that inscriptions like ULFBERHT and INGELRED were a kind of 'trade mark', testifying the authenticity of items made in the Carolingian Empire. In this case we would expect also the existence of ideas of commodity and commodity circulation in this time (Appadurai 1988). An interpretation of such inscriptions as trademarks would also presuppose that both the producers and their Scandinavian purchasers understood Latin script, which also has no grounds. Written sources which could be quoted in this discussion seem to indicate the association of inscriptions with owners of the swords, not their manufacturer. For example, the description of the so-called 'Constantine the Great's sword' could be interesting. It is said that on the sword "could be read the name of the ancient owner in letters of gold; on the pommel and also above the thick plates of gold you could see an iron nail fixed, one of the four which the Jewish faction prepared for the fructification of our Lord's body" (Whitelock 1955, 282). It is possible to suggest that this description reflects the existence of a real oral tradition created around this sword that probably had a sign on the blade and a pommel fastened by means of rivets.

There is no doubt that swords had certain qualitative characteristics during the Viking Age. In Old Norse literature there are plenty in detailed blade descriptions but almost no words concerning the shapes of hilts. It

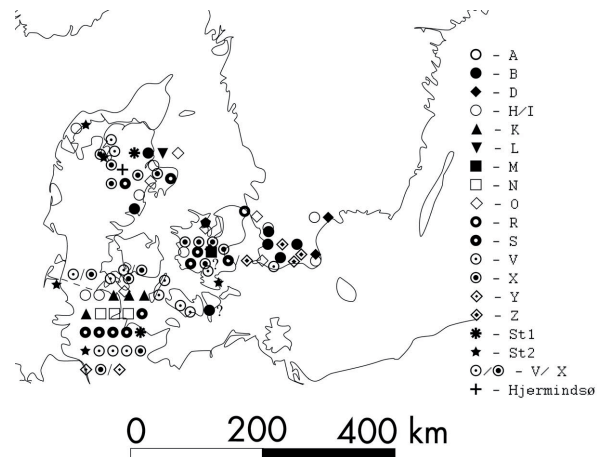


Fig. 4. Distribution of types of Viking Age swords on the territory of Old Denmark. Drawing by the author.

seems that until the 11th century there were common ideas of what a high quality blade should be like. Hilts had different lengths and shapes according to the local tastes of their customers. That is why inscriptions and/or signs on the blades can not only be considered as evidence of the origin of a particular sword and its owner in the Carolingian Empire. Smiths manufactured the iron parts of swords while details cast in bronze or silver could be ordered from jewellers. Finds from the Swedish provinces of Öland, Gotland and Uppland could be quoted in this connection. Five blades with inscriptions and geometrical signs but without hilts found on Öland and have been interpreted as imported half-finished products (Arbman 1937, 232; Steuer 1987, 152; Thålin Bergman/Arrhenius 2005, 51). Three moulds for producing bronze terminals for shield handles were found in Birka among finds associated with the activity of a jewellery workshop from the middle of the 9th century. In layers dated to 900–930/40 and 950–975 one half-finished iron pommel and two iron guards of swords were found (Ambrosiani/Androschuk 2006 Fig. 3). The shape of suspension rings for scramasax sheaths found in the Birka graves have close parallels among ringed types of ring pins from the same site (Arbman 1940 Taf. 6,1; 4;8 Taf. 44,1.6). A number of half-finished pieces of swords come from Gotland. One half-finished piece of a bronze pommel decorated in Mammen/Jellinge Style was found on Gotland on a site with remains of jewellery production from the Viking Age (Thunmark-Nylén 1995-2006, II Taf. 231,5; IV, 190). Another half-finished object, namely a scabbard chape, comes from a settlement (Östergren 1989, 86 Fig.73). Two half-finished pieces of a sword pommel of Petersen type N and the upper guard of a sword of type T were also found in the same province (Thunmark-Nylén 1995-2006 III, 295). The last find is very important because of the total lack of this type among swords found in Sweden. As expressed earlier (Jansson 1995; Thunmark-Nylén 2001, 76), some

jewellers could make objects that were not common in traditional Gotlandic culture on the order of external customers. Perhaps the same conclusion is also correct for the manufacture of some types of weaponry details of bronze.

Circulation of swords in Viking Age society

Both archaeological and written sources allow us to suggest several ways by which swords could change their owners (Härke 2000, 377):

1. as a gift from lord to retainer (and between peers);
2. as a gift from retainer to lord (including the heriot);
3. as an heirloom;
4. as ritual depositions in graves and rivers.

According to the Beowulf epic, despite the fact that shield, spears, knives and arrows are most often mentioned among the weaponry of the elite, most of the current gifts were swords, mails and helmets (ibid. 380).

In Anglo-Saxon sources swords as well as other weaponry very often play the role of regulators of social connections between different generations, between equals and between chiefs and servants. Such objects were often associated with a certain story or event. For example, the sword that saved King Athelstan's life during an unexpected Viking attack was kept in the Royal treasury as a testimony of the miracle. It is worthy of note that his sword was not remarkable in appearance and was never decorated with silver or gold (Whitelock 1955, 278).

Swords as regulators of social relations are clearly manifested in the Anglo-Saxon right *heriot*. Literally heriot means 'army-gear', which was the gift of a chieftain to his *thegn* who vowed to serve him. Upon the *thegn's* death, the heriot should be returned to the chieftain. However, if a man fell in a campaign before his lord the heriot could be transferred to his heirs. The composition of the heriot depended on the social status of the man. According to the laws of Cnut, an earl's heriot consisted of four saddled and four unsaddled horses, four helmets, and four coats of mail, and eight spears, eight shields and four swords and 200 mancuses of gold. The heriot of the thegns who were closest to the king included two saddled and two unsaddled horses, two swords, four spears and as many shields, a helmet and a coat of mail and 50 mancuses of gold. A man who had "a more intimate relation with the king" got one saddled and one unsaddled horse, a sword, two spears, two shields and 50 mancuses of gold (Whitelock 1955, 429 f.).

Heriot is mentioned in a series of Anglo-Saxon wills. Between 941 and 951 Bishop Theodred promised to grant his lord, that is the King, his heriot consisting of 200 marks of red gold, two silver cups, four horses, two swords, four shields, four spears and three estates (Whitelock 1930, 3). Judging from this the social status of Theodred was equal to the king's thegn. In his will Ealdorman Ælfheah (968–971) promised the king

seven swords of which: one short sword decorated with gold, six spears, as many shields and horses and 300 mancuses of gold and a dish and also a drinking-cup of three pounds. Apart from this he also promised a sword and 30 mancuses of gold to the king's son Ætheling (ibid. 23). Two swords with silver hilts (*twa seolforhilted sword*), and also four horses and two hundred mancuses were granted to the king by Wulfric in his will from 1002–1004 (ibid. 47).

Particularly interesting are the swords listed in the will of Æthelstan Ætheling, son of King Æthelred II from around 1015 (ibid. 57 ff.).

The first, "the sword with the silver hilt which Wulfric made", was granted to St Peter's Church where Æthelstan should be buried.

The second, "the silver-hilted sword which belonged to Ulfketel", Æthelstan granted to his father King Æthelred II. Ulfketel is famous for his participation in campaigns against the Danes in 1004 and 1010. He fell at Assandun in 1016 (ibid. 170 note l.15). Because Ulfketel was married to Ethelred's daughter it could be suggested that we are dealing with an object that was inherited by relatives.

The third was "the sword which belonged to King Offa" and was granted by Æthelstan to his brother Edmund, who later became King Edmund Ironside. Judging from the association with the name King Offa, who ruled Mercia in 757–796, it seems that the sword was considered as a symbol of power and was handed down through several generations.

The fourth, "the sword with the 'pitted' hilt" was also granted to Edmund I. The sword had a *pyttedan hiltan*, which probably could be understood as a 'hilt decorated with pits' (for some examples, see Petersen 1919, 75 f. Fig. 61–62).

The fifth, "a silver-hilted sword" was granted to another brother of Æthelstan, Eadwig.

The sixth, "the inlaid sword which belonged to Withar" was granted to Æthelstan's chaplain Ælfwine.

The seventh, "the notched (?; *sceardan*) sword" was granted to Æthelstan's seneschal Ælfmær.

The eighth, "a sword" with no further description, was granted to Siferth. He was the brother of Morkære who is also mentioned in Æthelstan's will. It is seems that the two brothers were later murdered by Æthelred II. It is known that Edmund Ironside married Siferth's widow against his father's will (Whitelock 1930, 170 note l.16).

The ninth, "the sword on which the hand is marked", was granted to Eadric the son of Wynflæd. The "hand" should probably be interpreted as a sign on the blade depicting the Hand of Providence. This type of images for example, represented on the coins of Edward the Elder (899–924), Earl Sihtric (c. 910) and also Æthelred II (978–1016) (North 1980, 20; 22; 25 Pl. VII,5; 97 Pl. IX,9; 120 Pl. X,20–31).

The tenth sword Æthelstan granted "to my servant Æthelwine the sword which he has given to me".

Finally, the eleventh sword, he granted “to Ælfnoth my sword polisher the notched inlaid sword” (?; *sceardan malswurdas*).

Thus some of the swords were given to new owners, some of them should be returned to former owners and some were family relics inherited by members of the family. Some of the swords could become such relics, for example the sword promised to Siferth.

There is no doubt, that the swords mentioned in Anglo-Saxon wills were expensive weapons. For example, the sword promised by King Alfred (873–888) to ealdorman Ethelred was worth 100 mancuses (Whitelock 1955, 494). However, not all swords could be appreciated only on the basis of the material cost. The possession of an inherited weapon was an important condition for keeping respect and social status in society. Losing or giving away an inherited weapon could lead to deprivation of social position of the owner (an example of this is *Víga-Glúms saga* VI, XXV).

It is worth to remember that Viking Age swords are composite artefacts consisting of blades, guards, grips and one- or two-pieced pommels. That means that all these parts could be changed or replaced in the course of time. There are single finds of different parts of swords and half-finished pieces of swords and sword hilts, which are composed of parts dated to different times.

For example, there are Swedish swords combining in their hilts details of swords of types B and H (SHM 6001) and also Norwegian examples of combinations of types E and M/N/X, Mannheim and type H, types H and Y (Petersen 1919 Fig. 66; 84; 88). A remarkable find was made in Kalmar harbour in Swedish Småland. A fragmentary hilt with the long grip of a sword from Middle Ages was revealed there (Colmo et al. 1979, 342 Fig. 33). The hilt was furnished with a decorated bronze pommel from the 11th century, which has a close parallel from the Russian town of Ryazan’ (Kirpičnikov 1966 Pl. XXXI,1). There is one Swedish and one Norwegian sword, blades of which were broken into two pieces. It is interesting that the broken blades were not replaced but fitted together by means of two rivets in prehistory (SHM 5237; SHM 17343:195B).

Among finds from Russia, one sword with a pattern-welded blade from a barrow at Novoselki, near Smolensk should be mentioned (Šmidt 2005 Fig. 9,22). The sword was classified as type B according to Jan Petersen’s typology (Kirpičnikov 1966, 26). However, strictly speaking, it is only the lower guard of this specimen which could be referred to this type. The pommel of the sword is lost but the upper guard is preserved. It is oval-shaped with two holes for nails to fasten the pommel. Pommels of swords of type B were fastened to the upper guard only by means of the tang (Androschuk 2007) while use of rivets was characteristic of hilts of swords of types H/I, N, V, S and Z (Petersen 1919). Judging from the construction and shape of the upper guard it could be suggested that the sword from

Novoselki had a two-part half-round pommel. This is a typical element of swords of type N, which belong to the 10th century. This is also the date indicated by the other finds in the grave (Šmidt 2005). Thus we are dealing with a sword, which was undoubtedly considered as old before it was deposited in the grave. Swords usually of type B are dated to the 9th century (Androschuk 2007). At the same time, the repair of the hilt in the 10th century clearly indicates that the sword had a certain value. Most likely some of the above-mentioned swords had their own special history or biography. For example, they or most probably part of them may have belonged to a famous forefather. They may also represent gifts or memorized objects associated with a special event.

With the aim of shedding light on swords as objects with a biography, I am going to look at the history of St Olav’s sword *Hneitir*. King Olav lost this sword when he fell at Stiklestad. A Swedish warrior found the sword and thanks to this was able to return home alive. Later, the sword was transferred to an owner who knew its name and origin until the days of the Byzantine emperor Alexios II Comnenos when it appeared again in Constantinople. It is told that a member of the Varangian guard of the emperor miraculously found the sword. When the emperor understood to whom the sword had belonged, he put it above the altar in the church of Saint Olaf (Hák. Herð, chapter 20). Another sword mentioned in *Sturlunga saga* is connected to a farm in the northern part of Iceland. The farm has a very unusual name – Miklagardr. Thorvardr Örnolfs-son was the name of a man who lived at the farm and it seems that he was mentioned in the saga thanks only to the fact that he owned a sword called *Brynjubít*, which had a particular biography. As it is said in the saga, Sigurdr the Greek had brought it to Iceland from Miklagardr. Then Svein Jónsson used the sword in the battle at Víðines. Sigvat’s sons Sturla and Tumi made an unsuccessful attempt to buy the sword, but Thorvard only allowed him to borrow it. Since the offer did not interest Sigvatr it is possible to suggest that only the full possession of such an object was of value. When Sturla could not find a peaceful way of acquiring the sword, he took it by force (*Sturlunga saga* XXXII).

The handling of an ancient sword during several generations did not mean that the weapon should be completely preserved. A sword could be considered as ancient on the basis that one of its parts came from an ancient sword. It may have been broken in the past and then symbolically repaired before deposition. The exceptional status of some swords was underlined by viewing them as creatures of divinity. Confirmation of this could be Cassiodorus’s description of swords which were sent as a gift to Theodoric, king of the Ostrogoths and because of their beauty were looked upon as the work of divine, not mortal hands (citation in Theuws/Alkemade 2000, 401). This information is

very important for understanding the phenomenon of weaponry deposition.

The archaeological context of such finds allows us to single out three types of weapon deposition: in graves, in water (Müller-Wille 2002; Lund 2004) and in dry places close to cult buildings (Helgesson 2004, 223 ff.). Most finds in water came to light in Denmark where 140 find sites were registered (Lund 2004). The Swedish finds come basically from Gotland but there are also finds from Uppland, for example Estuna Church, the River Fyris and the “Garrison at Birka” (Müller-Wille 1984; Ljungkvist 2006, 173 ff.). Finds on the continent were registered in Germany (Menghin 1980), England, the Netherlands (Willemsen 2004) and Rus’ (Androshchuk 2001; 2002).

Objects deposited in water are very often of high quality and bear traces of intentional destruction, which confirms their ritual context and association with the elite. In some cases, for example at Tissø in Denmark, such finds are connected to residences of the elite. It seems that the elite were controlling the depositions. An analysis of the topography of the depositions has shown that they come from river mouths, old bridges and passages (Lund 2004, 203). In most cases such depositions should be considered as offerings and rituals of power. Despite the possibility that the depositions may have different explanations, they probably usually belong to rituals connected to journeys (Androshchuk 2001; 2002; Lund 2004, 208 f.). What was the reason for the intentional destruction of precious weapons, their withdrawal from circulation in society? In order to answer this question it is important to clarify the concept of value current in the Viking Age.

The date of the Beowulf epic is much discussed, but as it belongs to the period which we are studying (Chase 1981; Owen-Crocker 2000, 18; 114 ff.), it should be correct to view it as a source reflecting ideas characteristic of Viking Age society. As an example, let me list the characteristics of the sword which Beowulf took from Grendel’s vault:

- a victory-blessed weapon;
- an ancient giant-made sword;
- doughty of edge;
- the glory of warriors;
- choicest of weapons;
- greater than any other man could carry to the bottle-play;
- good and majestic;
- the ornamented hilt;
- the patterned blade (lines 1557–1559; 1615–1698 in Wrenn 1958).

It is interesting that despite the fact that the poisonous blood of Grendel dissolved the blade, the hilt was kept as a precious object. It was called as ‘a work of cunning craftsmen’, ‘the ancient heirloom’ which was ‘marked in runic letters, on the sword-guards of pure gold noted down and said, for whom that sword, choicest of weapons, with twisted hilt and snake-adornment, had been

made at first’ (lines 1681; 1694–1695; 1698).

It is a common view that the deposition of weapons in graves reflects the former social status of the buried individuals. However, it is also possible that such objects were ‘charged’ with a certain power which influenced the future of their new owners. The possession of an object that had belonged to a particular individual in the past could have a fatal influence on his life. This idea explains the cases of plundering of ancient barrows that are known from the sagas. In this way, heroes got hold of old objects which brought them glory and fame (Harðar saga ok Hólmverja, XV; Hervarar saga I).

It should be noted, that the Beowulf’s concept of a ‘hoard’ is completely different from the archaeological concept. For example, the poem calls the place where a hoard was located:

- a barrow (2242)
- an earthy chamber (2410);
- a vault under the ground (2411)
- the foeman’s vault (3123);
- the ring-hall (3053).

The topographical description of the site of a hoard also differs. On one hand it is said to be deposited “on open ground, near the billows surged, hard by a cape” (2243–2244; 2412) on the other hand “under the grey rock” (2744).

A hoard contained drinking-cups, ancient vessels, old and rusty helmet, a gold standard and rusty and eaten-through swords (lines 2244–2245; 2760–2763; 2768; 3048–3049). What we see here is evidence of the fact that the value of an object was not always determined by the material it was made of. It may be rusty or made of an unattractive material, but most important was its ‘biography’.

This particular understanding of the ‘value’ of an object with a biography in connection with offering or sacrificing could be illustrated by the story how a mid-18th-century gospel-book was acquired by the community of Christ Church in Canterbury. In the margin of a page in a book known as *Codex Aureus* Ealdorman Alfred and his wife Werburg in the 9th century added inscription which tells us that they had bought it from the ‘heathen army’ and donated it to Christ Church. As said in the inscription, the couple obtained the book from the heathen host with their “pure money that was with pure gold”. They did this “for their love of God and for the need of their souls, and because they did not wish that ‘these holy books should remain longer in heathen hands’”. However, what is interesting is that the inscription sounds like a contract emphasizing that the donors want to give the book *on the condition* that the religious community would pray every month for “the eternal salvation of the souls” of Alfred’s family, “as long as God foresees that Christianity should exist at that place” (Gameson 2001, 75 f.). In this story the following facts are interesting – a book valued as a precious object both by the Vikings and by Ealdormen

Alfred, and a donation as a contract with God and his church. Contracts or agreements were very important in the society of the sagas where oaths, handshakes and gifts were the important elements (Habbe 2005, 115 ff.). Icelandic sagas list a series of objects associated with these cases, objects such as rings, stones, cups, weapons, bibles and crosses (ibid. 134 ff.). Among the places where these contracts could be arranged royal residences, things and churches are mentioned (ibid. 145). To this should be added also sacral places associated with heathen gods' mentioned in the agreement of 944 between Rus' and the Greeks (Cross/Sherbvwitz-Wetzor 1953, 77). A contract as a form of relationship with the divine world was probably a very common practice in Viking Age society and various offerings seem to be entailed in their ritual.

Conclusions

The social aspect of Viking Age weaponry was closely connected to the institution of gift-giving which has been a subject of research for several scholars (Mauss 1990; Gurevich 1968; Zachrisson 1998; Bazelmans 1999; Habbe 2005). Here, I would like to summarize some of conclusions which are important for understanding the mechanism of gift exchange as well as offering and deposition.

First of all, the object was considered as animate in archaic societies. The life of people was closely connected to the life of surrounding objects. One of the first groups of beings that people had to make an agreement with, were the spirits of the dead and the gods. This group was the full owner of all material possessions of the world. For this reason it was necessary to reach an agreement and establish an exchange with this group. In this connection, destruction in the form of offering represents an act of giving that was necessary to reciprocate. Exchange of gifts between men and gods means buying peace between them. Despite their material value, gifts were considered as embodied power, symbols of status and abundance. Essential elements in an exchange were three key obligations: to give, to receive and to reciprocate. Thus, objects considered as valuable have their individuality, their name, their special qualities and power. They could also be interpreted as having faces, eyes, animal masks and human masks which turned them into living beings (Mauss 1990, 16; 17; 20; 39; 44).

I believe that these ideas are reflected in the decoration of many swords from the Viking Age. Some of them have three-lobed pommels shaped as human or animal masks (especially types D, E, L, R, S, T, Z according to Jan Petersen). In addition, they could be decorated with animal ornament. We know 176 names of swords mentioned in the Old Norse literature (Falk 1914, 47 ff.). The name given to swords indicates that they were viewed as animate objects with their own biographies (for another explanation, see Gansum 2004, 140 ff.). Swords and other weapons were participating in con-

tractual rituals such as oaths, gift giving and offerings. The sword hilt from Lake Hjermandsø indicates the potential of a closer analysis of the archaeological material when we discuss such problems as the role of weaponry in the social life of Viking Age society. I also hope that this paper has demonstrated the importance of collecting information from different kinds of sources.

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Abstract

This article presents an analysis and interpretation of a unique lower guard of a Viking Age sword type from the found in Lake Hjermandsø in Denmark. The find is related to other swords found in South Scandinavia. 109 swords and fragments or details of swords have been registered on the territory of ancient Denmark (including 19 from Scania in present-day Sweden and 36 from Schleswig in present-day Germany). It is possible to define three main areas with the largest concentration of finds – Middelsom herred and Hedeby on Jutland and the area of the lake Tissø on Sjælland (Zealand). It is stressed that, contrary to the situation in Norway and Sweden where most finds come from rural areas, Danish sword finds mostly come from areas controlled by the aristocracy and the royal power. On the basis of the analysis of the guard from Hjermandsø and other sword hilts cast of silver or bronze, it is concluded that jewellers may have taken part in the production of some swords. This means that different parts of swords may have been produced by different craftsmen. An analysis of written sources makes it possible to suggest four different models for the circulation of swords in the Viking Age. Finds of weapons in water can be explained in different ways but some finds like the Hjermandsø guard should be interpreted as offerings, a kind of 'contract' between the people and the gods.

Zusammenfassung

Dieser Artikel enthält eine Analyse und Interpretation der wikingerzeitlichen Parierstange eines Schwertes aus dem See Hjermandsø in Dänemark. Der Fund wird mit anderen Schwertern in Süd-Skandinavien in Beziehung gesetzt. 109 Schwerter und Bruchstücke von Schwertern aus dem Gebiet des mittelalterlichen Dänemark (darunter 19 aus Scania im heutigen Schweden

und 36 aus Schleswig im heutigen Deutschland) können registriert werden. Es ist möglich, drei Regionen mit den größten Konzentrationen von Funden zu erkennen: Middelsom Herred und Haithabu auf Jütland sowie die Umgebung des Tisso-Sees auf Sjælland (Seeland). Es ist zu betonen, dass im Gegensatz zu der Situation in Norwegen und Schweden, wo die meisten Schwerter aus ländlichen Gebieten stammen, fanden sich die dänischen Schwerter überwiegend in Regionen, die vom Adel und der königlichen Macht kontrolliert wurden. Auf der Grundlage der Analyse der Parierstange aus Hjerminsø und anderer Schwertgriffe aus Silber oder Bronze kann geschlossen werden, dass Feinschmiede

an der Produktion einiger Schwerter beteiligt waren. Dies bedeutet, dass vermutlich verschiedene Teile der Schwerter von verschiedenen Handwerkern hergestellt worden sind. Eine Analyse der schriftlichen Quellen zeigt, dass vier verschiedene Modelle für die Verbreitung von Schwertern in der Wikingerzeit vorgeschlagen werden können. Gewässerfunde von Waffen können verschiedene Erklärungsmuster haben, aber einige Funde wie das Schwert aus Hjerminsø können als Opfergaben interpretiert werden; möglicherweise waren sie eine Art „Vertrag“ zwischen den Menschen und den Göttern.

List 1

Catalogue of sword finds from the territory of modern Denmark

Jutland

Swords of type B

1. C6871 Mossø Sø (Androshchuk 2007 Fig.1,2).
2. C6375 Norrå, Fladbro, Grensten sogn, Middelsom herred, Viborg, Jylland.

Swords of type D

3. C1572 Sønderløse, Overløse sogn, Års herred, Ålborg amt, Jylland (Skibsted Klæsøe 2005). Variant JP D1.
4. Løgstør (Skibsted Klæsøe 2005, 9 Fig. 7).

Swords of types H/I

5. C32337, Hospital sengen, Randers, Støvring, Randers amt, Jylland.
6. D1030 Sjørring sogn, Hundborg herred, Thisted amt, Jylland (Behrend 1970, 90 Fig. 91).

Swords of type L

7. D2335 Støvringgård, Støvring sogn, Støvring herred, Frederiksborg, Jylland.

Swords of type M

8. C15293, Roum, Roum sogn, Rinds herred, Viborg amt, Jylland.

Swords of type O

9. RAM 5403 Fladbro, Haslum, Galten herred, Randers amt, Jylland.
10. C25221 Stenalt, Ørsted sogn, Rougsø herred, Randers amt, Jylland.

Swords of type S

11. Brandstrup I, Vindum sogn, Middelsom herred, Viborg amt, Jylland (Lavrsen 1960).
12. Hemstok, Århus amt, Jylland (Pedersen 1995, 71).
13. C5205 Kolindsund, Sønder herred, Randers amt, Jylland.

Swords of type V

14. C9058 Farsø, Farsø sogn, Gislum herred, Aalborg amt, Jylland (Brøndsted 1936).
15. Kammerhøj, Redsted sogn, Mors, Jylland (ibid 88; Pedersen 1995, 72).
16. VSM 6285a Lamhøj, Laastrup sogn, Rinds herred, Viborg amt, Jylland (Brøndsted 1936).

Swords of type X

17. RAM 5401 Grensten, Grensten sogn, Middelsom herred, Viborg amt, Jylland.
18. Hald, grave 1, Ørslevkloster sogn, Viborg amt, Jylland (Brøndsted 1936, 92; Pedersen 1995, 73).
19. C19425 Rends, Burkal sogn, Slogs herred, Tønder amt, Jylland.

Swords of "Special type 1"

20. C6373-6374 Norrå, Fladbro, Grengsten sogn, Middelsom herred, Viborg, Jylland (Peirce 2002, 150).

Swords of "Special type 2"

21. C2504 Graasand, Haderup, sogn, Ginding herred, Ringkøbing amt, Jylland.
22. D1031 Sjørring Sø, Sjørring sogn, Hundborg herred, Thisted amt, Jylland.

Uncertain types

23. C23622 Broager, Broager sogn, Nybøl herred, Sønderborg amt, Jylland (Brøndsted 1936, 123; Pedersen 1995, 73). Type JP X or V.
24. C1613 Hjerminsø, Hjerminde sogn, Middelsom herred, Viborg amt, Jylland.
25. C20600 Ravnholt, Tiset sogn, Aarhus amt, Jylland Type JP D or U (Brøndsted 1936).
26. C5204 Kolindsund, Djur Sønder herred, Randers amt, Jylland.
27. C20367 Veggerslev, Veggerslev sogn, Djurs Nørre herred, Randers amt, Jylland.
28. C5864 Hurup, Als, Hindsted herred, Ålborg amt, Jylland (a clay cast for a bronze hilt).

Zealand

Swords of type A

29. C16348 Hørby, Holbæk amt, Sjælland (Brøndsted 1936, 200; Pedersen 1995, 69).

Swords of types H/I

30. C23627 Kirkmosegård, København, Sjælland (Pedersen 1995, 69).
31. C24550 Sørup Sø, Måløv sogn, Smørum herred, Københavns amt, Sjælland (ibid. 69).
32. C24554 Tudeå, Hejninge, Slagelse herred, Sorø amt, Sjælland.

Swords of type O

33. C23666 Høllenslev, Holbæk amt, Sjælland. Variant JP O1.

Swords of type R

34. C16430 Søborg Sø, Søborg sogn, Holbo herred, Frederiksborg amt, Sjælland (Peirce 2002, 106).

Swords of type S

35. C5821 Frølund, Tornborg sogn, Slagelse herred, Sorø amt, Sjælland (Lund 2004 Fig. 3).
36. 15556 Køge havn, Køge sogn, Ramsø herred, København amt, Sjælland.
37. C25684 Magleø, Korsør Nor, Tornborg sogn, Slagelse herred, Sorø amt, Sjælland (Pedersen 1995, 71).

38. C25683 Magleø, Korsør Nor, Tomborg sogn, Slagelse herred, Sorø amt, Sjælland (ibid.).
39. C5821 Storebælt, Frølund Fed, Tårnborgh sogn, Slagelse herred, Sorø amt, Sjælland (ibid.).

Swords of type V

40. C22323 Næstelsø, Næstelsø sogn, Hammer herred, Præstø amt.
41. C5818 Osted, Osted sogn, Volborgs herred, København amt (Peirce 2002, 112).
42. FSM (Fyns Stiftelsemuseum) A 1775 Jørlunde sogn, Lyng-Fredriksborg herred, Frederiksborg amt, Sjælland.

Swords of type X

43. C8727 Tissø, St. Fuglede sogn, Ars herred, Holbæk amt, Sjælland.

Swords of "Special type 1"

44. C3118 Kallungborg/Holbæk, Sjælland (Peirce 2002, 30).

Swords of "Special type 2"

45. C1849 Øster Egesborg, Bårge herred, Præstø amt, Sjælland.

Uncertain types

46. C25655 Herlufmagle, Tybjerg herred Sjælland.
47. C26043 Værebros å, Gundsøsnagle sogn, Sømme herred, København amt, Sjælland.

Langeland

Swords of type V

48. Langelands museum Stengade I, grave 3, Tullebølle, Langeland. Nørre herred, Svendborg amt (Brøndsted 1936 Fig. 66).

Uncertain types

49. Langelandsmuseum Longelse, Longelse sogn, Svendborg amt, Langeland, Probably JP type X or V.

Lolland

Swords of type V

50. C8304 Errindlev, Errindlev sogn, Fuglse, Maribo amt (Brøndsted 1936 Fig. 93-94; Pedersen 1995, 72).
51. C7371 Hoby, Gloslunde, Maribo Lolland, (Brøndsted 1936 Fig. 88).

Uncertain types

52. B34881 Nysted, Lolland. Probably type JP B or C.
53. C25487 Ventave Storeø.

Danish Swords without Provenance

Swords of type E

54. UI1364

List 2

Swords from Hedeby and its vicinity

Swords of type H

1. Haithabu (Geibig 1991, Kat.-Nr. 287; Taf. 159/6).

Swords of type K

2. Haithabu (ibid. Kat.-Nr. 276 Taf. 156,1-3).
3. Haithabu (ibid. Kat.-Nr. 277 Taf. 157,1-3).
4. Haithabu JP K? (ibid. Kat.-Nr. 284 Taf. 159,3).

Swords of type L

5. Haithabu JP L? (Geibig 1991 Kat.-Nr. 282 Taf. 159,1).
6. Schleswig-Holstein (ibid. Kat.-Nr. 332 Taf. 165,1-3).

Swords of type N

7. Angeln (Geibig 1991 Kat.-Nr. 329 Taf. 165,1-3).

Swords of type O

8. Angeln (Geibig 1991 Kat.-Nr. 330 Taf. 165,4-5).
9. Haddebyer Noor (ibid. Kat.-Nr. 274 Taf. 155,4).

Swords of type S

10. Haithabu (Geibig 1991 Kat.-Nr. 293 Taf. 160,3).
11. Haithabu (ibid. Kat.-Nr. 301 Taf. 161,2).
12. Haithabu (ibid. Kat.-Nr. 304 Taf. 161,5).

Swords of type V

13. Haddebyer Noor (Geibig 1991 Kat.-Nr. 273 Taf. 155,1-3).
14. Haithabu (ibid. Kat.-Nr. 280 Taf. 158,5-7).
15. Haithabu (ibid. Kat.-Nr. 303 Taf. 161,4).

List 3

Swords from Scania

Swords from the Late Vendel period

1. SHM 2110:73 Vendel/Viking (Behmer 1939 Taf. LIV,3).

Swords of type B

2. LUHM (Lund universitetes Historiska museum) 9999 Hällestad (Strömberg 1961, 61 Taf. 40,3; Androshchuk 2007, 162 nr.14).
3. SHM 28271 Lund, Källby (Arbman 1937, 216; Wilson 1955, 105

Swords of type W

16. Schleswig (Geibig 1991 Kat.-Nr. 324 Taf. 164,4-5).

Swords of type X

17. Haithabu JP X (Geibig 1991 Kat.-Nr. 279 Taf. 158,1-4).

Swords of type Y

18. Haithabu JP Y (Geibig 1991 Kat.-Nr. 302 Taf. 161,3).

Swords of 'Distinctive type 1'

19. Haithabu (Geibig 1991 Kat.-Nr. 275 Taf. 156,4-65).

Uncertain types of swords

20. Haithabu JP? (Geibig 1991 Kat.-Nr. 278 Taf. 157,4-6).
21. Haithabu JP? (ibid. Kat.-Nr. 283 Taf. 159,2).
22. Haithabu JP? (ibid. Kat.-Nr. 285 Taf. 159,4).
23. Haithabu JP? (ibid. Kat.-Nr. 286 Taf. 159,5).
24. Haithabu JP? (ibid. Kat.-Nr. 288 Taf. 159,7).
25. Haithabu JP? (ibid. Kat.-Nr. 289 Taf. 159,8).
26. Haithabu JP? (ibid. Kat.-Nr. 290 Taf. 159,9).
27. Haithabu JP? (ibid. Kat.-Nr. 291 Taf. 160,1).
28. Haithabu JP? (ibid. Kat.-Nr. 292 Taf. 160,2).
29. Haithabu JP? (ibid. Kat.-Nr. 294 Taf. 160,4).
30. Haithabu JP? (ibid. Kat.-Nr. 295 Taf. 160,5).
31. Haithabu JP? (ibid. Kat.-Nr. 296 Taf. 160,6).
32. Haithabu JP N/X? (ibid. Kat.-Nr. 297 Taf. 160,7).
33. Haithabu JP N/X? (ibid. Kat.-Nr. 298 Taf. 160,8).
34. Haithabu JP? (ibid. Kat.-Nr. 299 Taf. 160,7).
35. Haithabu JP? (ibid. Kat.-Nr. 300 Taf. 161,1).
36. Haithabu JP? (ibid. Kat.-Nr. 300 Taf. 161,1).

ff.; Strömberg 1961, 46).

Swords of type D

4. LUHM 29087 St. Köpinge (Strömberg 1961, 27 Taf. 64,3,3).
5. LUHM 24929 Österlövsta, Oppmansjön (Strömberg 1961, 72 Taf. 64,1).

Swords of types H/I

6. LUHM 29026 Burköv, Arlov (Strömberg 1961, 15 Taf. 40,1).
7. LUHM 12358 Kristianstad, Hammarsjön (Strömberg 1961, 43 Taf. 40,2).
8. Löderups, Hagestad (Strömberg 1963, 1 ff.; 1961, 149 Abb. 13).
9. Löddeköpinge, Vikhögsvägen (Olsson 1976, 106 Fig. 66–67).
10. LUHM 3213.

Swords of type M

11. LUHM 13078.

Swords of type O

12. LUHM 28399 Kvistofta, Rya (Strömberg 1961, 44 Taf. 39,1).
13. SHM 3217:52 Skanör (ibid. 56 Taf. 64,2).

Swords of type V

14. LUHM 13077 Trelleborg.
15. LUHM (without provenance)

Swords of type X

16. LUHM 24925 Bosärp (Strömberg 1961, 57 Taf. 40,4; Svanberg 2003, 162; 295 Fig. 67,7).

Swords of type Z

17. KM 661666:1903 Lund (Bergman/Billberg 1976, 387 ff. Fig. 341a-b).
18. LUHM 22930 Sövde, Vrångebäck (Rydbeck 1932, 253 f.; Strömberg 1961, 21-22 Taf. 65,1; Androshchuk 2003, 35 ff. Fig. 8).
19. SHM 4515 Ö.Vemmenhög, Dybäck (Rydbeck 1932, 253 f.; Strömberg 1961, 66-67 Taf. 65,2; Graham-Campbell 1980, 70 Pl. 250; Androshchuk 2003 Fig. 7).

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