

# Viking and medieval amulets in Scandinavia

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Identification of Viking period and medieval amulets entails problems of source criticism: the literary sources on medicine, leechcraft etc. are all late and depend on West-European prototypes, and to distinguish between amulets, ornaments and cult objects is difficult. Many types of amulets have been postulated for the Viking period and the Middle Ages, but the theories sometimes seem exaggerated.

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The identification of Viking and medieval amulets from Scandinavia entails several problems of source criticism. For instance, potentially relevant plant and animal remains in the archaeological material may have dissolved or been overlooked, and consequently what survives may not be representative. All texts on medicine and leechcraft are late (the earliest is from the 13th century) and depend on West-European prototypes (Sørensen, 1966). They may reflect contemporary Scandinavian practices, but their value for our understanding of earlier customs remains doubtful unless confirmed by archaeological finds. In fact, all Scandinavian texts concerning amulets are late and projecting their information backwards in time can easily result in a circular argument. For example, attention may be drawn to the discrepancy between literature and actual remains in the case of runic inscriptions on weapons. The *Sigrdrifumál*, written in the 13th century, contains a famous passage on how to incise "runes of victory" on weapons. In actual fact only 20 of the 5.000 or so weapons surviving from the Viking and Medieval periods bear runic inscriptions, and none of them has a magical content (Düwel, 1981, esp. pp. 163-167).

It is also notoriously difficult to draw the line between amulets on the one hand and orna-

ments or cult objects on the other. In the Viking period, miniatures of tools and weapons of silver or bronze were frequently worn on a necklace (Fig. 1.) They can easily have been ornaments. The interpretation of them as amulets rests partly on the simultaneous occurrence of identical models in iron (Arrhenius, 1961) partly on the interpretation of similar, earlier objects from graves in England and on the Continent (Meaney, 1981). The suggested association of some of these models with particular pagan gods raises further questions. Apart from Thor's hammer, which seems certain, none of them is an obvious attribute and their identification with Odin, Thor and Freyr rests mainly on inference. Finally, it is noteworthy that none of the Scandinavian Viking amulets depicts animals of the species which later sources associate with the pagan gods, e.g. Thor's goats, Odin's ravens or Freyr's boar.

*Miniature objects* are normally of metal; most of them are miniatures of tools and weapons which have a fairly long European tradition (Fig. 1) (Arrhenius, 1961; Näsman, 1972-73; Schwarz-Mackensen, 1978; Meaney, 1981; Duczko, 1986). The miniatures of weapons from the dwellings at Eketorp, Öland, probably date from the 6th-7th century and conform to contemporaneous West-European types of models (Näsman, 1972-73). The Viking minia-



Fig. 1. Pendant miniatures of bronze: horse, sword, spear, chair, from Sweden; provenance unknown. Museum of National Antiquities, Stockholm. (Photo ATA, Stockholm. Drawing from Arrhenius 1961.) — Miniaturer av brons: hest, sverd, spyd og stol fra Sverige, ukjent funsted.

tures which have been found *in situ* in graves seem normally to have been suspended from a necklace rather than a chatelaine. This facilitates their distinction from toilet implements, but raises the possibility of their being ornaments. For instance, the Viking sieve spoon normally lacks a handle, and its position on a necklace suggests that its function was amuletic or ornamental rather than practical. (Duczko 1985, pp. 47 f.; Meaney 1981, p. 152. For a practical function of those on chatelaines see Gräs-lund, 1978–79, esp. p. 299.) Circular shield-shaped pendants of bronze or silver are found on necklaces from the 10th century. Since they are not usually associated with other miniature weapons, they may have been regarded as ornaments although their form and decoration coincide strikingly with early Anglo-Saxon examples (e.g. Arbman, 1940, Pl. 97:1–20; Duczko, 1985, p. 50; Meaney, 1981, Fig. V:6). In addition to those from Western Europe, Scandinavian Viking miniatures include spade-like objects, scythes, strike-a-lights and staffs (Arrhenius, 1961). Their precise symbolic connotations are unknown, although Odin, Thor and the fertility god Freyr have been mentioned in this connection (Arrhenius, 1961; Andersen, 1971). Miniature chairs are apparently peculiar to Scandinavia. So far, 13 examples are known from Sweden (incl. Gotland) and Denmark

(incl. Bornholm). They date from the mid-Viking period (c. 875/900–950/975), and have been connected with the cult of Odin (Arrhenius, 1961, esp. p. 157; Drescher and Hauck, 1982, esp. pp. 289, 294 f.).

*Pendant capsules* of silver occur sporadically in mid- and late-Viking contexts (Stenberger, 1958, pp. 181–185; Duczko, 1978–79 and 1985, pp. 61–66). They presumably contained fragrant herbs, and one from Birka grave 552 has a runic inscription indicating that it was used against vermin (Duczko, 1985).

*Votive rings* are a group of amulets peculiar to East-Scandinavia, esp. to Uppland, Södermanland and Västmanland in Sweden (Fig 2; Ström, 1974 and 1984). They are large rings (diameter about 15 cm) made from an iron rod with twisted locks of different types. When found complete, they have suspended hammer-, spatula- and L-shaped miniatures, occasionally with additional rings and spirals. Ninety-five per cent of the approximately 450 “Thor’s rings” of this type come from the Mälär region, and most of them date from the 9th century. They could be worn around the neck, as shown by some of the inhumation graves at Birka, but since the overwhelming majority of such rings come from cremation graves their use in the world of the living remains conjectural. The association of such rings with the

Fig. 2. Votive ring from Birka, grave 985, Uppland, Sweden. Viking period. Museum of National Antiquities, Stockholm. (Photo ATA, Stockholm.) — Votivring fra Birka, grav 985. Vikingtid.



cult of Thor seems reasonable, and their regional distribution is striking. But it should not be overlooked that they bear a marked resemblance to small rings with miniatures of both iron and other metals found in other areas of Scandinavia (e.g. Arrhenius, 1961; Andersen, 1971; Müller-Wille, 1976).

*Miniature hammers* occur in pre-Viking times both in Scandinavia and in England (Fig 3; Schwarz-Mackensen, 1978, p. 85 with refs.; Meaney, 1981, p. 151). But their number increased markedly in Viking-Age Scandinavia. The material is iron, bronze, occasionally amber, and — from the 10th century onwards — silver. They are predominantly, though not exclusively, found in women's graves, while most of the silver examples come from hoards of the late 10th and the 11th century (Stenberger, 1958, esp. pp. 167–171; Ström, 1984, esp. p. 136). The hammer-shaped pendant is normally interpreted as the symbol of the god Thor, an interpretation based on contemporaneous



Fig. 3. Pendant hammer of silver from Birka, grave 750. 10th century. Museum of National Antiquities, Stockholm. (Photo ATA, Stockholm.) — Miniaturhammer av sølv fra Birka, grav 750. 900-tallet.



Fig. 4. Casting mould of soapstone from Trendgården, Jutland, Denmark. Danish National Museum, Copenhagen. (Photo Danish National Museum, Copenhagen.) — En støpeform av klebersten fra Trendgården, Jylland.

iconography and on later but fairly reliable literary evidence. Its amuletic significance is taken to be generally prophylactic. The proliferation of silver hammers in the 10th and 11th centuries has occasionally been interpreted as a pagan riposte to the Christian pendant cross with became current in the same period. The casting mould from Trendgården, Jutland, demonstrates that cross and hammer were manufactured simultaneously (Fig. 4).

*Cross pendants* have been found in all parts of Scandinavia (Fig. 5). Some, particularly bronze crosses, are found in graves, but most of the surviving pieces are of silver and have been recovered from hoards (Stenberger, 1958, pp. 171–181; Müller-Wille, 1976, pp. 37 f.; Gräslund, 1984 with refs.). Crosses in graves are at times associated with other types of amulet pendants, in Birka grave 968, for instance, with a miniature chair which is usually interpreted as a symbol of Odin, the figure of a small woman, possibly a pagan “valkyrie”, and a shield-shaped pendant (Gräslund, 1984, p. 115). Another grave contained both a cross and a Thor’s hammer (Birka grave 750; Gräslund, 1984, esp. p. 118). Similarly, a grave in Taskula, Finland, had a pendant cross and a miniature axe (Kivikoski, 1965, p. 32). Such combinations of pagan and Christian amulets correspond to the occurrence of cross pendants in graves showing pagan ritual, and probably reflect individual vagaries in the period of transition to Christi-



Fig. 5. Pendant cross of silver from Birka, grave 480. 10th century. Museum of National Antiquities, Stockholm. (Photo ATA, Stockholm.) — Hengekors av sølv fra Birka, grav 480. 900-tallet.

anity (Gräslund, 1984, pp. 115–118). Normally, neither hammers nor crosses found in hoards are hacked (Stenberger, 1958, pp. 168, 176).

As mentioned, *animals* associated with specific gods do not occur among the amulet miniatures. The bosses on some types of 10th century brooches are occasionally shaped like seminaturalistic goats which may have had an amuletic function through the animal’s association with Thor (Roesdahl, 1982, p. 162). However, other animal types used for bosses are without deistic connotations. On the other hand, a small bronze frog crouching behind what has been interpreted as female genitals is clearly amuletic (Fig. 6; Brøndsted, 1942). It was found in a woman’s grave in Jutland, Denmark.

*Figure representations*, including bracteates which may have been worn as amulets (Hauck, 1985, vol. 1:1), are of more interest for the history of religion. But two groups should be mentioned. One is peculiar to Scandinavia, namely the small gold plaques with repoussé renderings of a man, a woman or a couple. There



Fig. 6. Grave amulet of bronze: frog or toad crouching behind female genitals (?), from Sønderteglård, Jutland, Denmark. Viking period, probably 10th century. Danish National Museum, Copenhagen. (Photo Danish National Museum, Copenhagen.) — Gravamulett av bronse: frosk sammenkrøpet bak en vulva (?). Vikingtid, sannsynligvis 900-tallet.

seems to be both a regional and a chronological distinction between the iconographies: a man and woman rendered on separate sheets appear to be pre-Viking and mainly South-east Scandinavian (Fig. 7), while the couple is of Viking date and has a pan-Scandinavian distribution (Fig. 8; Stenberger, 1973). Although the identification of the figures with specific gods is uncertain, the facing and sometimes embracing pair is probably a fertility symbol (Nordén, 1938; Blindheim, 1959; Holmqvist, 1958; Lidén, 1969). The pieces have no sign of fastening, and their diminutive size and fragility argue against a practical or ornamental function. The earliest are pre-Viking (Stenberger, 1973) and they seem to have continued through most of the Viking period. Some have been found singly, but surprisingly often they occur together in large numbers, e.g. 26 at Helgö, Sweden, 19 at Mære, Norway (Gustafson, 1899; Holmqvist, 1958, Lidén, 1969). The latest, exciting discovery of hundreds of such pieces in one locality on the Island of Bornholm

strengthens the theory that the gold plaques served as votive gifts (Watt, 1987). The other group is, in contrast, found only singly and rarely, and consists of small bronze or bone statuettes of sitting men. Those that can be dated are from the 11th century. The ithyphallic figure from Rällinge, Sweden, is sometimes taken to be a model of the fertility god Freyr which Adam of Bremen mentions as one of the cult statues in the Temple of Uppsala, while other statuettes of bearded men are interpreted variously as Thor or Odin (e.g. Drescher and Hauck, 1982). They are sometimes taken to be amulets, on the strength of two saga texts of the 13th century which mention 9th- and 10th-century worship of Freyr and Thor respectively (*Vatnsdæla saga*, ch. 10 and *Hallfredar saga*, ch. 6; cf. Turville-Petre, 1964, p. 248). There is little foundation for such theories, however, and the function of the statuettes remains uncertain. Those of bone may have been gaming pieces (Roesdahl, 1982, p. 163).

*Beads* have at times been interpreted as pos-

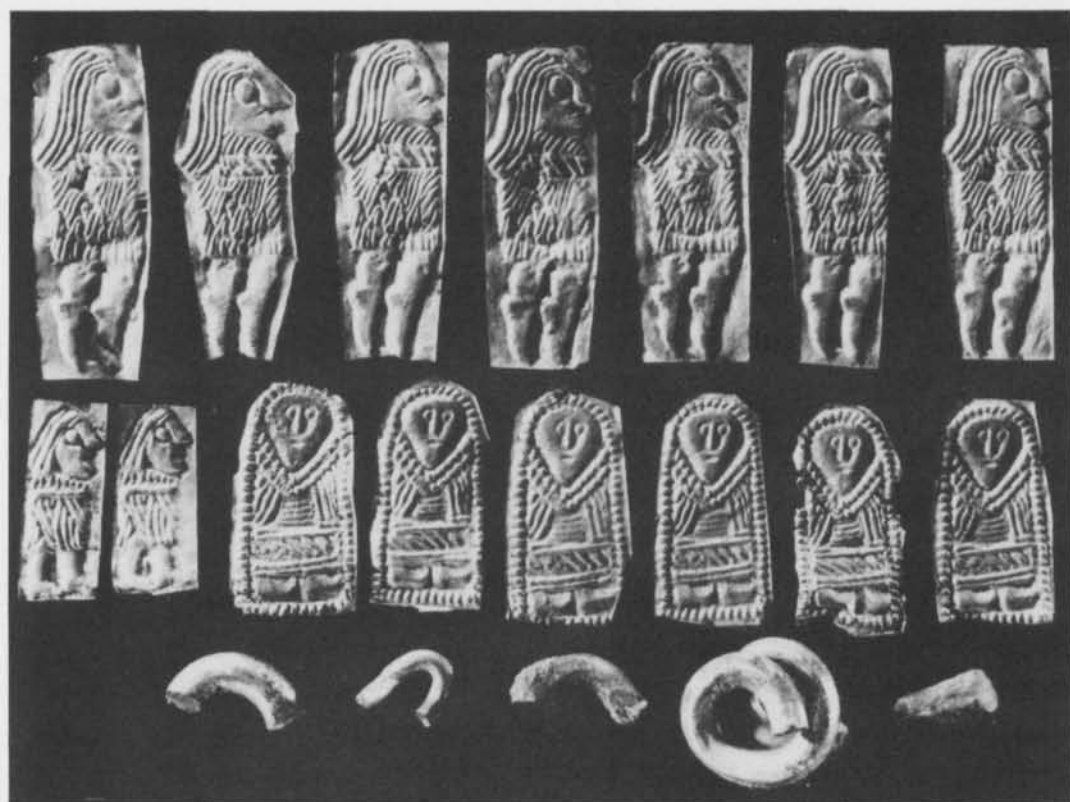


Fig. 7. Plaques of gold from Eketorp, Öland, Sweden. Migration period. Museum of National Antiquities, Stockholm. (Photo ATA, Stockholm.) — "Gullgubber" fra Eketorp, Öland. Folkevandringstid.

sible amulets, with special emphasis on those made of jet, amber and rock crystal (Meaney, 1981). There are some Viking finds which might support this view. For instance, jet beads recorded from Norwegian graves seem to occur singly (Petersen, 1940, pp. 207 f.), and in a woman's grave at Sunnmøre, Norway, a jet bead was associated with a snake of jet, a woman-shaped bead of amber, and 66 glass beads (Blindheim, 1958–59, p. 82). In Sweden, amber is frequently the material when a bead is found singly in a grave, and even on large necklaces there are examples of amber being used for only one bead (Gräslund, 1972–73, pp. 173 f.). Against this must be held the great number of finds where amber beads are clearly ornamental, however. Moreover the inclusion of all types of beads in jewellery hoards indicates a pecuniary rather than amuletic value (Stenber-

ger, 1958, pp. 222 f.). Rock crystal seems to have been used mainly for ornamental beads, several occurring together with other types of beads on necklaces. Pendants of rock crystal are very rare, and have been found mainly on Gotland and in Finland (Stenberger, 1958, pp. 200–203). Most of them date from the second half of the 11th century. The most impressive example, the necklace from Lilla Rone, Gotland, contains 14 crystal balls set in silver filigree and is clearly a very valuable ornament. Since rock-crystal pendants are rarely found singly and were apparently imported over a short period only, they seem — like the beads — to have been ornaments rather than amulets. Pendants made from other imported precious and semi-precious stones, e.g. an amethyst found at Hedeby (Arrhenius, 1978), may have been attributed with magic power, but such interpretations rest

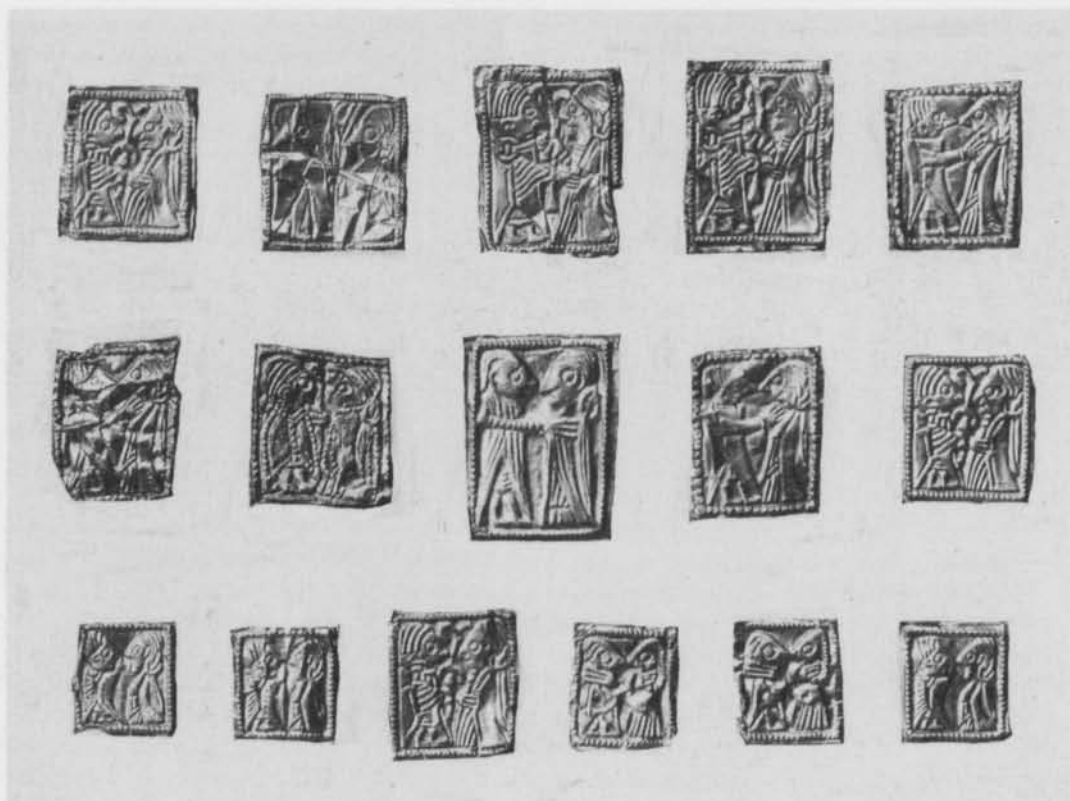


Fig. 8. Plaques of gold from Hauge, Rogaland, Norway. Viking period, probably 10th century. Historisk Museum, Bergen. (Photo Historisk Museum, Bergen.) — "Gullgubber" fra Hauge, Rogaland. Vikingtid, sannsynligvis 900-tallet.

on the European lapidaries and not on the circumstances of the Scandinavian finds.

In addition to being used for beads, *jet* has been carved into finger- and arm-rings recovered from a few 9th century graves along the Norwegian coast (Petersen, 1940; Shetelig, 1944). Apart from an arm ring found at Birka, *jet* does not seem to be recorded in other Scandinavian areas, and there is nothing to suggest that the material was regarded as inherently amuletic. Three animal-shaped figures of *jet* and another three of amber, all likewise of the 9th century and from coastal Norway, are at times interpreted as amulets (Shetelig, 1944). However, their very rarity and regional distribution caution against this view.

*Amber* seems also to have been used mainly for ornaments, but there is some evidence that it could be used for amulets. At Birka, for in-

stance, a couple of men's graves contained a piece of amber together with a coin, a bead or such like in a purse (Gräslund, 1972-73, p. 174). There are also some indications from Gotland that amber could be used for grave amulets (Trotzig, 1983, Fig. 10). Some men's graves yielded small axe- and adze-heads, some women's squarish pieces with a groove (probably a vulva, cf. Brønsted, 1944; Meaney, 1981, Fig. VI:ww). They were lying at the feet of the deceased, and are consequently unlikely to have been worn. Some of them have been carved from beads.

*Charon's obol* is sporadically documented in Scandinavian graves from the Roman Iron Age and the Migration period (Schetelig, 1907). A critical study shows that the best evidence for the custom in the Viking period comes from eastern Sweden, while it seems to have been

rare in Denmark and the evidence from Norway and Finland is inconclusive (Gräslund, 1965–1966; Skaarup, 1976, pp. 192 f; Müller-Wille, 1976, pp. 42 f.). Graves of the 13th and 14th centuries have documented Charon's obol from Sweden, Scania and Norway. In Swedish folklore, the custom can be followed again from the 18th to the 20th century, and a continuity from the Middle Ages seems likely (Gräslund, 1965–66).

A different category of grave amulet is the *Stone-Age axe-heads* which have at times been found in medieval Danish and Swedish graves (Moltke, 1938, pp. 144–147 with refs.; Almquist, 1974). Many of them bear runic inscriptions, mostly unintelligible, and their amuletic function is probably similar to that of fossils and "snake stones" (Almquist, 1974).

Possible amulets of *natural origin* are rarely recorded from Viking graves, but one at Ramme, Jutland, contained an echinite and two small stones together with an amber ring and eight beads of glass and amber (Brøndsted, 1936, p. 111), while a more definitely amuletic purpose may be ascribed to the assemblage of owl pellets, henbane seeds and fragmentary pig's jaw found in a woman's grave at Fyrkat, Jutland (Roedahl, 1977, pp. 143, 150 and 1982, p. 162). An amulet bag occurs in Birka grave 97 (Arbman, 1940, p. 64), and further amulet bags with *inter alia* human hair and "snake stones" have occasionally come to light in Finnish graves of the Viking period (Kivikoski, 1965, p. 31). On the other hand, fossils have been found spread over most of the town site at Hedeby, and there is nothing to indicate that they were used as amulets. This evidence cautions against general interpretations of fossils as amulets in Viking Scandinavia (Metzger-Krahé, 1978). It is also uncertain whether the stones listed from Icelandic pagan graves can be interpreted as amulets (Steffensen, 1966–69, pp. 192–194; Meaney, 1981, pp. 102 f.) Bear claws in Scandinavian graves come generally from the pelts on which the deceased had been placed; only a very few examples from Sweden can be shown to have served as amulets (Petré, 1980). A bear tooth was found in a child's grave, Birka no. 890 (Gräslund, 1972–73, p. 170). Bronze miniatures of bear teeth form a group of

amulets peculiar to Viking-Age Finland, while graves on the island of Åland from the 7th century onwards often contain a clay miniature of an animal's paw, a type of amulet which has parallels in Russia (Kivikoski, 1965). The bear tooth miniature may have had a general apotropaic function, while that of the animal's paw is uncertain (Kivikoski, 1965). Evidence for herbs, animal parts and gems as amulets is on the whole mostly literary and from later in the Middle Ages. King Magnus Eriksson (1316–1374), for instance, owned a "stone" taken from a toad's head. It was believed to sweat in the vicinity of poison. Snake's tongues were charms against black magic and disease. In 1272, King Magnus Lagabøter of Norway sent two snake's tongues to Bishop Arni on Iceland, and part of a snake's tongue is listed in the royal inventory at Bohus Castle in 1340. Sapphire was likewise believed to cure illness, as evidenced by the inscription on a medieval finger ring from Visby: "my power works against the poison of disease". The plants which seem to have been amuletic, as opposed to medical, include garlic, grains of barley, *Cicuta* and *Daphne* (Bø, Swartling and Kivikoski, 1956). The oldest Scandinavian law texts contain brief passages on sorcery, but the Icelandic *Grágás* seems to be alone in specifying an implement: a "stone" which in medieval Norse terminology could mean either mineral or animal origin for the magic piece (Steffensen, 1966–69, pp. 192–194).

An apotropaic function of the *allium* species is suggested by *inter alia* the runic *laukaR* inscriptions on some bracteates of the Migration period from Denmark (Bæksted, 1952, p. 126; Heizmann, 1986, with refs.). A magical function of leek and/or onion would be intimately related to, and probably derived from, the plants' use in Classical and Medieval medicine (Heizmann, 1986). However, critical modern studies contradict interpretations of *allium* as an ingredient in a phallic cult, since the only reference for such usage is the very late and novelistic story of the *vólisa*, a horse phallus, included in the Flateyjar Book written in the late 14th century (Heizmann, 1986; Klaus Düwel, Habilschrift, Universität Göttingen, unpublished MS., esp. pp. 200–209, with refs.)

Rings can be interpreted as amuletic only by association or inscription. No Scandinavian amulet ring known so far seems to be earlier than the 13th century (Moltke, 1938; Liestøl, 1980, pp. 68 f.).

Runes were not inherently magical — first and foremost they were the practical script of a pre-parchment society. But they were also used to write magical formulae, from the Migration period into the late Middle Ages. The Scandinavian examples of runic amulets (as opposed to magic inscriptions on *inter alia* runestones, bracteates etc.) are sporadic. The earliest recovered so far is a copper sheet with what is interpreted as an invocation against disease, found on Gotland in a grave from c. A.D. 700 (Gustavson and Brink, 1981). A few, similar invocations on metal sheets come from Viking graves in Sweden (Nordén, 1943). But the great number of runic amulets are post-Viking. Many of the inscriptions are corrupt or pure gibberish. But when they can be read, they normally use Christian formulae and invocations, mostly in Latin (i. a. *Pater Noster*, *Christus regnat*, the names of the evangelists or archangels, etc.). Some of them include pan-European magical phrases, frequently *agla* (for the Hebraic *Attah Gibbor Leolam Adonaj*, i. e. ‘‘Thou art strong in eternity, Lord’’). The majority of amulets have similarly generalized prophylactic inscriptions, in some cases specifying the person to be protected, notably on the lead sheets from Odense, Denmark and Boge, Gotland (Moltke, 1938, pp. 120–122; Gustavson, 1984). But some inscriptions were directed against specific illnesses, notably the invocation of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus known from a lead sheet found at Alvastra, Sweden, and a small piece of wood from the wharf in Bergen, Norway. The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus were assumed to protect against fever, particularly malaria (Gustavson, 1984, p. 67; Møller-Christensen, 1959 with refs; Liestøl, 1980, pp. 73–77.). Runic amulets occur normally as lead, sometimes copper, sheets which have been folded or cut into the shape of a cross (Fig. 9), but they were also made as runic sticks or from bone. Their function varied. Some have been interred with the dead, presumably to protect them. Uninscribed crosses must have had the same func-



Fig. 9. Runic amulet of lead sheet from Osen, Sogn og Fjordane, Norway. 13th century (?). Historisk Museum, Bergen. (Photo Historisk Museum, Bergen.) — Runeamulett, blyblikk fra Osen, Sogn og Fjordane. 1200-tallet (?). Høyde ca. 6 cm.

tion, e. g. the more than fifty wooden crosses from the Norse graves at Herjolfsnes, Greenland (Nørlund, 1924). Others, such as the Odense sheet, were deposited in churchyard soil or a grave, possibly to transfer illness from the living to the dead (Moltke, 1938 with refs.; Gustavson, 1984). Some have come to light under church floors, inserted between the planks, probably to protect the living (e. g. Liestøl, 1978; Olsen ed., 1940 ff., vol. 4, No. 348, pp. 140–143). Others again have been found in towns under circumstances which indicate that they had been accidentally lost and hence presumably worn by their owners (e. g. Liestøl, 1980, No. 637, pp. 73–77, from Bergen; Gus-

tavson and Brink, 1980, pp. 199–201 from Stockholm).

Finally, a runic lead cross from Sunnfjord, Norway, may have been placed under the floor of a dwelling, again presumably for general protection (Knudsen and Dyvik, 1980).

### Conclusion

The above survey suggests that despite certain overlaps, there is a fairly clear demarkation as regards the use of amulets between the Viking period and the late Middle Ages. In the Viking period, the emphasis is on miniatures while amulets of natural origin and runic amulets are relatively few and often of questionable interpretation. Another peculiarity of the Viking amulets is the absence of close connections with pagan gods; apart from the Thor's hammer, there is no verifiable instance of divine attributes used as amulets. Conversely, in the later Middle Ages amulets of natural origin dominate both the written and the archaeological sources, while the numerous runic amulets frequently demonstrate ties with the Christian cult the cross being the only miniature. Even allowing for losses and overlaps, the tendency seems marked enough to be culturally significant, and indicates inter alia that only with the utmost caution should later, written sources be used to interpret Viking objects as amuletic.

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## Sammandrag

Identifikasjonen av skandinaviske amuletter byr på en rekke kildekritiske problem: i arkeologisk materiale kan organiske gjenstander være formulert eller oversatt; alle tekster om medisin, magi etc. er sene (eldste: 1200-tallet) og bygget på europeiske forbilder; diktning kan være direkte misvisende, som *Sigrdrífumál* om "seierruner" på våpen (c. 5 000 våpen bevart, 20 av dem har runeinnskrifter, ingen innskrift kan tolkes magisk, cf. Düwel, 1981); skillet mellom amulett, kultobjekt og ornament er vanskelig å presisere; Tors hammer er det eneste gudeattributt som kan identifiseres.

*Miniatyrer* av våpen, redskap o. lign. er identifisert som amuletter dels p.g.a. overensstemmelser med europeiske paralleller, dels fordi smykkefunksjonen kan utelukkes siden det forekommer eksemplarer også i jern (fig. 1). Gjenstandsgruppene omfatter våpen, skjold, spade, sigd, stav, ildstål, silskje, stol. Symbolfunksjon er ukjent. Dateringene dekker merovingertid og vikingtid.

*Votivringer* av jern er spesielle for Østskandinavia, 95 % av de bevarte c. 450 eksemplarene er funnet i Mälaronrådet (fig. 2). Når de er intakte, har de fleste påhengt hammer-, spatula- og L-formete miniatyrer. Sammenheng med Torskult er sannsynlig.

*Miniatyrhamre* kjennes før vikingtid i både England og Skandinavia, men de fleste er fra vikingtid (fig. 3). Materialet er jern, bronse, f.o.m. 900-tallet sølv, i noen tilfelle rav. De fleste av jern og bronse er funnet i kvinnegraver, sølv-eksemplarene vesentlig i skattefunn nedlagt sent 900- og 1000-tall. Hammeren tolkes normalt som Torssymbol, og amulettfunksjonen som generelt profylaktisk. Økningen av sølvhamre på 900- og 1000-tallet antas å være reaksjon på bruk av kors (fig. 4).

*Hengekors* er funnet i alle deler av Skandinavia (fig. 5). Noen, vesentlig av bronse, er funnet i graver, de fleste av sølv er fra skattefunn. Vanligvis er hverken hamre eller kors i skattefunn hakket.

*Dyrefigurer* er normalt ikke brukt som amuletter, og det er ikke bevart eksemplarer på guders attributtdyr. En sannsynlig amulett (ved fød-

selshjelp?) er derimot en halvnaturalistisk frosk sammenkrøpet bak en vulva (?) (fig. 6).

*Figurfremstillinger* er normalt ikke amulettiske. "Gullgubbene" som er spesielle for Skandinavia, er sannsynligvis votivgaver (fig. 7, 8). Små statuetter av bein eller bronse er tidvis tolket som amuletter og kopier etter gudebilder. Det er ingen bevis for slike teorier.

*Perler*, spesielt av rav, jet og bergkrystall, tolkes tidvis som amuletter og noen funn bestyrker dette synet. Men i langt de fleste funn er perlene smykker. Det samme gjelder sannsynligvis henger av bergkrystall. Henger av andre importerte halvedelsteiner kan ha vært tillagt amulettfunksjon, men slik tolkning er basert på de europeiske lapidariene, ikke de skandinaviske funnomstendigheter.

*Charons mynt* er sporadisk belagt i skandinaviske graver. De fleste funn fra vikingtid er fra Sverige, fra 12- og 1300-tall også i Skåne og Norge.

*Steinalders økser* er funnet i noen svenske og danske graver fra middelalder. Mange av dem har uleselig runeinnskrift, og amulettfunksjonen tilsvarer sannsynligvis fossiler og "ormsteiner".

*Naturamuletter* er meget sjeldne i vikingtid, men det er eksemplarer i kvinnegraver på Jylland, og "pjotreposer" er belagt i Birka og i Finland. Bjørneklør i graver stammer oftest fra fellen på likleiet, men et par eksemplarer fra Sverige er sannsynlige amuletter. Bronseminiatyrer av bjørnetenner er spesielle for Finland i vikingtid, mens graver på Åland ofte har leirminiatyr av en dyrepote. Bjørnetannminiatyren kan ha vært alment apotropaisk, dyrepotens betydning er ukjent. Belegg for amuletter av urter, dyredeler og steiner er iøvrig vesentlig litterære og fra høymiddelalderen. Kong Magnus Eriksson (1316-1374) eiet en "stein" fra et paddehode, den svettet når den kom nær gift. Ormetunge vernet mot sykdom og svart magi; kong Magnus Lagabøter sendte to av dem til biskop Arni på Island i 1272, og en er nevnt i inventariet fra Båhus i 1340. De eldste skandinaviske lover har korte bestemmelser om straff for trolldom, men bare *Grágás* spesifiserer et tryllemiddel, nemlig en "stein", som finnes brukt

som term for amuletter av både mineralsk og animalsk opprinnelse. En apotropaisk funksjon for *allium* er sannsynlig bl. a. utfra *laukaR*-innskriften på danske gullbrakteater fra folkevandringstid; trolig er amulettfunksjonen avledet av plantens bruk i klassisk og middelaldersk medisin. Derimot går moderne kritiske studier mot tolkninger av *allium* som ledd i en fallisk kult, siden det eneste belegget er den sene og fantasifulle historien om *volsa* i *Flateyjarbók*.

*Runer* var ikke i seg selv magiske, de var først og fremst en skrift til praktisk bruk. Men de ble også brukt til magiske formler, fra folkevandringstid til sen middelalder. Eksempler på runeamuletter (i motsetning til magiske runeinnskrifter) er sporadiske. Det eldste funnet til nå er et kopperblykk fra ca. 700 e. Kr., fra en

grav på Gotland; innskriften er tolket som en formel mot sykdom. I Sverige er funnet noen få, lignende stykker fra vikingtid. Men hovedmengden av runeamuletter er fra senere i middelalderen. Mange av innskriftene er imitasjoner av runer. Men når de er leselige, inneholder de normalt kristne formler og påkallelser, oftest på latin. De fleste innskriftene er alment profylaktiske, men noen er rettet mot spesielle sykdommer, oftest feber. Runeamuletter er oftest av blyblykk, tidvis av kopper, som er sammenfoldet eller skåret til et kors (fig. 9), men runepinner av tre eller bein forekommer også. Bruken varierte, og må tolkes utfra de enkelte funnomstendigheter: i grav, under kirkegulv, under husgulv, i byhus.