

Challenging Gender

*A reconsideration of gender in the Viking Age using the mortuary
landscape*

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Acknowledgements

And so it's finally come to this: the writing of acknowledgements, which means I am at the very end of three years of PhD research.

These past three years have been rewarding and fulfilling. To get to spend three years researching and writing about a subject that is, to my mind, both fascinating and vitally important has been a privilege and not least a great deal of fun.

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Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter will introduce the thesis to follow by setting out the research questions and overall aims. It will also serve as an introduction to some of the overarching theoretical frameworks which have informed the thesis.

The dominant perception of sex and gender in the Viking Age holds gender as a natural, binary divide between male and female as two opposite categories, governed by fundamentally different social norms and rules. This thesis aims to examine selected material evidence in the form of mortuary remains in order to examine in what way gender was expressed and to what degree this conforms to a binary pattern. Within this lies a wish to open discussions about how gender in the past is perceived.

Perceptions and interpretations of gender in the Viking Age form the main focus of the thesis, but it will also examine the idea of gender as a natural extension of two different ways of being, with inherently different characteristics, behavioural patterns and internal values. Through this, the backwards projection of current western modes of thinking regarding gender will be questioned. Inherent in this lies a concern with the use of the past as a legitimising tool for current social ideologies.

The main investigatory tool will be elite mortuary contexts in the current day Norwegian county of Vestfold, as will be further elucidated below.

This introductory chapter will first outline my main research questions and the material by which these will be tested. It will introduce the thesis to follow by an overview of the separate chapters and overall structure. It will then settle some points of terminology, before moving on to an introduction to some concerns regarding the nature of knowledge production and thereby an introduction to the theory which forms the foundation for my enquiries: as will be seen below the thesis is written within a framework of understanding knowledge production as culturally specific, and an elucidation of these concerns is therefore integral to introducing the text.

Research aims and questions

As stated above, and as will be discussed throughout this thesis, the general consensus on gender in the Viking Age, both in academic scholarship and in popular dissemination,

tends to position men and women as strictly segregated opposites. This tradition holds that men and women of the upper social strata were so essentially divided, that they were even restricted physically to fixed domains, in which women were given responsibility for tasks *innanstokks*, meaning within the household where she governed as the lady of the house, and men for tasks *utanstokks*, including not just outdoors activities connected to farming, but also everything else, such as trading, travelling and attendance at legal assemblies (see for example Roesdahl 1987:71; Sigurðsson 2008:44). This divide will be further explicated in later chapters, but it provides crucial context for my research questions and is therefore broached here.

Further context is provided in traditional interpretations of burial mounds, which tend towards seeing them as signals of status and power, both of the individual interred, but also of those who created the mound and cultivated a bond with it. The barrows are also often thought to symbolise ownership, and to be property markers. Crucially, these attributes of wealth, status, power and ownership tend to be discussed, in the main, as male prerogatives.

These perceptions have given rise to my first three research questions:

- Does the material evidence, in the form of mortuary contexts, uphold gender as an absolute divide between male and female social roles?
- Does the mortuary evidence support a social model where men are more clearly marked as belonging to the elite?
- Is there, in general, anything that sets male and female burials apart in a way which would support conjectures about different governing social ideals?

These questions will be approached through both the internal and the external aspects of the burials. In this lies an analysis of the grave goods, here conducted through correspondence analysis, and a subsequent analysis of the external expression of the graves, and their placement in the landscape. The methodology will be detailed in Chapter Six, following on from a theoretical and research historical component, as will be outlined below.

Within the first two questions lies an aim to test the hypothesis that gender in the Viking Age can be better understood as fluid and contextual. This was first argued by Carol Clover in 1993 (1993), and has since been given support by other studies (see for example

Hedeager 2011; Mundal 2014). Clover argued that there was only one model, one set of ideal characteristics for both men and women, and that these were what we would term masculine in this period (Clover 1993). Consequently, masculinity need not correspond with a male body, but can be embodied and demonstrated by women as well as men. This has several implications for the way in which gender is traditionally depicted in the Viking Age, which is as binary and rather static. Building on this, the fourth question becomes:

- Does the material examined in this thesis give cause to consider an alternative understanding of gender?

This ties in with the first three questions which seek to address to what degree the material supports a rigid and binary gender divide, but is further interlinked with a concern that there is a tendency within both research, as well as in society in general, to view our modern day gender roles as natural and universal. Whilst binary gender roles must be considered a possible scenario, they cannot be seen as the *only* scenario, and this thesis aims to question the practices which lead to an assumption of inevitability in gender roles. It therefore seeks to examine other ways in which gender may be perceived and studied. It also aims to highlight the thought that identities are made up of more than fixed and binary gender designations, and should instead be seen as composed of a number of co-existing and intersecting factions, including social status, wealth, and physical attributes as well as gender.

The material: limitations, restrictions, and the selected areas and dates

I have chosen to limit my enquiries to the modern day county of Vestfold. Not because this demarcation would necessarily have meant anything in the Viking Age, but because Vestfold is a county both rich in archaeological material, as well as having well excavated and documented sites. As will be detailed later, this focus on a small area yields material with strong local connections, where arguments of shared cultural traits and material culture can be made.

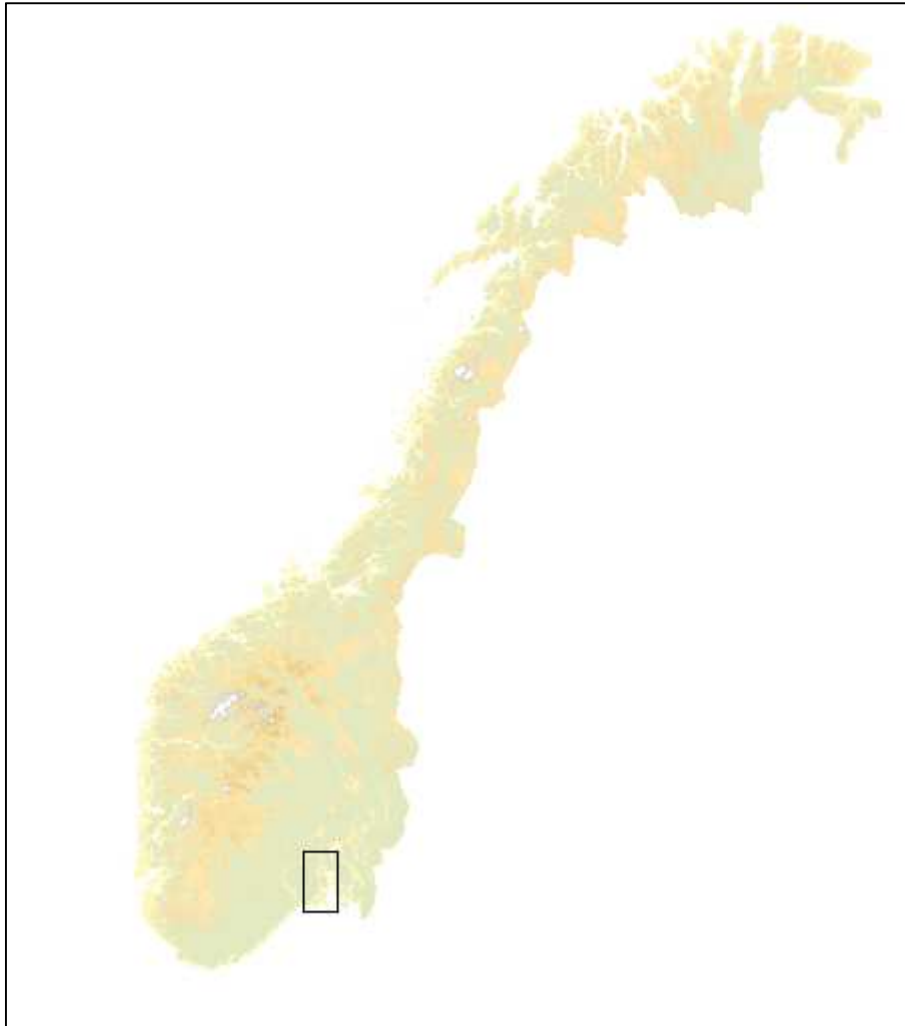


Figure 1: Norway, with the area in which this thesis is focused marked

My research questions are explored through the analysis of three different areas: the cemetery at Gulli, the Kaupang cemeteries, and four selected cemeteries from the Hedrum areas. These sites were chosen for different reasons, which deserves some elucidation:

- The cemetery at Gulli was chosen as a showcase cemetery. Recently excavated (Gjerpe 2005), it has benefited from excellent excavation methods and is very well documented indeed. I have termed it a showcase because the high degree of documentation allows for a thorough and comprehensive analysis. Gulli has therefore served as the test-site for the various methods, and has formed the first step in the analysis carried out here.
- The Kaupang cemeteries are included for a number of reasons. First of all, the material is unparalleled in Norwegian contexts, both in sheer number of graves, as well as consistent levels of amount, and variety, of grave goods. Second, the site

has seen extensive activity and excavation throughout the last century, and so is, in the main, well-documented through prior research. Thirdly, it is the only currently known, well-documented urban context from Norway, making it the only possible representative for such a social setting. It is considered relevant to capture sites from different settings, and therefore Kaupang, representing urban lifestyles, is considered a necessary foil to the more typical, rural cemeteries of Vestfold.

- Finally, four sites from the area of Hedrum have been chosen. These four are the best documented from Nicolay Nicolaysen's excavations in the area in the 19th century, and consequently form the most approachable of the known sites from there. Though there is a considerable number of known graves and mounds from Hedrum, many of these are not professionally excavated, and are therefore left out of the analysis. The four sites chosen here are the ones which can be located more or less accurately geographically (as demonstrated by Tønning 2003), meaning they can be analysed from a landscape perspective as well as from the grave assemblages. Hedrum as an area presents a fascinating prospect: with such rich and varied material, with the proximity to Kaupang providing access to trade and with a landscape that facilitates travel, it is a wonder why it has not been more extensively used in research.

The material chosen for a PhD thesis must be limited in order to create a viable project, and so although similar analysis could be suggested for other regions and sites, these three main areas have formed the core of my enquiries. They provide sufficient data to draw tentative conclusions and interpretations from, and the material used is a solid base from which to work.

In terms of dates and temporalities, the choice of the Viking Age was a logical one for several reasons: firstly comes the existence of a great degree of research done on gender roles in this time, and secondly there is the lack of impact of this research on mainstream representations, which makes this an interesting prospect from the angle of gender scholarship. The Viking Age is fascinating in that it rests between history and archaeology, and accordingly is approached by several different academic disciplines. The decision not to delve further backwards or forwards in time was reached because of a wish to keep the material comparable, and thus a limitation of dates helps facilitate this, through an increased chance of a shared cultural language and understanding. Further, the

Viking Age holds a special place in Norwegian history and culture, with a high level of public engagement and interest. It remains, to some degree, a hallmark of Norwegian cultural history production, and as will be explored later in this thesis, still merits the description of being perceived as a cultural ancestor to our own society.

Finally, as an archaeologist, I have chosen to focus my enquiries on the archaeological record. Thus, although written material must arguably be a consideration for anyone who studies the Viking Age, it has not formed part of the core of my material. Historical interpretations and written sources has however been used for comparative material, and this will feature, albeit rather briefly, in my concluding discussion and in Chapters Four and Five. The main foundation for my analysis and argumentation however, is built on analysis of archaeological material.

The text to follow – an argument constructed through material

The research questions will be approached through a thesis structured around one part focusing on theory and history of research, and one part focusing on the material, with a final part summarising and contextualising the results of the analysis. This is done in order to situate the material analysis within a research context, both historical and indeed current.

The first part of the thesis, outlining theory, is formed of four chapters. Chapter Two provides an introduction to the history of research and my theoretical influences through feminist and gender archaeology. Chapter Three turns to the more methodological, but still in essence theoretical, influences of landscape and mortuary archaeology. Chapter Four and Five are companion pieces, both analysing representations of gender in the Viking Age: Chapter Four looks at the typical interpretations of social order, with a focus on the male as default. Chapter Five lays out the challenges to this through discussing previous research done on women's roles and gender.

The second part of the thesis is concerned with the material. Chapter Six outlines the methodology used, which is made up of two parts: correspondence analysis, a form of multivariate analysis, used on the internal aspects of the burials, and an analysis of the burials as they would have appeared in the landscape for the external aspects. Chapter Seven provides an introduction to the material, and a broad outline of the sites and areas discussed. Chapter Eight then turns to analyse the internal aspects: the grave assemblages, body treatment, expressions of gender and other aspects. Chapter Nine goes deeper into

the heart of the analysis, through examining where and how the graves are situated in the landscape.

The final part is concerned with summarising the findings, and with a deeper discussion of the implications of these. This section is formed of two chapters: Chapter Ten, which is a discussion of the results, using comparative evidence in the form of written sources and other material. The focus of this will be to draw together the findings from the material analysis and the implications thereof. Chapter Eleven is the concluding remarks, and forms the end of the thesis.

The Late Iron Age or the Age of Vikings

A point that needs to be settled at the outset is the question of terminology. The Viking Age is by no means a simple designation, being rather a term loaded with meaning. That there should have been an Age of the Vikings is in itself a conceit, and it tells us something of the emotive power of this particular period to engage and to draw interest. We talk of a Stone Age and an Iron Age, we do not talk of a Roman Age or a Merovingian Age; these are instead merely *periods*. Why this should be so, why the Viking Age gets this special designation, needs some elucidation.

It ought at this stage to be mentioned that recent years have seen a wider criticism of the concept of prehistory as a series of successive Ages (McGlade 1999; Lucas 2005; Dobres 2010; Maynes, et al. 2012). Such a neat breakdown gives the illusion of clear-cut transitions and uniform development, when of course the reality would have been something quite different, and rather more diverse. Not only this, but the mode of classification is through technology (Dobres 2010:103), and a discussion around the usefulness of such a narrow approach has been gathering momentum in recent years. Useful though it has no doubt been, this old way of breaking down time and prehistory has come to be limiting (as discussed in amongst others Arnold 2012:86), and this must be recognised here.

In light of the history of Western scholarship, it is also relevant to acknowledge a certain androcentric bias in the idea of human progress following a chronological pattern as decided by technological advancement (Maynes, et al. 2012:61). Technological advancement has traditionally been the domain of men in archaeological accounts and interpretations, an outmoded theory that culminated with the infamous Man the Hunter paradigm (Lee and DeVore 1968). This will be further discussed in Chapter Two, but it

remains a pertinent point that whilst academia purports to have left this particular theory behind, it remains influential in popular culture (Maynes, et al. 2012:73) and arguably also in academic narratives (Haraway 1989:188).

The idea of time as linear, and of human history as prescribed by ages delineated by technological advancement is therefore in itself problematical, assuming as it does that technological changes are the hallmark of human advancement, and that prehistory can be understood as a series of distinct phases all moving towards increasing sophistication (as seen in for example Halsall 2004). It is not within the scope of this thesis to open up a wider debate surrounding the ways in which we divide and classify the past in general, but it is a relevant point to remember that the ways in which we talk about the past are formed in the present. The Neolithic as a concept will have meant nothing to the inhabitants of any given society during this spatially and temporally diverse period. Perhaps it ought not determine our discourse in such decisive ways now either. A plea can also be made for less internal divisions within our discipline, where arguably much could be gained from more cooperation across what can sometimes feel like insurmountable temporal divides.

Returning to the concept of the *Viking Age*, this is a more directly relevant point and one that does need settling at the outset of this text. Many Scandinavian scholars tend to sidestep the issue, and very rightly so in many ways, by using terminology such as the Late Iron Age. Such a classification can be justified by the widely recognised similarities between the Merovingian period and the Viking Age in Norway specifically, where similarities of material culture and expressions thereof, along with presumed similarities in customs and beliefs, amply substantiates a lack of desire to separate the two periods. As of now however, the Merovingian Period and the Viking Age remain distinct in the canon of Iron Age research.

The rather grandiose terminology of the Viking Age has been retained here precisely because I believe the terminology itself is important. It points to the period's reputation as the start of kingdoms in Scandinavia, which is to stay the start of history as it stands in popular perception. This issue of the Viking Age as a political tool will be further explored in Chapter Four, as will the concept of the Viking Age as familiar, but it also deserves a mention at the outset of the thesis. That this one, brief interlude at the end of the Iron Age should be seen as so significant as to grant it the designation of *Age* tells us

something of significance. It tells us of the reverence in which it has traditionally been, and arguably still is, held. And it tells us something of the ideas of greatness and grandeur which often attach to accounts of it. It marks it as different, and gives it a degree of significance above that of preceding eras, which are mere periods. This is a crucial point to bear in mind when seeking to address knowledge production related to the Iron Age as a whole, and the Viking Age in particular.

A final consideration when deciding on the terminology to use, was that the material which I have chosen to use is dated specifically to the Viking Age only. Whether or not one ought to instead talk of a Viking Period is a valid point, but in light of the above, it seems right to retain the Age label. It would not do, when discussing historical issues relating to research history as I aim to do, to dismiss such a vital part of this very past.

The illusion of objectivity in research

All knowledge about the past is constructed in a present, and thus, all archaeological interpretations are in some way ethnocentric, in the sense that the past is a product of a particular historical setting (Dobres 2004:211). Questions of gender are necessarily influenced by the agendas, implicit or otherwise, of those who seek to untangle past societies.

At the outset of gender archaeology, as will be detailed in Chapter Two, there was a strong focus on calling out androcentrism with the result that archaeology was laid bare as a deeply biased discipline. In the time since however, there has been something of a backlash, with practitioners of gender archaeology called upon to defend their own political views, and accusations of bias raised in turn towards the very scholars who have sought to balance views of the past, which has perhaps conveniently brought the focus away from the consideration that we are still writing biased histories. Consequently, practitioners of gender archaeology, and indeed especially ones who adhere to a feminist viewpoint, are often called on to defend whether or not we find what we seek in our analysis, due to our assumed inability to be objective. This can be traced to an endemic assumption that feminist theoreticians are incapable of objectivity (Wylie 2012:55). A highly problematic proposition, which will be further explored in Chapter Two, it begs the question of why those who are not feminists are not challenged in the same way. It

also begs the question of what someone who is not a feminist is exactly¹. Personal conviction and political beliefs do not necessarily equate with wishful thinking, though of course they may in some cases do so. That feminist convictions are somehow more likely to influence one's interpretations however, is a deeply troubling proposition.

As a founding principle behind this thesis, it is necessary to explain that my research is based in the proposition of *situated knowledges* (Haraway [1988] 2013), in which it is recognised that we need to re-evaluate the concept of *objective* knowledge as founded in a “view from nowhere” (Wylie 2016:9). Vision is embodied, it cannot be separated from the body, and as such it cannot be separated from the individual and all which this entails (Haraway [1988] 2013:414). Any knowledge is in this sense embodied knowledge (Haraway [1988] 2013:418), with all the resultantly embedded biases and personal subjectivities.

All our interpretations are simply this; they are interpretations. A set of data in the form of a mortuary context represents as far as is possible an objective proposition. But as soon as this mortuary context is excavated, as soon as the objects within and the settings without are picked apart and interpreted, in short as soon as they are laid open to archaeological eyes, they become subject to an interpretation, and this can never be anything but subjective. Within this, we must accept that interpretations that are more, or less, credible can be offered, and that there are ways of assessing these with solid methodologies and cross-referencing so that a final, offered interpretation can be chosen as the most robust claim. That this interpretation needs to be situated in a particular cultural context in order for this claim to be credible however, remains the baseline. Hence, whilst the nature of objectivity is in itself complex (as discussed in Wylie 2016), the idea of a neutral, or objective, knowledge production process must be challenged. Though theories and interpretations can be determined as either solid or less so through rigorous testing, the issue remains that all knowledge is produced, and therefore comes from *somewhere*. This is not to say that we cannot distinguish between viable theories and those that are less so, nor that we ought not to attempt this, it simply means we need to question the notion of an unbiased and independent “objective” bank of knowledge.

¹ Using the Oxford English Dictionary definition, Feminism is described as “The advocacy of women's rights on the grounds of sexual equality” (Concise Oxford English Dictionary 2011). As to who would be opposed to the equality of the sexes, I leave that open to the reader's own discretion.

The illusion of objectivity which certain forms of pseudoscience such as sociobiology yields are no more truly objective than any other form of methodology. Somewhat ironically, statistical analysis can also be mentioned as a favoured way of claiming objectivity: I write this with the knowledge that I have employed statistical analysis in this thesis, in the form of the above mentioned correspondence analysis, but without any sort of claim that it makes my interpretations objective. They cannot; a statistic must still be read and therein comes the personal perspective which is inescapable. In addition to the interpretation of information, the subjective also enters into the choices that we make in research methods, questions asked, and data selection. The personal in this sense is more than the sum of its parts, it is the social settings which have shaped thought structures, and is therefore something derived from a specific culture rather than just one person's way of thinking. Consequently, archaeological scholarship becomes a reflection of social beliefs and structures in their own time as much as of the past which we purport to study.

There can be no such thing as objectivity in the sense of a view from nowhere therefore, which may seem a bleak outlook for a thesis. However, there can be such a thing as well-founded theories, albeit with the acknowledgement that these theories do not spring solely from the material which we study. I aim to present one such theory, on the basis of a comprehensive analysis of several aspects of mortuary contexts from the Viking Age in Vestfold. I make no claim to it being true, but I do hold it to be likely based on the material used, both in the shape of the cemeteries discussed and comparative material through both archaeological remains and written sources.

The past as a foreign country, but with curiously familiar social patterns

The past may be a foreign country, but it is one which we approach with modern eyes. And although the statement that “they do things differently there” (L.P. Hartley 1953 cited in Lowenthal 1985) is so commonly cited as to have become ubiquitous, it is not one that is often actually acted upon in interpretations of social order. As has been shown by Elisabeth Arwill-Nordbladh (1998), when it comes to the Viking Age, the past is presented more as a distorted mirror of Victorian ideals than a reflection of the archaeological material. That early practitioners of the discipline who had no concept of presentism did not see the problems with this is of course not hard to understand. It is harder to justify why this idea of a Viking Age which mirrors known historical and

indeed modern gender ideals has remained the dominant paradigm, especially in the light of so much opposing material, as will be detailed in Chapter Five.

Thus, when it comes to representations of gender in the Viking Age, the past is not so much a foreign country, as the ideological and cultural ancestor to our own. This is of course not in itself a problem, it only becomes so when we examine the foundations of these theories. In cases where it has been successfully argued that the material does not support such beliefs, there is a need to readdress the theories themselves.

The idea of strong female figures runs large through Viking Age scholarship, but they are strong only in certain fixed contexts. Women are allowed rule indoors, over the household. They are allowed influence over their male relatives and husbands. But they are rarely allowed out of the house, or allowed any sort of social agency that is not prescribed and licenced by male decree. As was made clear in my research questions, this thesis aims to test this hypothesis.

Sex and gender: a fraught relationship

Another main motivation for exploring gender in the past lies in the problematic idea that sex makes gender, and that there is something inherently natural and universal behind our current way of ordering society according to binary lines of gender. In this lies a wish to challenge the idea that gender is the cultural interpretation of an underlying universal truth.

I draw on Thomas Laqueur's *Making Sex* (Laqueur 1990) for my overall understanding of both sex and gender as culturally constructed and historically specific. His book charts the rise of the relatively recent two-sex model, and hence provides an excellent view of the fragility of scientific knowledge. By describing how the concept of two separate sexes is a recent invention, and by revealing the previous belief in a one-sex model, he deftly demonstrates how far from a universal truth sex-based differences in temper and behaviour are. According to his overview of the history of sex, women were perceived as inverted men, their mirror image as it were, up until around 1800, when the idea of two separate sexes occurred (Laqueur 1990:4-5). With this also came the introduction of the characteristics which men and women are meant to embody, remade to fit with a new ideal in which women were sexually passive and timid for example, which is directly opposed to older ideas on the subject (Laqueur 1990:3).

When committed to paper, the idea that our reproductive roles somehow determine our personalities seems overly simplistic. And yet it is a cornerstone of much western culture (Laqueur 1990:6; Wylie 1991:34), and one which can be found repeated in the general perception of gender roles in the Viking Age. In the modern West, women tend to get allotted the task of main caregiver in family situations for example, as witnessed by the imbalance of maternity and paternity leave in almost any given European country. Women are accordingly disadvantaged by choosing to have children in ways that men are not, and this can be traced to the intrinsic understanding of women as mothers in Western culture (Villa 2011:173), an idea that has informed much of the stereotypical interpretations of gender in the past. This is further perpetuated by archaeological interpretations which highlight women's reproductive roles, which subsequently helps cement the idea of women as inevitably linked with nurturing and caring for children. Though it is not my intention to delve into a feminist manifesto at this stage, a brief mention of these issues are relevant nonetheless, because they both explain how we are often unable to see alternative gender patterns in the past, as well as issue a warning not to build arguments of inevitability on these very models.

In keeping with scholars such as Rosemary Joyce (Joyce 2008:49), I urge caution in assigning modern ways of ordering the world on to past societies. Hence, analysing graves from a starting point of male and female as binary oppositions is potentially limiting, in that it neglects other characteristics and distinctions which may have been equally or more important (Joyce 2008:49). Consequently, although expressed gender is necessarily a concern in this thesis, the analysis here will attempt to move past this to question if gender really was the primary divider between the burials in my material. It is my outlook that a deeper understanding can be gained if we accept that identities are not defined simply by one supreme part of our bodies, but rather is constituted through a mass of different aspects of our bodies, minds, cultural language and social expectations.

Has gender archaeology worked?

Archaeology must be viewed as a political project (Tomášková 2011:110). It is, in essence, about who owns the past, about who interprets it, and about what kind of stories are told. As Donna Haraway succinctly put it, "*History is a story Western culture buffs tell each other; science is a contestable text and a power field*" (Haraway [1988] 2013:413). Archaeology, drawing as it does both on history and science, is quite nicely epitomised by this quote.

Archaeological interpretation is inextricably bound up with the times in which they are created, as a brief delve into the development of archaeological thought over the 20th century can testify to. From ideas of diffusionism in the early decades of the century, and through to the New Archaeology of the 1960s and onwards, and over to the influence of postmodernist thought and postprocessual archaeology, all these theoretical shifts can only be understood *in context*, political, cultural and social.

That archaeology is powerful is something that must be stressed in a thesis seeking to challenge ideas of gender. The use of prehistory by Nazi Germany (as discussed in amongst others Arnold 1990) remains amongst the most significant examples that illustrate this point, and it cannot be dismissed as misappropriation of the past without further analysis of what this means. Although the explicit use of the past for purposes of spreading agendas of hate and exclusion can only be viewed as hateful, it serves as perhaps the best example of how powerful, and how political, archaeology is. We may tell ourselves that our political affiliations are divorced from our interpretations of the past, but they are not, nor can they ever be. This connects with the concept that objectivity in archaeology is an illusion. A knife is an object, a material truth that cannot be denied. But it ceases to be an object in this sense as soon as it enters an interpretation of what it means, and then becomes something else, something imbued with modern ideas about past uses, as well as the object itself. Thus, archaeological knowledge is produced knowledge, and produced knowledge exists within a historical context which needs to be acknowledged.

Stories about the past are powerful because they are used to explain the present. Origin stories is an apt term here: it describes what it is we are dealing with, when faced with narratives of how past people lived and ordered their world. When it comes to gender, this is especially pertinent, in light of the historical tendency to gender activities male without question, and to present the past as a place populated mainly by men. As a result, the past is used to legitimise the present (Ballard 2007:167), and to deflect blame for social inequalities away from modern society. If women are portrayed as universally subordinate throughout prehistory in academic mainstream publications, textbooks and museum displays, it helps make the gender pay gap more palatable and excusable for example. The past as a political tool is therefore extremely potent, and a main concern in this thesis.

The following chapter will delve further into the history of gender and archaeology, but the question needs to be asked at this stage whether or not gender archaeology has *worked*, as it is an integral part of the context for this thesis. In this lies the question of what sort of impact gender archaeology has had on mainstream research and public outreach. The 1980s and the 1990s saw gender put on the agenda, with a rise in theoretical developments and the realisation that gender was not a fixed or a given in any social setting. As Chapter Two will demonstrate, after the initial jolt which this caused, the general way in which archaeology portrays social order has not changed considerably. Thus, although there have been valuable contributions to the field in the last 40 years, in most cases mainstream archaeology cannot be said to have progressed past a token inclusion of gender.

A brief survey of academic publications within the field of Viking Age studies demonstrates two different ways of ticking the gender box. These examples are taken from textbooks and academic books currently in use:

- The first is typically found in books dedicated to describing society and culture, where a common approach is to dedicate one chapter to women. Often this same chapter will also deal with family, as if women have a natural affiliation with family life that men lack (see for instance Roesdahl 1987; Sawyer 1992; Sawyer and Sawyer 1993; Hall 2007; Sigurðsson 2010).
- The second approach is manifested in academic books which touch on concerns regarding women's social status under any relevant headings and subheadings, and which then gather these references up in the index. These same indexes do not reference men and men's activities, presumably as these are too numerous. The implication is that men are active as a norm, whereas women are active only in exceptional cases (Sawyer 1996; Christiansen 2002; Sigurðsson 2008; Williams, et al. 2013; Sundqvist 2016), giving the impression of a society run in the main by men.

These problems will be much more exhaustively discussed in Chapters Four and Five, but are introduced here to provide a backdrop to my research questions, as well as providing the reasons why they are important.

Furthermore, a relatively recent article examined the impact of gender archaeology through the simple yet telling expedient of reviewing the proportion of journal articles

dedicated to concerns of gender, with the resulting conclusion that gender archaeology has as yet to achieve a deeper impact beyond its “core constituencies” (Tomášková 2011:118). A similar conclusion was reached independently by another scholar writing a year later with slightly different data (Danielsson 2012:229), thus showing that two separate review processes came to the same conclusion of gender remaining on the margins of archaeological research.

Gender archaeology has yet to succeed in other words, and one must question why this is, with the amount of excellent work done in the past several decades highlighting the inadequacies of the discipline. Token inclusion is not a truly gendered archaeology, for this we need to change the way in which we talk about and understand gender, as well as the practices by which we attempt to understand gender in the past.

The mortuary landscape as a social arena

The central focus of this thesis is on the mortuary landscape of the Viking Age as an arena imbued with cultural symbolism. The idea of the landscape as a way of communicating status and power will be further explored in subsequent chapters, and the landscape here is approached through mortuary remains. Attention is given to whether or not gender can be seen as a differentiating factor in the placement, size, exposition and visibility of mortuary monuments. The cemeteries in question are seen as a form of communication, an aid to cultural memory and as an anchor in the reiteration of identity. The central concept is that if burials were used to mark status and ownership, a strictly delineated hierarchy based on gender can be presumed to be visible therein. If women were not comparable with men socially in other words, we can expect to see this reflected in mortuary monuments which are often held up to represent social ideologies and indeed realities, as will be further detailed in Chapter Four.

Phenomenology plays a part in the interpretative perspective here, with the landscape as experienced and interpreted through physical interaction, be it movement, vision, hearing or other senses. This view marries well with gender as lived and performed, the landscape forming a part of how identity is produced and reproduced.

Performativity can also be brought in here, as lived experience is translated through the body, and the body is subject to performative social acts (Fowler 2002:50). Hence the mortuary landscape is seen as the product of, but also influence on, lived experiences. It is worthwhile to remember here though, that lived and embodied experience must be

expected to have been different in societies with other social and cultural meanings and constructs from our own (Fowler 2002:64; Hamilakis 2002:100). This does not invalidate the points made above, but it does call for caution in assigning individual experiences to unknown prehistoric people.

The introduction concluded

As the above will have made clear, this thesis aims to test the hypothesis of gender as a binary proposition in the Viking Age, through the use of mortuary contexts. It also seeks to question the ways in which we assign gender roles of the present to the past, and to ask whether or not there are alternative ways of working with gender in the past.

Writing from an understanding that all knowledge is produced from a point of view that is both culturally, socially and indeed personally specific, means I have attempted to make some of the influences clear at the outset. A more in depth discussion of these issues will follow in the next four chapters, focusing on questions of gender research in general, concerns regarding understandings of landscape and mortuary behaviour, and positioning my research within the academic traditions of Viking Age scholarship.

Chapter Two: The question of sex - history of research in gender archaeology and theoretical platform outlined

This chapter aims to outline the broader theoretical background and framework for the thesis. The chapter is built up around gender archaeology as the core of my investigations, and is written as part research history and part theory in order to provide a solid theoretical base to the text to follow.

In a thesis dealing with the mortuary landscape from a gendered perspective, there will be a multitude of theoretical influences to detangle. In order to better set out the theoretical framework for my analysis, the theoretical components are divided in order of level of influence on my work. Hence, gender is treated separately in this section, as the main theoretical basis. Landscape and mortuary archaeology will follow in a separate chapter, as belonging more to the methodology by which my theoretical standpoint is tested. This reflects the main aim of the thesis, which is to investigate gender through the use of the mortuary landscape.

I have chosen to discuss history of research together with theoretical perspectives as an understanding of the development of theoretical perspectives is paramount in order to have a deeper understanding of the implications, possibilities and potential hazards of any given theory. This is derived from viewing knowledge as politically constituted (see for example Haraway 1989:186 for a discussion of scientific narratives), described by Donna Haraway as “situated knowledge” (Lykke 2010:4; Haraway [1988] 2013), as was described in Chapter One. In this lies that theoretical movements and developments are inherently products of a specific time, place and of various social and cultural pressures. Consequently, my theoretical influences must first be laid out in their historical contexts, as they cannot be understood as independent from, or somehow divorced, from this. Significantly, the platform for this thesis is made up of multiple influences, rather than being informed by a dominant paradigm, as will be further elucidated below.

As was introduced in the previous chapter, a main theoretical premise for this thesis is the rejection of gender as the cultural expression of an underlying, biological truth. Gender as the social aspect of sex became a popular concept in feminist research as a means to avoid biological determinism (Davies [2007] 2013:506). Unfortunately, the divide has by now

become allied with the very thing it sought to avoid in many ways, as will be further explored in the text to follow.

The idea that sex is somehow non-negotiable, that it is beyond criticism because it is a basic underlying biological truth has been subject to criticism over the past several decades, perhaps most notably by Judith Butler (Butler 1990, [1999] 2006). If sex is also culturally constructed, the distinction between sex and gender becomes a question of semantics as much as anything. It removes the need to discuss how we negotiate underlying biological truths, because these truths are recognised as culturally and temporally bound with the current Western paradigm of biology as a natural differentiator. These issues will be further explored later in this chapter, but need introducing at this stage so as to provide context for the central theoretical arguments.

Gender as a female pursuit

A brief note on the subject of gender as a female domain also needs to be made at this point, as there is an overriding idea socially that gender is something that women have more of than men (Laqueur 1990:22; Jordanova 1993:474; Nelson 1997:14; Villa 2011:173). A reference to de Beauvoir's dissection of how women are always the *other*, as she famously called it the second sex (Beauvoir 2011) is in order here. I would perhaps go so far as to call it the only sex, as talk of gender tends to focus on women, as if women were somehow more connected with hormones and physicality than men are (Davies [2007] 2013:506). Men are the default position in the modern West, and women are defined largely as being "not men" (Laqueur 1990:viii; Jakobsen 1998:7; Nelson 1999:188), as so many have commented on before me.

The example of "masculinity studies" is interesting here, as there is no corresponding wide-reaching "femininity studies" (Danielsson and Thedéen 2012:10). This can be interpreted as being because women are already covered under gender studies, thus reinforcing the idea that gender is more naturally associated with women than with men: women have gender, men have masculinity.

Naturally, there is a strong argument for why gender research has tended to be associated with women, in the sense that its origins are intermixed with feminist agendas of correcting the past, and indeed what is now known as "gender studies" did originate as "women's studies" (Lykke 2016:77). Women are still the neglected contingent in most studies of the past, and so studies of gender often end up being more about women than

about men because this is where the deficit lies. However, this does not detract from the fact that if you revise women's roles in the past, you must likewise revise men's. If women made stone tools for example, that means men were not the sole proprietors of this technology, and the social dynamics must be adjusted accordingly in our interpretations.

Finally, it must be noted that gender studies is not a unified field with overarching objectives and aims (Lykke 2016:86), but rather a diverse and fragmented area encompassing a variety of different approaches.

The self-reflective practices of gender archaeology

It has been pointed out by amongst others Ing-Marie Back Danielsson, that gender archaeology has a rather singular tendency to analyse its own history (Danielsson 2012:22), more so than other theoretical movements, such as for example landscape archaeology. I consider this habit of self-reflection positive, as it allows practitioners to learn from past research. However, it does also carry a danger of new practitioners being unduly dismissive of older practices, which can lead to neglect of significant past contributions as well as allowing for a certain trivialising attitude: If gender practitioners themselves term second wave theory flawed and outmoded, what is there to stop mainstream archaeology from treating it as unimportant? These are questions which will be addressed below.

The following does not represent an exhaustive history of gender research in archaeology, as that would require a full length book at the very least. Rather, it focuses on the strands of theory and the developments of thought which have directly influenced this thesis. This entails an Anglo-European slant on the research history, and an anchoring in feminist theory.

In light of the above, it is crucial to make the point that gender archaeology does not necessarily equate with feminist archaeology, as there still seems to be some confusion around this subject (as evidenced in Christiansen 2002:321 and his breakdown of feminist archaeology as occupied with proving female supremacies). In very simplified terms, feminist archaeology does not set out to prove female supremacies in the past or promote a gynocentric world view. Rather, feminist archaeology has an explicit interest in challenging legitimization of current gender ideologies and patriarchal ideals through the projection of these on to the past (Spencer-Wood 2011:4), whilst gender archaeology

does not necessarily identify with a feminist standpoint, and does not therefore *automatically* ask the same critical questions. In the following, the various strands of feminist archaeology will be the main focus, though from a research historical perspective, feminist and gender archaeology are inextricably interlinked as will be seen below. The question of “doing archaeology as a feminist” (as described by Wylie 2007) and whether or not that entails any overt pitfalls of bias will also be dealt with in the course of this chapter.

Gender and Archaeology – cordial acquaintances, not yet close friends

Most archaeologists working today in Scandinavia will accept that gender forms a basic structuring principle of all human societies. As archaeologists Joan Gero and Margaret Conkey termed it, gender is an integral part of individual identity, as well as a uniting aspect for social groups. It is a fundamental structuring category for most human societies, socially and culturally constituted, as well as historically created and maintained (Gero and Conkey 1991:8). However, there is a crucial difference between accepting gender as important, and between asking questions about the nature of gender in any given society. Despite the persistent efforts of gender archaeologists over the last four decades, there is still a marked tendency for interpretations to rely on a fundamentally modern understanding of gender, thus perpetuating the gender myths and ideologies of the modern Western world. In this view, gender is first and foremost binary and based ultimately on biology, with men and women as opposites, and as fundamentally different beings. Gender in the modern West also functions as highly restrictive in terms of accepted normative behaviour. Not only is this a very narrow conception of gender, it is also one which is a product of one specific cultural and historical setting, and as such cannot be divorced from this, nor can it be assumed to be universal. Consequently, a binary understanding of gender does not have universal applicability, nor is there anything inevitable about our current male and female stereotypes.

By constructing narratives about the past which flatter the present, a self-referencing circle is created. For all that archaeology has decried presentism and the dangers thereof in the last several decades, less has been said about the particular impact of this on gender ideologies. Narratives about the past are also inevitably narratives about the present (Tomášková 2011:130), and it is vital to recognise the role of archaeology in naturalising and legitimising gender roles.

The long and winding road: The slow rise of gender perspectives in archaeology

Archaeology came rather late, and perhaps somewhat reluctantly, to the party of gender awareness and studies. The beginnings of gender archaeology can be traced to the women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s, when gender awareness began to be problematized in many of the disciplines which traditionally inform theoretical movements in archaeology, such as anthropology, philosophy and psychology (Nelson 2006:3). The general awareness of, and interest in, gender in archaeology on an international scale however was heralded by the publication of Margaret Conkey and Janet Spector's seminal 1984 paper *Archaeology and the Study of Gender* (Conkey and Spector 1984). This paper is often presented as the official start of gender archaeology, and although this requires a few qualifications, it is in the main defensible to use it as a starting point. The first qualification is that gender had already begun to garner interest in Scandinavian, and in particular Norwegian archaeology, where the conference *Were They All Men?* (Bertelsen, et al. 1987), questioning the assumed dominance of men throughout prehistory, was held in 1979. However, the papers from this conference did not find a publisher until 1987, hence postponing its wider dissemination. The second qualification is found in amongst others Sarah Nelson's references to earlier interest in feminist and gender perspectives, where those with shared interest would discuss questions of gender prior to the 1984 article (Nelson 1997:40). Again however, these texts and perspectives were not published until later. As well as these two points, articles and theses with a focus on women's roles and gender obviously did appear individually and at different times, but there was no cohesive movement, and the term gender archaeology was not a concept. Consequently, whilst not diminishing the importance of gender awareness in the decades prior to 1984, this date still marks the first high impact, published work concerning gender perspectives in archaeology.

That archaeology lagged behind other disciplines is consequently quite clear. This poses the question why. In some cases, this slowness has been played down, and excused with the fact that archaeology relies on other disciplines such as anthropology, and that therefore a certain time-lag is only to be expected (Sørensen 2000:22). This is certainly a valid point, and it goes some way towards explaining why archaeology took so long to catch up where gender is concerned. However, it is not the full story, which must rather be sought in that it was simply not considered necessary to discuss gender in the past, because in the academic consensus, gender was considered a known aspect of human

societies (Schmidt 2005:80; Spencer-Wood 2006:61). The explanation for this can be sought in that male dominance was considered a universal given, and consequently this was not seen as something that needed clarification or warranted further research. After all, the history of *mankind* was written mostly by men, who saw no issue with underrepresentation of women. As will be further explored below, much of this can be traced to archaeology's reliance on Darwinist influences, which ascribes activity to men and passivity to women by natural decree.

Waving not drowning: Feminism in waves

Feminist influence and theory is often spoken of in terms of “waves”, and “the three waves of feminism” are often used to describe the advance of feminist theory (Nicholson [2010] 2013:49), and with it changes in the theoretical landscape of gender archaeology. These three waves are of course not fixed and definite movements with complete consensus at specific times, but rather a diverse and fragmented development. It is important to note that the wave metaphor has attracted valid criticism for simplifying the history of feminist thought, and for giving the impression of the existence of a unified school of feminism (Nicholson [2010] 2013:50; Rowley [2012] 2013:77). Further, it carries the implication of the third wave superseding the second, when the reality is more complicated, and more about complimenting and developing views and research. Hence, whilst the terminology of second and third wave feminism does indeed appear in this text, this should not be taken to mean anything outside of a very crude chronological and theoretical division. It should not be read as any sort of value judgement on the respective output of different theoreticians or stages in the long and arduous task of gendering archaeology. A more positive focus on that the earliest attempts to rectify the idea of an all-male past are worthy of respect and can still impart knowledge is much more relevant. Consequently, the wave metaphor, though undoubtedly useful, has arguably gone past its sell-by date, and the danger of inherent value judgement on the quality of former research is fully recognised here.

Returning to the general framework of the wave metaphor, the first wave consists of the suffragette movement, roughly speaking between the 1880s and 1920s (Gilchrist 1999:2). This was of course the first major breakthrough for women's rights in modern Western societies. In concurrence with most summaries of the history of gender archaeology (Nelson 1997; Gilchrist 1999; Sørensen 2000), the first wave will not be detailed here, as there was no immediate impact on archaeological theory. One can of course argue that it

formed the background for the later women's movement, and is therefore crucial, but it remains a fact that the first wave had very little immediate impact on archaeological theory or practice. Within Scandinavian archaeology, there were a few murmurs questioning whether or not the subjugation of women was indeed the "natural order" of things, as illustrated by two essays published by Oscar Montelius in 1898 and 1906 (Montelius as cited in Arwill-Nordbladh 1998:4-5) but with no decisive impact.

The self-identified second wave arrived in the 1960s and developed through the 1970s (Nicholson [2010] 2013). Attributed in part to the discontent that came about amongst women who had stepped out of the domestic sphere and into paid work during the second World War, and who were expected to quietly step back into their former role and leave the paid work for their husbands and brothers upon their return (Gilchrist 1999:20), the women's movement grew out of this upheaval. Archaeology therefore, saw its first focus on questions of gender as a result of a deeply political movement regarding women's rights, and as a result there was an explicit interest in identifying the roots of women's oppression across the board in early gender archaeology (Gilchrist 1999:2).

The emerging feminist awareness grew and changed and mutated until it became what is now usually referred to as the third wave in the 1990s, heavily indebted to postmodern thought. With this, also in the 1990s and no longer lagging behind by decades, came a focus on culture and social archaeology (Gilchrist 1999:2). This entailed greater pluralism in theoretical approaches, a trend which has continued to shape the theoretical landscape.

Murmurs of a fourth wave have started to emerge, but as yet there is no definite change from approaches typical to the third wave which justifies talk of a fourth wave in archaeological theory. Coexisting within these rather roughly outlined categories, are a multitude of complex theoretical approaches, such as queer theory, intersectional approaches and other strands which will be further discussed below.

As seen above, described in rather rough terms, the development of gender in archaeology can be seen to echo what is often termed the second and third wave of feminist theory, and certainly needs to be understood in context with this. However, theoretical viewpoints transcend the simple wave metaphor, and it is here stressed that it must be understood as a simplified tool for understanding theoretical trends, rather than a serious assessment of the history of feminist thought.

Indeed, in my own assessment of the changing theoretical landscape, there is too much overlap and common ground between the perceived second and third wave to really identify either of these as truly separate. Linda Nicholson makes a persuasive argument for the wave metaphor to be applicable to times which mobilises a high degree of public engagement with feminist issues (Nicholson [2010] 2013:54), and an argument can be made that the third wave did not start in the 1990s, but is instead a recent movement. With regards to the changing face of feminist thought in the 1990s, it is also easy to get the slight apprehension that some adherents and proponents of the third wave terminology had an (un)conscious wish to distance themselves from their perhaps more radical and outspoken predecessors: it cannot be denied that much of what came out of early engagement in the 1980s and early 1990s is more explicitly critical than much later output, and this is sadly not always because the academic landscape in archaeology has changed so much for the better. This is by no means a criticism of those who identify with writing within third wave feminist influences in any way. It is simply a suggestion that perhaps the introduction of the terminology has not, in the long run, been helpful, suggesting as it does improvements and closed doors. Instead of talking of the second wave as if it was finished, a better understanding may be reached by talking about feminist archaeology as characterised by being a healthy and constantly evolving discipline, which allows for a plurality of approaches to co-exist, learn from each other and through this, grow into better understandings of human gender as it has been shaped in, and also shaped, prehistory.

The quest to engender the past

Early feminist influences in archaeology are often described as preoccupied by a concern with calling out androcentrism and sexism, and with identifying and rectifying bias in the paradigms that informed and influenced society (Gilchrist 1999:3). In archaeology, this translated into an explicit agenda to “find women” in the past (Brumfield 2006:34; Sørensen 2006:106), and the early impact of feminist thought in archaeology meant highlighting the ways in which traditional interpretations of the past were neither the “neutral” nor “un-gendered” accounts which they had previously been presented as, but were instead highly androcentric, and in many cases explicitly sexist (Conkey and Gero 1991:4; Gilchrist 1999:1; Nelson 2006:6; Villa 2011:173). Traditional interpretations tended to afford women less importance and therefore interest, to assume a sexual division of labour, and in short to assume a natural pattern of gendered behaviour based

on modern Western stereotypes, backed up by comparisons with ethnographic material (Joyce 2004:307; Schmidt 2005:83). As a natural result of this long-standing bias, early gender archaeology was primarily concerned with highlighting women's contributions and importance in prehistory. As stated by Conkey and Spector in 1984: "*We argue that the archaeological invisibility of females is more the result of a false notion of objectivity and of the gender paradigms archaeologists employ, than of inherent invisibility of such data*" (Conkey and Spector 1984:6). As will become apparent, this is still to some extent a persisting bias.

The question of why women were assumed to be less visible in the past returned an answer that pointed to a profound bias in the way in which archaeology was done. The values and ideologies within which archaeologists themselves live inevitably influence their interpretations of the past, and accordingly the questions which are asked about the past are often biased to start with, especially with regards to gender (Nelson 1997:17). It follows that if you ask "how were women discriminated against in this particular setting" or "how were women subordinate in this culture", the answers are likely to be of a nature that supports a social model with pronounced gender inequality (Pyburn 2004:29), and this applies in cases where other questions might have returned different answers. Accordingly, the questions that we ask inevitably colour the answers we get, because these questions are formed by the societies in which we live, and our place in them.

As a response to this bias, the first gender archaeologists were motivated to do what has since been rather dismissively termed "remedial archaeology" (Nelson 1997:16; Meskell 2001:195). If only women could be identified in the archaeological record the argument went, we could redress the idea that women were unimportant.

Consequently, the 1980s and early 1990s saw an emphasis on *finding* women in the past, now rather famously dismissed as an "add women and stir" approach, an issue problematized by Sandra Harding in 1986 with regards to women and science, and picked up later in the debate on gender and archaeology (Harding 1986; Conkey and Gero 1991; Bunch 1987:140 cited in Spencer-Wood 2006:140). Examples of the inherent androcentrism so very evident in archaeology pre-1984 are certainly too numerous to be accounted for in a brief summary, since it permeated the very way in which archaeology was done. The archaeological subject was inherently male (Nelson 1997:39), the chieftains, leaders, warriors, tradespeople and farmers who were studied and written

about were assumed male. For who had ever heard of, or indeed who wanted to hear of, a female chieftain or prehistoric tradesperson (or *tradesman* as much literature still terms them), before the advent of the women's movement?

That there was no need to actually find women in the past was established fairly soon, just as there was never a need to "find" men in the past (Conkey and Gero 1991:12). And yet, highlighting women's contribution to prehistory and history has remained on the agenda, perhaps due to the tendency to explain away evidence of active female social agents. The famous Vix burial in France illustrates this tendency very clearly: the burial is the final resting place of a woman buried with what are generally assumed to be typical male trappings of power such as a four-wheeled wagon, feasting and drinking equipment, and other artefacts testifying to great wealth (Arnold 2002:252). Regardless of the fact that the burial contains what is commonly recognised as an osteologically sexed female body, it has been interpreted in time as anything ranging from a transvestite priest to a cross-dressing warrior: anything in short, but the rather obvious explanation of a woman wielding what had hitherto been interpreted as masculine symbols of power (Gilchrist 1999:70; Arnold 2002:253). Another example can be found closer to home, in the monumental Oseberg Viking Age burial mound in Vestfold. This burial will be featured again in other chapters in this thesis, as it epitomises a lot of the challenges attached to the interpretation of women in the archaeological record (as demonstrated by Pedersen 2008), but here it serves to illustrate the point of women being explained away: containing two exceptionally wealthy osteologically sexed females, the burial has been interpreted as anything from a religious sacrifice (Gansum 1995), a bride with a sizeable dowry (Skre 2007g), and even as having contained a third body, a man, which has vanished without a trace (Fedir Androschuk as referenced in Gardela 2013:293). Very rarely do we hear of the Oseberg chieftain, and yet the burial is comparable with male monumental burials which are routinely described as the memorials of chieftains or petty kings.

The above examples illustrate the tendency to explain away any female burials of obvious power and wealth, which remain prevalent to this day. It is no exaggeration to call it a habitual practice to interpret wealthy male burials as chieftains or leaders, whilst wealthy female burials in similar circumstances are relegated to chieftain's wives at best (Nelson 1997:133). Similarly evidence of female agency and women as active social players in the past tends to be quietly passed over in many archaeological interpretations, an inclination that still prevails.

In consequence, the need to talk about women in the past ought not to be dismissed as a quaint wish of “finding women” or “adding them”, but rather it needs to be recognised that there is still a job to be done on this score. Whilst this is not to suggest that the past will be gendered if we simply throw some women into the mix of our archaeological interpretations, I do not accept that this is all that can be taken from early attempts to rectify past neglect of women as social players. In fact, one could rather argue that “adding women and stirring” is what is done in books which add on a chapter on “women and families” in order to tick the gender box, as was discussed in the previous chapter. Hence it must still be considered important to highlight the unfortunate fact that one half of the population is routinely dedicated much less than half the research space.

In order to approach an understanding of the complexities of gender constellations and roles in past societies, we must certainly recognise that these are more than simple and unified categories of men and women. But though it may not be very on trend, there is still an unequivocal need to address why perceived “women’s domains” so often receive less attention than male counterparts, as will be demonstrated in this thesis.

The legacy of Darwin

The supposed invisibility of women in the past has permeated interpretations in numerous ways, and can be traced back to a variety of erroneous and ill-informed assumptions about the universality of “women’s work” and how this would leave less traces in the archaeological record (Wylie 1991:31; Gilchrist 1999:51; Doucette 2001:172). These models are traceable to their author’s belief in the universality of western gender stereotypes, where women’s work is traditionally domestically focused. This line of thinking is a direct result of the supremacy of the male in modern Western culture, and in this tradition supposed male attributes have become the norm, and supposed female ones as a result become aberrations (Haraway 1989:186; Jordanova 1993:474; Hays-Gilpin and Whitley 1998:5; Nelson 1999:188). Similarly, men are associated with action, with doing, whilst women are seen as passive (Joyce 2008:124). In the modern west, as de Beauvoir famously stated, women have become the “other”, making men the proper representatives of the human race (de Beauvoir 2011). This is reflected in archaeology in the way that men are the unspoken norm, as evidenced by artist reconstructions of past daily life for example, which often features men in active roles and women in passive poses (as discussed in Moser 1993), or which hardly feature women at all. Some examples of how this practice still continues to a degree are included in Chapter Four as specifically

relating to the Viking Age, and is here illustrated by the below schematic drawing of the lifespan of a sunken building: with active men building, backfilling and ploughing, and with a single woman depicted in one of the phases; inside the house, near her loom:

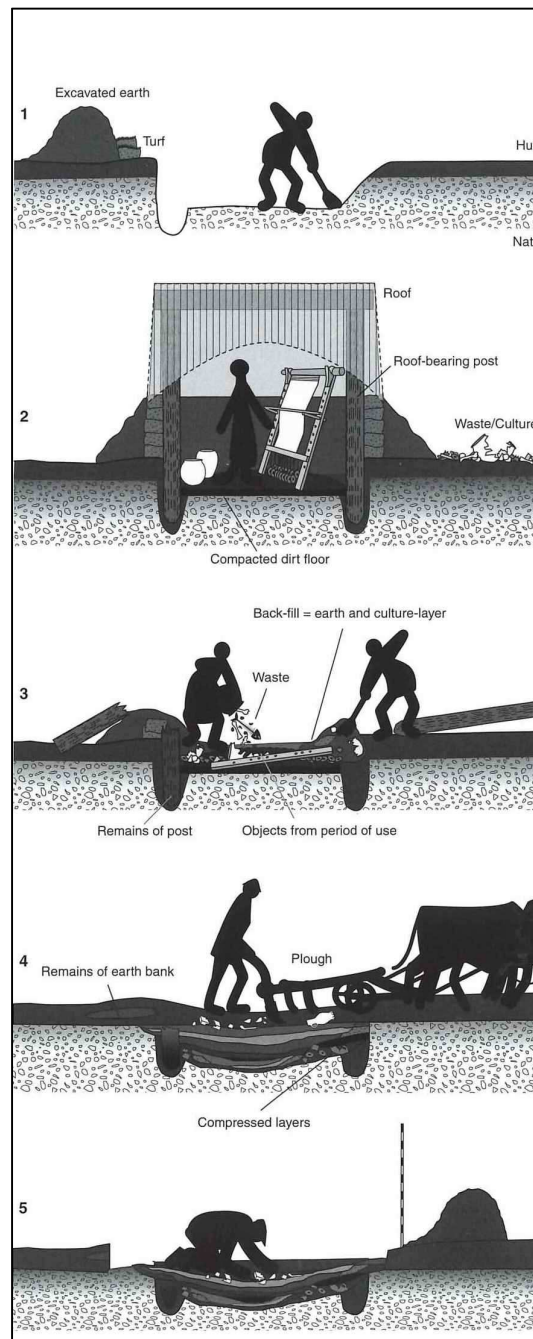


Figure 2: the lifespan of a sunken building. Image copied from a volume on the Viking settlement and fortress at Aggersborg (Roesdhal, et al. 2014:114)

The line of thinking which allows for and creates woman as *other* relies on a belief in biology as truth, with Darwin as the reference point. There has been, and indeed there still is, a persistent assumption that a trans-historical structure of gender norms is somehow

built into our bodies (Connell 1987:64; Butler 1993:3; Jordanova 1993:479), and that there is a natural male, and a natural female, way to be, think and behave. As was made clear at the outset of this chapter, this is an assumption that is rejected in this thesis.

A significant part of this is the unspoken assumption that objectivity is somehow easier for men (Haraway [1988] 2013:412), from which springs the common accusation levelled at female scientists and researchers: of their subjectivity influenced by emotional agendas, an accusation which is not often levelled at male practitioners. Consequently, female researchers can be dismissed as emotionally biased, whilst men are generally not held to the same standards. This ties back to the point made in the introduction, where women are more often criticised as being subjective and influenced by their feelings than are men, and it also connects with the point made at the start of this chapter, where women are often portrayed as more closely associated with gender, with bodies and hormones. This creates an underlying suspicion of female researchers, which can be used to undermine any results which do not fit with established knowledge structures. The origin of such different treatment of the output of male and female scientists can be credited to modern ideals of sociobiology, which states that women are like **this** and men are like **that** (or that women are emotional and men are rational, as popular perception dictates (as discussed in Connell 1987:69)). Not only is this a potential petrie dish for sex-based discrimination, but it also fails to take into account that men are as different from other men as they are from women in many cases (as demonstrated by a recent study Joela, et al. 2015).

Biological determinist theories which explains men's dominance over women as natural, due to men's higher levels of aggression, are numerous and have proven resilient, but they lack scientific basis and support (Connell 1987:69). The line can be drawn directly from today's biological determinism to Darwin's belief that "*man has ultimately become superior to woman*" (Darwin as quoted in Gilchrist 1999:20). Highly influential, though perhaps less famous than his *Origin of the Species*, Darwin's *The Decent of Man*, makes the argument that men are superior by nature of secondary sexual characteristics evolving by virtue of male selection, with women evolving only on the coat tails of the men who selected them for mating (and as discussed in Gilchrist 1999:20; Darwin [1871] 1981), a model which neatly renders women passive, even in reproduction.

This model casts men as the active party in human evolution, an idea picked up in the now notorious “Man the Hunter” paradigm, which rested in a large degree on models taken from ethnographic analogies with contemporary hunter-gatherers, which cast men as the drivers of human progress, with women passively trading sexual favours and reproductive facilities in return for food and protection (Lee and DeVore 1968). In this view, men were directly responsible for progress: for language, bipedalism and technology, because hunting was the main driving motivation, and only men hunted. This model has been effectively debunked, not least due to the discovery that in many traditional hunter-gatherer societies, a plant-based diet was the mainstay, together with small game, which turned out to be often “gathered” as well. As gathering was considered women’s work, this along with the realisation that women were credited with an important socio-economic function by these same cultures, made it difficult to reconcile with a model in which only men were important (Nelson 1997:85; Wylie 2012:52). Not only this, but the realisation that sociobiology is a thoroughly modern invention (Connell 1987:23) has made many archaeologists question the wisdom of assuming past societies shared a belief in fixed, biologically determined gender roles which compare directly with our own. It is however, a view which persists in popular culture, and can be encountered in TV programs and newspaper articles alike (Spencer-Wood 2011:13; Fine 2016), where the male past as hunters is often referred to when explaining specific behavioural patterns for example. It also, in some regards, still permeates our narratives of strength, progress and will to succeed (Haraway 1989:187), throughout history and prehistory. The allure of sociobiology remains strong in other words, and whilst the central idea may be debunked, the paradigm remains influential on many levels.

A sociobiological view of sex and gender casts sex as a biological fact which controls human behaviour, where a simple desire to propagate one’s genes is seen as the ruling motivation for all actions (Gilchrist 1999:10). This type of model is very often adopted by those who seek to justify gender differences by naturalising them, or who distance themselves from a feminist agenda (Sørensen 2007:59; Lykke 2010:23). As Roberta Gilchrist states “*it seems no coincidence that sociobiology gathered momentum just as the women’s movement challenged the validity of a “natural” female link with motherhood and home*” (Gilchrist 1999:10). It is also no coincidence that those who champion a sociobiologist view tend to do so with an agenda, to excuse why women tend to take on a greater part of childcare duties for example, or justify why there is still a

large and indisputable gendered pay gap in today's society². Quoting Connell, it is tempting to conclude that sociobiology is a "justification more than an explanation" (Connell 1987:246).

When it comes to sociobiology, it is of the utmost importance to remember that the world of science is never clear-cut or uncontested. There are strong factions which argue for biology as a main reason for sex-differences. But this dominant paradigm is increasingly contested, both by recent studies which failed to identify universal and sex-based general differences in male and female brains (Joela, et al. 2015), by Anne Fausto-Sterling's work on the non-binary qualities of gender (Fausto-Sterling 1993), and indeed by re-examination of the history of biological arguments which show a profound bias in the way results were interpreted, to the degree of invalidating many of the founding studies used to justify sex-differences as decreed by nature (see Fine 2016 for a comprehensive discussion of this).

Consequently, scientific examination as well as ethnographic analogy has shown these models do not hold up to scrutiny. The naturalisation of gender roles is deeply problematical in so many ways, as it permeates so much of our current ideology. That the simple biological difference between men and women should somehow shape our brains and abilities is not simply an innocent misconception. It is a justification for our social inequalities (Kane and Schippens 1996:663) which we subsequently transfer on to the past because it makes it more palatable to blame these inequalities on natural differences. The implicit assumption that past gender equals current gender needs to be challenged continuously, as it helps us understand that today's gender ideology is not inevitable.

In fact, there is very often little to no evidence in the archaeological record to support suppositions about a gendered division of labour for activities such as hunting or child care (Pyburn 2004:10), and yet the idea of a natural sexual division of labour is one of the most basic things which gender archaeology seeks to dispel. As Joan Gero demonstrated in her influential paper on stone tool production, we need to question what activities we ascribe to each gender, and why. Her paper elegantly demonstrated that there is in fact little to no evidence for the assumptions we make about early hominid sexual division of

² For an unbiased and clear view of the current pay gap in Europe, please see the European Commissions report on the issue from 2014 (European Commission 2014)

For any reader in doubt as to whether or not the pay gap is caused by women working part time more than men, the thought is added that there is a cultural sanction of women working part time which is lacking for men, which in Western Europe is so strong as to merit the description institutionalised.

labour, and that the activities we ascribe to either gender say more about our own assumptions of appropriate gendered behaviour than they do about early human societies (Gero 1991). In order to discuss a gendered division of labour therefore, evidence is needed, rather than assumptions based on modern ideals influenced by Darwin's exclusion of women from evolution. It is time to stop explaining human development through male aggression, and to acknowledge that our own adherence to assumed biological differences between men and women is nothing more than a cultural quirk, and certainly not a universal truth.

The world historic defeat

The assumption that the subordination of women is somehow intimately, and inevitably, connected with the rise of complex societies, as argued by Engels (Pyburn 2004:22) has equally proven hard to dispel. Engel's famous "*world historic defeat of the female sex*" sets out that with the rise of complex societies came a shift in values that lead to a diminishing of women's importance and scope (Nelson 1997:127). This sort of presentist belief plays on the biological essentialism described above, and reduces women to being little more than "natural mothers", leaving men to do all the developing and progressing. Accordingly, with increased sophistication came men's ascendancy, which quite neatly and ever so subtly, implies that women are less capable of culture.

The fallacy of women as naturally more sedentary than men because of their role in pregnancy and childbearing is related to this. However, it will be well to remember that not all women were pregnant or had children, and certainly not all women were pregnant *all* of the time. Equally, the idea that reproduction is a woman's job is short-sighted and culturally specific, and quite possibly not applicable to past settings where the successful rearing of offspring required a cohesive group effort. It is also not a given that childcare is immobilising: though western society prescribes passivity as the ideal, many other cultures successfully combine agricultural work and childcare for example. The tendency to reduce women to nothing more than their reproductive abilities serves to obscure the inevitably complex reality of past social structures. It ought also be mentioned that the idea that women ought only to care for their own biological offspring is a peculiarly modern notion, which cannot be assumed to be applicable to other cultures and social models (Pyburn 2004:16). In a subsistence economy where every day's labour was important, it cannot be assumed that one half of the adult population regularly sat at home without contributing anything other than childcare to the maintenance of group economy.

And yet, the idea that women's subordination is somehow natural, and caused by biology has proven resilient. Sherry Ortner's (in)famous 1972 essay "*Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture*" explored male and female as binary oppositions and proposed there was a universal tendency to see women as closer to nature, and men as closer to culture (Ortner 1972). And implicit in this lies our value division where *public* is afforded more importance than *private*, thus supporting the origin myth that women have always been subordinate (Spencer-Wood 1999:178; Pyburn 2004:8). This type of origin myth is dangerous, in that it lends legitimacy to inequality, and to myths which positions men as natural leaders and women as natural followers.

The world historic defeat of the female sex therefore, is less a historical accuracy, and more a comforting origin story. Comforting in that it allows for women having had power long ago, but that this was connected with a time when nature had higher currency. When culture came along, this power was lost, hence projecting a belief in the inherent correctness of modern western social values on to the past. Paradoxically, this trope has been employed both by feminists, decrying men who usurped women's early power, and by mainstream practitioners, seeking to show how the subjugation of women is explained by a simple, inevitable, model.

Early feminist archaeology: impacts and influences

The women's rights movement's influence on archaeology brought about significant positive impacts in the way in which women were allowed into interpretations in the past, but any movement which seeks to change the established order of things must expect to meet resistance, and this was no exception. Much of this resistance was politically motivated by a resistance to change, but one criticism which has been levelled at the second wave movement is relevant and needs mentioning, namely the tendency to generalise and essentialise women's experience. The expectation that there existed a universal female experience has been criticised for creating models which are excluding and even alienating for many, and the consideration that this supposed universal female experience tended to be based on middle-class, white experiences remains important (Nelson 1997:34; Spencer-Wood 2006:73; Thompson [2002] 2013). Having taken such criticisms on-board, many current approaches to gender in the past will explicitly seek to avoid such issues, and there is in general a growing awareness that there can be no universals or general truths about something as complex as gendered experience.

However, accepting that the second wave had teething problems is very far from rejecting it as a valid theoretical movement. Indeed, the criticism towards the wave-metaphor needs broaching again here: the terminology of a second and a third assumes that the second wave is completed, finished and neatly tied up. This is very much not the case. As the above has attempted to make clear, many of the questions raised by the second wave are still relevant and remain open and unanswered. My own approach is coloured and influenced by many theoretical strands which have their origin in the second wave: the need to challenge sociobiology for example, and the persisting fact that women often remain less visible than men in interpretations of the past, as will be discussed further in Chapters Four and Five.

In with the new, but keeping the old: pluralities and choices

As new approaches and theoretical stances developed and appeared in the 1990s, the terminology of the third wave came into play. This is descriptive of today's theoretical landscape, if one uses the wave metaphor, where even the most current of theoretical debates, such as intersectionality is still strongly aligned with third wave pluralities, at least within archaeology. The current theoretical climate therefore remains largely traceable to third wave influences within this parlance.

Sex and gender – opposites, different ends of a spectrum or meaningless categorisation?

Perhaps one of the most challenging aspects of gender archaeology is the sex and gender dichotomy, or the sex vs. gender debate, as it has by now become. Early feminist scholarship tended to see sex and gender as clear and distinctive categories, where sex was a fixed biological category, whilst gender was seen as socially created and therefore culturally variable (Gilchrist 1999:9; Skogstrand 2006:110). In this view, gender is seen as culturally constructed, a physical manifestation of biological differences between men and women (Arwill-Nordbladh 2002:202), and a crucial question becomes to what degree gender is made or born (Gilchrist 1999:10).

Subsequent developments brought with it a move away from accepting sex and gender as neatly divided categories, or as inevitable expressions of physical differences. Rather, the realisation dawned that the two-sex model dominant in the modern West is by no means universal (Laqueur 1990; Nordbladh and Yates 1990:227; Arwill-Nordbladh 1998:64; Wiesner-Hanks and Meade 2004:2-3). As was explored above, biology as a universally applicable truth has come to be questioned, and this leaves a need for a different way of

talking about sex and gender altogether, especially in archaeology (Skogstrand 2006:111). An example of an early challenge to the idea of sex as natural and biology as a simple binary proposition of male versus female can be seen in an article published in 1990 which problematized this (Nordbladh and Yates 1990:233), an idea which gained purchase with the advent of queer theory.

Queer theory, as championed by Judith Butler, has done a great deal to highlight the problems inherent in the division between sex and gender (Butler 1993, [1999] 2006). Refuting the idea of sex as a biological truth does not necessarily mean refuting there being such a thing as predominantly male and female bodies, but it does mean challenging the assumption that these bodies carry within them inherent meanings which make male and female meaningful categories. As long as gender is considered the cultural interpretation of biological sex, the assumption remains of sex as an objective category (Lykke 2010:24).

Gender as the cultural interpretation and projection of sex works less well if the supposed neutral and fixed category of sex is also seen as shifting and fluid. The facticity of the body cannot be denied (Butler [1997] 2013), as humans we experience our worlds through the medium of our bodies. However, the interpretation of these bodies cannot be assumed to be fixed. Gender, in Butler's view, is constructed through performativity (Butler [1997] 2013:470), a fluid aspect of our social selves which needs to be repeatedly asserted, and is not at any point a given (Butler 1990:191). Gendered performance teaches us how to act in accordance with our assigned gender: in the modern West women are taught to take less space than men, both in the physical and the metaphorical sense of the word (Barthé [1990] 2013). Women are taught to smile more, to speak in a softer voice and to affect calmer gestures: these are not qualities one is born with, but which are socially conditioned (Barthé [1990] 2013:448), presumably with the overarching aim of making women appear less visible. Less imposing, weaker, smaller (Barthé [1990] 2013:448-454), these are all positive attributes to cultivate as a woman in current Western society. However, this ideal of female weakness cannot be assumed to be universal, and the idea of women as decorative objects with little physical use is one that is not necessarily supported in prehistory, nor indeed in history.

The arrogance of modern science needs challenging in this sense, specifically with regards to the idea that we have now achieved a correct and in many ways unquestionable

understanding of the world through biology (Thomas 2002:32). Biology is grounded in science, and science is hard to argue against for those who are not well versed in the language and methods. Partly because many archaeologists do not have a deep understanding of the terminology and concepts, and partly because it fits so well with our current mode of gender-based structuring that it seems a very likely explanation indeed. Sociobiology tends to take the high road therefore, and to present itself as Science, raised above the inaccuracy of the humanities (Lykke 2010:23). However, that the world should be divided into male and female beings, who embody different (but complimentary) characteristics seems rather too good to be true. Though the existence of male and female bodies is not challenged here, we must reject the idea that our personal capabilities are predicted by our reproductive capacities. It is also noteworthy that the characteristics assigned to women are the ones that men do not particularly want themselves. In a culture where strong leaders are lauded, where aggressiveness in business deals is rewarded, it makes perfect sense that these characteristics should be assigned to the dominant gender (Connell 1987:69; and see also Fine 2016 for an illuminating discussion of this theme). Consequently, the belief that nature has decreed one gender as embodying the necessary qualities for leadership and the other gender is characterised by the lack of these same qualities, needs calling out as pseudoscience rather than holding up as some sort of inviolable biological truth. Consequently, we cannot assume universality of such patterns throughout prehistory, and archaeology has a crucially important role to play in demonstrating that there is no inevitability in our current tyranny of biology. Bodies, though undeniable and tactile facts, do not determine personalities, at least not outside the sense that the body is subject to cultural norms and interpretations.

I argue, in the vein of Butler, that sex is also a cultural categorisation, and that sex and gender really are two sides of the same coin: in the modern west, gender as a projection of sex is really just another way of reinforcing the perceived truth of biology. By representing sex as something fixed and inevitable, the need for gender as a cultural interpretation is created. The two are therefore mutually dependent, an even interchangeable in many ways.

A further profound influence on my theoretical framework is the work of Thomas Laqueur, whose book *Making Sex* (Laqueur 1990) elegantly charts the rise of our current two-sex model. As he demonstrates, the idea of men and women as distinct and separate opposites is relatively modern, dating from the last two centuries. If we look back to the

17th and indeed 18th centuries, the prevailing understanding was that men and women were simply variations on the same sex. In this one-sex model, which Laqueur traces back to Ancient Greece, women were thought to have essentially the same traits as men, only with the genitalia inverted, making women slightly inferior versions of men in almost all respects (Laqueur 1990; Bolin 2004:170; Joyce 2008:19). After the French revolution however, the suppression of women became increasingly justified in biology, which set out the “truths” that we still have to contend with today, wherein men are active, public and aggressive, while women are passive, submissive and private (Kent 2004:101; Winslow 2004:191). Much though we might deride the one-sex model with our current knowledge of anatomy, it is important to remember that what we now see as ignorance was in fact regarded as truth pre-19th century. Perhaps caution might be urged then, in promoting our own “biological truths”, when history shows us how transient such truths can be.

Further, the idea of sex as more of a spectrum than a binary divide is currently gaining purchase, with male and female at either end of the spectrum but with many possible variations in between (Arboleda, et al. 2014; Joela, et al. 2015). In light of research which has found a multitude of possible genders (Fausto-Sterling 1993) rather than just the two which are generally acknowledged today, it is perhaps wise to remember that science does not present us with final answers, but rather with likely scenarios, which are subject to change when new discoveries are made.

A recent article by Ingrid Fuglestedt argues for a new terminology altogether in the question of sex and gender, which she has since implemented methodologically in a recent study of Mesolithic rock art (Fuglestedt 2014, 2018). Her contention is that an archaeology of *sexe* would move us away from the terminal confusion of the sex versus gender terminology (Fuglestedt 2014:49). Fuglestedt argues that our way of thinking about sex and gender is a profoundly Cartesian dualistic view between body and mind, and thus the crux of her argument, that our modern Western way of thinking about sex is effectively inapplicable to the past (Fuglestedt 2014:52) is one which is supported in this thesis. However, the old terminology has been retained in this thesis in order to make the arguments presented legible within the framework of modern scholarship, and because it is necessary to carry on the debate of gender and sex as a fundamental value in our own society, where archaeology can contribute to the debate by showing alternative models.

Thus, whilst acknowledging male and female as categories, it is important to highlight that they do not come with pre-prescribed meanings. The rejection of sex as culturally independent and universally applicable is significant. If there is nothing in our sex that naturally determines our gender, the category of sex in itself becomes analytically challenging. Nevertheless, the interplay between physical traits and gendered identities remains interesting, though we must always be aware that what we would interpret as a female body may not necessarily have been a woman in the modern western sense of the word. Hence studies on masculinity and femininity for example are somewhat problematic from my theoretical stance, as I reject the historicity of such terms. Femininity or masculinity is not a born set of skills (Barth [1990] 2013:448), it is acquired through gendered training within specific social contexts, and thus ties into the performance of gendered identities. Gender is really only a modern projection of sex therefore, but the terminology has been retained in this thesis to illustrate that there may be a disparity between physical characteristics and interpretations thereof.

Third genders and new possibilities

With the increasing focus on the relative poverty of western gender identities during the 1990s (Joyce 2008:18), came an interest in alternative gender models and third genders. This is exemplified by the ethnographical account used in many archaeological debates, of the Native American *berdache*, commonly termed two-spirit people, where individuals chose to live as the opposite gender, taking on the trappings, occupation and even designated appropriate sexual partner of this gender (Gilchrist 1999:61). The realisation that our Victorian-influenced two-sex model was not universally applicable, opened up a wealth of possibilities in terms of how to understand past sexuality and gender (Spencer-Wood 1999:175).

In connection with the section above however, it is necessary to note that varying expressions ought not automatically be ascribed to third genders, but rather that we ought to consider the difference between this and freedom of choice within the parameters of what was considered normative behaviour. Thus, third genders indicate an institutionalised transgression, whereas instead we need to first ask the question of whether our “normal”, and consequently our transgressions, can be ascribed to the past. After all, there is no automatic rule which makes deviations from a norm a transgression: that particular sexual rigidity is dictated by our own rules (Voss 2004:67). As Ingrid Fuglestedt succinctly argues, variations on the theme of gender does not necessarily

equate to new and exotic gender categories (Fuglestedt 2014:58), nor should we assume that just because categories such as male and female existed in the past, that they meant what they do today, or were in some way mutually exclusive or static. Moreover, the tendency to look for third genders can be argued to be a symptomatic expression of our own binary understanding of gender (Connell 1987:75; Joyce 2008:58). A third gender assumes that there are already two clearly demarcated and separate “correct” genders, namely male and female, and that anything outside of these normative roles are considered anomalies. Hence, searching for third genders is often counterproductive in a quest to understand past gender configurations, as it assumes a comparison with known values is appropriate.

As mentioned earlier, today’s theoretical landscape is characterised by plurality. Certain areas have gained popularity within archaeology in recent years and have influenced this thesis. Chief amongst these is intersectionality, or the focus on the intersection of multiple identities and experiences which often gets the credit for putting the spotlight on early gender studies’ tendency to generalise on the basis of a typical practitioner’s privileged and usually white background (Davis 2008; Vivar, et al. 2011; Crenshaw [1989] 2011). Intersectionality seeks to diversify perspectives and as such must be embraced as an important part of the archaeological gender debate (for a few examples, see Villa 2011; Fahlander 2012; Thedéen 2012). Part of the relevance of this as a theoretical stance comes in the realisation that an individual is never *only* a woman (Jakobsen 1998:5), or a man for that matter, that what makes an individual is a multitude of different aspects, all intermingled and crossing. Through intersectionality, an understanding of gender as contextual, and as only one part of what makes up a person’s identity (both individual and group identities), can be reached.

An intersectional outlook is essential for anyone wishing to study the complexity of social identity, though the recent rise to popularity in intersectionality as a buzzword tends to ignore that this has long been on the agenda for gender archaeologists, and indeed for gender theorists in general (Lykke 2010:75). The intersecting lines of what makes up a person’s social identity, together with how this is expressed, forms a critical part of how I propose to further our understanding of past social constellations and roles.

The impossibility of objectivity in knowledge production

As mentioned above, objectivity is often seen as a male trait, something that comes more naturally to men of science and thought than to women, ruled by emotions (Haraway [1988] 2013:412). Though you might be hard pressed to find anyone who would openly tell you so, the very fact of doing science or research *as a feminist* means you will most likely experience having your motivations questioned on a regular basis, as was highlighted in the introductory chapter.

To this, the answer is that there can be no such thing as *unacknowledged* objectivity, as was introduced in Chapter One and which will be followed up here. As Donna Haraway so succinctly explained, there can be no knowledge but embodied knowledge (Haraway [1988] 2013:418), and knowledge must be recognised as coming from *somewhere*. Results must always be interpreted, and interpretations must be done by a person. A person will always have a history, and they will be shaped by this history. Their early life, education, country of origin and residence, and even their language, will shape and influence their potential interpretations, not to mention the obvious challenges of personal beliefs, religion and political persuasions. In light of this, it is a wonder people still talk about pure objectivity without qualifying what is meant by this, when the best that can be achieved is to be aware of, and to disclose, any influencing factors which may colour one's reading of any given results. Through these strategies, credible knowledge claims can be made, which can be substantiated and supported by solid methods and testing, but with the awareness that an impartially objective theoretician or interpreter is not feasible. It often seems that "objectivity" in science and academia corresponds with an androcentric view of the world (Skogstrand 2006:59), whilst anything that diverges from this is subject to accusations of subjectivity.

This insurmountable challenge of subjectivity can be exemplified by a brief delve into anthropological archives: though ethnocentrism has been held up as a warning for decades, few people speak of the different experiences a male and a female anthropologist might have. A case in point is when Margaret Mead wrote her book *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive societies* (Mead [1935] 2001). In the third of her case studies, she describes a society where the women act as men, and are the main decision makers. In her own words:

“Although Tchambuli is patrilineal in organisation, although there is polygyny and a man pays for his wife – two institutions that have been popularly supposed to degrade women – it is the women in Tchambuli who have the real position of power” (Mead [1935] 2001:237)

The question of whether a male anthropologist would have reached the same conclusion can be answered by a brief foray into classical anthropological literature (Lévi-Strauss 1969; Eriksen 2001; Mauss [1925] 1990; Rubin [1975] 2006), which indicates a strong likelihood that they would not. By accepting male informants and male informants’ views as the correct and dominant ones, anthropology has historically presented only one side of the story, and that side is the male one (as discussed by Pyburn 2004). Thus we have ended up accepting stories of male supremacy across the board, which may in fact have turned out rather differently had the anthropologist thought to ask different questions, or to be wary of uncritical acceptance of how they are told things are. Though feminist anthropologists have problematized this in the past (as for example Strathern 1988), archaeology as a discipline often leans heavily on ethnographic parallels without asking the necessary questions regarding whose point of view these accounts are built on. This uncritical borrowing from other disciplines can be dangerous, as it can often result in arguments built on patchwork reading which do not take the full disciplinary debates into account. Further, ethnographic analogies carry an inherent complication in that they assume a common “primitive” past, comparable to modern hunter-gatherer groups. When this premise is examined closely, the unsavoury roots in early ethnography and ideas of the linear development of all human societies shine through. Ethnographic analogy therefore, is best used with extreme caution, if at all (as summed up by Gosselain 2016).

Haraway coined the phrase “situated knowledges”, arguing that positioning and partiality are basic requirements for any claims of rationality (Haraway [1988] 2013:414), and described the “view from the body” as the source for any knowledge (Haraway [1988] 2013:414). These are points that will be employed in this thesis. Firstly, in the sense that I accept there is no such thing as unprovenanced objective knowledge, but that I remain aware of my own cultural influences as a middle class, white, well educated, feminist woman. Second, in the sense that the view from the body is viewed as the real origin of any knowledge, and that the material that is discussed in this thesis must be viewed as meaningful only in so far as it was and is experienced by individuals.

Gender in today's theoretical landscape

In a current theoretical climate which is open to so many different approaches, the influence of postmodern feminism is particularly evident. Studies of masculinity for example (Bandlien 2005, 2006; Østigaard 2006; Skogstrand 2016) appear more in vogue than do studies of women or men, and in some ways, gender has become a more accepted part of social structure within archaeology (Spencer-Wood 2006:59), rather than a code-word for a niche study of women as it used to be.

However, there is still a definite need to keep putting gender on the agenda. Questions of gender, and the acceptance of women as social agents still tend to happen only in allotted, and limited, spaces. Assuming that feminist influence has done its job, and we can now move on is naïve, to say the least. The need to focus on that the human past contained more than active men remains important, not least because the stories we tell about the past helps legitimise the present (Ballard 2007:167). There has been a worrying trend for practitioners of gender archaeology to be rather apologetic about any feminist leanings they might harbour (Wylie 2007:210). In a fairly recent publication concerning archaeology and women, the quote “*while we are sympathetic to the motivation behind feminist scholarship, we feel that it should be possible to find surprising or unpleasant or unpredictable conclusions*” (Hamilton, et al. 2007:16-17) rings several alarm bells: this statement is made by academics with an interest in gender who criticise feminist scholarship without understanding what it is. Similarly, an influential textbook on gender archaeology from the early 2000s takes an active stance against feminism, arguing that the feminist motivation behind early gender archaeology is to blame for gender archaeology being marginalised (Sørensen 2000:5). This is, to my mind, a potentially damaging way of thinking. The rejection of gender archaeology by the mainstream is not the fault of the practitioners who were too radical, it is of the establishment which remained too staid. It is a type of apologetic argument which seeks to conform rather than confront, and which is therefore counterproductive to the aims of gender archaeology which seeks to talk about gender without modern bias. This same author claims that the objectives of feminism are incompatible with the objective study of society (Sørensen 2000:36; 2007), making one wonder how it is possible to write a criticism of a theoretical movement without understanding it, and indeed to champion gender archaeology without understanding its main reason for existence. Whilst it is perfectly possible to write gendered archaeology without holding a strong personal feminist conviction, a basic

understanding of the political persuasion which initiated gender archaeology ought to be a prerequisite. I also contend that once this basic understanding has been reached, few practitioners would hesitate to call themselves feminist.

To clarify: doing archaeology from a feminist standpoint does not mean seeking to see only women in the past. Nor does it mean a wish to make women in the past more powerful than evidence might suggest. It does mean having an explicit interest in understanding the full spectrum of gender relations and ideologies, and often means addressing bias where appropriate. It also means wishing to study the past without bringing modern conceptions of the social worth or intrinsic abilities of either gender into the picture. In one regard, I would even argue that doing archaeology as a feminist enables a higher degree of transparency. This is interlinked with the inherently political nature of archaeology (Tomášková 2011:130), where it must be recognised that archaeological interpretations are always written within a set historical climate. Everyone has political beliefs and persuasions; it is the unspoken ones which enter into narratives obliquely that are the dangerous ones.

Although overt androcentrism is becoming more rare in archaeology, paradigms and models founded on androcentric principles remain in use (Nelson 1997:17), and our very thought-structures are shaped by them, as this thesis will aim to demonstrate. This means that unconscious biases still shines through more academic texts than one might perhaps expect, over 30 years after gender archaeology arrived on the scene.

It is not enough to simply ask what roles women and men held in the past, we need to question the very foundations of what we understand by gender, and try and see social structures within their unique cultural contexts (Meskell 2001:197). That being said, neither can we assume that androcentric biases are a thing of the past, as will be further argued and evidenced in Chapters Four, Five and Ten. Whilst questions concerning gender ought to be part of every study of the past, inasmuch as archaeology seeks to understand past social and cultural ideals and realities, it is lamentably common to still get the sense that gender is somehow niche, and that it has no real place in mainstream academia. This side-lining of feminist research has led to the quiet persistence of some very questionable practices, as will again be further explored in Chapters Four and Five.

A theoretical platform emerging

The sections above have touched on some, though by no means all, of the main developments and influences in gender archaeology through its emergence and history. Knowing what has shaped and informed a current theoretical climate is crucial to an understanding of the research that emerges from it, and the above will have given an overview of the main influences on this thesis.

The points to be carried forward spring from the so-called second and third wave both. There is still a need to point out inherent biases where they exist, and as subsequent chapters will demonstrate, they certainly do exist in Viking Age scholarship. There further remains a need to challenge sociobiological influences, as these rests on a number of contentious and contested theories which tend to devalue women's role in social change and development. I further uphold the need to make women visible in the past. By visible, more is needed than merely acknowledging their existence however. We all know women existed in the past. What needs to be addressed is their inclusion as social agents and as worthy of academic interest on the same level as men. This ought to be an unnecessary aim in 2018, but sadly it still remains the case that women are made passive in a great deal of archaeological interpretations and depictions.

Additionally, it must be highlighted that knowledge production is political, and that all knowledge must be considered situated within a particular social framework and even on an individual level. Finally, I will argue that gender cannot be understood as binary, and that the sex/gender divide is to some degree nonsensical when studying the past. If sex is culturally determined as much as gender, keeping both as analytical categories makes little sense. Thus, whilst this thesis will at some points refer to skeletal remains and biological sex, the terms sex and gender are seen as equally culturally dependent here, and will only be highlighted when they go against *modern expectations*. In this lies the contention that ascertaining biological sex in mortuary remains for instance is of interest because it can help challenge the restraints of our modern theoretical frameworks. It does not mean however, that it will necessary divulge much about past beliefs of sexual difference. Gender is the preferred terminology in this thesis, as it allows more room for the fact that what we are talking about is a culturally dependent interpretation of identity. Gendered identities can be reliant on a number of factors other than just genitalia, such as age, wealth and occupation. Crucially though, gender is contextual and culturally dependent.

The following chapter will turn to examine the theoretical tools by which I will investigate my main research questions, namely landscape and mortuary archaeology.

Chapter Three: Landscapes of death, landscapes of gender

The following chapter will detail landscape archaeology and mortuary theory judged directly relevant to this thesis. A brief history of research will be included, though this is by no means intended to be exhaustive: it is limited to include the theoretical movements of relevance to my own theoretical platform.

The following chapter continues the clarification of the theoretical influences behind this thesis, by turning to look at landscape and mortuary archaeology. These two perspectives are considered a connecting link between theory and methodology, as they are the aspects which are analysed in order to ask questions concerning gender. This chapter will focus on history of research and theory, while Chapter Six will detail the specific methods used.

Landscape perspectives

Starting with the very basic question of language and terminology, it is worth noting that the very term “landscape” is culturally loaded. Coined in the 16th century (Bender 1993a:1), the word originally pertained to landscape painting and entered the English language from the original Dutch (David and Thomas 2008:27; Spencer-Wood and Baugher 2010). Landscape painting represents a way of partitioning the landscape, and a way of signalling ownership of the land (Thomas 2001:168), and the word landscape thus implicitly signals class and ownership (Bender 1993b:246). A landscape is a specific part of the world, contained and belonging in some way to someone. Its existence is also dependent on being seen or otherwise experienced, as a landscape cannot exist without human agents to make it into an entity.

Embedded in this is a particular way of seeing the world, which still permeates basic understandings of landscape. The influence of landscape painting can still be felt in the way we understand the term landscape, used as it often is to describe a particular view or portion of land, with focus on the visual, and on communication of ownership (Ashmore 2006:200; Strang 2008:51). Landscape has become something idealised and elevated (Thomas 2001:168), a view which runs through much of modern Western culture.

This view of landscape as something tamed, and as something benignly beautiful is likely to contrast rather drastically with how people viewed it in societies more dependent on crops and harvests than people tend to be in modern day Europe. We live largely

independent of the natural world in many ways: if crops fail, we buy our corn from other countries, if rivers flood, the government will help rebuild roads and houses. We are privileged in ways that people who live more dependently on the land are not, and should therefore assume that respect for, and to a certain extent fear of, the natural world influenced how people in prehistoric cultures experienced and thought of the landscape around them.

The etymology of the word “landscape” has been brought up here as relevant to the different ways in which people see the world around them. Landscape, as it is used and understood in this thesis, is an analytical proposition, containing a wealth of encoded meanings. The challenge comes of course with separating modern notions of landscape from what we believe past ones to be, and to try and limit the transference of these modern ideals on to our interpretations of the past.

From large scale patterns to small scale histories: the rise of a social understanding of landscape

Landscape as a concept and an interpretative dimension has existed in archaeology more or less since the earliest beginnings of the discipline (Knapp and Ashmore 2000:1). As archaeological locations and sites must necessarily exist in a wider space, so landscape as an analytical concept has featured in one form or another. However, landscape archaeology as we know it today, as an explicit theoretical branch of archaeology, can be traced back to the 1970s, which saw the emergence of publications specifically addressing landscape studies (Darvill 2008:60; David and Thomas 2008:27 and 31). The idea of understanding past cultures through landscape very much caught the spirit of New Archaeology when it first emerged, and its first incarnations as an archaeological method took the form of large-scale area analysis (Darvill 2008:60). Early manifestations such as Site Catchment Analysis (Higgs and Vita-Finzi 1972), and environmental archaeology typifies a tendency to see the landscape purely in terms of functionality such as economic resources and land use, with little or no interest in encoded meanings and symbolic features (for a discussion of the changing theoretical trends of landscape archaeology as used here, see Lund 2009:50-51). In this way of “doing” landscape analysis, we can see a direct alignment between New Archaeology and New Geography (Blake 2007:233) , with its positivist emphasis on large scale settlement systems analysis and searches for artefact distribution patterns.

As archaeological theory began the shift towards post-processualism with its focus on social and cultural concerns during the 1980s, landscape perspectives also changed (see for example Barrett, et al. 1991; Bender 1993a; Bradley 1993a; and for a breakdown of this see Lund 2009:50-51). Thus, the focus changed from geographical and environmental large scale analysis to symbolic and social inferences along with a general shift from the natural sciences and geography towards a stronger influence from anthropology and philosophy during the 1980s and 1990s (as evident in for example Bender 1993b; Tilley 1994; Thomas 1996). The many new perspectives that grew out of this anthropological influence can be seen in the general acceptance that individual experiences of landscape will always differ, and that the perception of landscape is dependent on cultural affinity and social conditioning (Thomas 2001:166). This naturally enabled broader perspectives and multiple approaches to landscape understanding and use.

Phenomenological influences

A significant theoretical development came in the advent of phenomenological approaches, which emerged in the early 1990s, and which remains an influential theoretical framework. Using questions of experience and embodiment to further understand past peoples, two of the earliest champions of the approach were Julian Thomas and Christopher Tilley.

Tilley's seminal book *A Phenomenology of Landscape: Places, Paths and Monuments* (Tilley 1994) was the first volume dedicated to phenomenology in archaeology. His aim was to criticise traditional archaeological interpretations which tended to present landscape as nothing more than a neutral space where human activities took place, and relied on using experience, through points of access and exclusion (Tilley 1994). Drawing on both Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, his approach centred around experience through movement as a way to understanding, an approach which he has continued to develop in later works (Tilley 1994, 2008), meaning that he has placed great importance on his experience of walking through monuments. His approach however, has met with criticism focused on his assertion that contemporary archaeologists can access a valid understanding of past people's experiences simply by moving through the same landscapes, hence justifying a sort of extreme presentism. By failing to take into account that his own experiences will inevitably be shaped by his own modern education and life, he fails to engage with how this would have made his perceptions and experience differ from people of other backgrounds and cultures (Rainbird 2008:264; Lund 2009:55). On a

related note, it must be remembered that there is a profound difference between experiencing remnants of past monuments and experiencing them as living social arenas. Tilley presents an uncompromising version of archaeological phenomenology in other words, one which is hard to reconcile with concerns for presentism and cultural bias. Though there is certainly much to be said for experiencing a landscape before attempting to create a meaningful analysis of it, this experience cannot count as the sole factor in an analysis. There are multiple variables that will be different, both in terms of the landscape itself, as well as in how people from different cultural backgrounds will feel in any given setting. Grass and trees may be decorative to me, whilst to a person reliant on agriculture they may carry practical information about soil conditions and the degree of usability of the land. Hills may to me present a tantalising object, I may wonder what lies behind them and be content that whatever it is, will not be a hostile neighbouring tribe, or a pack of wolves that threaten my safety. Accordingly, whilst experiencing a landscape gives a certain insight into how it may be perceived and used, it does not in any way give a reliable understanding into how people with different subsistence economies, values and beliefs may experience it.

Julian Thomas's book, *Time, culture and identity: an interpretive archaeology* (Thomas 1996), the other half of the canon of early phenomenological approaches, uses concepts of temporality and being-in-the-world for an approach which emphasises how human engagement with the world underlies meaning and material culture (Thomas 1996). Drawing in the main on Heidegger, Thomas presented a framework where everything is interlinked with history, and where all interpretations must be reached through a structure of intelligibility which underpins how we understand the world (Brück 2005:49). Thomas's approach is more temperate than Tilley's, with his emphasis on the temporality of being, and his focus on how all understandings of the world must be dependent on prior knowledge and experience (Thomas 1996:76-82). By his admission that archaeologists can never fully understand past meanings, he makes his approach more temperate and therefore useable. It is easier in other words, to draw inspiration from his approach, though the question of how central it really is when even its strongest proponents admit to its weakness is a valid one to ask. Nevertheless, awareness of an approach's strengths and weaknesses ultimately assist in making it better. This comes back to the concept of situated knowledges, that we must be aware of the subjective nature of all knowledge before we can pretend to contribute anything of value.

Gender and phenomenology

A central contribution of phenomenology, and one which is particularly pertinent to the gender perspective of this thesis, is its challenge to structuralist thinking with its dependence on Cartesian ideals which casts the body and mind as essentially separate in nature (Thomas 1996:11). The structuralist love of binary oppositions means viewing the world as a continuance of opposites, a situation which always requires an Other, a category to stand opposed to the studied subject, such as body versus mind. Phenomenological approaches however, seek to interpret the world as we meet and experience it, by highlighting that these things cannot be separated from bodily experience (Tilley 2008:271), thereby creating a more unified and complete approach. Consequently, landscapes ought to be understood through how people lived in them, how they negotiated and inscribed meanings on to them (Tilley 1994:26). By not separating self and world, but rather by accepting culture and knowledge as propagated by human bodily engagement with the world, phenomenology is in many ways compatible with the aims of gender archaeology in seeking to understand that the world was experienced differently in the past by different people. The challenge is to try and identify whether or not gender was something that led to different experiences in the past, meaning whether or not gender was a differentiating social divide.

Aside from the above mentioned danger of presentism through assuming there is such a thing as a universal human bodily experience, there are two more significant criticisms to be mentioned against un-tempered phenomenology. The first is the tendency to assume there has been a “correct” meaning attached to monuments, which tends to ignore the potential for space to be used in subversive ways (Brück 2005:60). Spaces and monuments must be assumed to have contained a multitude of meanings according to who was viewing and experiencing them, when and in what circumstances. The second is that allowances must be made for different bodily experiences. The body determines so much of how we meet the world: the young body compared with the old, the strong compared with the weak, the able of body compared to those with a physical disability, these are all things that will have profound impacts on how the world is met, interpreted and experienced.

That being said however, an approach informed by phenomenology is a logical way of examining landscapes when asking questions regarding gender, power and status. Landscape archaeology has to a certain degree neglected questions of gender (Spencer-

Wood 2011:1), which seems a missed opportunity, as the used landscape can potentially contribute a great deal to understanding gender in the past. How people related to social structures, ideologies and norms through physical manifestations is crucial to the material discussed in this thesis. The concept of embodiment therefore becomes central. That the landscape must be understood through the medium of the body is a central proposition (Tilley 2008:271), explained, albeit rather simplistically, through the basic equation that all human experience must be interpreted through the body, as the body is the physical manifestation of our selves. Embodiment and bodily experience as a perspective through which landscape is interpreted marries well with the central questions posed in this thesis. However, this is with the crucial caveat that our gendered bodies now cannot presume to understand how past bodies experienced things. I can never change my origins as a white, middle class woman, with the privileges and limitations which this entails. Furthermore, I can never fully shake off my social conditioning in a gendered body. Therefore I can never fully understand the bodily experiences of someone who does not share these traits, as well as my specific cultural setting. In order to understand how people experienced past landscapes therefore, we must first attempt to understand how these people thought and lived.

Other influences

Not everything that happened in landscape archaeology in the 1990s was related to or inspired by phenomenology. Another extremely influential way of thinking was informed by Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice, and sprang up around the same time. Based on the concept that lived experience is constituted of daily practices which reinforce and transmit meaning and knowledge, this approach assumes that social space and how we use it provides a way of understanding how to live in the world, and by this the norms that govern us (Van Dyke 2008:279). This theoretical bent has remained current, as can be seen in recent work on dwelling and the inhabited landscape (such as Eriksen 2015; Gjerpe 2017). The basic concept that our lives are structured according to the spaces in which we live, and that we by this know what appropriate and inappropriate behaviour is according to where we are, is integral to understanding how the landscape forms part of the world which human beings must negotiate. Although this thesis is concerned with the mortuary landscape, it is my contention that the mortuary landscape with which we deal was not made primarily for the dead, but for the living who needed to honour and remember their dead. That the burials themselves were considered of importance to the

individual mound-dwellers is something we will return to later in the discussion chapter, but the premise that burials and mortuary monuments were seen to matter to both those who were interred in them as well as their descendants and their communities is a central contention here. How to act in accordance with the landscape of death is therefore of interest, though it will not take centre stage of the analysis.

Another approach of interest to my work is Barbara Bender's examination of the landscape as a political process (Bender 1993b). Although her work was influenced by Marxist theory which does not enter into my own theoretical platform³, her emphasis on the landscape as *owned*, and through this as limited for and by some people helps illuminate the understanding that landscape can be an active communication of the ideologies of power. This ties in with the mortuary landscape as arena for displays of status, wealth and power, which as we will see in Chapter Four has played a significant role in the interpretation of Viking Age mortuary remains. It also raises the point that the mortuary landscape will have meant different things to different people: to those who determined its shape and to those who observed and experienced it: to those who *owned* and to those who did not.

Conversely, another influential theoretical development in recent years has been the development of materiality theory, which has had far-reaching influences, including in landscape studies (see Ingold 2007 for a succinct overview of the growing field of materiality studies and some of its challenges). Other examples of theoretical roads not taken in this thesis include symmetrical archaeology (Olsen 2012) and atmospheric influences (Sørensen 2018). Though not explicitly used here, this is in no way a reflection on the usefulness of such enquiries, it is simply a choice made of theoretical platforms to suit the material at hand.

The approaches outlined above are of course not descriptive of everything that has happened in landscape archaeology during the last 30 years, but they are symptomatic of a wider interest in social archaeology which remains strong in the theoretical landscape.

Landscapes of meaning, landscapes of memory

A focus on social memory was also amongst the approaches to gain ground during the 1990s, and is the final theoretical influence connected with landscape analysis to be cited

³ Though the emphasis on ownership (or lack thereof) is retained, this thesis' focus on manifestations of gender means there is less attention paid to social dynamics across class boundaries, but rather within these.

here. Social memory can be described as the “*construction of a collective notion (not an individual belief) about the way things were in the past*” (Van Dyke and Alcock 2003:2). The concept of social memory stems from the sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, who pioneered the concept in the 1920s, moving the discussion away from individual memories alone and towards the idea that memories can form a social and collective phenomenon (Van Dyke and Alcock 2003:2; Halbwachs [1925] 1992). The realisation that the maintenance of memories requires creation and recreation, processes which would have left traces in the archaeological record was crucial, and gave rise to the “past in the past” as a concept, pioneered by amongst others Richard Bradley (Bradley 1993b, 2003). Within this lies a desire to problematize how past people understood and used their own past, how it shaped social relations, and how it in turn was shaped in the present in the past (see for example Joyce 2003; Meskell 2003; Van Dyke and Alcock 2003; Lund and Arwill-Nordblad 2016). When this is applied to the landscape and use thereof, it becomes a potent perspective on the past. Studies such as Howard Williams’s examination of reuse of ancient monuments by Anglo-Saxon communities (Williams 1998) demonstrates a conscious linking with a distant past. In a similar vein, John C. Barrett’s argument that past societies relied on ancient monuments in order to create their own histories, and that the Bronze Age therefore effectively laid the foundations for the Iron Age through the creation of their mythical landscape (Barrett 2000:264) resonates with the typical arguments for the political meaning of Viking Age burial mounds in Norway as symbolic shows of legitimacy through their invocation of the past, as will be discussed in the following chapter

A final point to bear in mind is best quoted in its original wording here: “*the landscape is where different time scales intersect, and archaeologists have always accepted that. What they tend to forget is that this was equally true for people in prehistory who would also have to come to terms with these traces of the past*” (Bradley 2002:156). In order to understand the true meaning of landscape therefore, we must accept its role in the perpetuation of social memory.

An approach to landscape outlined

The sections above have presented nothing more than a brief introduction to the theoretical movements within landscape archaeology which have shaped my own perspectives. Landscape is considered a means to an end in this thesis, an avenue into

understanding the social codes and mores which created it, and consequently this has remained the focus of the theoretical overview.

Landscape here is understood as both the physical environment in which people live, but also as something that can anchor and change mental structures (Lund 2009:8). Landscape will mean different things to different people, and the experience of landscape will always be subjective, depending on where a person comes from both geographically and more figuratively in terms of social status, gender, age, wealth, ethnicity, class and heritage. Landscape archaeology thus becomes about understanding how people lived in their world, and how they communicated and structured their own understanding of their social and cultural realities in relation to their surroundings.

By seeing cultural landscapes as landscapes of knowledge (Strang 2008:53), the priority becomes to attempt to access this knowledge. Archaeology as a discipline is concerned with the interpretation of material culture, and our understanding of any inner meaning a landscape may have held must come from material manifestations of these meanings (Gamble 2008:257), on the premise that engagement with a given cultural landscape will have left behind traces in the form of a material record.

Bodily engagement becomes a natural part of social understanding of the landscape, in trying to understand how it was meant to make those who lived in and passed through it feel, and what it was meant to make them understand. To attempt to understand landscape, is to attempt to understand how people structured and pictured the world, and how they manipulated their surroundings to suit their ideologies and beliefs. If we accept that landscape was made to carry meanings about political structures, power, ritual and social relations, it follows that we can attempt to access these through studying it.

Crucially, working on the premise that landscape carries information about social identity and order, works towards the aim of investigating gender in the past. The crux of this thesis is that the mortuary landscape in the Viking Age was made to carry symbolic meanings, and that it constituted a key factor in the structuring and recreation of social order and therefore ultimately reflects social realities.

A culturally constituted landscape is invested with power of remembrance, symbolism, beliefs and social norms. Therefore, it can be manipulated to suit the needs of a given population, or perhaps more commonly a segment of a given population, usually those

with resources to push their aims through. It is often asserted that landscape is manipulated mainly by the ruling classes in order to naturalise or legitimise authority (Van Dyke and Alcock 2003:3), and in the case of the Viking Age mortuary landscape this holds true in many regards. A culturally constituted memory is also coded with ideology, and accordingly we can attempt to detangle what past societies deemed important, by seeing what they chose to commemorate. It must also be remembered however, that these meanings may not have been universally understood. A landscape may have been experienced differently according to social standing, cultural belonging or indeed individual bent. It may also be that in some cases we are looking at an attempt to communicate status and power which did not in fact succeed: some landscapes may very well communicate an attempt at control which was unsuccessful. However, in the case of the material used for this thesis, we have sufficient comparative material to assert that mortuary landscapes were used to communicate dominant ideals, and that therefore the landscapes examined here communicate a set of relatively stable cultural and ideological traits.

Landscape in this thesis then, is a vehicle for meaning, carrying symbolism pertinent to gender ideologies and realities, status, wealth and power. Attempting to understand the use of the mortuary landscape here means attempting to understand these meanings.

Mortuary Archaeology, and to what extent the dead can be argued to bury themselves

The main aim of this thesis is to use mortuary archaeology in order to say something meaningful about Viking Age social realities through interpreting the manifestation of gendered expressions apparent in the material. Consequently, this section will outline a general overview of typical challenges and debates in mortuary archaeology. As with the previous two theoretical movements detailed, this section will provide a high level overview, whilst details and breakdowns more specific to Viking Age mortuary behaviour will follow in the subsequent three chapters, on Viking Age research history and methodology respectively.

Mortuary archaeology: the dead versus the living

Mortuary archaeology means working with one of the most prolific categories of sites available to archaeologists. With good reason, burials have been described as containing more information per cubic meter than any other archaeological feature (Crass 2001:105), and are often held up as the archaeologist's best source of information (Fahlander

2012:137). Burials allow us to see deliberate deposits, rather than the more haphazard selections we are likely find in for example settlement archaeology. Mortuary archaeology also allows a more direct emotional link with the past, in that burials are deliberate expressions of identity and culture (Stutz and Tarlow 2013:2), though whether or not these expressions reflect a reality or an idealised version thereof is a significant question.



Figure 3: the Viking Age cemetery at Hedrum Prestegård. The cemetery does not form part of the core material here, but serves as a visual example of the types of landscapes described. The stone in the front centre of the image is an information plaque containing brief information regarding the site. Photo taken 15.05.2017 by the author.

Burials can be seen as time capsules, sealed into a specific point in time and closed off from the changing world outside. However, as has become increasingly apparent over the last few decades, interpreting mortuary remains is by no means straightforward or unproblematic. In fact, all of the hitherto mentioned benefits can also be perceived as challenges. Because a burial is a deliberate deposit, it is also open to manipulation by those who created them. They are constructs, made to answer a specific purpose or indeed several purposes, and not imprints of social reality. And they are memorials raised over a specific individual, or sometimes over several specific individuals, which means that they represent this one person or persons and arguably their mourners, and not necessarily society at large.

The dangers of deconstructing

The idea that the dead do not bury themselves (Pearson 1999) came to the fore in the 1980s and 1990s, and has remained a consideration in mortuary analysis since. Key to this concept is that burials are created by those who are left, in many cases those who mourn the dead, and are as such susceptible to ideological manipulation (Parker-Pearson 1982:99). This means that we cannot automatically assume that the treatment of a given dead individual bears direct relation to their status in life (Stylegar 1997:80; Fahlander 2009:36), nor can we assume that grave goods were the personal belongings of the deceased. Instead, they may be grave gifts given by mourners (Fahlander and Østigård 2008:7) with little relation to the deceased's occupation or social standing. That the custom may have been to bury the dead in different attire from what they wore in life is another complication (Tarlow 2001:91; Bazelmans 2002:74). Added to this is the consideration that we construct identities based on partial reflections only, as perishable materials only rarely survive. Not only do we have to contend with the challenge that we may misunderstand the material traces that we do have, we also have to factor in that we are quite likely to be missing integral pieces of the puzzle.

In addition, grave goods may not be the only aspects which reflect wealth and status; there are other aspects which may have been just as important, such as the external burial monument and its location. From this, it is clear that the reconstruction of society from mortuary remains is a field fraught with dangers and difficulties. Nevertheless, it remains one of the best sources archaeologists have to hand.

Burials are rituals, and as such they are idealised actions, a performed set of prescribed actions that fulfil specific goals and needs (Kristoffersen and Østigård 2008:128-137). What we see is the final outcome, the remains of such rituals (Williams and Sayer 2009:3). Depending on the religious beliefs in question, burials can fulfil the needs of the dead, the living, or as is arguably most common, of both.

Mortuary archaeology studies the remains of rituals which allow us to conjecture about past belief systems and ideals (Stutz and Tarlow 2013:5), but there can be no assumption that they directly reflect social reality. Instead, we may expect a distorted reflection, deliberately created to fulfil a multitude of possible roles and functions. It is however important to remember that although burials must be understood as ritualised actions,

they are the particular rituals belonging to a certain society, and can subsequently be assumed to contain information about this society's ideologies and norms.

Importantly, burials must be understood in a social context (Williams and Sayer 2009:4), and should not be overcomplicated and alienated as ritual actions divorced from any social reality. There is a real danger in deconstructing everything to the point where nothing can be seen to say anything of meaning at all. In other words, it is vital to retain a sense of the important information that burials do contain, whilst remaining aware of the potential pitfalls of interpreting them at face value.

In fact, an underlying assumption for my approach is that it is justifiable to say that to some extent the dead *do* bury themselves. This pertains specifically to the Norwegian Viking Age, where mortuary contexts testify to a society that placed a great deal of care and consideration in the treatment of their dead. In such societies, it seems facetious to insist that the dead had no hand in their own burial, because there would have been an expectation to be buried right. Within this lies the threat of a bad burial causing revenants, as well as the obligation to honour the dead. There is also the wider consideration of burials as imbued with political messages. Hence, we ought not dismiss the deceased as agents in their own mortuary contexts, though it may be correct to state that the ultimate decisions would have rested with the living.

Burials can be seen as the physical manifestations of certain beliefs, which leave behind an archaeological record. They also alter and influence the landscape in which they are placed, and therefore influence the physical reality surrounding those who lived in that landscape. On a related note, it is important to bear in mind that death rituals do not necessarily display the actual relations of power relevant to a given society (Parker-Pearson 1982:100)⁴. Instead, they may be expressions of the ideal, or of a desired situation. In this sense, burials can in some cases be interpreted as naturalising and legitimating hierarchies of power, as has, as we will see in the subsequent chapter, been argued for Viking Age Vestfold. This thesis will argue that the mortuary record from the Norwegian Iron Age, and in this case specifically the Viking Age, can yield information relevant to social structure and realities. This is based on the integrated and entangled

⁴ Though as an interesting note here, it is worth mentioning that this interpretation is often called upon in cases where prominent female burials feature, as will be evidenced later in this thesis.

nature of belief and reality in the Viking Age, where beliefs and rituals were part of daily life, thus forming part of the reality of social structure.

Rituals of change and transition

A common influence on how burials are interpreted draws on van Gennep's theory of *rites de passage* with its tripartite process of transition from one social state to another, moving through preliminary rites (separation from the existing world), liminal or threshold rites (rites during the transitional stage) and into postliminal rites (ceremonies which introduce the person into the new world) (Pearson 1999:22; Robb 2013:453). Although it certainly has been used extensively, and has been criticised for being rather vague and even quite self-evident (Pearson 1999:22), it is in many contexts still a useful basis from which to make sense of mortuary evidence. Burials that are visible in the archaeological record are often the remains of elaborate rituals, and what we seek to glean from them is not only a sense of the individual interred (who were they, what role did they play, how did they fit into society in general), nor is it merely the social structures and norms. It is all of these things, as well as the underlying beliefs which led to the creation of such lasting burial monuments (Tarlow 2013). Understanding burials as rituals of transition can help understand aspects relating to the individual buried, as well as the wider belief systems in which they were created.

However, the liminalities and transitions, though a contributing factor, is not the main point of enquiry here. Hence these are fascinating aspects to keep in mind, which will be touched upon in later discussions, but which will not form the main focus here.

The transitory nature of wealth

A final comment must be made on the terminology of wealth and affluence. It is common in mortuary archaeology to discuss the relative wealth of burials, and this thesis will be no exception. Many studies of mortuary remains will summarise the amount of grave goods, or assign a wealth score to individual graves based on the finds and furnishings.

The potential hazards of this need to be recognised however, as wealth is a relative term. What modern Western eyes consider wealth may not correlate with what past societies valued. Though to my eyes, a sword with silver inlay may be more impressive than a now empty container, we do not know what this container symbolised, or indeed if it may have contained perishable goods of high value. And on the subject of perishables, we must consider the likelihood that much of the original grave goods may have decomposed, such

as fabrics and wooden artefacts. Consequently, assigning wealth scores is considered too insecure to be of much methodological use here, though it is justifiable to compare similar burial assemblages to see where they belong on a spectrum of comparable contexts.

This relates to that we can only work with what we have. Thus, the term wealth in this thesis is used to describe the documented and recorded grave goods, though the likelihood that this is not a complete picture is recognised.

Concluding remarks on mortuary evidence

In summary then, burials serve a wealth of different purposes. They may be political events and elaborate displays of ruling power; they are almost always a way of disposing of the dead, and they serve to separate the living from the dead both by physically removing the dead from circulation in the living world, and often by going through the correct and required rituals in order to cement the new identity of the deceased as dead and no longer amongst living. Here, they will be interpreted as the remains of deliberate ritual action, the result of deeply embedded beliefs. They will also be interpreted as reflections of a kind, albeit distorted and exaggerated, of a social ideology in action. Finally, burials are considered in part as political and ideological statements.

The pick and mix approach to theory

As will have become evident throughout this chapter and the previous, a common factor in many areas of study is a tendency towards pluralisms and an openness to different approaches. This is not symptomatic of archaeology alone, but rather symptomatic of the social sciences in general (Fahlander 2012:140), and arguably even of our wider social context. I argue this is a positive development academically, as it allows influence from several strands of theory to be combined without becoming too rigid or dogmatic. If we are to say anything new about the past, we need different ways of thinking about our material, and a theoretical approach characterised by openness to different influences is integral to this.

To summarise, the theoretical platform used in this thesis draws on several movements and influences, whilst actively seeking to avoid alignment with strict dogmas or single paradigms. Chief amongst these influences is a gender perspective informed by feminist theory. The fallacy of seeking to impose a narrow gender system on to the past is also key, and a belief in the continued importance of challenging stereotypes which disallow

individual agency, which still often happens in interpretations of women and women's potential social roles. A landscape analysis influenced by phenomenology with a wish to view the landscape as an inhabited arena influenced by social realities, as well as an understanding that people are shaped by their social memories, and that social memories are in turn recreated and reaffirmed by the people who live within their parameters, is also essential. An understanding that a shared past is a very powerful concept, and one which unites groups of people who may otherwise not have found much in common, thereby creating social cohesiveness across factors such as class, family, gender and age, is fundamental.

The aim of all of this is to question the known "truth" of gender rules in the past, which continues an unspoken premise in so many interpretations.

Chapter Four: A history of important men: the Viking Age condensed

This chapter forms the first half of a two-part exploration of Viking Age scholarship on the main themes in this thesis, of gender ideologies, power relations and expressions of these. This section will offer a breakdown of some pertinent themes within Viking Age research, especially as regards the issues of perceived familiarity in social order, as well as traditional representations of Viking Age social organisation.

This chapter, together with the next, will provide a framework for my research questions, by exploring questions of social organisation, power, gender and status in Viking Age scholarship. The themes will be approached through a presentation of history of research and current debates, and will be split thematically. This first chapter will explore the traditional aspects of Viking Age scholarships, specifically with a view towards social order as it has typically been represented, and to the fallacy of familiarity, where the past is depicted as closely resembling social models from recent history, which so often attaches to the Viking Age.

It is important to note that the following does not present a comprehensive overview of scholarship on the Viking Age, but is intended as an introduction to the challenges attached to ideas of gender and gendered power balances. Hence the ensuing discussion is intended as a critical view of the overarching academic structures which have fostered a discipline which tends to neglect the active role of women in the production and reproduction of culture, and should not be taken as a critique of any scholarly output cited here in a wider sense. The second chapter will delve more deeply into questions on gender and gender-specific social status, and will explore in detail the idiosyncrasies in the standard presentations of the Viking Age versus the opposing evidence which speaks for a more fluid reality in gender roles.

The overarching theoretical foundations which were laid down in the previous chapters will be carried forward here, meaning the focus is kept on topics of gender, landscape and expressions of power. Viking Age research has an established and marked tendency to focus on power, on aggressive expansion, communication and consolidation of power and status, and as a result the stories often told about the Viking Age tend to portray a time of

violence, where doughty men of valour fought and schemed for riches and glory. To quote Judith Jesch's seminal *Women in the Viking Age*, the popular perception of the era remains "irredeemably male" (1991:1), an apt description over 25 years after it was first made.

The result of this narrow focus in research questions is a narrow understanding of society, where the emphasis remains firmly on high status men as the perceived doers of actions. As will be explored in the next chapter, this idea of the Viking Age as male has been challenged repeatedly throughout the last four decades, and yet academic publishing and discourse remains firmly anchored in a world view which discounts large parts of the population as socially insignificant or economically uninteresting.

The Viking heritage

The topic of the Scandinavian relationship with, and use of, its Viking past has seen a lot of attention in the last 20 years or so (Arwill-Nordbladh 1998; Svanberg 2003a, 2003b; Haavardsholm 2004; Steinsland 2005:59; Hillerdal 2009a; Orning 2017:249), so much so that it is now part of the canon of Viking Age scholarship. What has received less attention however, is the impact the transference of modern gender norms and value divisions on to the Viking past may have on today's society.

In Norway especially, the emergence of archaeology as a discipline in the 19th century is significant, as this was a time in which there was an explicit agenda of finding a uniting past and the prerequisite symbols of national unity. Under Swedish rule in the 19th century, and with a long history of Danish rule before then, there was a growing wish for independence at the time, which was very well served by creating a common origin myth in the Vikings (Gansum 2004:28; Hillerdal 2009a:251; Orning 2017:249). The wish to find a shared past which was untainted by foreign rule, and of which people could be proud, goes a long way towards explaining the interest which the Viking Age generated in the 19th and early 20th century. It also helps understand the feelings of ownership and even affection that persists in public perceptions of the Viking Age.

It was as a country searching for its collective soul that the Viking Age in Norway came to be used both as a shared past of which people could be proud, as well as a potent reminder of how great the nation had once been. Cultural appropriation in the shape of ancestor stories about how "we" lived in the Viking Age and about "our" Viking heritage became popular not just in Norway, but across Scandinavia (Svanberg 2003a:13;

Hillerdal 2009a:48). In Norway, this was fuelled by the finds and subsequent excavations of the ship burials at Gokstad in 1880 and Oseberg in 1904 which presented ready-made symbols of a glorious past, the ship burials were freely linked with royal names from saga literature (see for example Brøgger 1916; Shetelig and Brøgger 1928) in order to promote a sense of shared history. That these early tendencies in Viking studies have coloured research up until the present day can be safely conjectured, and hearing about “our” ancestors or of “our” Viking heritage is by no means uncommon still (see for example Haavardsholm 1996:32; and see Jahnsen 2015 for a discussion of this type of cultural referencing), nor is it uncommon to hear evocations of the Viking Age in discussions of modern day Scandinavian culture. Tourist shops still touting horned plastic “viking” helmets is but one example of how ingrained the idea of Viking heritage has become. The topic of who owns the past is wide and complex, and one that needs to be considered wherever accounts of history and prehistory are concerned. A reminder that perceived ownership breeds familiarity, which in turn breeds assumptions of similarity, seems timely at this stage.

This point becomes especially pertinent when it comes to questions of gender and gender roles. A recurring theme in this thesis are the Victorian roots of Viking Age scholarship, and the subsequent influence this has had on our own understanding of gender, status and social order. This influence is manifested in a set of perceived truths which have subsequently become cemented through continuous repetition in academic accounts throughout the 20th century, as will be further detailed in the subsequent chapter (and as discussed by Arwill-Nordbladh 1998). If gender in the past is influenced by gender in the present, the same is also true in reverse. As was discussed in Chapter Two, ideas of gender in the past serves to legitimise modern gender ideologies.

After the initial flurry of interest in all things Viking Age, the famous misuse of Viking symbolism by the Nazis resulted in a somewhat subdued approach to the Viking Age in the aftermath of the Second World War, which saw less emphasis placed on the history of the Vikings as conquerors and warriors, and indeed on the tendency to draw direct cultural lines to the past in general. Instead, the second half of the 20th century saw an increased focus on their pursuits as traders and settlers (Brink 2008:4-5). After a while though, the tradition started in the 19th and early 20th century of viewing the Viking Age as a time of glorious expansion and as the origin of state formation in Scandinavia eventually regained popularity. This can be seen in standard textbooks published in the

latter part of the 20th century where the Viking Age tends once again to be described as a history of powerful men with aggressive expansion tactics (as evident in amongst others Roesdahl 1987; Sawyer 1996; Fitzhugh 2000; Poulsen and Sindbæk 2011; Jesch 2015; and as problematised in Myhre 2015). Specialised studies of kings, chieftains and petty kingdoms have also re-entered the mainstream, albeit with new theoretical viewpoints and different focuses (though examples are numerous, see for instance Iversen 2011; Storli 2016; Skre 2017c, 2017a). The present climate of public interest in the Vikings has recently undergone something of a renaissance, with high-budget TV series such as *Vikings* and *The Last Kingdom* capturing wide audiences. Though there is still a certain association between extreme far-right groups and Old Norse mythologies, these are not seen as tainting by association and interest in the Viking Age remains strong amongst both public and academic environments.

What remains of this legacy of identification with the past is a sense of familiarity which pervades ideas about the Viking Age. This limits interpretations of social organisation amongst other things, as it presumes an inherent understanding on the part of modern researchers which I propose is ill-founded.

Viking Age Social order: a male affair?

Returning to the theme of how the common image of the Viking Age tends to present a very narrow view of society, it remains a consideration that the main bulk of academic interest is directed at able-bodied men of good birth (Dommasnes [1991] 1998:337). The consequence of this is that several groups are left out of mainstream narratives, and that the prevailing view of the Viking Age becomes one of a time where high status men are the only clearly visible inhabitants, with all other social groups providing a shadowy background. This view of the Viking Age is commonly encountered in scholarly works and textbooks, as well as in conference papers and in more popularised stories. A few examples to illustrate this will follow, but with the reminder that this is meant as a critical review of the overarching structures within our subject that neglect questions of gender, rather than as a critique of any of the works cited below in a broader context.

In a recent article which seeks to attribute the Viking expansion to male biased operational sex ratios, the suggestion is furthered that the Viking Age was triggered by male aggression caused by a surplus of men (Raffield, et al. 2016). This argument builds on James Barrett's influential article from 2008, which made a case for much the same

mechanisms of surplus young men created by a practice of female infanticide (Barrett 2008). The problems in this aforementioned article are numerous (both methodological, theoretical and indeed in the material used), and some of these will feature in subsequent chapters, but for the purposes of this particular issue, the elimination of women as social agents from prehistory, it suffices to point out that the article assumes men as the sole drivers of social change, casting women as little more than incentives for male action. Such a view posits that men alone were responsible for the Viking Age, its culture and its social consequences. It is more than a little reminiscent of *Man the Hunter*, and in fact relies on evolutionary theory to explain male aggression and female subordination, an underlying assumption that is contentious at best.

Another example is found in a relatively recent book detailing friendships and alliances in Norway and Iceland, which dedicates seven out of 150 pages to women (Sigurðsson 2010), making the case, both implicitly and explicitly, that men made all the important decisions. This last point is further implied in a recent publication on Avaldsnes, which although it generally represents a more carefully written account than many other publications as regards gender, still persists in describing the attributes of an area as attractive to “men of power and ambition”, effectively rendering decisions of land use and settlement a male domain (Skre 2017b:5). And a telling example of how evidence of female power is written out of historical interpretations is found in more than one case where large scale burial mounds are described as testifying to how (male) chieftains could command great resources (Sigurðsson 2008:22; Steinsland 2011a:9), without stopping to consider that one of the most famous of the large burial mounds was erected over two women. Accounts of women’s social role as secondary to men can also be encountered where the roles of women are essentially limited to reproduction, with cooking and weaving as their main skills, and where this is attributed explicitly to biology (Øye 2006:47). This gives voice to the suspicion that biology makes women less viable in the capacity of social agents, as was discussed in Chapters One and Two.

Going back a bit further, we can find descriptions of Viking Age Scandinavia as populated by slaves, and varying ranks of freemen (Sawyer 1996:42), with no women mentioned at all in the general set-up. Similarly, another example describes the Viking Age population as made up of warriors, kings, tradesmen and builders (Roesdahl 1987:10), with these groups being presumably made up of men.

Viking Age social order subsequently remains a male domain, with women only mentioned either as male accessories or even in some case as incentives for male action. The best one can hope for in such interpretations is that women are added merely as an afterthought, along with children and family concerns. The worst case scenario paints women as objects of male sexual desire with little function outside of this.

The best of friends

Viking Age social order is commonly described as founded upon, and revolving around, alliances in the guise of friendships (Miller 1986; Sigurðsson 2008:78; 2010:20). These friendships are not sentimental relationships of mutual emotional ties such as we know them today, but rather a network of intricate alliances which determined loyalty and support both of a remunerative and political nature (Sigurðsson 2010:20). This has changed from the long-standing belief that the Viking Age was primarily organised around family loyalty and kinship structures, which was the prevalent view from the 19th century and up until the last couple of decades (Sawyer 1996:45; Durrenberger and Pålsson 1999:59; Solberg 2003:259; Sigurðsson 2010:11). This shift in academia from kinship to friendship as the main social motivator has been brought about by persuasive analysis of written sources in the historical tradition, which show a society where alliances were formed through gift exchange and where bonds of friendship were maintained through mutual obligations (Müller 1986:23; Müller 1991; Durrenberger and Pålsson 1999; Sigurðsson 2010), in a rather classically Maussian model (Mauss [1925] 1990). An interesting variation on this theme is the suggestion that alliances were often kin-based, thus combining a kinship-oriented society with an alliance network (Odner 1973). Such alliances were often formalised by marriages, and in relatively small-scale societies this would mean a great deal of these friendships were actually formed with kin, hence creating a double-bind of alliances and kinship ties.

This shift from kinship to friendship in academic interpretations has however had very little effect on the perceived core of society, which in both models remain male heads of household. Inherent in most accounts of friendship structures, and indeed explicit in many, lies the assumption that this was a male domain, where women had little presence or influence. As stated by historian Jon Viðar Sigurðsson “Friendships were connected with the political arena, and women were for the most part excluded from this” (Sigurðsson 2010:134 my translation). This sentiment is one that can be found echoing throughout accounts of the Viking Age, perhaps especially within the historical tradition, and it

epitomizes the main issue with a scholarly tradition which excludes women from the social sphere. It is relevant here to mention that the most recent publication by the same historian has revised this statement to a position that holds that friendships were the prerogative of the elite, and that both women and men could form them (Sigurðsson 2017:57), and this positive trend will be further detailed in the next chapter. One publication does not reverse such a pervasive trend however, and there is a prevalent tendency to accord men more importance, more social agency, more influence and consequently, more academic interest than women. The end result of such one sided focus is to create a model of a society which was largely made up by men, where women are all but unimportant, unless as pawns in male power play. As will be seen in the discussion chapter, this idea can be traced in a large part to the legacy of the written sources, and can conversely be challenged through the analysis of the archaeological material. An increased cross-disciplinary engagement with material therefore, can be recommended in order to further explore questions of gender, as will also be discussed in Chapter 10.

Modern Vikings: how much of our gender ideology did they really share?

This thesis seeks to challenge the one sided view of society as male dominated through material remains. As stated above however, even if the remains in question were as male dominated as typical interpretations of the Viking Age might lead one to expect, that would not justify such a singular focus on one part of society only. If we assume that the traditional interpretations of a male led and dominated society are correct, that does not mean that women merit any the less attention. The tendency to focus on the particular social groups which academics themselves deem interesting leaves a very unfortunate tendency to ignore other aspects of society – maybe less glamorous, but none the less crucial to the smooth running of every-day life.

As a thought experiment, let us assume that women in the Viking Age really were always subordinate, tied to the home, and busy with the cooking, the cleaning and the childcare. These are all vitally important activities, without which the prominent men we so often hear about could have no hope of being successful. Ignoring these aspects when writing accounts of social order, betrays nothing so much as ignorance about how different parts of a society all play a role towards a greater whole. The front of house staff is not necessarily any more important than those who work behind the scenes. Such a focus simply reveals what the academic finds interesting and deems important, it does not show what was actually important in the past. This is of course a cornerstone of second wave

feminism in archaeology, the critique of the tendency to impose modern value divisions on to a past which may or may not have shared these.

A second critique to the traditional depictions of the Viking Age is one which we will return to in the subsequent chapter, but which merits a brief mention here: namely the tendency to assume that past societies shared our perceptions on public and private domains. Viking Age long houses were not like Victorian mansions where the cooking was done out of sight and the servants flitted about unseen with the aid of hidden doors and back stairs. The Viking Age house was, as much as anything else, a social arena (for an in-depth discussion on life in long houses see Eriksen 2015 or; Oma 2016). Daily life was part of this arena, in full public view, and presumably an important aspect of it. This feeds into the problem of designating what was private and what was public in the past. It can hardly be claimed that the farmhouse, the domain of women according to traditional stricture, but also the place in which farm workers gathered for their meals, and where guests were received and entertained, was a *private* domain (as discussed by amongst others Kristoffersen 1993, 2004; Løkka 2014), and yet it is often depicted as just that.

This transference of modern ideals on to the past is a fundamental building block in many interpretations. The assumption that the Viking Age was heavily male dominated in all respects has been questioned in recent decades as will be seen in the next chapter (To cite but a few Dommasnes 1982; Hjørungdal 1991; Arwill-Nordbladh 1998; Stalsberg 2001; Solli 2002; Bolin 2004; Mortensen 2004; Pedersen 2008; Pantman 2014; Sanmark 2014), but it remains a commonly accepted belief. An alternative understanding can be sought in a more fluid configuration of gender in the Viking Age, with fewer divisions in appropriate occupations for men and women and with a shared set of characteristics held up as the ideal for both.

Although I wish to argue for a shared set of ideals, these ideals are, in keeping with Carol Clover's argument from 1993, essentially what we would recognise today as masculine (Clover 1993:371), though not by this naturally assigned to men only: as will be further explored in Chapter Ten, they could be embodied and enacted by women too. This is crucial to the core of this thesis, as it is not how we understand these values that matters. The question is whether or not there was a feminine ideal to correspond with the masculine, one which exalted women as passive and submissive. In short, it is vital to understand whether or not the dominant understanding of gender was binary in the sense

of two separate domains and ways of being, or whether the reality was more complex: a society may have different roles and social expressions governed in part by gender without necessarily envisaging a fundamental ideological divide between two separate forms of human beings, such as the typical two-sex model posits.

The great divide – *innanstokks*/*utanstokks* debunked

In the historical tradition, independent farmers form the core of society, with slaves and serfs below them and the aristocracy above, as described in the Eddic poem *Rígstula*⁵ (Sigurðsson 2008:19). Indeed, the farm can be seen as the core of Viking Age society (Dommasnes 2016; Sigurðsson 2017:15), where the housewife reigned indoors and the farmer took care of the outdoors, including public affairs (Solli 2002:17; Sigurðsson 2017:140).

This sexual division of labour is fundamental in the arguments which uphold a traditional divide between men and women in the Viking Age. Men and women were so fundamentally different, the argument goes, that they even had separate domains in which they carried out their tasks and their activities. Appropriately for our modern minds, women are given the running of domestic tasks, *innanstokks*, meaning all work done within the household. Men are given *utanstokks*, meaning everything else – from field labour to public speaking. The assumption of the universality of women's work has reinforced this stereotype, as exemplified by Jesch's assertion that childcare and care of the elderly is traditionally done by women, and the Viking Age was no different from later times in this regard (Jesch 1991:22). Other similar examples pertain to women and cooking, with the argument that women were important in the settlement of Iceland for example, as they looked after the food (Sigurðsson 2008:44), or the matter-of-fact presentation of cooking as women's work by amongst others Jenny Jochens (Jochens 1995:131). This disregards the fact that there are little grounds to indicate cooking as a female-only domain, and in fact upholds the idea despite there being very few instances of women cooking in Old Norse texts (Jochens 1995:131). Grave goods indicate that kitchen equipment feature commonly in both male and female graves, as will be further explored in Chapter Ten, together with the fluidity of other supposedly gendered categories. Further, preparation of food can be seen to be carried out by men in some instances in written sources (though circumstances are often obscure, see the following

⁵ The use of this poem is somewhat contentious, with many upholding it as a poem of an early date which contains a true reflection of Viking Age social order, whilst others find it of too uncertain a date ((Sigurðsson 2017:100)

for examples *Vatnsdøla Saga* 1989:327-329; *Njáls saga* 2007:194; *Soga om fosterbrørne* 2014:307; *Tåtten om Ravn Gudrunsson* 2014:459). Consequently, the matter-of-fact association between women and food preparation is a questionable practice that requires some further dissection.

The gender divide has nevertheless been cited as a known entity throughout the last 200 years, until it has by now become incontestable. It can be encountered everywhere from popular dissemination articles (Pedersen and Sigurdsson 2015) to academic publications where it is mentioned as a matter of course (Roesdahl 1987; Solberg 2003; Callmer 2006:189; 2008:185; Sigurðsson 2008:44), or even in cases where gender roles are ostensibly on review, and where this divide is listed as more or less absolute despite the authors having clear knowledge of substantial evidence to the contrary (Raffield, et al. 2017:187 in which works which disprove this sexual division are cited widely). This is despite the fact that it has been repeatedly pointed out that this may be more the ideal than the actual reality of social organisation (Clover 1993; Hoftun 1995; Price 2002:111; Dommasnes [1991] 1998:339), if it existed at all.

An additional worry is that the divide is derived from medieval legal codes, and there is the question of whether or not this can be assumed to apply to the Viking Age (Sigurðardóttir 2002:284), especially as it is not in fact supported by archaeological evidence (Croix 2012:188). A recent study of Danish dwelling sites shows that whilst there is a stronger correlation between women and the interior of houses, there is male presence there as well, and that both genders are represented in outside activities (Croix 2012:189). As the material discussed in Chapter Eight also shows, the mortuary record does not lend support to such a strict divide. The *innanstokks/utanstokks* divide can thus be shown to be the result of uncritical use of sources, rather than a reflection of the actual evidence (Croix 2012:245). This is in keeping with the material to be discussed in this thesis, and accordingly the assumption of a strict sexual division of labour will not be upheld here.

The male farmer, ploughing his land while his wife cooked and looked after the children is therefore assigned to the history books, replaced with the recommendation we look to other farming communities where the work is shared between the able of body, less dependent on gender and more on skills and capacity to work.

Warriors and farmers, tradesmen, craftsmen and settlers

Together with the farmer, the second archetypal image of a Viking Age man is of course the warrior (Jesch 1991:1), the intrepid explorer, conqueror and settler who travelled abroad with his band of brothers and his trusty weapons. But modern accounts tell us that the typical Viking was not just a farmer or a pirate and a looter, he was also a craftsman, a hunter, a trader and a settler (as exemplified in Jesch 1991:208; Jochens 1995:116; Sigurðsson 2008:35; and discussed in Løkka 2014:26 and; Dommasnes [1991] 1998:225). This all-male star cast of the Viking Age will be delved further into in the next chapter, where the presence of women in all of these categories will be discussed.

The perceived *maleness* of the Viking Age is highlighted in a recent article by Unn Pedersen, where her dissection of gender-loaded terminology in a recent important publication shows that words such as *kings/petty kings* occur 335 times as opposed to *queen*, which comes up once, and even more tellingly: that *man/men* occurs 44 times to *women/woman's* four (Pedersen 2014:178). The implication of this is clear: men are considered simply more interesting than women.

There has been a pronounced tendency to describe what men *could* do and what women *could not do*, which pinpoints a lot of the issues inherent in treating only one part of the population as active social agents. From the outset, such accounts are told from a perspective where male activities are the positive, the ones that are important and the ones that really count. Women are described only in terms of what they are not. Men are described in active language, whereas women remain passive, as can be seen in for example an article from 2006 discussing gendered style elements, wherein it is stated that masculine elements of style were taken over by women only after they “fell into disuse” (Callmer 2006:193), which ironically fails to see that an element is not in disuse if it is used by another group than the one originally affiliated with it. Likewise, assuming that most women did not wield weapons on a daily basis, this is unlikely to have been a defining feature of their social status, although it can sometimes read as if this really was what defines a woman (as could be inferred from Sigurðsson 2008:21). The tendency to define women by what they are not is a peculiarly Western one, where the main shortcoming of women is that they are not men. It is possible to conjecture that other societies defined women more by the activities that they actually did do, than what they did not.

Picturing the Viking Age

A final part of the overall picture which helps to maintain the Viking Age as male in popular opinion, is found in depictions of it.

Though it is not part of the explicit research aims of this thesis to critique museum representations and depictions of the Viking Age, this is a vital part of how our knowledge is communicated to the wider public, and therefore a vital part of how common perceptions are shaped. Museums are how many people first encounter the distant past, through school trips or family outings. Consequently, museums carry a serious responsibility to make sure the knowledge which they transmit is correct, unbiased and reflective of the highest academic standards.

When it comes to gender however, this responsibility is not often met. What many people visiting museums will be told when they enter exhibitions is that men were active agents in the past, while women are few and far between, and when they occur are often associated with domestic activities (Gifford-Gonzales 1993; Bergsdóttir 2016) In other cases, women are simply removed from the story, as is the case in a new short film currently showing at the Viking Ship museum in Oslo. This film shows the travels and the eventual burial of a (male) Viking chieftain, using predominantly material from the (female) Oseberg burial, in the form of material expressions and imagery from the Oseberg tapestries and other grave goods. Watching this film after visiting the surrounding exhibition, the viewer's thoughts would naturally go to the finds from Oseberg. This film is therefore particularly galling to watch from a gendered perspective: it gives no thought to the appropriation of symbols of female power to tell a story of male glory, and after having watched it through several times, I cannot recall having noticed a single female figure in it. It is worth noting that this film was released in 2017.



Figure 4: a still from the film "The Vikings Alive", as described above. Photo taken from the webpages of the Viking Ship museum.

A recent visit to the Trelleborg museum near Slagelse in Denmark also shows stereotypical depictions in their information posters, where women are indoors, static and passive, whilst men are fighting, *doing* and active:



Figure 5: an illustration poster of life at Trelleborg, where active men surround a passive woman, situated on the threshold of her house. Photo taken by the author 23.07.2018



Figure 6. an illustration poster at Trelleborg depicting a burial scene, where one shadowy woman features in the background. Photo taken by the author 23.07.2018

We must acknowledge the impact this can have on those who visit these museums. Museums form an important part of children's formative education with regards to engagement with the past for example. If we teach children the misguided assumption that women have tended babies and looked after the food while men have protected them hunted and fought since the earliest dawn of human history, we instil an expectation of this as natural and normal. From it being natural comes the logical extension that is also right, and from there it sets expectations of what girls and boys should grow up to be and do. This is not only limiting and potentially damaging, but considering the fact that we lack evidence to support these representations, I argue it is indefensible.

It is not only museums where this tacit understanding of the Viking Age as primarily male is observable however. It can also be found in illustrations in textbooks, Power Point presentations at conferences and in lectures, and even in postage stamps, as some examples below will show.

The issue of female underrepresentation in reconstruction drawings used to accompany archaeological texts is well documented, and has been succinctly summed up by scholars other than myself (Gifford-Gonzales 1993; Moser 1993). A consideration to bring forward from these critiques however, is the tendency of illustrators to make women passive and men active (as discussed in Gilchrist 1999:17). In this way, men are more

often depicted in situations of action than women, and the stereotypical activities which are so often unquestioningly assumed male, such as hunting, fighting, or producing, tend to be depicted as carried out by men. Women meanwhile, tend to be shown in domestic scenarios: cooking or tending children.

The first example is taken from an accompanying book published in connection with a museum exhibition about Kaupang in 2004 (Skre and Stylegar 2004). This particular image purports to show a day in the life of Kaupang, a bustling Viking Age town. The image is beautifully drawn, and does indeed show a busy townscape. It is however, a townscape which by my count shows 47 men and seven women. As an amusing aside, this typical representation of town life depicts as many seagulls as it does women, and it is hard to see how this is representative of a living population:



Figure 7: life in the Viking Age town of Kaupang, as illustrated in 2004 (Skre and Stylegar 2004).

Another, perhaps less striking example is found on postage stamps used in the Faroe Islands issued in 2005. The title is *everyday life in the Viking Age*. It is admittedly a far sight better than the conspicuously missing women from the example above, but it remains a depiction of everyday life where there are ten men to four women, and where these four women are restricted to such tasks as milking, weaving and carrying things. The men scythe, shear sheep, handle boats and sport weapons, meanwhile.



Figure 8: postage stamp used in the Faroe Islands. Photo taken from Faroe Island post service website (<http://en.stamps.fo/ShopItem/2005/0/PPS990205/ARK>)

Another fairly recent publications on Vikings in Denmark (Eriksen, et al. 2009), shows quite a few illustrations of general daily life, including farming which is here imagined as overwhelmingly male:



Figure 9 and Figure 10: two examples of farming, as depicted in *Vikinger i Vest* (Eriksen, et al. 2009:73 and 91).

Conversely, the same publications imagines a Viking family as per the below illustration, which though although one cannot quibble with the general make-up of people and ages, does warrant the observation of the adherence to gender stereotypes with its strong looking men and its child-carrying woman:

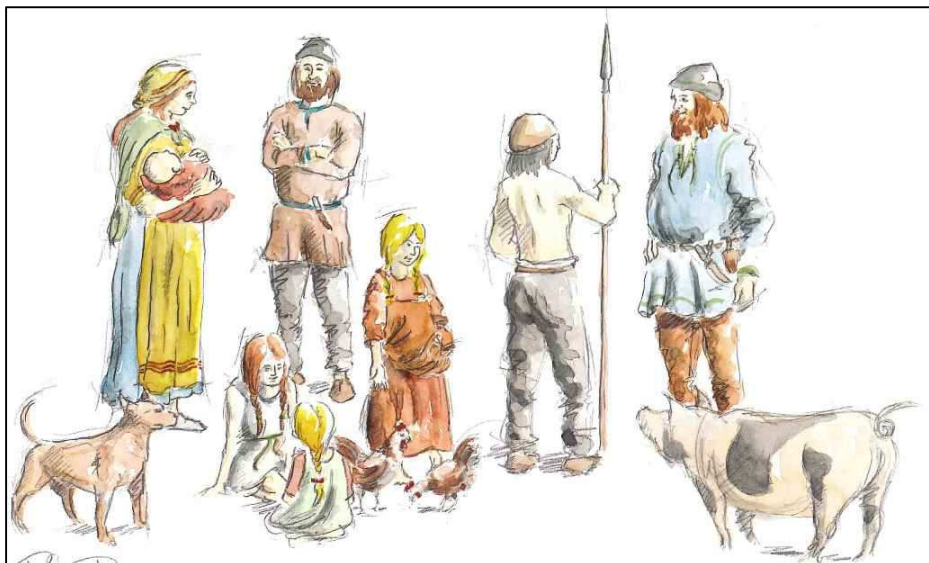


Figure 11: a Viking Age family, with the father looking authoritative, and the mother holding an infant (Eriksen, et al. 2009:146).

Going back a little further, it is clear this trend has roots stretching back into earlier publications. The below shows the construction of town defences, as imagined in a volume on Denmark's history, where there is a single (cooking) woman amongst 15 men in the background (Birkebæk 1982):

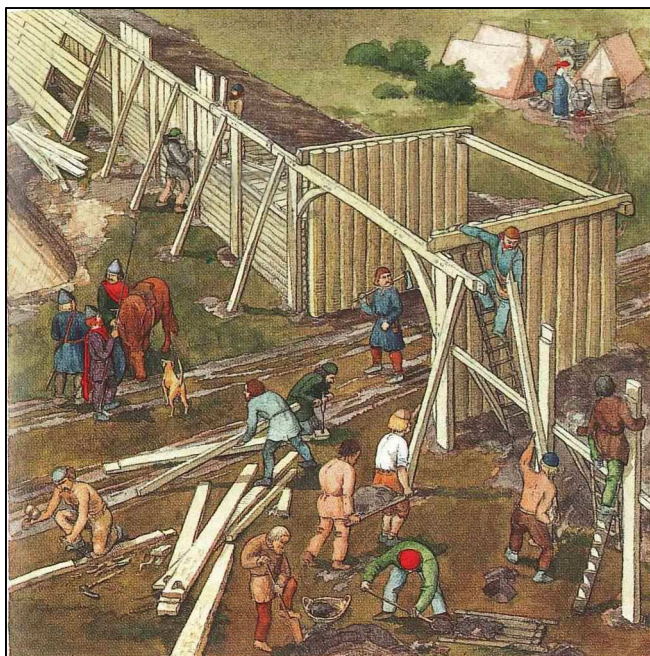


Figure 12: the construction of town defences, with one (cooking) woman amongst 15 men (Birkebæk 1982:23).

This same volume also imagines a Viking Age marketplace where there are six men engaged in various activities, and one woman, cooking:

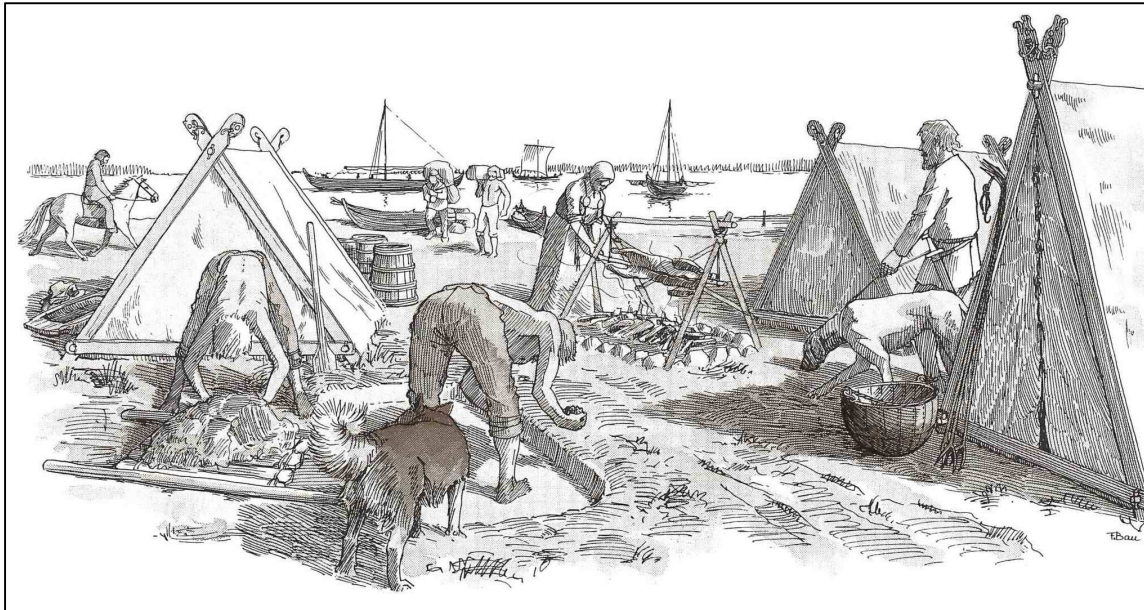


Figure 13:a Viking Age marketplace (Birkebak 1982:52)

In a reconstruction of a Viking Age longhouse (Roesdhal, et al. 2014:51) we can see men and women in their imagined places: the one woman in the picture is cooking, whilst the men are variously looking out into the world, admiring the livestock or waiting by the fire:

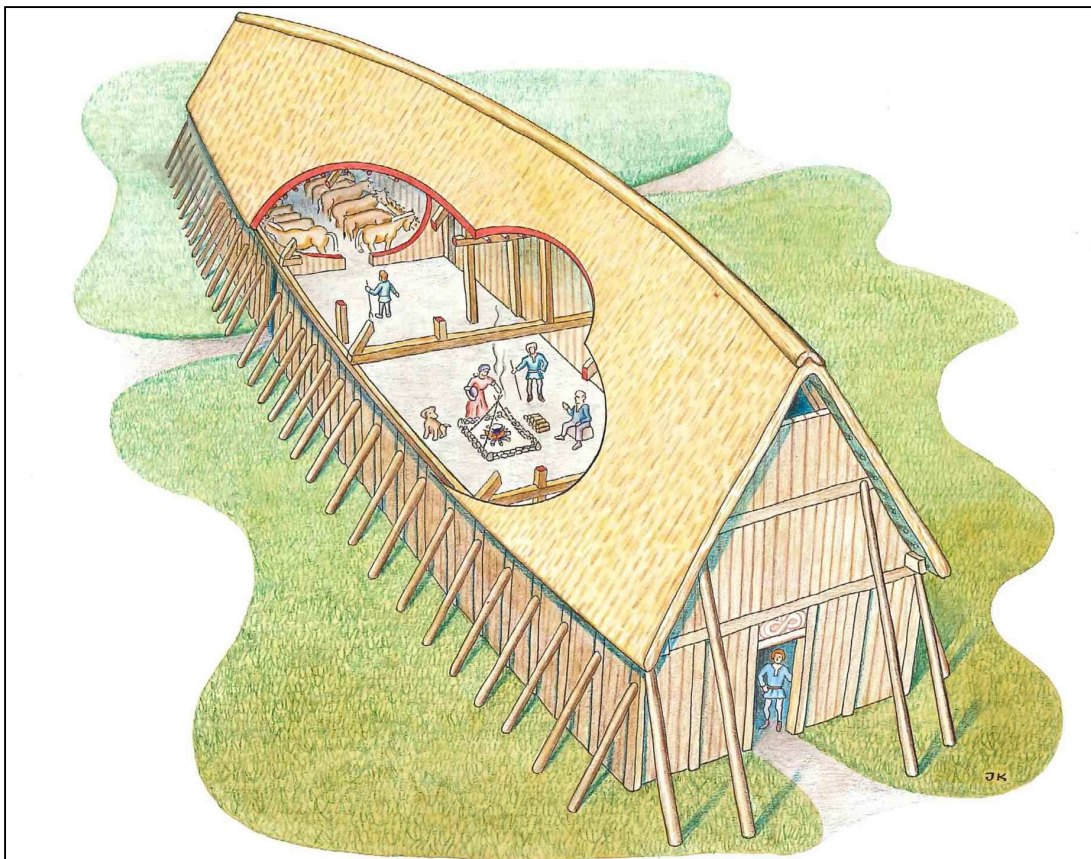


Figure 14: a Viking Age longhouse, with its inhabitants in their allotted spaces (Roesdhal, et al. 2014:51)

And judging by this final illustration of how York might have looked in the Viking Age (Roesdahl, et al. 1981), it seems that marketplaces and towns tended to be universally low on female representation, with three women visible, one of whom is holding a baby:



Figure 15: York as it may have looked in the Viking Age (Roesdahl, et al. 1981:98)

Thus, it remains a problem that depictions of Viking Age life tend to underrepresent one half of the population. When read in conjunction with texts which neglect to explore women's roles and contributions, the result is an image of a society where men really were the main actors.

Owned landscapes and the language of power

That archaeology as a discipline tends to focus on the elites of past societies is a valid point of criticism and one which aptly fits many studies of the Norwegian Viking Age. The counterargument to this complaint is of course that the remains that we work with tend to be the remains left by the elites, because they had the resources to leave lasting records (Lewis-Simpson 2010:224); burials with little or no grave goods, smaller homesteads and poorer remains tend to go unnoticed. Although arguments can be made that it was not the members of the elite themselves who created the monuments with which they marked their status, a point can certainly be made that they remain memorials of those who occasioned their building more than those who actually shifted the stones and earth to create them. At least this can be argued in the sense of them being memorials containing specific information regarding one person or a few persons: whilst not diminishing the role of the labourer, their work remains, in this context, sadly anonymous. This is perhaps particularly the case with mortuary monuments, which are often built in a

particular way, or which contain particular items, meant to communicate something about the person they commemorate. Thus, the study of the mortuary landscape in Viking Age Vestfold becomes a study of elite practices. It is contended here that these customs can be assumed to communicate an ideal, meaning that they contained and communicated an ideology upheld and believed in by the wider population. However, this does mean that the evidence in question here pertains to a restricted part of society only.

It is therefore necessary to acknowledge the limitations of a work that focuses on elite practices, whilst at the same time highlighting that this is less through choice of material than through availability. Though elite practices may arguably be a distorted reflection of more widespread customs, it is important to leave in the clause that the conclusions drawn here pertain to a small segment of Viking Age society.

A further point to remember is that “the elite” cannot be assumed to have been a unified and uniform class of people, who all fulfilled the same role and held the same beliefs. Rather, we must expect diversity in social mores and beliefs, varying between regions, families and social groups.

Boundaries, possessions and the owned landscape

To return to the main theme of this section, landscape studies of the Viking Age in Vestfold have tended to focus on the mortuary landscape, a circumstance occasioned by Norway’s relative poverty in excavated settlement evidence, which is more abundant in other countries.

In keeping with the tendency to focus on the Viking Age as populated by powerful men, studies of the mortuary landscape have correspondingly often focused on questions of status and ownership (See for example Gansum 1995, 1997; Skre 1997, 1998; Gansum 2004; Skre 2007e; Brink 2008). As a result of this preoccupation with power relations, the mortuary landscape is often described in rather loaded terms: as imposing, dominating, powerful, competitive, and as an integral part of how the elite communicated their power (Jennbert 2006:136; Thäte 2009:115; Griffiths and Harrison 2011:132 and the references cited above, Skre and Gansum). In this tradition, the landscape is a manifestation of power, and the focus remains very much on its manipulation by chieftains, kings and the landowning elite.

An overarching theme in the mid-1990s was an emphasis on the manipulated landscape and on burial mounds as symbols of power and ownership (for examples of this approach, see Gansum 1995, 1997; Skre 1997; Iversen 1999:339), interpretations which have come to be accepted as the dominant theories. In line with this view, the mortuary landscape has been interpreted as manifestations of power, seeing burial mounds as expressions from the ruling elite who are, according to different interpretations, either secure (Ingstad 1993:226; Skre 1997) or insecure in their power (Fuglestedt 1997; Gansum 1997; Opedal 2010:17). Whether secure or insecure however, the burial mounds remain potent symbols in interpretations where they feature as physical manifestations of control.

The location of the mounds is often emphasised as important, mainly in terms of how they dominate the landscape. Their outward expressions are discussed in terms of size and visibility, with the underlying argument that these are crucial aspects of their meaning and symbolism. In general, the usual approach is to derive assumptions about the status and wealth of the interred judged on the grave goods and, crucially to this thesis, the size of the burial mound (Aannestad and Glørstad 2017:158). Indeed, it is hard to see the burials as anything but expressions of high status, extreme examples of conspicuous consumption as it were, created to communicate a very specific message of power ideology.



Figure 16: an illustration photo from the national park at Borre, demonstrating the imposing appearance of large burial mounds

In addition to their role as manifestations of power, another meaning often ascribed to burial mounds is based on the Medieval legal classification of burial mounds as property markers⁶, which argues that they should be seen as symbols of ownership (Skre 1997:43). This argumentation makes a case that the household leader of every generation was provided with a burial mound, thereby marking their social importance and connecting the family with the land (Skre 1997, 1998), which is certainly a persuasive argument, though perhaps not universally applicable. There has also been a marked trend to connect burial mounds with *odelsrett*, namely inheritance rights to land, which are often conjectured to have come into play around the time of the Early Iron Age (as problematised in Gjerpe 2017:154; and as detailed in Zachrisson 2017). The particularly interesting thing here, is the clear stance of many academics that ownership and *odelsrett* was in the main a male prerogative, referencing male burials as more visibly marked in the landscape (as problematised in Gjerpe 2017:161; and argued for in Zachrisson 2017:127). The suggestion has even been furthered that it is graves containing weapons which communicate ownership (Solberg 2003:268), which does not account for the shared symbolism in outward shape between male and female graves.

Burial mounds as symbols of land ownership and inheritance rights is well and good, but the question needs to be answered why there is such a unanimous agreement that only men could own land, when so many burial mounds are erected over women. Zachrisson points to that in Sweden, more men are commemorated by mounds in the Viking Age (Zachrisson 2017:128), but the same cannot so easily be argued for Norway: though there are indeed more male than female burial mounds known as a whole, there are sufficient female gendered burials in mounds to demonstrate that land-ownership cannot be unequivocally aligned with men. Early medieval inheritance laws place land in male hands, though women could also inherit in some circumstances (Sawyer 1992:53-55), a factor which is often used to support the idea of land ownership as mainly male. In general though, discussions of land ownership as expressed by burial mounds has a tendency to overlook the presence of female gendered burials in mounds.

The thriving study on what burial mounds symbolise serves to illustrate that the mortuary landscape of the Viking Age is seen as symbolically important. It also serves to illustrate that it is often seen as a more or less direct extension of perceived social structures and

⁶ Two Norwegian medieval legal texts state that land ownership can be proved by following the family line back to heathen burial mounds, or *to haugs ok til heiðni* (Skre 1997:43; Zachrisson 2017)

ideologies of the time, but that these perceived social structures may not be based on a full view of the material in question.

More recent approaches to the mortuary landscape of Viking Age Norway have focused on ritual aspects, and on the burial mounds as foci for ritual actions which may have served to legitimise power structures (Østmo 2004). The wider context of the landscape in which the burials are located is considered of great importance, and aspects such as proximity to roads and other boundaries has been examined at some length (Østmo 2005). Further, the landscape as a social and cultural arena (Solli 2002:30) and concepts of the cognitive landscape (Lund 2009) has seen increasing interest in the last couple of decades. However, mingled with these approaches is the remaining foundation that the mortuary landscape expresses status, which also acts as a basic principle in my work. That this status may be varied, that the landscape may have held many different meanings and acted as a multifaceted arena for social interplay and cultural coding is another aspect of my focus.

Viking Age social order summed up

As this chapter has made a point of examining, the Viking Age has remained the domain of warlike men. There is often little time or attention given to other social groups, including but not limited to, the female half of the population. Children, the elderly, men who could not or did not fight, the poor and the disabled are more of the groups which tend to be left out of many representations of Viking Age society.

The picture which still stands at the forefront of both public consciousness and academic interpretations is one of powerful men, with strong housewives standing firmly in the background.



Figure 17: depiction of a Viking Age man and woman, conforming to stereotype with the foregrounded, weapon-wielding man, and the woman standing behind (Roesdahl, et al. 1981:106).

These strong men were typically commemorated by large scale burial mounds, which represented not only their wealth and social standing, but also their claim to ownership of the land itself.

As will be evident from this chapter, this is but one side of the story, and perhaps needless to say one which I find inadequate. The following chapter will turn to a closer examination of scholarship which has challenged the status quo. This tends to be scholarship with an explicit interest in gender and women's lives, which is symptomatic of the resistance of mainstream archaeology to incorporate questions of gender and social status: it remains an unfortunate fact that gender has remained on the outskirts, a specialised field of enquiry, rather than a part of every study of social organisation, as it ought to be. However, as the next chapter will demonstrate, a reappraisal of the Viking Age as we think we know it is overdue.

Chapter Five: Cooking, weaving, fighting and trading – what did women do?

This chapter examines the extensive scholarship on women in the Viking Age. The main aim of the chapter is to demonstrate that once one starts to delve into several different activities and social norms, there are few arenas which appear to be exclusive to either gender. This challenges the predominant binary gender model, by demonstrating that the absolute divides presented as the norm in the previous chapter often do not hold up to closer scrutiny.

Where the previous chapter sought to outline Viking Age society as it is traditionally represented, so this one turns to the challengers to this status quo.

The gendered Viking Age in Norway – A Victorian stereotype perpetuated?

Any discussion of where the traditional image of gender in the Viking Age springs from, ought to my mind to start with Elisabet Arwill-Nordbladh's insightful *Genuskonstruksjoner i Nordisk Vikingatid, Förr och Nu* (Arwill-Nordbladh 1998), in which she demonstrates how the common understanding of gender in the Viking Age stems in a large part from Victorian ideals. This theme had been previously brought to light by other researchers with an interest in gender in the Viking Age (Dommasnes [1991] 1998), but had not been explored to the same depth, leaving Arwill-Nordbladh's work as a turning point for those wishing to understand the harmful legacies of presentism in gender ideals in this research area. The popular image of the publically active man and the competent, but domestically centred woman (who, crucially, was content with her role in the home) became an integral part of the general understanding of the Viking Age, forming as they did the very core of society as it was imagined. Because they mirrored the gender ideologies of the time in which the first archaeologists were working, these gender roles were accepted as normal and true, and they entered the cannon of truths about the Viking Age through being reiterated in scholarly accounts from the 19th Century and right up into present times (Arwill-Nordbladh 1998:48). The familiarity of these gender roles made them seem right to 19th century scholars, as they still seem right to us today. No wonder perhaps, seeing as our own gender ideologies spring from the same 19th century values, making the Viking Age look familiar and indeed natural in this regard. It

also, as Arwill-Nordbladh pointed out, served the political purpose of helping to legitimise women's association with the domestic sphere (Arwill-Nordbladh 1998:48): it was considered natural and proper that women should tend the home, and the power of historicity in showing it has "always" been this way ought not to be underestimated.

Within this, lies the contention that even when there was evidence to the contrary, there was a lack of interest amongst the general academic community throughout much of the 20th century to challenge the accepted gender ideologies ascribed to the Viking Age. Thus it was possible for the Oseberg burial to be proposed as a religious sacrifice as recently as 1995 (Gansum 1995), a proposition that has been shown to rest on acceptance of gender stereotypes rather than on the nature of the burial (for a detailed argument of this, see Pedersen 2008; Moen 2011).

As we will see however, alternative voices started appearing in the 1980s and 1990s which sought to challenge the model of Victorian Vikings, and it is these that we will now turn to.

The early beginnings of gender interest in the Viking Age

The previous three decades have seen an abundance of research done on women and on gender in the Viking Age, much of which challenges the typical representations detailed in the previous chapter. The development of gender focus in Viking Age studies corresponds well with the general trends of gender archaeology: the early pioneers in the 1980s showed an explicit interest in identifying and locating women in the record, whereas this eventually blended with emphasis on social organisation and fluidity in gender roles. Gender focus blended more happily with mainstream archaeology in these early years in Norway than in many other countries. There was even a specialised journal, *K.A.N.*, which was dedicated to perspectives on gender and women, which ran from 1985 to 2005. However, Viking studies are not limited to Norway nor indeed Scandinavia, and though many invaluable contributions have come from other countries, the acceptance of gender theory has been somewhat sluggish in Viking Age scholarship.

In line with the general trends of gender archaeology, early gender research in the Viking Age focused on women's visibility and on highlighting the various contributions of women (Løkka 2014:13). Works such as Judith Jesch's *Women in the Viking Age* published in 1991 sought to systematically describe women's lives in the Viking Age (Jesch 1991), and Jenny Jochen's *Old Norse Images of Women* (Jochens 1995) similarly

focused on discussing women in the Old Norse sources in terms of visibility. These early works were invaluable for raising awareness and interest in what had hitherto been a neglected side to Viking Age society, though there are valid critiques that can be raised regarding their use of source material, as well as in presentist assignments of modern gender stereotypes on to past behavioural patterns. A primary focus on written sources can be problematic, as will be further explored in Chapter Ten, especially when this approach is not tempered with engagement with the archaeological material.

Other works focused more on women within the family and on how women had access to influence and status, such as for example Liv Helga Dommasnes's influential examination of burials on the west coast of Norway in which she argues that women who were accorded high-status burials had achieved their social standing by taking over the running of farms in their husbands' absence (Dommasnes [1991] 1998). A common denominator for much work on power and gender relations however, is the tendency to highlight women's *influence*, rather than any direct power. Even works explicitly interested in women in powerful situations seem to avoid putting those words together, and if they do, they tend to compensate by stating how very rare such persons were (as demonstrated in Dommasnes 1982:442; Gräslund 2001:82; Magnusdóttir 2008:41; and problematised in Løkka 2014:15). This idea of female subordination as a given truth permeates much of the early work on gender questions (Jesch 1991; Jochens 1995; Wicker 1998), as well as being fundamental to ideas of social organisation in the dominant academic discourse. As we will see however, the assumption of this as a universal truth does not rest on a solid foundation in the sources and material available,

The contribution of the early works focusing on women and gender in the Viking Age ought not to be underestimated. Without these seminal works, the debate into which I am feeding would not have been initiated at all, and though I may disagree with some of the basic assumptions about social organisation, this disagreement is a direct result of these works having provided a platform from which to further investigate questions of the social dynamics and gender organisation.

Carrying the torch forwards

As demonstrated in Chapter Two, the use of the wave metaphor for feminist influence in academia somewhat clouds the complex reality. This is especially true as regards the Viking Age, as much of the work done has clear and explicit roots in ideas and theoretical

strands which originate in the 1980s and 1990s. This does not mean that practitioners of gender archaeology within the Viking Age are particularly backwards, it is rather symptomatic of archaeology in general. What it does mean is that the theoretical landscape has not drastically changed, and that work which was begun 30 years or more ago still needs carrying forward and completing today.

In order to construct a solid background for where my own research fits in, the remainder of this chapter will therefore be spent examining some of the most common tropes often attributed to the Viking Age, such as selective female infanticide, and that certain social domains were reserved only for men. Hence the remainder of the history of research will be intermixed with this review of women in the wrong places.

Indexing women: Women and women's roles in mainstream academia

As the previous chapter sought to illuminate, in the accepted model of the Viking Age, women were markedly subordinate to male heads of their households, be it a father, brother, husband or son (as evidenced in Jesch 1991; Jochens 1995; Øye 2006). These accounts often propose that *some* women could gain influence in the Viking Age (notably widows), but with the caveat that this was rare. There is often a brief mention of that women could own and inherit property, and that they had access to divorce, but again with the caveat that this meant little in terms of their actual social standing (Solberg 2003:260; Sigurðsson 2008:84; 2010:132). The impression such paragraphs tend to leave is that they are little more than lip-service paid to make sure the “gender-aspect” has been paid sufficient attention to. What these issues actually mean is rarely explored, leaving a general impression that there is little question regarding social organisation in the Viking Age, because it is largely well known. This type of treatment of gender is categorised, as the title of the section refers to, by an indexing of women. It is a quick test that can be run on a number of academic books: check the index and see if women are given an entry, then check if men are. This has the potential to illustrate the underlying assumptions the author has regarding which gender is the “normal” one, and whose roles are so self-evident as to need no further clarification.

The common image of gender in the Viking Age is uncomplicated in this regard: women tend to be cast in traditional roles, where domesticity and characteristically feminine domains and pursuits take centre stage (Mortensen 2004:94; Thedéen 2012:63). That these ideas of femininity are modern, and that we do not have evidence to support a

shared ideology in this regard in the Viking Age is rarely brought in to question. The typical account of women in the Viking Age will cite the role of influential and formidable housewife, who had command over her own property and could solicit divorce, but who had little opportunity to participate in male affairs outside the home (Jesch 1991:63; Jochens 1995; Sigurðsson 2010; and as discussed in Thedéen 2012). Whilst the premise that the role of lady of the house entailed a great deal of respect and influence is not challenged, it cannot be assumed to be the *only* role where women could assume high status, as we will see below. It is also important to examine the legacy of this typical image of the happy housewife, which can, as mentioned above, be traced back to Victorian ideals.

The transference of modern ideals is nowhere more evident than in the tendency to associate women with family without question. This idea of the homemaker, of women as naturally more inclined to be involved in childcare and in maintaining a family unit and a home is deeply problematical, as was argued in Chapters One and Two. It surfaces in Viking Age studies in cases which refer to “women and family life” in their own chapters and articles (Roesdahl 1987; Sawyer 2014; Jesch 2015), and even in more explicitly stated examples where reproduction is argued to be central to any female power (Callmer 2006:192; 2008), as if reproduction was somehow a female domain and simultaneously the main female accomplishment. Though the intention may be good, the result is to put women in their allotted space according to modern ideals without examining if such associations are applicable to the society in question. Moreover, it also removes men from family life, and it reinforces the lingering belief that a woman’s worth can be measured by her reproductive success.

As it turns out however, once you start to delve into the details of all the things that women could supposedly not do, or that were shameful for men, it starts to transpire that these supposed rigid divisions are more fluid than one might at first think. In fact, one would be hard pressed to find any activity which could not be carried out by both men and women, once one starts to really look into it. That being said, there are activities which are much more strongly aligned with one over the other gender. As we now know, female warriors of the Viking Age are presumably rare (but see Mørck 1901; Hedenstierna-Jonson, et al. 2017 for two examples). But they do exist, and must therefore be included in accounts of social order, not brushed aside as is habitually done.

This is crucial, because every transgression in social order requires a society which allows for it to happen. Female warriors, or female heads of households cannot have existed in a social order which left no room for such eventualities (See for example Dommasnes [1991] 1998 for this type of argument). Their very presence means we must reconsider our understanding of the fundamental ideologies of the Viking Age.

Female infanticide, sexual exploitation and the supposed dearth of women

The influential theory of selective female infanticide as a habitual practice in Old Norse society deserves some mention here, as it can be attributed to similar ideologies as the tendency to index women.

Infanticide is notoriously hard to document through archaeological means, not least because the skeletal remains of children tend to survive less well than adults due to bone density, but also because the victims were unlikely to have been afforded furnished burials (Price 2008:259). That leaves us with written sources, and in the case of the Viking Age that means we must trust that these medieval texts correctly document what can be assumed to have been an obscure and little-talked about practice in the previous centuries. That being said however, infanticide is quite well documented as a fairly common practice in many historical rural communities (Clover 1988), and we can conjecture that it was also practiced to some degree in the Viking Age.

Hence the real difficulty comes here with the assumption that female infanticide was the preferred option, a theory introduced by Carol Clover in 1988 and prominently championed by Nancy Wicker in 1998, attempting to explain the perceived “lack of women” in Scandinavian burial evidence (Wicker 1998, 2012). Rather surprisingly, this theory has since become something of a trope, as evidenced by its repetition in a wide variety of articles and books (Sawyer 1992:71; Jochens 1995:86; 2002; Hall 2007; Barrett 2008; Raffield, et al. 2016). I find its popularity baffling in many respects, as Wicker herself admits, there is no direct archaeological evidence of selective female infanticide (Wicker 2012:254; Ashby 2015:92), and the written sources are hardly conclusive or even particularly strong. Wicker argues the lack of female burials in Scandinavia can be used as support. As will be seen later in this thesis however, this perceived lack of burials is peculiar to Norway and does not apply to Scandinavia as a whole, nor is the Norwegian dominance of male burials entirely unproblematic. As a comparison, Fredrik Svanberg’s survey of burial rites in South East Scandinavia for example showed 269 graves

containing jewellery to 87 containing weapons, which would indicate a dominance of women if one uses traditional gender assignment from grave goods (Svanberg 2003b:22), and yet this apparent dearth of men has not given rise to any theories that selective male infanticide was habitually practiced in this particular region. It is also worth noting that there are several children's burials in this material (Svanberg 2003b), demonstrating that whether or not children received elaborate burials varied regionally. That means that archaeological support for this theory is lacking. The written sources which are used to support this theory are law codes, which gives no indication that girl-children were more often disposed of (as Wicker again states herself, Wicker 2012:245), and sagas, which actually mentions male infanticide as often as they do female. A final point to be highlighted is the assumed demographic growth in the Late Iron Age, which has been estimated to have been considerable (Barrett 2010:291; Sigurðsson 2017:23). Though it must be noted that this is a very uncertain conjecture because we have few ways of ascertaining population size, it is nonetheless a point that a fundamental lack of women would presumably have hampered this in quite significant ways.

The theory remains influential however, presumably because of the useful foil it presents to researchers wishing to focus on male aggression as a catalyst for change and development (such as for example Jochens 2002; Barrett 2008; Raffield, et al. 2016). A perceived lack of marriageable women has thus at times been attributed with sparking the start of the Viking Age, a problematic assumption that we will return to in the discussion in Chapter 10. A point of note here though, is that this fails to consider that one of the crucial sources of evidence used to support the theory, the perceived lack of women in the burial record, is far from clear cut. We will return to the supposed lack of women in Chapter Six, but it is also worthy of note that the number of female burials in Norway *goes down* as the Viking Age progresses. At Kaupang, 58% of gendered graves were determined female from the 9th century. Conversely, 24% were gendered female from the 10th (Stylegar 2007:82), a pattern that is reflected in other areas of Norway (Stylegar 2010:73). This is not exactly indicative of a lack of women occasioning a mass exodus of men in the early 800s in other words.

Female sexual freedom is also something of a conundrum to many researchers. Various textual sources testify to women having access to divorce, some even go so far as to state that divorce was a woman's prerogative. This is supported by legal codes, by saga material (Sawyer 1992:50; Øye 2006:65) and also by contemporary accounts written by

Arab travellers (Ya'qub 2014:163). Extramarital affairs were not cause for divorce, and sexual relationships outside of marriage are often mentioned rather casually in written sources (Sawyer 1992:29; Hedeager 2011:121), giving rise to the conjecture that they were in fact regarded as such. And yet, one can read about how men had access to *frille*-relationships⁷, and therefore may have had an easier time in arranged marriages (Sigurðsson 2010:131), which does not examine the sources which allows women to have affairs outside of marriage. This also disregards the fact that a *frille*-relationship was a voluntary social contract between two parties (Sigurðsson 2017:70). Hence, describing this as beneficial only to the male party, as is so often done, demonstrates more the prejudices of modern scholars which views extramarital affairs as beneficial to men and injurious to women. Judging by written evidence, this was not necessarily the case in the Viking Age.

Another poignant example states explicitly that the veracity of textual sources which testify to women's sexual freedom cannot be asserted, whilst simultaneously using those very same sources to support a theory of male sexual dominance over women (Raffield, et al. 2016). What this demonstrates is again the limitations of seeing men as the only active agents of the Viking Age, and it also demonstrates the very real tendency to accept sources when they talk of men and reject them when they talk of women. Quite how it is decided which parts of the sources are reliable is never made clear in such cases, nor is it problematized or discussed.

Additionally, the male gaze sometimes becomes glaringly obvious in accounts which talks of Valhall as a place of sex, drink, pork and battles (Christiansen 2002:294), when to my knowledge sex is not mentioned as a privilege particularly associated with Valhall. Similarly, whilst contemporary practice often dismisses warrior women as a medieval sexual fantasy (Jesch 1991:176-180; Christiansen 2002:21), it seems pertinent to question whether or not the idea of warrior women as sexually tantalising is not more modern than medieval, and the idea of fighting women as titillating is a transference of a modern ideal. For modern minds it entails a transgression, and transgressions can be exciting. As we

⁷ A *frille*-relationship was a sanctioned, semi-official extra-marital affair (Magnusdottir 2014:77). The word concubinage is often used to replace it in English, but I choose to retain the original word, as I believe it has quite a different content of meaning from "concubine". Concubine entails inferiority, with a dictionary definition as "a woman who cohabits with a man to whom she is not legally married, especially one regarded as socially or sexually subservient; mistress." (Dictionary.com 2018) Concubine also carries an association of social stigma, which should not be applied to *Frille*-relationships without question.

will examine below however, evidence is mounting for that women with weapons were not particularly transgressive.

A further example can be found in the way in which very weak evidence is often seen as sufficient to prop up theories of male dominance, such as in the case where rune-stones from Sweden are used to support arguments for polygyny as a common practice: Anne Sofie Gräslund has commented on this by pointing out that there are two rune stones from Sweden which give indications of this. Two, out of more than 1300 Viking Age rune stones, with women mentioned in 39% of these 1300 (Gräslund 2010:121). Hardly a conclusive sample in other words, and far less evidence than what is available for female warriors for example, and yet theories of polygyny find purchase much more easily than anything relating to women and violence. Adam of Bremen is also commonly used to support theories of polygyny (Raffield, et al. 2016:3), but as Adam of Bremen also writes about the cynocephali, a type of people whose heads came directly out of their chests, the veracity of this source may be questioned somewhat (Gräslund 2010:122; Bremen [1070] 1959:203 and 206). Thus, when theories which support a male dominated world are at stake, very little actual evidence is required, whereas with questions of female power, substantial amounts of evidence remains insufficient.

Finally, the lack of female burials is also used to support theories of the overarching dominance of men. This supposed lack of women will be further explored in the following chapter, but there is an interesting comparison at hand here in keeping with the general threads of this particular chapter: in the Early Iron Age, there is often a dominance of female burials. If a skewed sex ratio in burials equals social dominance of the gender which is most frequently found, one might expect this to be explained with social models in which women are socially dominant in the Early Iron Age, and yet this is not the case. Rather, explanations are sought in the limited expressions available to men, with little reflection on what this means in terms of social organisation as compared with other periods, and the suggestion that men were subordinate is not often encountered (as discussed in Tsigaridas 1998:15). In fact, one way of explaining this lack of men is to assume that all indeterminate burials were actually male, which neatly balances the gender ratios (Stylegar 2006:164). It is worth pointing out that the favour is rarely if ever returned when it is women who are scarce: rather than conjecture that indeterminate burials are quite possibly female, theories concerning female suppression and even actual systemic murder of women are to be preferred. My intention here is not to argue social

dominance for women in the Early Iron Age, it is rather to point out the different ways in which material is treated in research and interpretations according to assumed gender.

Burials as status symbols – unless they commemorate women?

As was mentioned in the previous chapter, it remains a curious fact that mortuary evidence is so often interpreted in different ways according to the gender of the person buried. In the Norwegian Viking Age, this is manifested by the tendency to hold up male monumental burials as evidence of the power that chieftains could command, whilst female monumental burials are treated as anomalies, as exceptions to the rule, or even as expressions of male power rather than female agency (as discussed in Pedersen 2008; Nelson 2011). Thus, Oseberg is often removed from discussions of monumental burials in Vestfold (as discussed in Pedersen 2008), or just not mentioned at all (Sigurðsson 2008:22). Similarly, some of the Kaupang burials are set forward as the burials of the retinue of the local chieftain, used to manifest his power. This proposition neglects to discuss what it means that almost half contain female gendered artefacts (Skre 2007e), which surely adds an interesting dimension.

As discussed in the previous chapter, burial mounds are often held up as property markers. Property, through inheritance rights and land ownership, is usually talked about as a male prerogative (as recently discussed by Gjerpe 2017:161-164). However, burial mounds are erected both over men and women, and yet very few scholars have problematized what this means, though there are some notable exceptions such as Lars Erik Gjerpe who has highlighted this incongruity in the research history (see Pedersen 2008 and also; Gjerpe 2017:161-163). If female gendered burial mounds are mentioned at all, the fact that there are fewer female burials than male is often used as evidence that only exceptional women were buried in such style (Dommasnes 1982; Hofseth 1999; Solberg 2003:269), and yet there are too many mounds containing women for this to be a viable reflection of a male dominated society as was highlighted in the previous chapter. A main aim of this thesis is to further discuss the practices that lead to female burials being effectively written out of the history of the Viking Age.

Tradesmen and craftsmen – tradespeople and craftspeople

Trade is one of the occupations which remains quite strongly gendered in accounts of the Viking Age, as the use of the terminology *tradesmen* testifies to (Pedersen 2014:176). The idea that only men traded was challenged as early as 1991 by Anne Stalsberg (Stalsberg 1991), who has shown that in Norway, 17% of all weights (used as indications of trading

activity) are found in female burials, whereas at Birka in Sweden 32% of all finds were in female burials compared to 28% in male ones (Stalsberg 2001:73). Weighing equipment is far from an exclusively male category in other words. Various interpretations have been offered for this: that women with scales and weights are tradesmen's widows, or that the woman in question died while looking after her husband's business while he was away (Stalsberg 2001:74). One overview of Old Norse society points out that scales in female burials are not evidence of trade, because there is no evidence of female traders (Christiansen 2002:19). One must in that case query what exactly would be accepted as evidence of female traders: scales and weights in male burials are generally taken as an indication that the deceased was involved in trade. Why it should mean something different in female burials, is unclear and unaccounted for.

Stalsberg offered trading families as an explanation, where the husband and wife both took part in trading (Stalsberg 2001:74). Unless there is evidence to indicate that equipment associated with trade meant something different in female graves however, we must consider the possibility that both men and women were engaged in trade. It is our modern ideas of appropriate and inappropriate gendered behaviour which makes us interpret similar items differently according to the sex of the person with which it was buried. In a related argument, Pedersen has proposed we ought to change our language to reflect that we actually cannot assume tradesmen were the norm (Pedersen 2014:174), a proposition that seems eminently sensible.

Similarly, references to craftsmen abound in the literature. Implicit in this lies a twofold problem: the first is that such language paints a mental image where men are craftspeople, when the reality is that we actually do not know in many cases. The second is that it obscures such crafts as can be gendered, such as for example textile work, which is strongly affiliated with women (Bek-Pedersen 2011:156; Pedersen 2014:175). To start with the second point: textile production is known to have happened at a large scale in Viking Age towns such as Kaupang, Birka and Hedeby (Øye 2010:307; 2011:339), and we also know that textile working was largely a feminine activity. The tendency to hide textile work as a domestic activity (Gräslund 2001:95-97; Croix 2012:60) therefore obscures an important contribution to the economy.

To return to the first point, the assumed gender of other craftspeople, there tends to be an implicit assumption that those who carried out crafts were men (Pedersen 2014:176). An

investigation of the evidence however, shows that this is by no means certain, and that it is not unlikely that women were also involved in crafts other than textile working (Pedersen 2014:176). The deciding factor in gender attribution of activities such as metalwork seems in fact to often rest more on present ideas of what is considered appropriate gendered activities, rather than on what the evidence can tell us. In Iceland for example, there is not a single grave found containing metalwork equipment, male or female (Kupiec and Milek 2015:113), and Trond Løken noted three burials in the areas of Vestfold and Østfold that were gendered female, yet contained tools for metalworking (Løken 1974:64), making the claim for male only metalworkers very much contestable. Indeed, there is little evidence for supporting suppositions about the gender of metalworkers anywhere (Pedersen 2014:177), and the tendency to ascribe this role to men is a demonstration of the inherent bias in interpretations: a lack of evidence often means something gets assigned to the male sphere without further ado, if that is where the researcher deems this activity more naturally belongs.

The social importance of feasting

The archaeology of feasting is not a theme that will be explored in detail in this thesis, only to the extent that feasts are considered a crucial form of social communication in the Viking Age. The giving of feasts served to demonstrate the power of the giver (Christiansen 2002:143; Sundqvist 2007:13-14), it served to bring people together to maintain social ties (Sigurðsson 2008:58-60), and it served as a subtle form of conspicuous consumption. The role of women in feasts presents a fascinating conundrum, in that their level of participation is rarely problematized.

A direction which is currently popular in discussions of gender in the Viking Age is the “Lady with the Mead Cup” theory, founded on Michael Enright’s exploration of complimentary roles for high status men and women in medieval Europe (Enright 1996; and as applied in Løkka 2017; Pedersen 2017b). In his view, women serving drinks at feasts and receptions ought not to be understood as servile, but rather as fulfilling an important ceremonial role (Enright 1996:5). This role consists in part of distinguishing the most important people at a gathering, and giving the order of precedence by the order of serving (Enright 1996:40). That the ruling couple was viewed as fulfilling important aspects in a unit can be supported in various sources (Pedersen 2017b), and is considered by and large compatible with the arguments developed in this thesis. The consideration

that unmarried men were unlikely to achieve power (Magnusdottir 2008:41) lends further support to this.

Women participating actively as consumers of alcohol and food in feast settings is less often discussed, but there is evidence to suggest they did as indicated both by saga references (for further details, see Sigurðsson 2017:83), and additionally by the archaeological material which places drinking vessels and food vessels in male and female graves alike.

Travelling women

The assumption that women's association with the hearth and home was so powerful so as to curtail their travelling, remained unchallenged in academia for a considerable length of time, and the belief that women did not travel unless as part of a settlement mission can be found reiterated in a number of places (as for example in Jesch 1991; Jochens 2002; Barrett 2008).

Through this assumption, the natural explanation offered for that the majority of insular imports in the Norwegian material is found with women, is that these items were given as gifts by boyfriends, suitors or husbands (as assumed in Barrett 2010:293; as discussed in Aannestad 2015; and as assumed in Jesch 2015). This is striking, as imports in male graves are generally discussed as symbols of status, with no questions asked concerning how the deceased came by such artefacts. Consequently, imports in female graves are thought to show male status and endeavour rather than female acquisition. The crucial point here is that there is nothing in the burials themselves that justifies such different treatment, and that the reason why imports are treated in so different a manner is arguably attributable to the modern scholars who offer these interpretations.

Travelling women occur in sagas, very prominently in for example *Grønlandinga Saga* (*Soga om Grønlandingane* 2014) and *Eyrbyggja Saga* (*Sagaen om Øyrbyggene* 2014) and of course the famous *Auðr* or *Unn* the Deepminded who appears in several sagas, and who travels extensively and acts in all regards as a male chieftain would (amongst others *Laksdøla saga* 1989; *Soga om Eirik Raude* 2014). Stray mentions of women travelling occur in a number of other sources however (various examples in *Laksdøla saga* 1989; the story of Åsgjerd who had travelled to Iceland and gained land there in *Njálssoga* 2007; and mention of a lady traveller in *Tåtten om Einar Skulason* 2014). This is not something that is often examined however, as the longevity of the belief in women as

place-bound testifies to. In a similar vein, *Landnámabók* is often cited as reporting a low number of female settlers of Iceland, with only thirteen mentioned. However, there is an argument that there was a conscious underrepresentation of women in the written sources (Wicker 2012:255), and the implication of the thirteen named Landnam-women is seldom discussed in the sense that their very presence demonstrate quite clearly that women did travel. A further aside here is that the historical veracity of *Landnámabók* has been debated in recent years, with some scholars suggesting it needs to be read not as a historical record of who settled in Iceland, but rather as a Medieval reconstruction based in part on place names and with potential political motivations of justifying claims to land (as discussed in Friðriksson and Vésteinsson 2003 and; Callow 2011).

Challenges to this idea of women's immobility can be found both to the east and west expansion areas: Anne Stalsberg has examined burials of Scandinavian settlers of the Rus area, known as Varangians. Typical accounts have tended to rule out the possibility of the presence of female settlers, an assumption challenged by Stalsberg on the basis of there being more female burials than male among those identified as Varangian (Stalsberg 2001:68; see also Hillerdal 2009a:52). The proffered explanation for these burials is that they were the local wives of Scandinavian men, whereas Stalsberg works from the assumption that burials which appear Varangian really were – an assumption also applied to male burials (Stalsberg 2001:69). Thus, by applying the same criteria to burials regardless of gender, we get a radically different outcome than if we 'pre-gender' our criteria for analysis.

On a similar note, it has long been accepted that women were not part of the first wave of travellers to the British Isles, but this assumption has been questioned in recent research (McLeod 2011; Kershaw 2013). Shane McLeod's article from 2013 discusses the presence of Scandinavian women in England, determined via the use of isotope analysis (McLeod 2011:333). Not only does this study demonstrate that six out of 14 burials in Eastern England were female, an area where archaeologically gendered burials had previously indicated a ratio of six to one male to female graves, it also shows that two of the examined female graves were buried with weapons (McLeod 2011:345), which is a discovery of undeniable importance. Similarly, Jane Kershaw has demonstrated the presence of women in the first wave of settlers to the British Isles by arguing that the large amount of jewellery normally associated with Scandinavian women, would indicate the actual presence of Scandinavian women rather than the traditional interpretation of

local women wearing the gifts of their foreign husbands (Kershaw 2013). Finally, Cat Jarman has used isotope analysis to show that mobility was high amongst both men and women in the Viking Age (personal communication and as presented in a conference paper from the SAA Annual Meeting in San Francisco 2015). This can be further put into context with studies of mtDNA (which is passed down through the maternal line only) which show considerable Scandinavian ancestry in several parts of the Viking World, such as Orkney and Iceland (Barrett 2003:91), further helping debunk the myth that travelling was a male pursuit.

Finally, a much cited study from 2000 analysed the DNA of modern Icelanders with the aim of determining ancient lines of ancestry. This study found that the female lines could in the majority be traced to Ireland, whilst male lines showed more in common with Norway (Helgason, et al. 2000). This has been subsequently used to argue that Iceland was settled primarily by Norwegian men and their female Irish slaves (Raffield, et al. 2016). However, this study has since met with significant challenges, not least in the sense that it was limited in its test for origins, as it only looked to certain countries for comparisons (Vésteinsson 2010:506). Most significantly however, a more recent study used aDNA to show that both male and female remains had significant similarities with typical Norwegian remains, and that there was no grounds for considering the origin of women in the first settlers of Iceland as coming from elsewhere than men (Krzewin´ska, et al. 2015).

The idea that women did not travel can in other words be laid to rest with the epitaph that it lived rather too long.

A gathering place for all free men – and for quite a few women too

The title of this section refers to the tendency to describe the *Þing* as a gathering place for all the free men in a district (as in Skre 2007f:385; but see also Sanmark 2014:89 with references for further examples of this), a sentiment which nicely sums up most perceptions of the assembly. Statements such as that women “could not participate at the *Þing*” (Sigurðsson 2008:21) are not uncommon, but neither are they correct according to a wide variety of sources. Liv Helga Dommasnes pointed out that women could in some cases participate at legal assemblies, and that women chieftains are known from Iceland (Dommasnes [1991] 1998:338). Þorunn Sigurðardóttir has pointed out that there are copious saga references to women being plaintiffs and participating at the *Þing*

(Sigurðardóttir 2002:281). Further, a recent article from Alexandra Sanmark analyses written evidence to find that women could attend the Þing in at least five different circumstances: these were widows (who were required to attend in cases where a husband had been murdered, and legal redress was being sought), so-called *ring-women*: that is unmarried women with no close male relatives, women in charge of households, and women who were in dispute with other women, and finally women who acted as witnesses (Sanmark 2014:94). Some of these, such as women who took action for their murdered husbands, and women in charge of households, testify clearly to women having high social standing and the necessary heft to participate in public life. A crucial argument here is that not all women could participate at the þing, but neither could all men: participation was dependent on social and legal status (Sanmark 2014:91). Female involvement with legal proceedings has also recently been argued by Anne Irene Riisøy, who has used Eddic poetry to demonstrate a connection between female deities, women and legal assemblies (Riisøy 2016).

From this, it is clear that stating that women did not participate in public life is far too simplistic, and that we can safely conjecture that some women could and did, though sources certainly indicate that fewer women did than men. The dismissive note of saying the Þing was a male only domain, is characteristic of the type of approach which only uses some of the sources available, as a wealth of references arguing for women's place in legal proceedings can easily be found.

Women and religion – acceptable power

In the obscure world of enactment of ritual and religion in the Viking Age, women are generally granted an uncontested space. Written sources testify to a number of religious functions for women, though much is unclear regarding specific function and relative importance thereof (see Sundqvist 2007 for a thorough discussion of this). Furthermore, female deities and beings are prominent in written records of the mythology (as evident in *The Poetic Edda* 2014; and as commented on by amongst others Gräslund [2003] 2005)

One such role is the *volve*, the seer and soothsayer who travelled the lands sharing her wisdom with those who sought it. A great deal of work has explored the role of these women (to mention a few Price 2002; Solli 2002; Heide 2006), for women they were, according to written sources. The magic they practiced, *seiðr*, could also be done by men, but this is a cloudy and complex area (Meulengracht Sørensen 1983). Written sources tell

us that men who practiced such magic were soft, feminine and despised (Price 2002:122). On the other hand we also know that Odin, the god of warriors and the elite, himself practiced such magic, and that it was considered powerful (Hedeager 2004:237). It was taught to him by Freyja, and he is described as the greatest *seiðman* (Sturlason [Approx. 1220] 1943:5). Brit Solli's work on the queerness of the god Odin has illuminated the contradictory nature of his supposed masculinity (Solli 2002). She has pointed out how several of the gods have multifaceted natures and roles that play with expected gendered behaviour, as will be further explored in Chapter Ten. It can be argued that this is because expected gendered behaviour is something imposed by modern eyes. As to the nature of this magic, there are many indications that it shared traits with Sami shamanistic rituals, involving a trance like state for the practitioner (Hedeager 1999:103; Price 2002). The social status of this art is also debated, with opposing views seeing it as marginal (Steinsland 2005:311) or as central (Sundqvist 2007:68-69; Solli 2008).

There are also archaeological traces which places magic in the hands of women, in the shape of *volve* staffs found in burials, as detailed by Neil Price (Price 2002). *Volve* means staff-bearer, and these staffs are often found in burials containing other indications of a ritual role, such as the cannabis found in the Oseberg burial, or the talismans found in a female burial at Klinta in Sweden (see Price 2002 for an extended argument surrounding this).

A point to be made here, is that the association of women and religious power is somehow more palatable than women and political power, as seen in the many publications that allow women a role in ritual, but deny them the same in the political arena, presumably because religion is perceived as less public. As one text describes it, men *controlled* the public sphere, whilst women could *perform* as leaders in for example cultic roles (Sundqvist 2016:365). Aside from the obvious challenges of language where men actively control, whilst women merely perform, this is a misinterpretation of what religious power was in a time when cult, politics and daily life was much more integrated than after the advent of the church (see Sundqvist 2007:56 for a discussion of this). Before the designation of set places and times for worship, such as the church imposed, it can be argued that religious power would have been an attribute of social standing and status, rather than necessarily being a separate role.

Women and poetry

Proficiency in poetry was a skill to be desired and cultivated, and skalds were afforded prestige (Mundal 2004a:233). There are records of several known female skalds (Straubhaar 2002; Mundal 2004a:232), but skaldic poetry is in the main talked about as a male domain (Myrvoll 2017:185). That this link persists despite knowledge of female skalds is symptomatic of a reluctance to delve further into indications of gender-fluid social roles: if skaldic poetry was generally a male domain but we know that women could also excel, questions need to be asked about the nature of male and female pursuits and what determined a person's ability or inability to pursue different skills. The named female skalds are significantly outnumbered by male ones, but their existence points to a potential for acting outside the domestic sphere, which fits badly with a strictly segregated gender ideology.

Violent women

The subject of women, war and violence is a truly fascinating one. Not only does the idea of shield maidens resonate with modern audiences, but the treatment of this subject is worthy of a study in itself. The long held belief in scholarly circles that women could not carry weapons (Jesch 1991; Sigurðsson 2008:21) is directly contradicted by a wealth of archaeological as well as written sources, but the subject remains contentious.

The fixity of warriors as male in the popular psyche can be seen in quotes such as "*people had a concept of a warrior.... of his function and his characteristics*" (Schjødt 2011:269). At which point it seems prudent point out that the author who speaks of warriors in male pronouns presumably also has a concept of a warrior. A recent article regarding the terminology of weapon graves as warrior graves is also worth considering here: whilst it very rightly questions the tendency to equate weapons with warrior status, it maintains that those buried with weapons had the ability and the right to use them (Harrison 2015:315). The article also makes the point that weapons were the hallmark of masculine status (Harrison 2015:307). Whilst few would contend that women participated in acts of war on the same scale as men, it is vital to acknowledge that there is mounting evidence that they *could*, and sometimes *did*. What is rarely problematized is that the presence of even a few female warriors has implications that reach far beyond their simple presence in a perceived male sphere: a society which allowed female warriors is not one where women were locked into social expectations of passivity, and if the men

who were buried with weapons had the right and skill to use them, we need to consider the same for women.

To cite a few archaeological examples: a female burial at Gausel, near Stavanger in Norway, which contains typical female equipment as well as a shield boss (Børsheim, et al. 2001:180), a female burial at Nordre Kjølén in Hedmark, Norway, which contains a full set of weapons (Mørck 1901; Lia 2004:308-309; Gardela 2017), a female burial at Gjerdrup in Denmark found with a spearhead (Gardela 2013:282) and another at Bogøvej, in Langeland in Denmark where a young woman was buried with a battle axe (Pedersen 2011:49), several female burials containing arrowheads in Southern Sweden (Gardela 2013:295) and in Aurland in Norway (Dommasnes 1982:77), as well as several burials at Kaupang containing axes, some with arrowheads, and one containing a spearhead, as will be detailed in chapter Eight. Finally, the recently explosive re-assignment of a warrior at Birka who has been determined female through aDNA must take prime place here (Hedenstierna-Jonson, et al. 2017), and will be further discussed below.

Moreover, several written sources assert that women could be warriors: Saxo talks of women who dressed as men and fought in battle, something he evidently found quite upsetting (Hedeager 2011:120). The historian Johannes Skylitzes, whose works is partly preserved in Cedrenus' history, details women warriors amongst the Rus forces from a battle in Bulgaria in AD 970 (Price 2002:332), and another example is the 12th century Irish chronicle *Cordagh Ghaedhel re Gallaigh*, which tells of a Viking attack on Dublin in the 9th century, where one of the fleet commanders was known as “the Red Girl”, on account of her red hair (Clover 1993:366; Price 2002:74). Several saga sources also mention fighting women, the most famous being perhaps *Hervarar Saga ok Heiðreks* (*Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks konungs* 1847), but here are several other occurrences such as the fornaldersaga *Star Oddi's dream*, which tells of a troublesome woman who ended up captaining a raiding fleet (Andrén 2008:50), and Auðr in *Laxdæla saga*, who takes her revenge on her ex-husband after he divorces her by maiming him with a sword (Straubhaar 2002:266). In the mythical world, several goddesses display links with violence and battle: Skaði carries weapons and fights (Clover 1986), whilst Freyja hosts dead warriors in her hall (See *Grimnesmål* in *The Poetic Edda* 2014). A final link between women and violence may be found in Neil Price's influential *The Viking Way: Religion and War in Late Iron Age Scandinavia* (Price 2002), which explores amongst other things the link between magic, *volur*, and war, drawing on mythology, written

sources and archaeology to paint a complex picture of a world where sex, magic and violence were often interlinked.

In addition to the material sited above, there are also quite a few depictions of armed women to be found in the archaeological record, as will be touched upon in Chapter 10. The image below, of the so-called Hårby Valkyrie, is but one of several similar figures:



Figure 18: the Hårby Valkyrie. Image copied from Odense Museums webpages

What is revealing here, is that Saxo and the other sources are used extensively by scholars who accept some things, and dismiss others from one and the same source. This picking and choosing of what we accept in a source is problematic: If we accept the historical veracity of a document in general, it becomes hard to defend why we would not accept their testimony to something as innocuous as female warriors, especially when we know that there is archaeological evidence to back this up, and that it occurs in multiple written sources. Many scholars state that multiple sources are a necessity in order to provide reliable evidence for a specific point or theory. To make a strong case, these sources should span different written texts, as well as be supported by archaeological material, so that the theory is corroborated by several different sources. However, it would seem that in the case of women fighting, even multiple corroborating sources (including textual, archaeological and pictorial) are not enough to make a strong claim, which does warrant the question of why this has proven to be so hard to accept for many.

The acceptance that women had a role to play in the violence that underpinned much of Viking Age ideology may be distasteful to some, and certainly goes against those

Victorian ideals which we have seen govern much of our interpretations. However, that women were also part of a violent ideology seems clear based on the evidence, and accepting it goes some way towards helping understand gender in the Viking Age as fundamentally different from our own.

The bilateral patriarchy

It has often been pointed out that the Viking Age was a bilateral society, where descent through both the male and the female line was considered important (Odner 1973:40; Sawyer 1992:59; Gräslund 2010:118; Steinsland 2011b:16; Mundal 2014). Kinship ties, obligations and privileges were passed down through both father and mother, and though this is often mentioned in accounts of kinship rules for Viking Age Scandinavia, the implications thereof are seldom considered, unless in research specifically interested in gender and social position (as for example Gräslund 2010; Mundal 2014)

A recent article by Else Mundal has explored the Viking Age perception of how children gained their characteristics, whether it was from the mother, the father or both (Mundal 2014:325), with the conclusion that it came from both parents. This means that maternal and paternal lineage was credited equally, again something that is hard to reconcile with a society in which women were unimportant or deemed to be less able. Consequently, the bilateral nature of Late Iron Age society goes deep, both in terms of conscious kinship ties with families on both sides, and in terms of the characteristics that a child might hope to inherit from either side.

Different genders, different rules?

As we have seen in this chapter, there is a marked tendency to apply different rules for finds that are gendered male and those that are gendered female. Not only that, but different rules appear to apply to written sources pertaining to men and to women, a point we will return to in Chapter Ten. Thus, we end up with a self-perpetuating circle, which erroneously assumes the material evidence corresponds with the written evidence, when in fact it is more a case of the same analytical concepts imposing restrictions on the interpretation of both. Hence, the supposed lack of women outside the home in written sources and in archaeological material is just that: supposed. It does not hold up to closer scrutiny, but what we can observe is a tendency to give different weighting and treatment to material according to which gender it relates to.

This connects to the above mentioned tendency amongst researchers to pick and choose what we wish to put our trust in when it comes to written sources. The powerful women often encountered in sagas are dismissed as fabrications of a later date, whereas their husbands, brothers and fathers are assumed to be accurate reflections of a male dominated social order (Clover 1988:148). We must ask ourselves why this is the case, why it has been decided that these powerful women are not acceptable when there is substantial archaeological evidence to back up their likely existence. This links with an important point concerning the written sources, that there is a danger of accepting what makes sense to modern eyes, as will be further explored in Chapter Ten. Sound research however, cannot dismiss part of the sources they use without substantial evidence to back up such a decision, and as will be shown here, archaeological evidence does not lend support to a model where only men had social power and recognition.

The Birka woman: a change in the weather?

This chapter and the previous one have sought to outline the general image of the Viking Age as it is presented in academic discourse. Having said this, there are signs in recent debates and publications that a change may be on the horizon.

The publication in 2017 of an article regarding a DNA analysis done on the skeleton of a wealthy weapons grave from Birka revealed that the grave was that of a woman, buried with full warrior equipment (Hedenstierna-Jonson, et al. 2017), which proved to be a controversial finding. As outlined above, this ought not to have been as surprising as it appeared to be to the wider academic community, in that women with weapons are known from both other burial contexts and from written sources. However, it certainly caused a stir. Media interest was high, and a number of prominent academics issued statements of support or disbelief⁸. Some went so far as to refuse the analysis completely, others expressed doubt of that military equipment necessarily makes a burial a warrior.

The first point can be dismissed on the grounds that the article in question presented a very thorough piece of work, which presents no cause to refute or flat out deny its findings. The second point however deserves consideration. The assumption that grave goods necessarily reflect the active social role of the deceased is problematic, and it can

⁸ The reader is referred to blogs by amongst others Judith Jesch (Jesch 2017a, 2017b) which argues the evidence in question is not admissible (and likewise, see Androshchuk 2017), and to Howard Williams series of blogs on the issue (Williams 2017a) which seeks to argue that warrior equipment does not a warrior make.

be put into context with Heinrich Härke's demonstration that weapons in Anglo-Saxon graves need not correspond with an active warrior status, as shown by the presence of weapons in burials of young children and those with severe physical impairments (Härke 1997b, 1997a). However, if it is no longer to be the standard that weapons denote military rank, we must go through the entire body of Viking Age burials and nuance the discussion. According to one blog, "*you won't find many reports calling weapon graves 'warriors' anymore: it is a hangover from 19th-century romanticism⁹*", listing a handful sources from recent reports which are indeed cautious in equating weapons with a warrior status. Whilst this is certainly a positive development, it would be equally easy however, to cite several sources which still do (see for instance Eriksen, et al. 2009:169; Barrett 2010:296; Ystgaard 2014; Glørstad 2016:206). In short, it remains the standard that weapons in a male burial are equated with warrior status, although recent publications have indeed tended to nuance this somewhat. Unfortunately though, it takes more than a couple of references to reverse a trend that has lasted for nearly two centuries.

The ultimate contribution of the female weapon burial at Birka however, is to restart an old debate, and to bring to the table new evidence which must be considered. Consequently, though the controversy was, and indeed at the time this is written still is, great, it can be considered positive that this debate is being had at all.

Aside from the Birka burial, it is worth noting that a number of recent publications have modified their dismissive language regarding women and power (see for example Sigurðsson 2017). One might hope this is the start of a more careful consideration of gender in the Viking Age, and this thesis is intended as part of a greater trend working towards this.

However, this positive trend does not change the fact that the overall Viking Age discourse remains dismissive of gender as anything but binary, and that men's and women's social roles are considered fixed and static. Though the current trend is therefore considered encouraging, it is important now to use the impetus provided and drive this subject forwards.

Moving away from gender as an either/or proposition

It is becoming increasingly clear that a binary approach to gender, as two strictly segregated and fundamentally different categories, is not particularly well suited to

⁹ (Williams 2017b, 2017c, 2017d, 2017e, 2017a, 2018)

understanding the Late Iron Age, or presumably the earlier Iron Age either. Instead, an approach informed by Laqueur's one-sex model is suggested as more appropriate here. In this lies the view that gender was largely contextual in the Viking Age (Bolin 2004:172), and that although the ideal traits and characteristics were masculine, this did not mean they were confined to men, or closed to women (Clover 1993:371; Hedeager 2011:122). The ideal may have been masculine, that does not mean it was necessarily male, as being born male did not guarantee the command of masculine values. A strict sex/gender division does not easily apply to a society in which biologically female bodies were allowed to act as men in social, legal and official capacities (Clover 1993:364-368; Sigurðsson 2017:112).

Simply because of this fluidity in gender roles, it can be argued that there was a vested interest in upholding the divisions between genders (Hedeager 2011). Because if you could transcend, you could also descend, and that way lies potential chaos. Through its very fluidity, the outward communication of gender became important. But the distinction here lies in that there was no concept of the inevitability of biological sex, and that sex did not automatically make gender. Thus, the two-sex model with its projected gender interpretations does not seem a natural framework for understanding Viking Age society.

This is of course interlinked with social status as well, as a high social standing was presumably a prerequisite for this degree of social fluidity. This is in keeping with an intersectional view, in which gender is but one of many diverging strands which constitute identities. These are propositions that will be further explored in Chapter Ten, once the material evidence has been laid out. Suffice to say for now, that we surely have sufficient evidence, in the form of persuasive arguments presented in both older and more recent research, of female agency in the Viking Age to leave behind the assumption that women were simply left at home while men went out and conquered, traded, manufactured and settled without them. The question is not whether or not women had a place in these activities any more, but rather to what degree they participated.

Towards a less biased past

This chapter and the one before it has examined the current state of gender awareness in Viking Age studies, and found it wanting in nuance. The next step of this thesis must therefore be to try and present an alternative model through analysing the material. Before

moving on however, a summary of the main challenges which this thesis seeks to question in Viking Age scholarship today seems pertinent.

The first question must remain unanswered, or at least only partially answered. This relates to why, when there has been so much excellent work done which has demonstrated the complexity of gender ideologies in the Viking Age, there is still such a fundamental belief in the basic idea that women were subordinate and bound to the domestic sphere. This chapter has outlined a research history of gender concerns within the Viking Age, and it ought to have made it very clear that we do not have any lack thereof. Why then are the issues which this research has brought up still left outside the mainstream canon of Viking Age social order? The answer to this can be sought in the subject outlined in Chapter Four, of the past as familiar, as relatable, as a distorted reflection of our modern selves, within which we can seek justification of our social injustices and inequalities. That this may for the most part manifest itself in unconscious bias is quite clear. But that this bias is in no way defensible after more than 30 years of gender and feminist scholarship is equally clear. The resulting argument is that whilst allowances can be made for what is essentially the result of long-standing and implicit bias, but we must push for the complexity of the archaeological record to be recognised.

The next two questions will be posed and explored in the course of the following chapters presenting the material:

- On the rejection of the gender divide as naturally binary, the mortuary assemblages will be explored with an eye for similarities as well as differences here. Rather than automatically divide mortuary context on the presence or absence of a limited number of gendered markers, the assemblages are considered in their entirety as comparable, thus seeking to see broader trends in Chapter Eight
- And on the central question of women's place in the landscape of power, the issue of gendered differences or lack thereof will be explored in detail in Chapter Nine

The central notion is of course that if society really was ordered along strict lines of gender, if women were always subordinate and men were the makers of history and the doers of actions, then we can presumably also connect this with the landscape of power in the shape of mortuary monuments and ask if this social status is reflected here with men

featuring more prominently than women. If it is not, then either the mortuary landscape *cannot* be said to represent social hierarchies, ruling individuals and power plays, or we must reassess our ideas of gender and power. In this way, the mortuary landscape be can used to question the assumed lack of female agency, and indeed the presumed lack of social fluidity between male and female ways of being and doing.

This concludes the first section of the thesis, which has outlined history of research and theoretical concerns. The following section will delve into the material, through an introductory methodology chapter and then into separate chapters detailing the internal and the external aspects of the mortuary contexts in question.

Chapter Six: Methodology: how to discuss gender through the mortuary landscape

This chapter presents the methodology used in the following three chapters, and thus forms an introduction to the material analysis. A brief introduction to challenges in burial evidence, especially as connected with the Norwegian Viking Age, will introduce the chapter, followed by a more in-depth explanation of the tools which are used to interpret the material.

A composite reality – burial in the Viking Age

Although the diversity of burial customs in the Viking Age has become something of a byword, there is nevertheless an overarching cultural similarity to be found in the material culture (Price 2008:259), which allows for a discussion of mortuary expressions in the Viking Age under one heading.

The selection of a limited geographical area for the analysis in this thesis reflects the recognition that local variation must, and should, be expected. Indeed, we know that there are differences in mortuary expressions to be found across what we can refer to as the sphere of Viking influence, but these differences are more variations on a common theme rather than the expressions of radically different beliefs and customs (Price 2008:259). Furthermore, Viking Age cemeteries are often characterised by internal differences, and as we will see in the following chapters even immediate proximity is no guarantee for closely comparable burial expressions. That being said however, the material expressions in the graves often carry certain common features across sites, and moreover the use of landscape and topography often seems to connect through similar ideas and standards.

It is also at this stage important to note that the “Viking” label is somewhat nonsensical when it comes to mortuary remains, as there are elements in death rituals which can be seen to persist throughout the Scandinavian Iron Age (Jennbert 2006:135), making a strong case for established traditions and beliefs influencing the ritual and religion of the Viking Age. As was discussed in Chapter One however, the Viking label has been retained in this thesis. The material to be discussed in the following chapters falls within this period, and has been limited to it so as to be as closely comparable as possible. A narrow time frame will aid the accuracy of any results that emerge. These themes will be

discussed in more detail in the material analysis and discussion chapter, but a brief introduction to the overarching variations to be expected is included here.

The physical expressions of burial rites

The physical manifestations of burials in the Viking Age represents a varied and complex material (Sellevold, et al. 1984:140; Jennbert 2006; Price 2008). One complicating factor is the high amount of presumed “missing dead” from the known record: there are very few children represented for example, though it must be noted that this too varies regionally. Overall however, it must be assumed that a considerable proportion of the population is not represented in the evidence which is known to us today. The most recent estimate of the number of burials known from Viking Age Norway numbers around 8000 (Stylegar 2010:71), which is certainly not a representative sample of the population. Related to this, is the concern that because burials represent such a small percentage of the population, we must assume that there will have been other ways of disposing of the dead. In effect therefore, while a burial is usually a disposal of a dead body, disposal of dead bodies need not take the form of burials (Pearson 1999:5). We must assume therefore that a large number of deceased people were either not buried at all, or not buried in ways which have survived or which we recognise as burials (Price 2008:259).

We must bear in mind therefore, that we are only looking at one, out of potentially several possible expressions, of ritual action connected with death. The reasons for this will not be explored further here, as this thesis is concerned with the expressions of gender in the material that we do have, but it is a point that needs to be made all the same. We can therefore assume that the burial evidence which we have available is representative only of a portion of the population, and a consideration must therefore be what the common denominator was between the people buried in recognisable burials. A proffered explanation here is that it was social standing and status which allowed for archaeologically visible and furnished burials, as is indeed an underlying assumption running through most mortuary interpretations.

For the Viking Age in Norway, there are also a considerable number of burial mounds which have been found to *not* contain a body. Whether this is through oversight during excavation, or whether it is indeed because there was a custom of erecting cenotaphs remains a question that must be considered on an individual basis, as it is unlikely there is one correct answer that encompasses all the relevant cases.

In the evidence that we do have from Viking Age Scandinavia, cremation with subsequent internment of part of the ashes, the bones, and remains of the pyre is the most common form of body treatment. Corpses could be burned in situ, or transported from a nearby pyre. Ashes could be scattered on the ground and covered with a mound, or buried in a container within a mound, and most cremations had the accompanied grave goods burned with the dead (Price 2008:260). Inhumation burial, though less common, occurs across Scandinavia and the Viking influence sphere, and is well represented in the material to be discussed in the following chapters. These are most often found in graves dug into the ground beneath barrows, with a variety of different possible containers (boats, coffins, tree bark, shrouds and sleds to mention a few), and are accompanied by a wide range of grave goods (Price 2008:262). Both inhumation and cremation graves can occur in flat graves and in barrows. Internal furnishings of the graves can take a wide variety of expressions, with boat graves, chamber graves and coffin graves all fairly common occurrences.

In addition to the variation in internal and external expressions, there are also differences in where the graves are placed. Some are found on their own, others in large cemeteries, and others again in smaller clusters. There are even mass graves known (Price 2008:262), though these are rare and do not feature in this material. Graves can be placed on hilltops, in valleys, near water and near roads, or in many cases near several of these features at the same time, and all of these different placements can be argued to be significant, as will be seen in the succeeding chapters.

In addition to the physical evidence in the ground, there are also a handful of written sources referring to Viking Age burials, though in the context of this thesis, few which throw much light on how, if at all, the gender of the deceased mattered. There are references to burials in sagas (Price 2008:257), wherein internment in mounds with grave goods are described for prominent men and women both (as for example the burial of Unn in *Laksdøla saga* 1989; and Egil in *Soga om Egil Skalla-Grimsson* 2014). The famous description of the burial of a chieftain of the Rus in ibn Fadlan is another fascinating example, where the description resonates with much of what can be seen in the archaeological record (Ibn Faḍlān 2011). None of these sources give much of an insight into the dynamics of gender ideologies in burial rituals however, other than to underscore that women and men both were buried in mounds, something we already knew from the archaeological material.

Detangling the death rituals of the Late Iron Age is a complicated affair in other words, but it remains one of the most direct routes we have to accessing the social and ideological frameworks of the time.

The gendered dead

Mortuary archaeology has proven itself particularly fruitful for gendered approaches to prehistory, and has traditionally been one of the strongest expression of early gender research (Sofaer and Sørensen 2013:527). Burials are deliberate actions (Sofaer and Sørensen 2013:527), arguably expressions of social ideologies. Whether or not gender is expressed, and how it is expressed and differentiated, is therefore of the utmost importance in archaeological attempts to interpret the past. As deliberate expressions of identity and ideology, gender in burials has the potential to divulge key concepts of past gender ideologies and realities.

Determining gender in burials is usually done in one of two ways: osteological sexing of skeletal remains, which of course depends on there being sufficient remains in the burial, and archaeological gendering which relies on gender associations of grave goods and other typological features of the burial. Both methods carry certain challenges, as will be discussed below, and with the advances of aDNA studies, new possibilities for a more secure physical determination are opening up, which can add new levels to our understanding of gender.

The problem with women

Gender is an aspect of personal identity and affiliation which is often made visible in death, and this has frequently called for inventive explanations in cases where wealthy female burials have occurred in settings where they were not expected or where grave goods do not conform to type. Vix and Oseberg are two famous examples mentioned previously, but other often-cited examples include Howard Winter's analysis of burials at Indian Knoll in Kentucky, where the same grave goods in male and female burials were given widely different interpretations (Nelson 1997:133), essentially removing agency from the interpretation of female burials by arguing that a type of marine shell in male burials indicated trade and the same marine shells in female burials indicated that the women wore them as decoration (Nelson 1997:133). On a similar note, Winter also argued that quern stones in female burials showed their involvement in seed grinding, whilst in male graves they showed production of quern stones (Pearson 1999:96). A

further, more recent example, sees knives in Bronze Age burials interpreted as weapons with men, and “something else” when found with women (Harding 2007 as cited in Skogstrand 2016). Interestingly, nothing but the gender of the deceased occasioned the difference in interpretation, and this can only be seen as an impressive example of how modern ideas about gender can be projected on to the past whereby the archaeologist judges women’s activities to be likely to involve cooking and personal beautification, and men’s roles to be more in production and trade. In this way, graves are gendered from artefacts, but these very artefacts in turn shape modern interpretations of gender in the past, creating a circle of inference which can be hard to look beyond.

Unfortunately however, this need to fit the past into gendered behavioural patterns which make sense to modern eyes has proven resistant to change. A third interesting example is Peter Hinton’s interpretation of the La Tène cemetery at Münsingen-Rain, where he asserts that the dominance of wealthy female burials evident does not indicate women of high status, but rather the existence of an exogamous marriage system signalled by jewellery (Hinton 1986:364), presumably because vain women who like to wear jewellery is more probable than wealthy women participating in conspicuous consumption.

A final example worth noting is how imports in female burials in Viking Age Norway are turned into symbols of male action rather than female agency as was mentioned in Chapter Five: a common way to interpret them is to describe them as presents to the women they are buried with, gifted them by their men (as discussed in Aannestad 2015; and demonstrated in Jesch 2015). Imports in male graves meanwhile, are synonymous with status, travel and trade. As there is nothing in the female burials themselves which would warrant such a different explanation apart from the perceived gender of the deceased, we must once again confront this with the likelihood that these interpretations rests more on the biases of the interpreter, rather than anything found in the actual material. Examples like these are endemic, and they are certainly too numerous to account for here in their entirety. The example of Münsingen-Rain is not a famous one, but it does highlight the deplorable tendency to attempt to explain women with wealth as expressions of anything other than powerful or wealthy women, even when the evidence does not give any indication to justify such an interpretation. Interpreting the same artefacts differently according to assigned gender tends to reveal what the archaeologist feels is more appropriate rather than what the evidence actually tells us, and that cannot be argued to be good practice. As was discussed in the previous chapter, this is a

recurring theme throughout Viking Age studies, where women with equipment of trade or with weapons are consistently interpreted as projections of masculine status, rather than allowed as active social agents.

In addition to the tendency of not accepting wealthy women as wealthy or powerful in their own right, and the issues of explaining the same grave goods in different ways in male and female burials, there is a third major issue with mortuary archaeology, which is the tendency to favour the male (Arnold 2006:144). This is quite well known when it comes to graves which have been gendered on the basis of grave goods, but less well known is that it also occurs in osteologically sexed burials. An often cited study by Kenneth Weiss demonstrated that there was a 12% bias toward sexing ambiguous burials as male (cited in Arnold 2006:144). That the results are also open to interpretation and the discretion of the assessor also leaves issues of subjectivity in terms of expectations and experience (Holck 1996:44). Finally, there is a tendency to favour grave goods over osteological material in cases where these do not match (as discussed in Gilchrist 1999:69), and as was demonstrated by the fact that the Birka burial BJ581 was osteologically defined as a female as early as the 1970s (Hedenstierna-Jonson, et al. 2017:857), and yet the burial remained male in common parlance until the recent irrefutable evidence to the contrary.

This is especially important when working with Late Iron Age Norway, as there is at first glance a very heavy bias indeed towards male burials. In fact, as many as 5:1 male to female burials are said to exist for the period dated as the Viking Age in Norway overall (Solberg 2003:169), although this number has not been verified and remains no more than an estimate. Throughout the years, a variety of explanations have been offered for this supposed “lack of women”, as was introduced in Chapter Five. Three important points need to be made here however:

- At cemeteries which have been professionally excavated, the ratio is closer to 50/50 for male and female burials, leading to the conjecture that female burials have been more easily overlooked in stray finds and non-professional excavations. This has been eloquently argued by Frans-Arne Stylegar (Stylegar 2010), who pointed out that a brooch is rather easier to miss when ploughing a field than a sword. It is further corroborated by recent excavation reports, which have found closer ratios of gendered graves (Glørstad 2016:184; Gjerpe 2017:162)

- There is also the legitimate concern that female burials are primarily determined through the presence of oval brooches. It cannot be assumed that oval brooches were worn by all women, at all times through the Viking Age, and in fact there are indications both that oval brooches were not worn by the highest levels of society (as indicated by Danish evidence highlighted in Pedersen 2010:72), and that their use declined towards and throughout the 10th century (Forseth 1993:107; Stylegar 2010:76)
- A third very telling circumstance is that this “lack of women” is peculiar to Norway, and is not reflected in the other Scandinavian countries. This can potentially be set directly in relation to that Norwegian burials are overwhelmingly gendered by archaeological assemblages as there is very little skeletal material, a challenge our neighbouring countries do not share, where osteological sexing has been more common (Stylegar 2010:71)

In consequence then, we may be looking more at a lack of *identified* female burials, rather than an actual lack of them.

A final consideration here is that we are looking at male or female *expressions* as signalled by grave goods in the vast majority of cases. Consequently, we are forced to rely on a narrow expression of male and female identity, one which we can recognise today. If a burial does not contain one of very few specifically male or female markers, it is left as “ungendered”. The “ungendered” contingent of many sites is around half of all graves, meaning that male and female markers as we recognise them today are actually comparatively rare. This is a point I will return to both below in terms methodology, and in the discussion in Chapter Ten, as a point that warrants further examination.

When grave goods determine gender

Significantly, the sex and gender debate has also had profound influence in mortuary studies in general, as this is an arena which is especially well suited to studying the subject. In an ideal situation, the material would allow for both osteological sexing and archaeological gendering, as this would enable a complete picture of whether or not the two correspond by conforming to expected and projected patterns. This would also allow for more secure gendering, and would provide information that might help look outside the narrow male/female definitions that we tend to work within. Conventional wisdom states that the control data is upheld by what Norwegian material we do have, but as there

is no systematic study of this, nor a collated database which can be referred to, this is very hard to verify indeed. As was shown in the previous chapter, there are several notable exceptions from these strict rules.

Unfortunately, much of the evidence from Viking Age Vestfold only allows for an examination of dressed gender, as the skeletal material is poorly preserved in many cases. This creates a situation where burials are gendered because of gender specific artefacts, and resulting theories are woven from the apparent strict adherence to these gendered categories. If burials are gendered male because of the presence of weapons, it becomes rather absurd to state that weapons are only found with men in the Norwegian Viking Age. Something of a catch-22 in other words, and one which will be discussed at length throughout this thesis. Although the control data for Viking Age gender specific items shows a good correlation between sex and gendered items (Sellevoid, et al. 1984; Svanberg 2003b), the lack of skeletal material in Norway means that we will inevitably miss deviations, which we can reasonably expect in any body of material.

It must also be mentioned that some concerns can be raised with regards to the control data: the samples are not large, the most widely cited case being a study of skeletal material from Denmark, where the correlation between female skeletal remains and jewellery and textile working tools and male remains with weapons is indeed upheld, but by a small sample: out of 320 skeletons, only a handful are associated with gendered artefacts (Sellevoid, et al. 1984:35-141). This can be further correlated with examples from Sweden however, to provide a fairly reliable base from which to draw general rules (Gräslund 1980; Svanberg 2003b): though it is well to remember that these rules inevitably are not universal.

A more directly relevant concern is however that the control data is, in the main, osteologically sexed, which as we have seen above is not an infallible method and which is arguably also susceptible to biases and expectations. Moreover, it does not take regional variation into account. In Denmark, female burials as a rule are not known to contain weapons, in Norway the occurrence of axes is not unknown. It is also a point that the majority of Danish burials have less finds than known Norwegian ones. Finally, there is a tendency to uphold the gender stereotypes which may not actually be reflected in the material, such as the ubiquitous idea that keys are buried with women, and that horse sacrifices indicate men (Svanberg 2003b:21), when in fact neither of these are universally

upheld in the material as will be further discussed below. All of these issues mean we must treat the control data with a certain amount of caution, and it seems wise to question just how comparable the data sets really are.

It also leaves a question mark after any burials with conflicting assemblages: weapons with textile working tools for example, warrants the question of which find category is considered the strongest gender indicator. Is it a man with textile tools, or a woman with weapons? The answer can only ever remain guesswork without the skeletal material, but I would venture the opinion that perhaps we are simply asking the wrong questions. Perhaps less rigidity in expected gender roles may be the answer to how to interpret such apparently transgressive burials. It is an exemplification of how locked in we tend to become by our own narrow gender definitions that complex burials which contain both male and female indicators become difficult to categorise, and those without assigned gender tend to be left out of many interpretations. Their existence however, argues for a different understanding of gender in the Viking Age, one which may not have been founded on binary oppositions and an either/or mentality, as will be further explored in Chapter Ten.

Mortuary archaeology often relies heavily on grave goods in more ways than in gender determination. It is used to classify the context in terms of social level and status, as well as to try and construct interpretations about the identity of who was buried in it. As discussed in Chapter Three, grave goods can of course be personal belongings, but they can also be gifts from mourners, necessary equipment for the afterlife, or even bribes to stop the dead coming back to life (Pearson 1999:7). Crucially, we have no way of knowing for sure which of these categories a set item falls into. It is therefore imperative to be aware of how we impose our own categories on to the past when dealing with grave goods (Pearson 1999:9). What I might interpret as a personal trinket may instead have been a potent amulet in the context in which it was deposited: indeed, context is the key word here, as we need to attempt to gain a view of the context in which a burial was created before we attempt to interpret the specific findings. An oxymoronic statement perhaps, as archaeologists often rely on burials in order to create a context. Nevertheless, by studying mortuary archaeology through the avenues of orientation, body treatment and arrangement, grave goods, location and cemetery organisation, and significantly by having control data and comparable material, there is a strong argument that burials can indeed contribute significant knowledge about social practices and beliefs. In the case of

the material discussed here, regular combinations of artefacts and similar expressions strengthen the case for the communication of ideologies and social roles.

In summary then, mortuary archaeology carries great potential for untangling past gender ideologies, but caution must be employed when decoding burials. It is important to remember that a burial is not necessarily true to life, and that the idealised expressions we often see in grave goods may not reflect the complex, inevitably messy, reality of people's lives. Whilst we can argue that burials reflect social norms such as gender ideologies, it is important to bear in mind that such ideologies may or may not reflect the actual reality of gender roles in a given society (Brumfield 2006:38). It is easy to argue that a lack of gender differentiation probably indicates a condition of gender equality, but archaeologists must question this in relation to other categories of materials, and not least whether or not the burial material we have to hand reflects an entire society, or merely a part of that society (Brumfield 2006:39). It may not always have been the case that gender took a deciding role in who belonged to which social strata for example (Joyce 2008:49), but it may equally be the case that gender determined a person's role within that stratum.

With all of these caveats in place, we will now move on a more specific overview of how gender is typically determined in Viking Age burials.

Gendered objects, gendered people

As seen above then, gendering graves by the use of grave goods is less than ideal in the sense that we can only hope to see material expressions of perceived gender, and never the correlation between physical attributes and certain artefacts. That being said, we have little choice but to rely on it as our main method of gender determination in the case of the material in question here. The assemblages in this material will be described in terms of *expressions* in order to reflect this. We cannot know the physical traits of the deceased in most cases, we can only see the perceived gendered *expressions* they communicated in death, and that only in some cases. In keeping with the argument of gender as contextual, dressed gender is understood as paramount in the context of Viking Age Vestfold, making the lack of skeletal material a regrettable but not an insurmountable obstacle. The below describes the categories of finds most often used to determine gender, and outlines the criteria used in this thesis. Though gender forms a crucial part of the analysis here for obvious reasons, it must be recognised that it should not automatically be considered as

equally important in the configuration of social identities, as we will return to in Chapter Ten.

The traditional equation of weapons with male individuals and jewellery in the form of oval brooches as well as textile working tools with female ones is certainly a simplified version of reality. However, with modifications, reservations and an appropriate amount of caution, it is applicable. That being said, gendering burials should not be the final word when attempting to detangle past identities, as will be further discussed in Chapter Ten.

As mentioned above the “control group” for gendering graves in Norway is found across southern Scandinavia, in the main in Denmark but also in Sweden, where skeletal remains allow for osteological sexing as well as archaeological gendering (Stylegar 2010:71). It must be remembered though, that regional variations will occur, as will variations based on more individual concerns. There are exceptions to most gendered artefacts as we will see. There are also what we would call gender-crossing graves, such as women with weapons and textile tools in male burials, though referring to them as gender-crossing is a direct extension of modern understandings of male and female rather than a considered view of how the Viking Age population might have perceived it. However, these burials are exceptions to the rule and working from a basis of probabilities allows us to assume gendered expressions with a degree of accuracy from the weapons/jewellery premise.

Delving into common gender markers, we will start with one of the most problematic categories of jewellery, at least in terms of gender determination, namely beads. Traditional wisdom state that beads are a typically female category when found in large numbers, and the standard categorisation is that the presence of more than three beads indicates a female burial (Johansen 2004:469; Wiker 2011:46). However, beads are relatively common in male burials, where they tend to be found in smaller numbers and often as single beads (Johansen 2004:469), a main difference often being that they show evidence of having been on a string necklace in female graves. This being said, female graves do not always contain numerous beads, nor are male graves with more than three beads unheard of (Johansen 2004:469). Some archaeologists are unwilling to gender graves as female purely on the basis of beads unless there are ten or more found (Glørstad 2010:63), but this thesis follows the more common rule of three or more beads, based on a consideration of the material discussed here. The ultimate gendering of a grave must rely on a view of the entire assemblage where multiple gendered finds are preferred, but

in cases where there are no strong markers other than beads, they will be taken as evidence of female expressions.



Figure 19: an example of a string of beads found at Kaupang (©2018 Kulturhistorisk museum, UiO /CC BY-SA 4.0)

Moving from a complex type of find to one that is less so, oval brooches are more or less universally considered certain female markers (to mention but a very few, see Sjøvold 1944:83; Svanberg 2003b:22; Stylegar 2007:83; Glørstad 2010:63; Stylegar 2010:71; Harrison and Floinn 2014:12). There are very few recorded instances of oval brooches buried with men, although it has been known to occur (as in the Klinta grave, described in Price 2002:147). However, the presence of one or more oval brooch is usually taken as a clear indicator of a female burial (Stylegar 2010:71). An important point to remember here though, is that while oval brooches indicate female burials, female burials need not contain oval brooches, as was mentioned above. One very famous example of this is the previously mentioned Oseberg burial, an extremely wealthy double female burial without a single oval brooch (Shetelig and Brøgger 1928). It ought to be mentioned that this may be due to a break in which took place relatively shortly after the burial (Bill and Daly 2012:810), and it is of course possible that those who entered the burial targeted jewellery.



Figure 20: pair of oval brooches (© 2018 Arkeologisk museum, UiS / CC BY-NC-ND 3.0)

However, Danish evidence supports a supposition that oval brooches belonged to the middle and upper classes, but that women of the very lowest and the very highest social classes did not wear them (Hedeager Madsen 1990:104 cited in Christiansen 2002:61;

Stylegar 2007:83). It is also necessary to make allowances for personal preferences of dress, and for changing modes and styles of dress. In the Hedrum area as we will see, oval brooches are rare, which may indicate a regional preference. Consequently, we cannot term oval brooches necessary for a burial to be gendered female. Moreover, Stylegar has linked the so-called decline of female burials in the 10th century as compared to the 9th to a potential decline in the popularity of these brooches (Stylegar 2007:83), which seems a more plausible explanation than the assumption that female burials in themselves declined. To conclude the discussion of oval brooches, we can work from the assumption that their presence indicates a female expression, but they are not necessary in order for a burial to be assumed female.

Oval brooches are often found in pairs, and often with a third brooch present in the grave goods in the wealthier graves. These third brooches can be equal-armed, trefoil or round, or in some cases a reworked Frankish or Insular mount – in other words they can take a number of different shapes (Stylegar 2010:72). Armrings, bracelets and pendants are all also forms of jewellery commonly found in female graves. Any one of these on their own may not immediately indicate a female expression, but these types of jewellery will in general be assumed female identifiers. The more jewellery found in any one grave, the stronger the likelihood is for it to be gendered female.

The exception to this are ring-pins and pennanular brooches which are often associated with male status (Glørstad 2010:3-4). Though they are also known from female burials, this follows a pattern of dates and types, and as a category they are more firmly associated with male burials (Glørstad 2010).

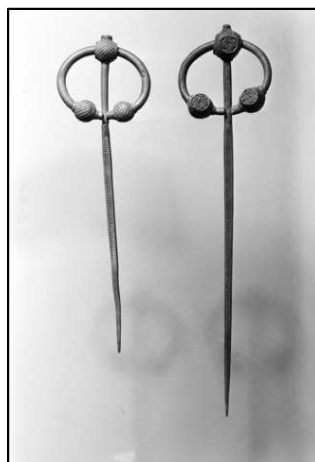


Figure 21: ringpins (©2018 Arkeologisk museum, UiS / CC BY-NC-ND 3.0)

The second large category of gendered female objects is textile working tools, including spindle whorls, loom weights and sword beaters (Glørstad 2010:62). They are not unknown in male graves, as will be evident in the Kaupang material, but the general rule is that they are associated with women, and thus textile working tools are termed a female category of grave goods and finds. Textile working tools indicate specialised craft production, but it also contains a potentially mythical link with the association of spinning and fate (Tsigaridas 1998:10). There is also textual evidence linking textile working with women (Croix 2012). Textile working tools will therefore be used as gender-determining artefacts in this thesis.

Moving on to the typical male gender markers, weapons in the shape of swords, arrows, spearheads and shield bosses, are strongly associated with male expressions. Again, there is a strong textual link between men and weapons (Croix 2012), and although it is not completely straightforward, it can be used as a general rule. There are however instances of female burials with weapons, both in the shape of full weapon sets, as well as single finds such as the axes found at Kaupang, as was discussed in Chapter Five, and will be brought up again in Chapter Ten. The category of axes is not straightforward in other words: it used to be described as part of a “full set” of weapons in Norwegian contexts, until it became clear that axes are relatively common in Norwegian female graves. This is specific to Norway, in other Scandinavian countries they appear mostly limited to male burials. In Norway, they often have the unfortunate tendency to be interpreted as weapons in male graves and tools in female, dating back to Nicolaysen’s interpretation of them as such (Myhre 2015:52) though they are often of the same typology in male and female graves, making the case for different interpretations of them hard to justify. A few exceptions aside however, the presence of weapons are usually an indicator of a male expression, and will be treated as such in this thesis, unless the remaining grave goods create a conflicting image.



Figure 22: Viking Age sword (© 2018 Kulturhistorisk museum, UiO / CC BY-SA 4.0)

A great deal of the artefact categories traditionally assumed to have been male identifiers have had to be reassessed, after their presence in female graves has been shown to be more than just anomalies and exceptions. These categories include ships and boats, equestrian equipment and horses, and other travel related equipment (as discussed in Arwill-Nordbladh 1998:113). Metalworking tools are also often termed male, though caution is necessary as there are few concrete examples to back this up at least in Norway and Iceland (Milek 2015:113), and indeed Trond Løken lists three burials in Østfold and Vestfold alone where female gendered burials contain metalworking equipment (Løken 1974:64) as was discussed in Chapter Five. Similarly, several of the categories that were at one point termed female markers have had to be reconsidered as not being gender-loaded at all. These include cooking equipment, which is almost as common in male graves as in female (Arwill-Nordbladh 1998:84-122). The marked tendency to categorise cooking equipment as “female” and food preparation as “women’s work” shows first of all a lack of understanding of the crucial social importance of food: the importance of this, of sharing and offering food cannot be underestimated and would most certainly have played a big part in social intercourse and manifestation of social superiority (Christiansen 2002:143). The layout of typical Viking Age longhouses rarely allows for any behind the scenes kitchen work either, indicating a social setting where food preparation must necessarily have been visible and open. Rhetoric which dismisses cooking as unimportant also betrays a peculiar sexist view of roles that we now denigrate as “women’s work”. This is not matched by the archaeological evidence, and instead the suggestion that cooking utensils represent a form of domestic wealth is furthered here, and of it symbolising being able to offer hospitality, which written sources testify was important (Sigurðsson 2008:58-60).

Another category which has seen similar treatment is keys, which have long been assumed as the archetypal symbol of the powerful lady of the house (Kristoffersen 1999; Gräslund 2001:85-88), as was previously mentioned. This in turn was used to support the supposed strict divide between women who were in charge of work indoors, or *innanstokks*, and men who were in charge of work outdoors, *utanstokks* as was discussed in Chapter Four. Upon closer examination however, it seems a considerable part of the keys retrieved from mortuary evidence are found in male graves (Berg 2013; Pantman 2014:45; Berg 2015). Similarly, recent research has shown the *innanstokks/utanstokks* divide to be tenuous at best, as was discussed in the previous chapters.

A lot of the supposed male or female finds are therefore no such thing after all. In terms of the most secure categories of finds that can be held up as gender-determining, they are in fact limited to weapons (in the form of swords, shields, arrows and spears) for men, and jewellery (oval brooches and third brooches, strings of beads) or textile-working tools for women.

The great ungendered mass: non-binary Vikings?

So far, this chapter has outlined requirements for gendering burials male or female, and has discussed at length the issues connected with making assumptions about male and female categories. Less obvious however, is the challenge of the large number of burials, present at the vast majority of burial sites, which cannot be securely assigned to either gender.

These burials often make up a considerable percentage of a cemetery's composition, and yet are often left out of in-depth analysis, presumably because they cannot be easily compartmentalised into discrete categories with which we can identify. Male and female are categories we know and feel safe with, but those who do not fit into this are usually left unceremoniously as "ungendered".

And yet, it is not very likely that the Viking Age had a large part of the population living their lives "ungendered", and this terminology gives a false impression of sexless people. What we are instead looking at, is likely to be a combination of factors. In part, they may be people who could not afford to bury gender markers with their dead, as brooches and weapons are after all expensive items. Or, they may be people to whom signalling gender was not *of the first importance*. This may be taken to mean that they were people whose social function and standing was not reliant on gender, or for whom gender was considered of lesser importance than other characteristics. It may of course also mean that they marked their gender in ways which we cannot now identify in the archaeological record or indeed in ways which we fail to recognise. From this we can draw the indication that male and female indicators were only deposited in some cases, meaning it may not have been such a great differentiator as we tend to assume. In a society where a binary gender division was paramount, one could arguably expect a stronger expression of this in the burial rites.

This is an issue which I will return to in the course of my analysis and discussion, but for now the question of what to term these burials remains. "Ungendered" or "gender-neutral"

creates a false impression: even though I do not believe that anyone really believes that “ungendered” means “without gender”, it nonetheless gives a rather dismissive slant to these burials. I propose to call them *indeterminate* burials instead, thus marking them as separate from their explicitly male or female counterparts.

The tools in use: correspondence analysis and understandings of landscape

So far this chapter has outlined and detailed the challenges and opportunities of mortuary evidence, and so it is time to turn to the actual methods which will be used for analysing the material.

The thesis is structured around an inside-out approach, which here means that the graves in question are analysed starting from the inside and moving towards the outside. This is quite simply because a solid knowledge of gender, wealth and composition of grave goods is a prerequisite for a meaningful discussion of gender in the landscape.

However, analysing grave goods is, as ought to be clear by now, a dangerous business. Preconceived notions and ideas are hard to eliminate, and so it can be helpful to find different ways of gathering and summarising data, if the material allows. In this case, the method used is correspondence analysis, carried out on the types of grave goods present or absent in various graves.

What the grave goods can tell us – correspondence analysis

Correspondence analysis can be highly useful in archaeology, a form of multivariate analysis which can be used in a number of different ways. As it forms only one part of a larger analysis in this thesis, this section will merely describe how it has been used here, and will not attempt to explain it in detail. Instead, I refer the reader to more specific books should they wish to understand the finer details and different applications (Shennan 1997; Greenacre 2007). I have used a program written by Danish archaeologist Torsten Madsen, whose CAPCA takes the form of an Excel add-in, making it user-friendly to anyone with basic Excel skills (Madsen 2014), and also therefore easy to master. Because I did not wish to carry out any further statistical analysis, this simpler programme was preferred rather than the more complex SPSS for example.

Correspondence analysis in this thesis forms the initial entry into the data. Thus, the starting point of the material analysis was to run a correspondence analysis, with the hope of discovering patterns that could not be so easily discovered by just looking at a database.

The main output of the analysis is a scattergram, which shows where the graves lie in relation to a calculated (and of course hypothetical) average, as well as in relation to each other. It does this by virtue of looking at variables, which in this case is grave goods in combination with a few other traits such as body treatment and outer shape of the burial, and then places the graves in relation to these variables based on their presence or absence in the individual graves in the scattergram. Thus, what the analysis has brought to the table in the context of this thesis is an overview of the relevant graves which shows levels of affinity. As will be seen, I have carried out analysis at several different levels in order to distinguish different trends.

As the initial step in using correspondence analysis, a number of trial analysis has been carried out in order to achieve readable results which accurately represent the data.

The first step was to remove any casual finds, and any other burials which were too poorly documented to feature in further analysis. Empty graves have also been removed, as they would contain too few variables to add anything to the picture.

The second main step was to classify the grave goods, and in some cases remove object classes which were too obscure to add anything to the picture. It should at this point be noted that the sorts of omissions and classifications that have been done in this study are considered best practice in correspondence analysis (Shennan 1997; Greenacre 2007). In order to create a readable result, categories must be consolidated and omissions can be made when they do not detract from the quality of the final picture. These consolidated categories may vary slightly from area to area, in which case this will be noted in the text concerning the individual sites.

The final categories of variables are:

- *Personal adornment* contains brooches and pins, beads, arm rings, pendants and any other decorative elements such as buckles or imported mounts
- *Textile production tools* is made up of mainly spindle whorls, but also scissors, loom weights and weaving swords
- *Indications of trade* are weights and scales, as well as coins
- *Less common tools* is a consolidated category of combs, fishing equipment, strike-a-lights, scythes and wood- and metalworking tools. This category contains a lot of different subcategories, but after extensive testing it was deemed defensible to

run the analysis with this as one variable, as splitting it into smaller categories confused the final scattergram without significantly altering the results

- *Common tools* are knives, sickles and hones. These are often found together, and are amongst the most commonly found objects
- *Horse related equipment* contains anything related to equestrian pursuits as well as more general equine traits such as horse bones and teeth, in addition to rattles
- *Indicators of domestic wealth* is another varied category, containing chests, locks and keys, as well as cooking equipment, glass- and ceramic vessels and animal remains. These items are all argued to represent the same thing here, namely a possession of, and responsibility for, domestic wealth and resulting displays of this
- *Weapons* contains the usual suspects of swords, arrows, axes, spears and shields
- *Imports* is retained as a separate category with the understanding that imports were symbols in themselves: owning and displaying imported wealth is understood as a way of communicating status and outside connections. This category encompasses all known imports, be they insular mounts, beads or swords
- *Barrows* is fairly self-explanatory: all barrows, whether round or long, are marked here
- Finally, *inhumations and cremations* are entered as two separate variables

It is worth noting that a few types of finds have been excluded from the analysis. This is not to say that they are considered unimportant, but rather that they do not add anything to the final results. This includes any singular finds: if there is only one of a very special type of find, such as for example gaming pieces, they will not even show up in the final analysis, as the method relies on multiples of variables in order to reveal connections. It also includes the opposite end of the spectrum, the very prolific items such as rivets and nails – these are too numerous and too diffuse to add useful knowledge. Finally, any unspecified finds, which tend to be quite numerous in Nicolaysen's reports, such as unknown iron tools, fragments of bronze and so on have been removed on the basis that they are too obscure to add relevant knowledge here.

These variables have further been tested for the individual sites, so as to make sure they represent an overview of the assemblages.

Once the variables have been determined, the next step is to decide the method of counts. A common way of doing it is to do a simple presence/absence count, but it is also possible to do a more weighted method, such as a 0-1-2 count. The material was here tested with both methods. The presence/absence count is quite self-explanatory, whereas with the 0-1-2 method the counts were determined on whether or not a grave contained either 0=no instances of a variable, 1=less than or equal to the average of a variable or 2=more than the average of a variable. Of the two methods, the 0-1-2 count yielded the most readable result, and was also deemed to be the truer reflection of the material at hand seen in the reflected accuracy of the final statistics. With a great deal of variation on find occurrences, this seemed the better method. After all, many male burials contain some jewellery, and several of the female burials in this material contain a weapon or two, and this method allowed for the differences to be clearly marked between a full necklace of beads and several brooches, and a single ring-pin for example.

With these methodological steps in place, the analysis can be run in a variety of different ways, as will be shown in the following chapters. An interesting view can be gained by removing gendered indicators for example, or by removing external traits and body treatment. These analyses help give a complete picture of the burials through exploring different ways of seeing them.

All the analysis were run with three axis in the initial runs, but the final scattergram and discussion uses axis 1 and 2 in all cases unless this is otherwise specified. This is because in all cases, axis 2 has a higher amount of contributions than does axis 3, and also because axis 2 and 3 are in most cases quite similar in terms of which variables manifest as differences. Overall then, the two axis picture presented in the following chapters present the clearest overviews of the analysis. For a full view of the three axis, the reader is referred to appendix II, where the scattergrams are all collated.

The aim is of course to attempt to discover any discernible patterns in the material, and whether or not these are related to the gender of the deceased. Once the grave goods have been analysed, the findings from the inside are then applied to the outside expressions, to see if there are correlations between the two.

The where of the matter – location as an analytical tool

As has been discussed previously, *where* graves are placed is generally conceded to be significant (Pearson 1999:124). The placement of burials requires a conscious decision,

which can tell us a great deal about the society in question in terms of their acts of remembrance, their relationship with past generations and their customs. Customs such as the reuse of older monuments in the Viking Age for example, points to a very clear agenda in terms of physical positioning of graves (Thäte 2009). It is thought that such reuse shows a desire to legitimise new power: by placing burials near those of old rulers, the new powers could demonstrate longevity and thus legitimacy (Fuglestedt 1997; Gansum 1997; Skre 1997). It is a physical manifestation of power play and ideology in other words. This is not the only possible explanation, reuse of monuments could also signal reverence of ancestors, and continuation of tradition. Nevertheless, the fact that burials were placed on significant sites from earlier periods demonstrates both the power of collective memory, as well as that location was an important consideration in the placement of burials.

The method employed in my landscape analysis is a combination of maps created in ArcGIS, together with site visits to the physical locations of the sites. ArcGIS enables detailed maps, showing the topographical lie of the land, nearby features, sight lines and a host of other features that enables accuracy and analysis. Sight-lines is one function that I have not relied heavily upon, though it has been used in a few cases as supporting data. The reason for my reluctance is that it is a very subjective approach: it measures sight lines from 1 meter above ground level, meaning we cannot compare it with an average person's view for example. Another consideration is that sight is but one feature of a site's overall impression, there is sound, smell, and light (both in terms of quantity and quality) to take into account as well. Questions such as vegetation, buildings and other temporary landscape features are also hard to account for, making this feature imprecise unless it is used with a great deal of supporting information.

In addition, ArcGIS allows for more complex analysis aside from just map creation and visual analysis thereof. Such features have not been employed here, as I believe they carry the danger of overcomplicating rather than increasing our understanding of sites. This is bearing in mind that the analysis done here works on a local level, and do not have great distances to span. It is also based on that the thesis is founded in selected sites, rather than a complete regional material. For the understanding of selected, limited sites, my approach of creating maps of the relevant cemeteries and analysing the maps through a visual understanding of them has answered the purpose. The maps have been created with the aid of various sources. The Gulli project allowed me access to their original GIS

data, thus enabling the creation of exact maps (access given by Steinar Kristiansen). In the case of Kaupang, the maps are reconstructed in the main using maps from the recent Kaupang publications (with thanks to Dagfinn Skre and as based on Skre 2007d), and also from the earlier publications and excavations (Nicolaysen 1868; Blindheim, et al. 1981; Blindheim and Heyerdahl-Larsen 1995; Blindheim, et al. 1999). The Hedrum maps are based on Christer Tønning's reconstructions of Nicolaysen's excavations, and consolidated with the original excavation reports (with thanks to Christer Tønning Nicolaysen 1884, 1886, 1887, 1888, 1894; Tønning 2003).

The online database Askeladden has also featured in my analysis, as an excellent gateway to the landscape in terms of archaeological features and remains, as will be further detailed in Chapter Nine.

Moreover, the importance of site visits cannot be undervalued: in order to truly understand a landscape, it is necessary to experience it. That is not to say that I believe visiting the sites of former cemeteries will grant any sort of deep understanding of how prehistoric people may have experienced them, but it does enable the visitor to grasp the interplay of nearby features, of light, accessibility, visibility and sound (as in sound coming from permanent features, such as rivers and fjords), which all contribute towards an increased chance of interpreting aspects of motivations for past use of the area.

Burials often take on a monumental nature, where the burials are potent physical reminders of the dead, which can help reinforce power structures or act as ritual focal points. The mortuary landscape of power is a well-known concept (Wright 2013:406), and the fact that the mortuary landscape would influence those who lived in it or travelled through it is a generally accepted belief (Stutz and Tarlow 2013:7). With this comes the realisation that the mortuary landscape is strategic, that where graves are placed is often deliberate and key to understanding the significance of the burial customs in question. This is a key part of the underlying methodology of interpretation in this thesis.

Further, the topography can be seen to matter as well. As will become clear in Chapter Nine, the location of cemeteries appear to have been carefully planned. In general, Viking Age sites show signs of having been chosen in terms of visibility and outlook, sometimes making use of hills to appear more imposing, sometimes dominating valleys. In the case of the material discussed here, there are certain very interesting commonalities as regards

the topographical positioning, where visibility from afar may not have been an overarching concern, as will be seen in Chapter Nine.

Moreover, at all the sites discussed in this thesis, travel is argued to have been a key consideration, as roads, rivers and seaways are prominent features at all the sites. Furthermore, the cemeteries in question share an aspect of accessibility, which strengthens the case that they were meant to be seen, and to be experienced.

Local features such as rivers, lakes, mountains and of course the sea are of importance as well. Though I cannot argue for general rules across Vestfold, there are certainly individual trends from each of the sites analysed here which speaks to a knowing and deliberate relationship with the surrounding landscape.

Thus, the aspects that will be considered as being of importance in this analysis are: the topographical positioning of sites, and of the internal organisation of the site where this is possible and deemed significant. The surrounding landscape: roads, shoreline, nearby water or hills, any known settlement sites, proximity to other significant sites or indeed cemeteries, are other significant features. Temporality is also a factor which must be considered, in terms of the development of sites over time, and changes to the nearby landscape.

It will be argued that these things together shows the significance placed on burials. That the burials were meant to dominate their surrounding landscape, and that their presence was meant to be a visible reminder of power, status and influence over those who lived in, and passed through, the landscape, is a founding principle for this analysis.

This matters from a gendered perspective, in the sense that the literal translation of the traditional model of private women and public men could reasonably be expected to be reflected in the mortuary record. If women were not deemed to be of much social importance save as objects to facilitate male alliances for example, why should they be accorded elaborate power displays in the mortuary record? Indeed, their very presence in monumental burials argues for a reassessment of traditional models of gendered value in the Viking Age.

An approach outlined

To sum up, this thesis aims to use an inside-out approach to analyse burials across and despite of the gender of the interred. Gender is here considered an important

distinguishing trait for individual burials and groups of burials, but not a divisive or necessarily restrictive trait, and gender is thus only one of several characteristics that will be examined.

The meaning of an inside-out approach is that the mortuary record will therefore be considered in its entirety, from grave goods, internal markings and body treatment, to outer shape and size, and crucially location. It is argued that these traits are symptomatic of the importance placed on the burials, and that this importance builds on the social standing of the interred. The use of correspondence analysis will help avoid bias, and instead initiate an analysis which considers all burials on equal grounds.

The landscape analysis has been carried out by site visits, as well as by reconstructing the burials as they were placed in the landscape through maps created in ArcGis. Apart from at Gulli however, where I had access to the data from the excavation, these maps are only approximately accurate. Due to the sometimes scant information recorded by previous excavators, complete reconstruction is out of the question. However, what matters is not the exact location of any given grave to the correct meter, but rather the relationship between graves on a given cemetery as well as the relationship with the greater landscape and any significant features in this. Approximate reconstructions are therefore considered sufficient for the purposes of this thesis.

Once the sites have been analysed, the overall results will be put in context with potential implications for gender ideologies and understandings of gender in the Viking Age.

Chapter Seven: An introduction to the material

The following pages will serve as an overview of the selected sites, with a brief description of the main traits of each location.

The sites presented here make up the material which is the foundation for this thesis. The individual cemeteries were chosen carefully, with the aim of creating a solid sample of representative cemeteries from the area now known as Vestfold. This geographical limitation, though non-existent in the Viking Age, originates in a desire to focus on an area with shared cultural traits, shared material culture and settlement customs (for a discussion of the latter, see Gjerpe 2017), as well as comparable burial customs. The sites in question overlap in time, and their close proximity means that mutual influence can be considered likely.

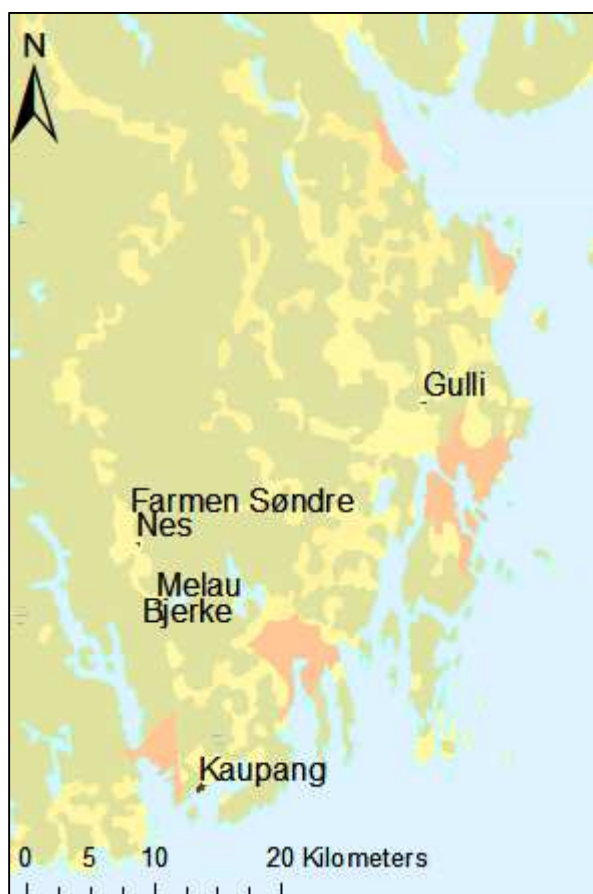


Figure 23: map of the area with all sites marked on: Kaupang, Gulli, Farmen, Nes, Melau and Bjerke.

Gulli was chosen in part because it is the most recently excavated, and therefore very well documented. It is also a relatively small sample size, making it a good test subject for methods and analysis.

Kaupang makes up a substantial percentage of the total Vestfold material, and also provides a fascinating contrast due to its urban nature. In a study aiming to discuss gender at the higher social strata *across* Viking Age society, including Kaupang was considered essential.

Finally, the Hedrum area was chosen for a number of reasons. Firstly, the close physical proximity and potential for communication links with Kaupang makes it an interesting prospect. Secondly, it houses a wealth of material which has hitherto not been extensively studied. Thirdly, excavated by Nicolaysen, it carries many similarities with parts of the Kaupang material in terms of documentation, and thus the potential information gleaned.

These sites will be treated as three main groups of material henceforth, separating Gulli, Kaupang and the Hedrum area. The remainder of this chapter will provide a brief overview of the individual areas and the research history pertaining to each one. This is included so as to provide an in-depth understanding of why the sites were chosen, such as in the case of Hedrum, as well as to give a background for why the individual sites are sometimes treated differently in the subsequent analysis. Older excavations for example, often carry source critical challenges in the amount and detail of documentation, meaning full analysis according to the methodology of this thesis may be challenging. Difference in location, nature and extent also requires some methodological adjustments, as will become apparent in the following two chapters.

Gulli

The cemetery at Gulli was excavated over two seasons in 2003 and 2004 (Gjerpe 2005:19). Uncovered in connection with roadworks in the region, it is located where the modern motorway (the E18) now runs, in the municipality of Tønsberg in Vestfold county (Gjerpe 2005:11). The site as it stood at excavation yielded a total of 20 burials, but the excavators have estimated that the site may have contained around 60 burials in total (Gjerpe 2005:15).

Due to prolonged agricultural activity in the region, all remaining traces were found below soil level, with no surviving external markers above ground. It is therefore

potentially significant that the majority of burials on the site are inhumations, which tend to be placed in cut graves beneath soil level, either under barrows or in flat graves, rather than cremations, which are often placed directly on the soil, with a barrow constructed on top (Price 2008:261). As will be discussed later this is potentially significant, when we consider the predominance of cremation as a burial form in Vestfold in general together with the general lack of excavations which can be held to a modern standard. It can be conjectured from this, that a substantial amount of evidence in the form of cremation burials may have been lost through agricultural activity (Gjerpe 2005:15), but also that many of the empty mounds recorded at various sites may have had graves cut underneath them which went unnoticed at the time of excavation.

One of several interesting characteristics of the site is its dating as a “pure” Viking Age cemetery, with the graves that can be dated falling exclusively to within the period between AD 700 to AD 1050 (Gjerpe 2005:133). It is a commonly held belief that Iron Age cemeteries in this part of Norway tended to span longer periods (Gjerpe 2005:16), though as we will see this is not a dominant trend in the material discussed here. Further, all 20 burials excavated on the site yielded grave goods, and most of a reasonably prosperous nature. The site does not reach the very heights of affluence that we know is possible in the Viking Age, but gives rather an overall impression of a fairly uniform site in terms of amount of grave goods. Indeed, the site’s overall composition gives the impression of having more similarities than differences in the general makeup of the graves.

Gulli is an inland site, located by the large morainic ridge known as *Raet*, which has played such a big role in the communication landscape in the region and which will be further detailed in Chapter Nine.

As was mentioned above, the site was chosen mainly on the strength of its recent excavation date, and therefore high standards of documentation. It has in many ways acted as a test site for many of the methods in this thesis, in that I have had access to the original ArcGis files for example, enabling a more accurate landscape analysis than at the other sites. The finds, such as have survived at any rate, are also all well documented, enabling a more thorough overview of the contents of the individual graves than is possible at those excavated at earlier dates. With “only” 20 graves as well, it is fairly easy to get to grips with, whilst remaining a representative sample.

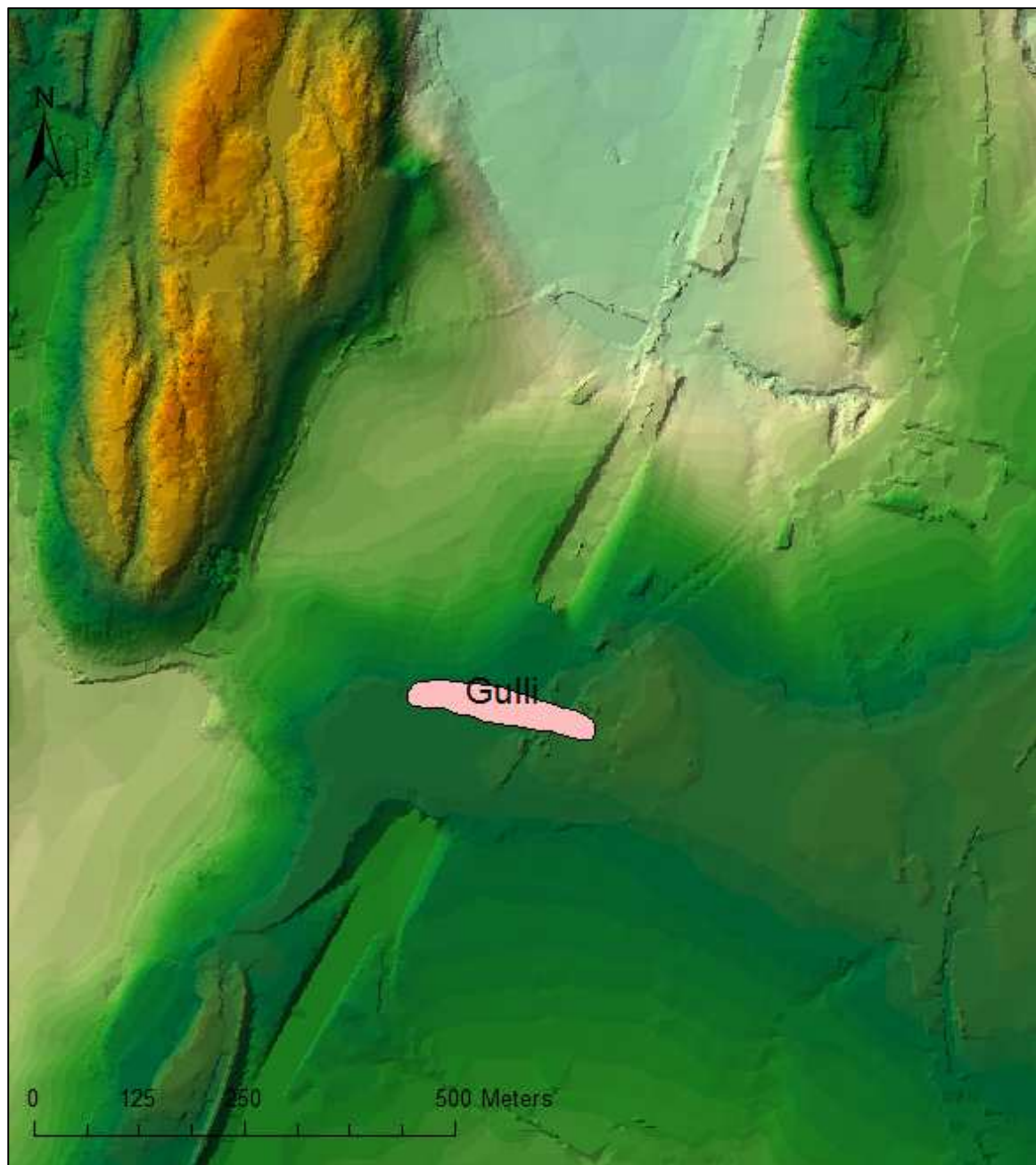


Figure 24: an overview of the Gulli site (the area is marked in pink) and its immediate surroundings. The depression running through the map from North to South is the modern-day motorway.

Naturally there are certain limitations to the material: as with most of Vestfold, there is no skeletal remains to speak of, and so all graves have been archaeologically gendered. There is the likelihood of it being only a third of the original site to contend with, meaning issues of representativity needs to be considered. The possibility remains that this was an area of the cemetery where only certain people were buried, or that it was the

Viking Age corner of a larger cemetery. These factors will be discussed further in the landscape analysis chapter.

Those issues notwithstanding, the cemetery provides a highly useful case study.

Kaupang

Kaupang forms the second main area, and is quite a different proposition from Gulli. Where the former is a relatively small cemetery without connections to any known nearby settlement, the Kaupang material is made up of a collection of large cemeteries all surrounding the trading town itself.

Kaupang is often styled as something of an anomaly in the Norwegian archaeological record, painted as a place where different rules applied than in the rest of contemporary Norway, which was at the time predominantly rural, and where the archaeology as a result is also different (Hofseth 1999; Skre 2007c:21). The recent discovery of a production and trading site at Heimdalsjordet by the Gokstad burial (Bill and Rødsrud 2013, 2017), also in Vestfold, means Kaupang is no longer Norway's only site of this nature from the Viking Age. However, these are the only two known and excavated settlements of an urban nature from Viking Age Norway, and they do therefore stand out somewhat in the archaeology, and the material culture is rather different in many regards from rural communities. Though Kaupang is not a large town, it is termed an urban site in this thesis. This is on the strength of its role as a craft and production centre, as a trading hub, and as a site which stands out from nearby rural settlements in its subsistence strategies. It is also conjectured that the relatively large ¹⁰population would have created a significantly different living experience in Kaupang compared with for example the Hedrum area.

As I will argue here though, the underlying social structures remain much the same, with a shared ideology enabling different social roles and expressions of these in urban, as well as rural communities. The site cannot be removed from its local context and sphere of influence, and must be treated as part of the local landscape of settlements, with all which that entails in terms of influence and impulses between local communities. Kaupang must therefore be discussed with the understanding that it remains firmly placed in the area's social structure. Rather than discussing it as falling outside the "normal" frameworks, we

¹⁰ The Kaupang project's 2008 publication estimates the population of the town somewhere between 200-500 people, based on the burial material (Stylegar 2007:65).

must recognise it as an integral part of this framework. This is especially important when considering the oft-quoted “high percentage” of women found in the cemeteries (Blindheim and Heyerdahl-Larsen 1995:126; Hofseth 1999; Pedersen 2014:169), as we will return to later.

It is also important to recognise that Kaupang is not unique. Urban settlements were found across Scandinavia and the Viking expansion areas at the time, and so the form of trading and manufacturing hub which we see here is not without parallel, with comparisons often drawn between Kaupang and larger places such as Hedeby in Denmark and Birka in Sweden.

It is not within the remit of this thesis to produce an in-depth discussion of the nature of social organisation at Kaupang at large, but a brief overview of the site and its history is necessary in order to put the material into context.

Previous research

The wish to confirm the location of the urban site in Skiringssal occupied many scholars during the 19th and first half of the 20th century. The town named Kaupang in Skiringssal is first mentioned in a contemporary source, the well-known Ohthere’s account of his travels given to King Alfred, which exists as a subscript to the Old English translation of Orosius’ World History, assumed to have been recorded some time during the reign of King Alfred (Skre 2007b:29). Brief and factual, it accounts for Ohthere’s journey along the Norwegian coast (*Norvegr*) from his home in Hålogoland to *Sciringesheal* to trade his goods there (Skre 2007b:29).

The exact location of this town became a matter of interest to antiquarians in the 19th century when the site was connected with the farm known as Kaupang in Tjølling, Vestfold (Skre 2007b:31). Subsequent excavations by the archaeologist Nicolay Nicolaysen revealed an extensive barrow cemetery at the farm Nordre Kaupang whose dates fell exclusively within the Viking Age, and another, smaller, cemetery at Søndre Kaupang. However, the excavation failed to reveal the spectacular material evidence that had been expected and hoped for, even though it did find a large and decidedly wealthy burial ground (Blindheim 1981:15). Interest in the site diminished somewhat after this, and the next phase of extensive and sustained research came with Charlotte Blindheim’s excavations which took place between 1950 and 1974, with subsequent publications during the 1980s and 1990s (Blindheim, et al. 1981; Blindheim and Heyerdahl-Larsen

1995; Blindheim, et al. 1999). The main aim of the excavation, which was to ascertain whether or not Kaupang was the site of Ohthere's port, was met by the partial excavation of the flat grave cemetery at Bikjholberget, as well as excavation in the settlement area (Blindheim, et al. 1981).

Research was carried forward after Dagfinn Skre took over the role of project leader, and extensive fieldwork was carried out in the period 1998 to 2003 (Pilø 2007a). This most recent part of the project has concluded beyond all doubt that Kaupang was the site of a permanent urban settlement with trade and craft production (Pilø 2007b:161). It has also extended the area of interest to encompass the Skiringssal complex, where a hall and a potential ping site has been excavated (Skre 2007a, 2007f).

The following analysis will use the reports and documentation from all the different phases of research.

The settlement – size and character

The town at Kaupang was a busy port, trading place, and craft production centre for a relatively brief period of time. The site saw intense activity from the late 8th century AD with the earliest date from the settlement, provided by dendrochronology, dating to around 800 AD (Pilø 2007b:177). The end phase is more uncertain, but the evidence points to the settlement remaining active until the middle of the 10th century (Pilø 2007b:178). Dating from the cemeteries certainly supports this, with dates spanning this period.

After ascertaining that Kaupang was indeed the trading port they had been looking for, Blindheim's initial suggestion was that it had been a seasonal trading-post, rather than a permanent settlement. This has since been modified, and the town is now recognised as just that: a town, settled year round as evidenced by food production and timber cut during winter months (Pilø and Skre 2008:24).

As is to be expected from an urban site where trade was important, coins are well represented in the finds (Blackburn 2008:29). The majority are Arabic silver dirhams, but there are also a few Late-Roman, Byzantine and some western European silver coins present (Blackburn 2008:29).

The finds from the site testify to a range of crafts (glass-bead production, metal casting, blacksmithing, amber-working and textile production), trade (coins, scales, hacksilver,

gemstones, glass-beads, pottery) and daily life (pottery, soapstone vessels, knives, strike-a-lights) (Pedersen and Pilø 2007:179). The artefact assemblage from Kaupang bears a strong resemblance to those from Hedeby and Birka (Pedersen and Pilø 2007:182), justifying comparisons with these sites in the context of early urban centres in Scandinavia. They all show evidence of glass-bead production, textile production, metal- and amber-working, as well as evidence of exchange and trade (Pedersen and Pilø 2007: 182). Overall, the picture that emerges from the settlement finds, is of a busy trading and production centre.

Overview of the cemeteries

Kaupang is situated on arable land, and with that comes the familiar tale of decimation of archaeological remains, which increased with the intensification of agriculture throughout the 19th century. At Kaupang we can actually chart this destruction up to a point, because interest in the site can be traced back to the early 19th century, thus recording some of the remains before large scale destruction set in. Due to the sustained interest in this locality in the form of archaeological investigations and publications, there is a great deal of material to work with, even for the sites which are all but gone today.

The cemeteries at Kaupang justify separate analysis and discussion on the merit of their distinct locations and expressions. It would be problematical to say the least to compare as like for like the barrows and cremation graves synonymous with Nordre Kaupang with the complex inhumations in flat graves at Bikjholberget. These two sites are in many regards opposites of each other, as will become apparent in the subsequent chapters. They serve to illustrate the important point that when it comes to data analysis, there is no one size fits all approach, and the methods in use must be tailored to suit each individual site.

Before the most recent Kaupang publications, the custom was to divide the Kaupang graves into four large cemeteries: Nordre Kaupang, Søndre Kaupang, Bikjholberget and Lamøya, each with their distinctive traits. In the 2007 publication however, Frans-Arne Stylegar made the case for there being a number of smaller clusters to be singled out from among these, taking the total of individual cemeteries up to seven (Stylegar 2007:69-75). The arguments for this further separation is that the localities are so far apart as to make it unlikely they were part of the same assemblages, and I concur with the main gist of this. However, there are a few caveats. Two of these smaller assemblages have no recorded finds, and no record of excavation, and are therefore not included in this analyses (these

being Bjønnes and Vikingholmen) (Stylegar 2007:74-75). The third, termed Hagejordet by Stylegar, is the southernmost tip of the Nordre Kaupang cemetery. Whilst the few burials found here are indeed separated from the main group of the cemetery by a stretch of land which contained no known burials, it is here kept as part of the Nordre Kaupang cemetery for purposes of analysis. It is argued that their position as separate from the rest of the site may carry a special meaning, but that the locality of the burials on the same stretch of land, with the same relationship to the sea and the nearby hills, means it can be argued as part of the same site. To lend further strength to this, it must also be mentioned that the graves themselves do not differentiate themselves from the rest of the Nordre Kaupang material, but rather seems to fit well within the overall picture.

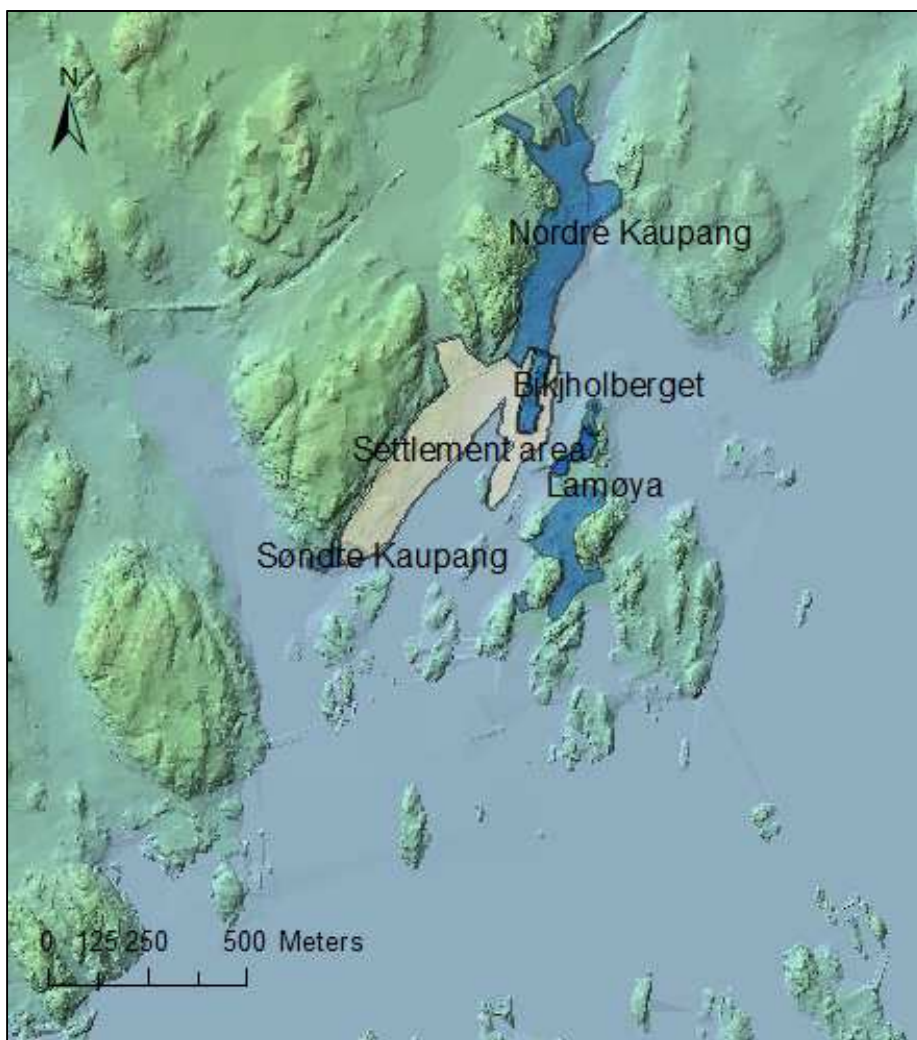


Figure 25: an overview of the Kaupang area as it would have appeared in the Viking Age.

As mentioned in the introduction, the inclusion of Kaupang as part of the material for this thesis can be justified in a number of ways. First off, it constitutes a considerable part of

the overall burial evidence for Vestfold. Second, it is very well documented and accessible. Third, the urban nature of the site makes it a fascinating juxtaposition with more rural cemeteries.

Hedrum

Hedrum today is part of the greater Larvik area, in Vestfold County, and is an area predominantly characterised by agriculture. The terrain of the area is divided by the river Numedalslågen, which runs through the area like an artery, and which must undoubtedly have played an important role in past subsistence strategies. The Hedrum landscape is a typical river-valley, gently sloping and fertile, as is illustrated by the map in illustration 7.4.

Though today's Hedrum is a fairly quiet, rural place, there is substantial evidence that it was a place of high and consistent activity throughout the Iron Age, as evidenced by extensive archaeological remains (Tonning 2003:5). This evidence is known primarily in the shape of burial mounds in cemeteries, both smaller and larger. During the course of the 1880s and 1890s, Nicolay Nicolaysen excavated a large number of Iron Age burials in the area, numbering 169 over several cemeteries. By including burials which are known and recorded though not professionally excavated, the total number of Iron Age burials would be 223. My database has been narrowed to those professionally excavated and dated to the Viking Age (or Late Iron Age), and numbers 72. The following discussion will focus on professionally excavated and recorded burials only, and only those that are accessible in terms of approximate reconstruction in the landscape, as there are too many questions concerning the quality of excavation and exact location of other finds. Thus, the four burials excavated by Nicolaysen at Vestre Vestrum have been left out of this analysis, as the data recorded is not sufficient to place them in the landscape. The same applies to Farmen Nordre, where the lack of a specific description of the location makes it difficult to place the burials in the landscape. The four remaining sites, Farmen Søndre, Nes, Melau and Bjerke will all thus form the material here.

Through comments made in Nicolaysen's reports (see for example Nicolaysen 1887:25), as well as later surveys, we know that there was a great number of burials in the area which were not excavated. Due to agricultural activity in recent years however, most of these have been decimated, and little now remains above ground.

Traces of Iron Age Hedrum

As with Kaupang described above, it is not within the remit of this thesis to draw a detailed picture of Hedrum as it might have been in the Iron Age, but it is necessary to sketch an outline of the area as it was then in order to sustain a meaningful analysis of mortuary remains.

We can deduce the area was fairly densely populated, where the landscape invited and facilitated a number of subsistence activities. Numedalslågen runs through the landscape, creating a transport link with the outside world (Resi 1987) both in summer and winter, and the gentle hills and generally flat land, together with the important natural travel route created by Raet, which also runs through the area, contributes to making overland travel easy. The landscape of Hedrum, in other words, is one characterised by accessibility and natural travel routes.

The area has in the past been described as a significant focal point in Viking Age settlements in Vestfold (Sjøvold 1944:86), and the proximity to Kaupang (see illustration 7.1) makes the location especially interesting: the river would have provided a transport link between any communities here and the town, and we must assume that these localities exercised considerable influence over each other. Indeed, as we will return to in Chapter Nine, some of the place names in the area indicate trading activity (Rygh NG 2082 quoted in Tønning 2003:29), and it does not require a great stretch of imagination to suggest Hedrum as a link between Kaupang and the inland areas beyond. Indeed, the similarities between the Hedrum and Kaupang burials has been commented on previously (Heyerdahl-Larsen 1981:41; Stylegar 2005:161), though the area remains relatively little studied. We can imagine it as a place of considerable importance in other words, as we will return to in the later discussion.

Our knowledge of the area is, as is so often the case, reliant more on burial evidence than on anything else. Only one Viking Age house has been excavated (64-1 in the appendix in Eriksen 2015:204 volume II), at Hedrum Prestegaard. Unfortunately, this does not tie in with any of the cemeteries treated in detail in this thesis. There are burial finds from Hedrum Prestegaard as well, but none of these have been professionally excavated.

The burials at Hedrum will be considered in terms of links with the wider world, transport links, evidence of trade and local landmarks where any are known.



Figure 26: overview of the area with the four cemeteries mapped.

The cemeteries from this area were chosen for several reasons: first of all, they are numerous, and contain a consistent level of grave goods, making them suitable for the type of analysis used in this thesis. Second, the fact that they were excavated by Nicolaysen makes them comparable with the Nordre Kaupang graves in this regard. Third, the area contains a wealth of finds, and yet is rarely the focus of academic discourse, and it is an area that deserves more attention. Fourthly and finally, the position was judged interesting here, both in terms of accessibility and communication in the landscape, but

also as a potentially semi-rural connection point. The sheer amount of Iron Age material from Hedrum makes it clear that we are dealing with a fairly densely populated area. A look at the geography shows a location with excellent connections both to inland Norway, and to the coastal trade. It seems likely therefore that this was a location of some significance, as will be further explored in the subsequent chapters.

Summary

The material described above represents a varied and representative selection of the overall Vestfold area, with a mix of smaller and larger cemeteries from rural and urban areas. Vestfold as it stands today is a relatively small area, and none of the sites are very far from each other, as seen in the map in illustration 7.1. It is therefore conjectured that the material chosen gives a representative sample for an overall social structure within elite communities in the area. A reminder of some of the challenges connected with burial evidence is in order here however: first of these is that we cannot assume that the burial evidence is complete, in the sense that we do not know if everyone was afforded a burial, not even everyone of a certain social class. Second is the potential that we are missing important parts of the cemeteries in question, such as at Gulli, and the unexcavated parts of Kaupang, as well as other known, unexcavated sites, at Hedrum. When the material is here deemed representative therefore, it is with the strict stipulation that it is representative in terms of the material we have from Vestfold overall, meaning the excavated and documented sites from this area.

The following two chapters will consider the individual sites in more detail, first from a perspective of grave assemblages and internal features, and subsequently using the findings from this applied to a landscape analysis.

Chapter Eight: Internal affairs – the burials from within

This chapter will discuss the internal aspects of the burials, focusing on grave goods as well as body treatment and grave type. The aim is to elucidate the general findings in terms of patterns, site specific finds and differences to see the overall conclusions that can be drawn from the internal aspects of the burials. The chapter is a companion to the following one, which focuses on the location of the graves in the landscape.

An introduction to the complete material

As was described in the methodology chapter, the material used for correspondence analysis has been subjected to extensive testing with different combinations of variables and different count measures. The analysis presented below is therefore the result of a careful process of data analysis intended to introduce an overview of the complete material.

The initial analysis has been carried out on all the burials discussed in the thesis, meaning it contains data from all the different sites discussed. Hence this introduction to the material provides an overview in broad brushstrokes, from which a more site specific and detailed analysis will follow. It also contains all variables, both the grave goods, body treatment and whether or not it was marked by a barrow. Through this, it provides insights into the material in general, as well as demonstrating the complexity of the material at hand.

The population sample, coming as it does from seven cemeteries ranging in size, is relatively large with a total number of 218 individuals included. Of these, 73 are aligned with what can be called a female expression, 53 are indeterminate, and 92 are male expressions. In percentages, the representation looks like this:

Female	Male	Indeterminate	Total
73 (33%)	92 (42%)	53 (24%)	218

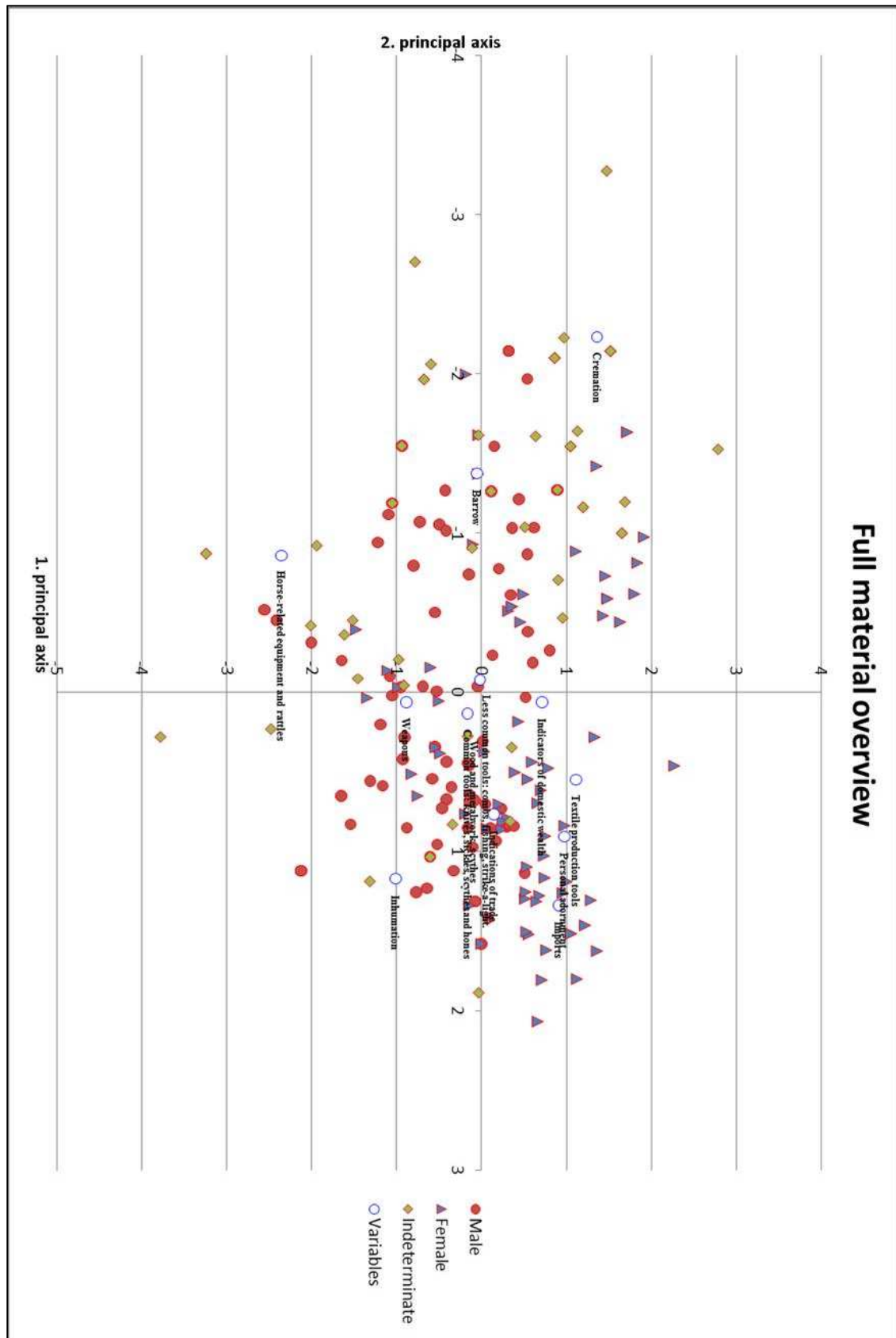


Table 1: the full overview of the material covered in this thesis. For ease of reading, the burials are not numbered, though the reader is referred to appendix II for a numbered version.

The burials span a considerable scope in terms of wealth, as some contain only one or two items in terms of grave goods, and others are very wealthy indeed, but all are dated to the Late Iron Age (mostly specifically Viking Age) and all are from the designated areas used in this thesis.

As can be seen from Table 8.1, the resulting scattergram shows a variety of interesting trends. The first thing to point out is perhaps that although there are gendered *tendencies* there are no clear cut and absolute gender-specific lines that can be drawn. So although the variables of textile production and personal adornment draw more female burials than male, there are enough male burials to ruin any claims of gender exclusivity. Similarly, weapons show more male than female ones clustered nearby, but female expressions are by no means excluded. Most of the variables are found on the right hand side of the scattergram, and thus we can see a difference based on wealth here as well. This is interesting, in that the left side is characterized by fewer variables, which seems to correspond with cremations, as we will return to later. Horse related equipment is set somewhat apart from the larger cluster of variables, meaning that in these burials the occurrence of this variable is stronger than other traits.

A note on all the charts in this chapter is that individual burial numbers have been removed in order to improve the legibility. These are however included in the scattergrams which form part of appendix II, should the reader wish to consult these.

Thus, the overall picture is one of graded nuances, rather than stark and absolute gender divisions, and the site specific analysis will further test these patterns.

Dating and gender

A significant amount of the material lacks detailed dating, with many graves dated no more closely than to the Viking Age. This is notably the case with the Hedrum material, where older excavation reports provide only broad detail. It was deemed outside the scope of this thesis to reexamine the material with a view to providing more accurate dating, on the basis that it would not be feasible within the given timeframe, and because there is sufficient dated evidence to provide a broad level overview as it stands today. An examination of gendered patterns and dates is included here, with more detailed analysis provided in the site specific sections below where this was possible. A more in depth discussion of the ramifications of the patterns which become apparent here will follow in the discussion chapter.

In general, there are few burials from the 8th century, with only four set to this period. Of these, two contain female expressions and two male. With a sample this small, any form of multivariate analysis would be unlikely to show much that could not be surmised from simply looking at the data. What we can see is that these are not particularly well equipped. Body treatment is an equal split, with a male and female expression each identified as cremations and inhumations respectively. Outer expressions are likewise equally represented, with one female expression in a flat grave and one in a barrow, and one male in a flat grave and one in a barrow, and there are no particular distinguishing traits in the assemblages.

From the 9th century, we have a much greater number, with 61 dated burials. A brief look at this dataset reveals an interesting trend: indeterminate burials are severely underrepresented. 29 (47.5%) can be classified as male expressions, 29 (47.5%) as female, but only three (5%) as indeterminate, drawing the conclusion that gender identifiers, as we classify them today, were common in this time-span. Further, a correspondence analysis produces a scattergram with clearly demarcated gender differences, as can be seen below. Though a few burials transgress this, most female expressions are aligned with textile working tools, personal adornment and imports. The male side is categorized by weapons and horse related tools. In a sense then, the burial assemblages from the 9th century here emerge as the purest image of stereotypical Viking Age gendered expressions.

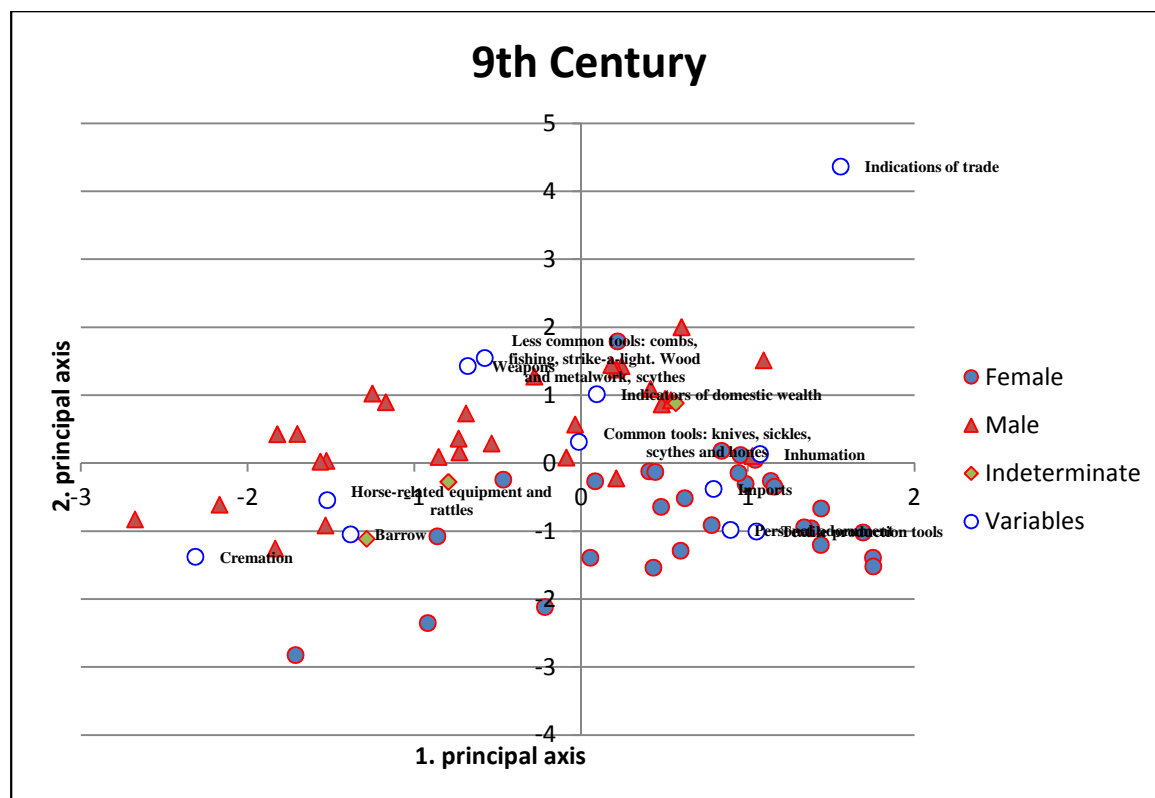


Table 2: the burials dated to the 9th century.

15 burials are dated as falling between 800 and 950, making them potentially part of either century. In order to keep the analysis clear, these are treated separately here. There are no indeterminate burials in this group, whilst male expressions make up 66% to female’s 33%. A correspondence analysis was run, which showed female expressions tended towards personal adornment, textile working tools and indicators of domestic wealth, whilst male expressions had more tools and weapons. The reader is here referred to the appendix for this scattergram, as it does not alter the overall picture gained from the 9th century burials.

The 10th century is a larger group, with 62 burials. This dataset reveals some very interesting trends: only 16 (26%) burials are classified as female expressions, with 37 (60%) containing male and 9 (14%) indeterminate. Straight away, we can see a significant drop in the representation of female expressions, corresponding with a rise in indeterminate burials. Not only that, but the scattergram reveals a much more mixed result, as can be seen below:

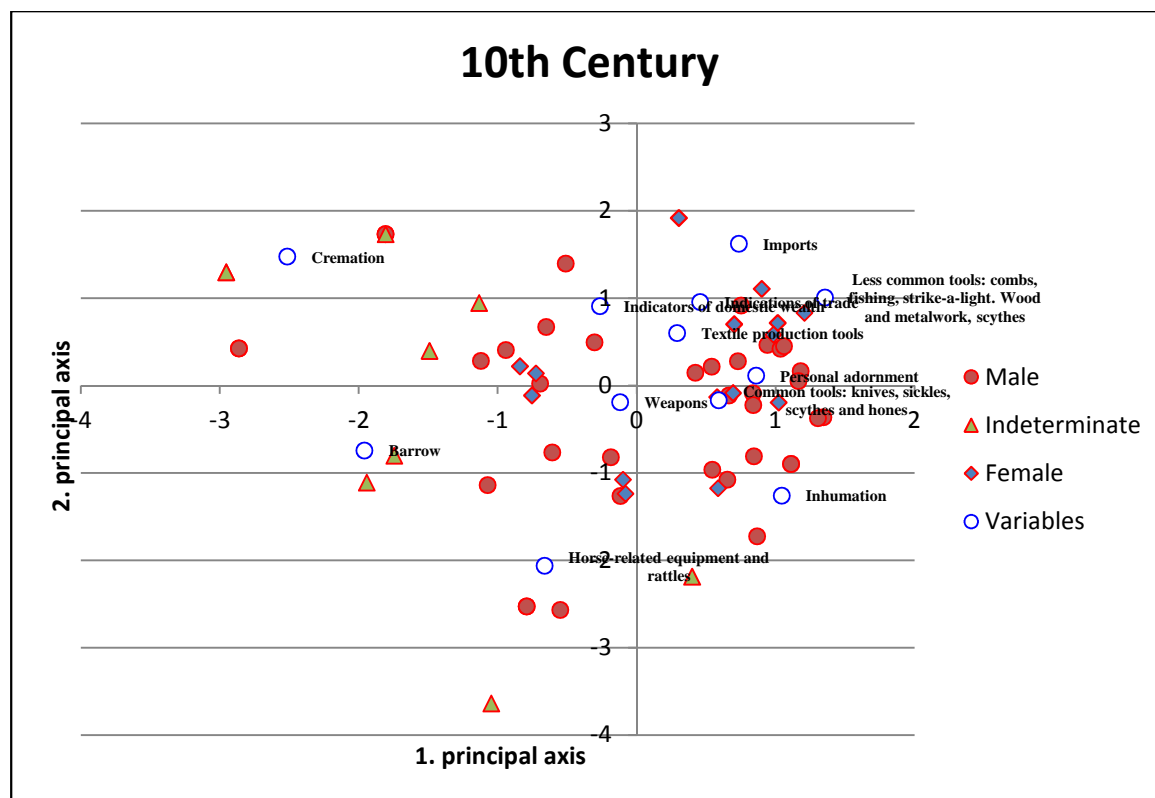


Table 3 :the burials dated 10th century.

Male and female expressions are here found largely intermixed, whilst indeterminate burials are separated out to one side (though there are also some male expressions with these). We will return to the discussion of the supposed lack of women in the burial record of Norway later, but suffice to say at this stage that in the burials dated to the 10th century, female expressions are harder to define.

The remaining burials are only dated as far as setting them within the Viking Age, with a few only set to the Late Iron Age. Perhaps unsurprisingly, a large proportion of this group are indeterminate burials, with 41 (54%) in total. 21 (28%) are female expressions, and 14 (18%) are male. This may be interlinked with that the indeterminate burials lack gendering artefacts, which are also often used to date burials. The correspondence analysis here reveals that male expressions are mostly concentrated in one area, drawn by weapons and horse related equipment. Female expressions and indeterminate ones however, seem to have a significant amount of common ground here:

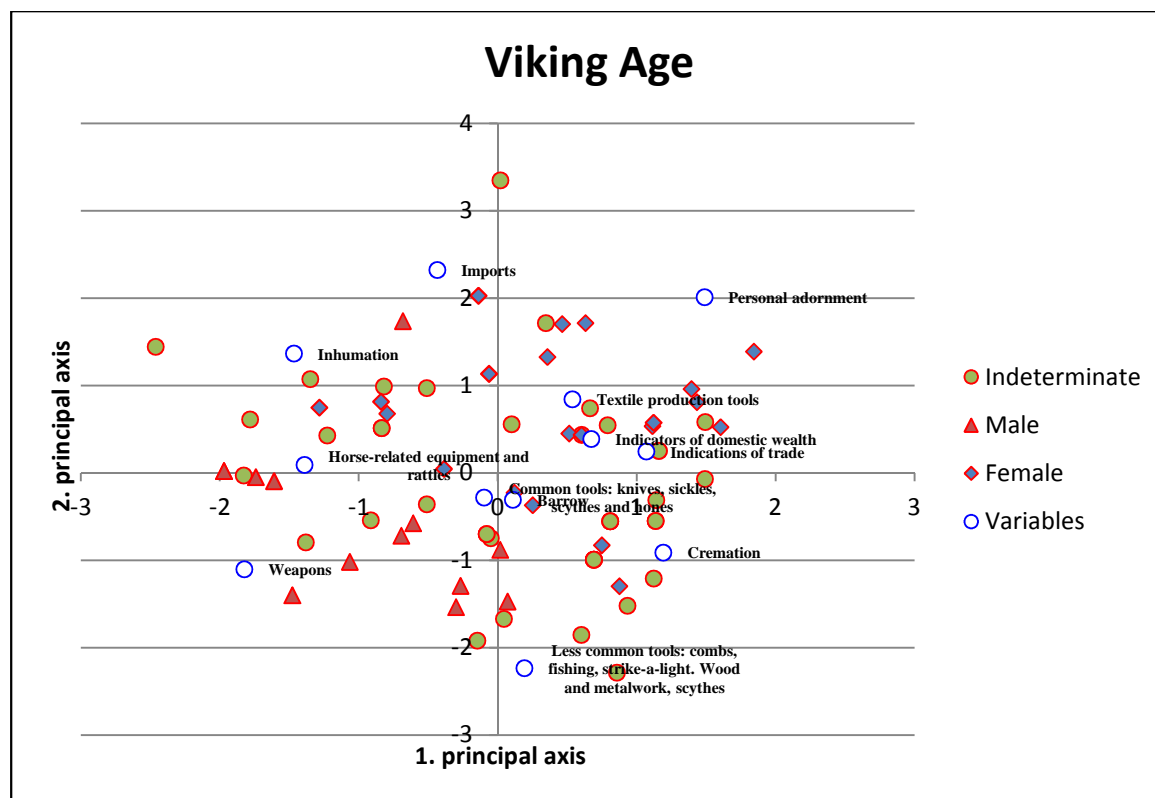


Table 4: the burials dated Viking Age

Though the indeterminate graves dominate this group, there are also more female than male expressions, and a mixed overall impression of the assemblages can be seen from the scattergram.

A point to ponder from this is the tendency for clearly demarcated gendered assemblages to become *less* pronounced as the Viking Age progresses at least as regards female identities, which we will return to in the discussion.

Taking gender out of the equation?

An interesting pattern emerges when strongly gendered items are removed from the analysis. This was done not from a wish to remove gender markers from the equation altogether, but rather to illustrate the level of similarities in male and female gendered assemblages. As will be discussed in Chapter Ten, there is often a tendency to focus on the gendering artefacts such as jewellery and weapons, without really considering that these are often merely a small percentage of a larger find. Although these are significant find categories, one can also argue for other finds being similarly important: horse related equipment for example ought to be considered a significant marker of status. Equally, indicators of domestic wealth ought to be credited as significant, as hospitality was considered of high importance in Viking Age society (see for example Sigurðsson

2008:58-60). Presumably items such as food vessels and cooking equipment testifies to a social role where hospitality was important. This analysis was therefore done to test the theory that the assemblages share a significant amount of common features, if only we can look past the obviously male and female expressions of oval brooches and swords.

The categories chosen for removal are the ones most often used to gender-determine burials, namely textile working tools, jewellery and weapons (as was discussed in Chapter Six). The result is interesting in several ways.

Firstly, it does not remove as many burials from the analysis as one might think, leaving a total of 205 burials as compared with the 218 in the original analysis. If one looks at the gendered status of these remaining burials, 85 (41,5%) have a male expression, 70 (34%) have a female one and the remaining 49 (24%) are indeterminate. These numbers are in keeping with the gendered expressions in the full sample where gendered variables are included, which shows that neither male nor female gender is the sole expression of importance in burials. Indeed, one could argue that this supports an idea that it may not have been quite as important as it is often assumed to have been, in that even without those stereotypical gender identifiers, the burials remain visible and varied.

Interestingly, the picture remains very similar to the one where gendered markers were included, meaning that the majority of grave goods variables are clustered nearer to the right hand side of the image, whilst the more find-poor burials are found to the left, aligned with cremations. This area also shows a dominance of indeterminate burials, showing that the lack of gendered artefacts tends to denote a slightly poorer grave.

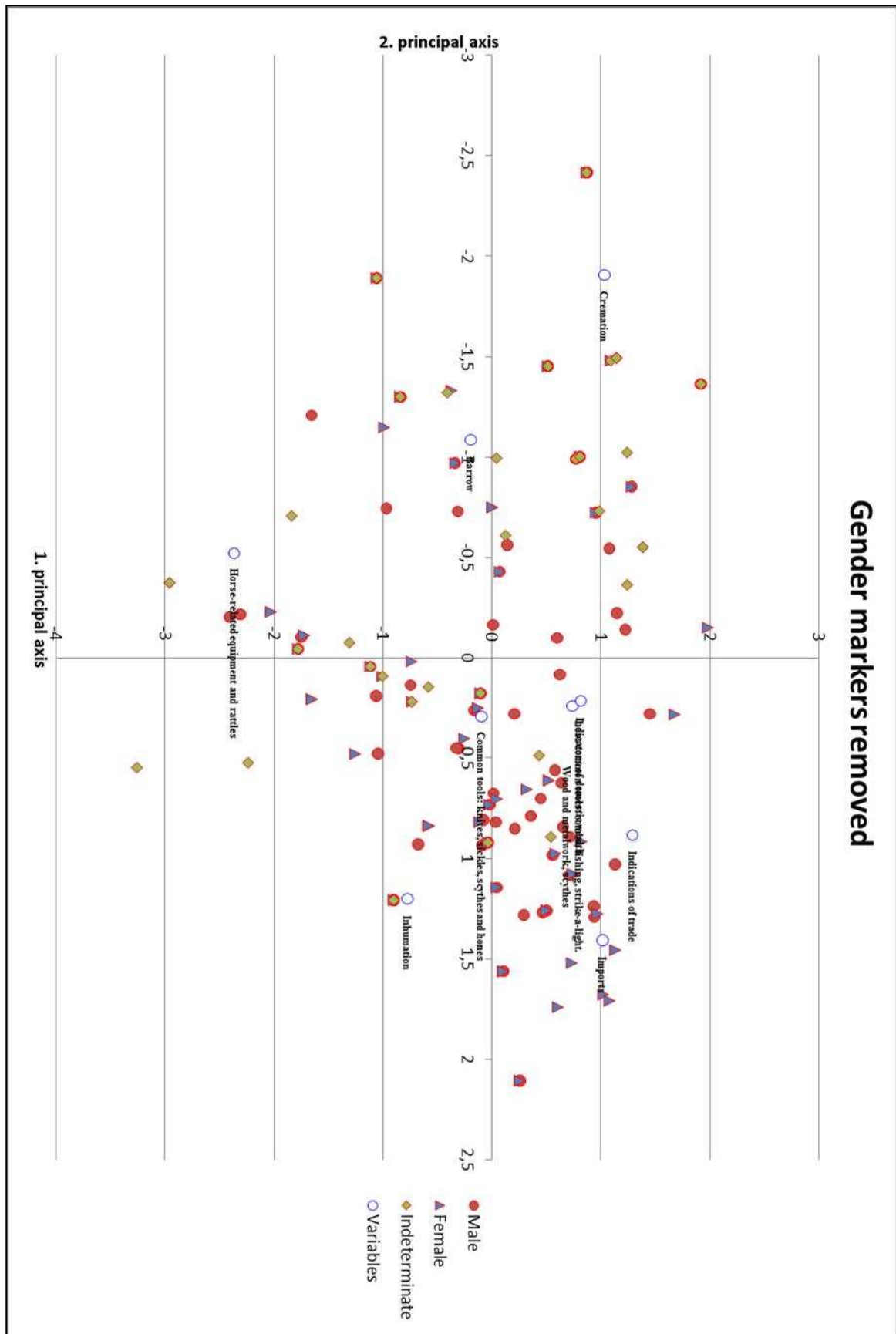


Table 5: the full material with typical diagnostic gendered artefacts removed.

Finally, what this experiment makes abundantly clear is that without specifically gender-determining items, the base assemblages in most graves are comparable in many ways. Although some variables are more strongly related to one gender over the other (such as for example indications of trade, of which 65% of all finds are in male graves as opposed to 23.5% in female ones. Conversely, that means indications of trade are found in 12% of all male expressions and 5.5% of female ones), most show a largely comparable occurrence rate in graves of both male and female expressions (such as indicators of domestic wealth of which 41% are aligned with a female expression and 37% with a male). This serves to illustrate the amount of common ground shared by burials aligned with either a male or female expression. Take away the swords and brooches, and we are still left with almost the full sample of graves, where the variables show a pattern where gendered expressions appears mixed across the board, and there are no strong gender affiliations with any particular type of assemblage.

Body treatment in relation to the grave goods

As previously observed, inhumation graves tend to contain a higher number of variables than their cremated counterparts, though there are exceptions to this rule. There are significant regional variations here, as will be shown in the site specific sections below, and there is of course also the consideration that the process of cremation carries the risk of leaving fewer final artefacts for depositing (Price 2008:262)

The inhumation graves number 127 out of the total sample of 218, so outnumber cremations by a relatively large percentage (58% inhumations compared to 40% cremations). Again, this is interesting in that cremation is often deemed the dominant custom in Vestfold (Sjøvold 1944:58-61; Gjerpe 2005:163) and certainly in Viking Age Scandinavia (Price 2008:261)

In terms of gendered expressions, 39% of inhumations can be classified as female, whilst 46% tend towards the male spectrum. The remaining 14% are indeterminate. This tells us several things: first of all, inhumations have a higher occurrence of gendered expressions than do cremations, as we will see below. Further, there is in general a higher number of female expressions in inhumation graves. If we alter the formula, we see that out of all female gendered burials, 65% are inhumations. Interestingly, 65% of male expressions are also inhumations. In contrast, 34% of indeterminate burials are inhumations. We must

now turn to the clear suggestion that cremation burials are less likely to contain artefacts that allow gender assignation, and why this might be.

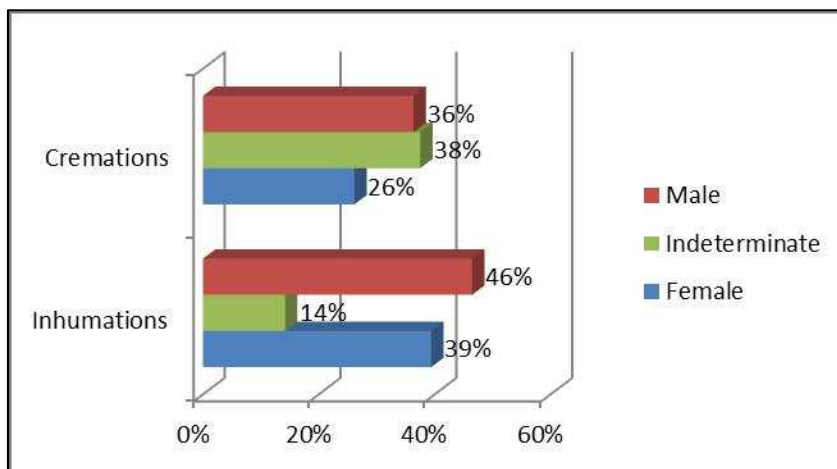


Table 6: cremations and inhumations broken into gendered percentages

87 out of 218 burials are cremations (the remaining being unknown or uncertain). As we already know, there is a different pattern in gender determination here: 26% can be called female expressions, 36% are male and the remaining 38% are indeterminate. Comparatively, out of all female expressions, 31% of are cremations, 35% of all male ones and 61% of indeterminate expressions¹¹.

When seen in the light of the likelihood that the dearth of female graves in Norway in general may be more to do with preservation than with the actual depositions as was discussed in Chapter Six (Stylegar 2010), the above finding becomes interesting indeed. Out of the cremations that demonstrate female expressions, 39% contain oval brooches. Compare this with 64% of inhumations, and a clear trend emerges, and the relative fragility of this gender-determinant is highlighted. This assumption that female graves ought to contain oval brooches is not without its challenges, as has been previously discussed, and it raises the suggestion that we need to look more at the complete assemblage than at one or two items on which we can peg gender determinations.

Having discussed some of the overarching trends, the remaining parts of this chapter will be dedicated to examining the different cemeteries and their respective assemblages in more detail.

¹¹ The observant reader will notice that in some cases the numbers here don't quite add up. 31% of all female expressions are found in cremations, whilst 65% are found in inhumations. This still leaves 4% which are unaccounted for. This is because some of the burials contain insufficient information regarding burial custom for this to be determined.

The Viking Age cemetery at Gulli

As introduced in the preceding chapter, Gulli presents a contained and accordingly effective case study of a Viking Age cemetery. Although not a rarity in the context of this thesis, this status as an exclusively Viking Age site makes it stand out from many contemporary sites (Gjerpe 2005:16). The burials at Gulli all contain sufficient variables to allow for correspondence analysis, but one burial has been removed on grounds of insufficient dating.

Gender and other factors

An important point regarding the burials at Gulli is that they are all gendered purely on the basis of artefact assemblages. Hence arguments cannot be constructed based on the association between male burials and weapons, as burials are gendered male *because* of the presence of weapons. Whilst this does impose certain limitations on the material as discussed in Chapter Six, it is not considered an insurmountable obstacle for further analysis.

Of seven burials with female expressions, six are gendered by the presence of oval brooches. The seventh is considered part of this group on the presence of five beads as well as two spindle whorls. All but one of this group contain textile working tools (spindle whorls and in a few cases also scissors), and this last burial is not among the wealthier finds from the site. A few of the burials with male expressions contain ornaments such as a single bead or ring pins, but this is not out of the common way, and most of the jewellery is found in female gendered assemblages. Consequently, there is a clear connection between ornaments, textile working tools and female expressions in the burial contexts.

In the published excavation report, eight burials are gendered male. I have revised this to seven on the basis that one burial, 6, though it does contain a spearhead which would point towards a male status, also contains a fragment of burnt shinbone interpreted as belonging to a woman (Gjerpe 2005:46-49). This circumstance casts too much doubt on the gendering of the burial in my opinion, and I choose to classify it as indeterminate. Of the seven burials which are considered male expressions, all have been gender determined on the presence of weapons (Gjerpe 2005).

Nearly a third of Gulli's burials belong to the indeterminate category, which have neither weapons nor jewellery. Whilst generally not amongst the richest burials, several of them

show evidence of a good level of affluence. Three indeterminate burials for example have horse related remains, which is often taken as a symbol of high status (Pedersen 1997:123; Axelsen 2012:49). Accordingly, it is reasonable to assume that these burials do not lack weapons or jewellery for reasons of poverty, but rather because these symbols were not considered important in their burial contexts. This category of burials will be discussed alongside their male/female counterparts where possible, and their presence taken to indicate that communicating gender may not always have been considered imperative, or that it was done in a way that we cannot recognise in the archaeological record today.

Finally, of the remaining types of grave goods, of which there are many categories including tools and indicators of domestic wealth, none show themselves as gender exclusive. A few are single finds, and as such no solid conclusions can be drawn from them, and others are found with male, female and indeterminate burials alike.

For a full view of the grave goods associated with the individual graves, the reader is referred to appendix I.

The analysis – test runs and results

The initial run was carried out with the exact same variables as on the analysis of the overall material, though it quickly became apparent that certain changes needed to be made in order to get the clearest possible picture: The first thing that was the loss of a category of variables (indications of trade), as the numbers were too low for it to make an impact. The second thing, the overwhelming dominance of inhumations over cremations here means that a clearer image could be obtained if this variable was removed. Consequently, three variables were removed here, inhumations, cremations and indications of trade. The initial analysis contains all of the graves dated to the Viking Age, and the scattergram can be seen below:

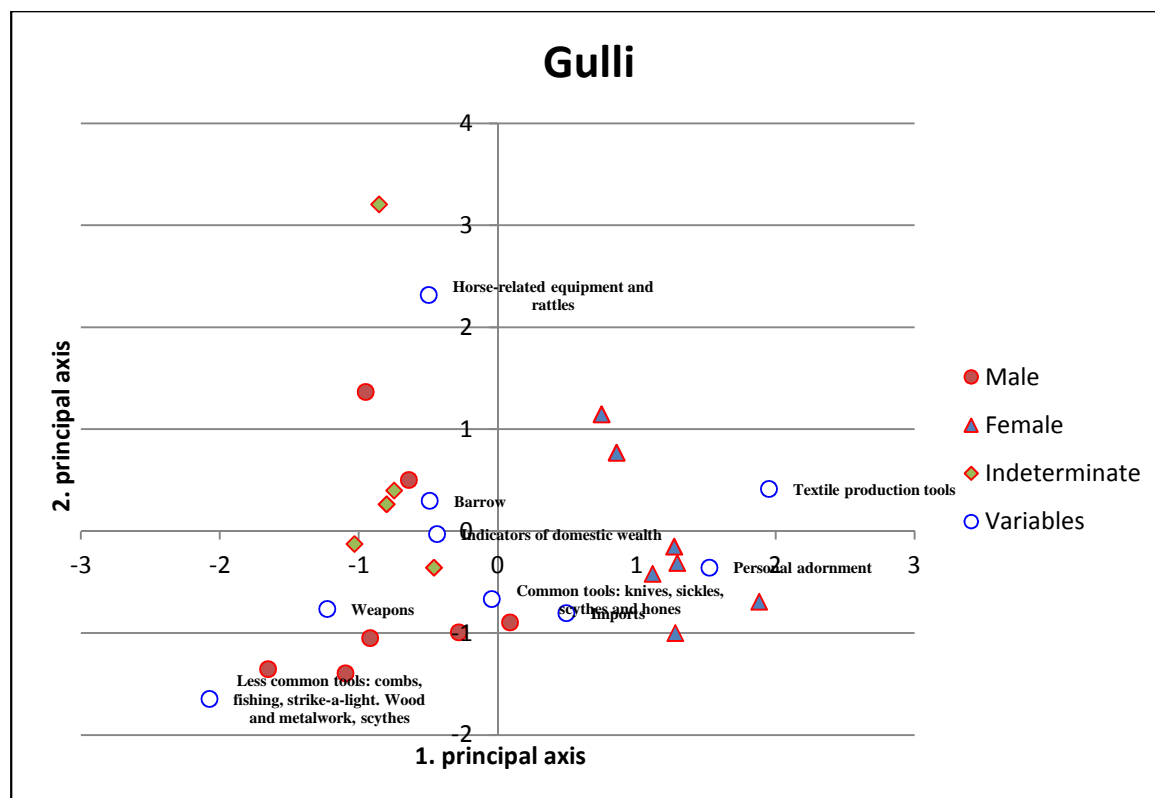


Table 7: the burials at Gulli presented in a scattergram

As with the previous scattergrams, the main analysis has been done from axis 1 and 2, although the program has been run with three main axis. This decision is defensible on the basis of representability: axis 1 and 2 contain by far the highest number of differentiators, thus creating an image which is far more representative of the graves' actual assemblages and other variables.

The final scattergram differs from the first analysis of the complete material with a significantly stronger division according to gender. Here, female expressions are clearly segregated from male ones. The male ones however, are largely mixed with indeterminate graves. It is tempting to see this divide as in part caused by the fact that these graves are archaeologically gendered, but it is nonetheless interesting that there are no so called gender-crossing finds here, the assemblages are quite rigid in their alignment. Often, as we will see with the other sites, there will be one or two items found which do not correspond with the basic gender division of oval brooches and textile equipment for women and weapons for men, but this is not the case at Gulli. Even supposing the skeletal material showed different results from the archaeological expression, this would still be a site with very rigid gender expressions.

Gulli has several graves with imported finds, numbering seven in total. Of these three are male, three female and one indeterminate (Aannestad 2011b:43). In the female graves, the imports here are all in the shape of pennanular brooches of insular origin, whilst the male burials display more variety with swords and pennanular brooches (Aannestad 2011b:43). The indeterminate burial contains a Carolingian copper alloy mount (Aannestad 2011b:43). The presence of imports at a site of such obvious wealth as Gulli is in no way surprising, and it seems not unreasonable to connect these with displays of status and wealth, an exclusive form of conspicuous consumption perhaps.

Grave type and dates

In contrast to many of the other sites discussed in this thesis, Gulli can be comprehensively divided into four different grave types. At many other sites, lack of information in old excavation reports makes this aspect of the graves hard to ascertain. This adds another dimension to the analysis at Gulli, which yields interesting results when added to the correspondence analysis. The four grave types present are boat graves, chamber graves, horse graves, and coffin graves (Gjerpe 2005:132). Boat burials are burials where a boat has acted as a container for the dead and the grave goods. Similarly coffin graves are burials where it is assumed a coffin was originally interred based on the shape of the burial, though no actual woodwork has been preserved (Gjerpe 2005: 137). Chamber graves are again determined based on the shape and size of the burial, as the woodwork has not been preserved (Gjerpe 2005:136). Horse graves are the final distinctive group of burials at Gulli, and are set apart by having a platform, or sometimes chamber, at the foot end of the grave, where horse remains or horse equipment was placed (Gjerpe 2005:136).

When these are added as variables to the analysis, some interesting trends become apparent. We can see that boat graves are more aligned with male types of assemblages, though not exclusively. On the other end of the spectrum, coffin graves are more aligned with female assemblages, whilst chamber graves are found with a mix of graves. Horse graves are more neutral in this sense. The scattergram below illustrates these trends:

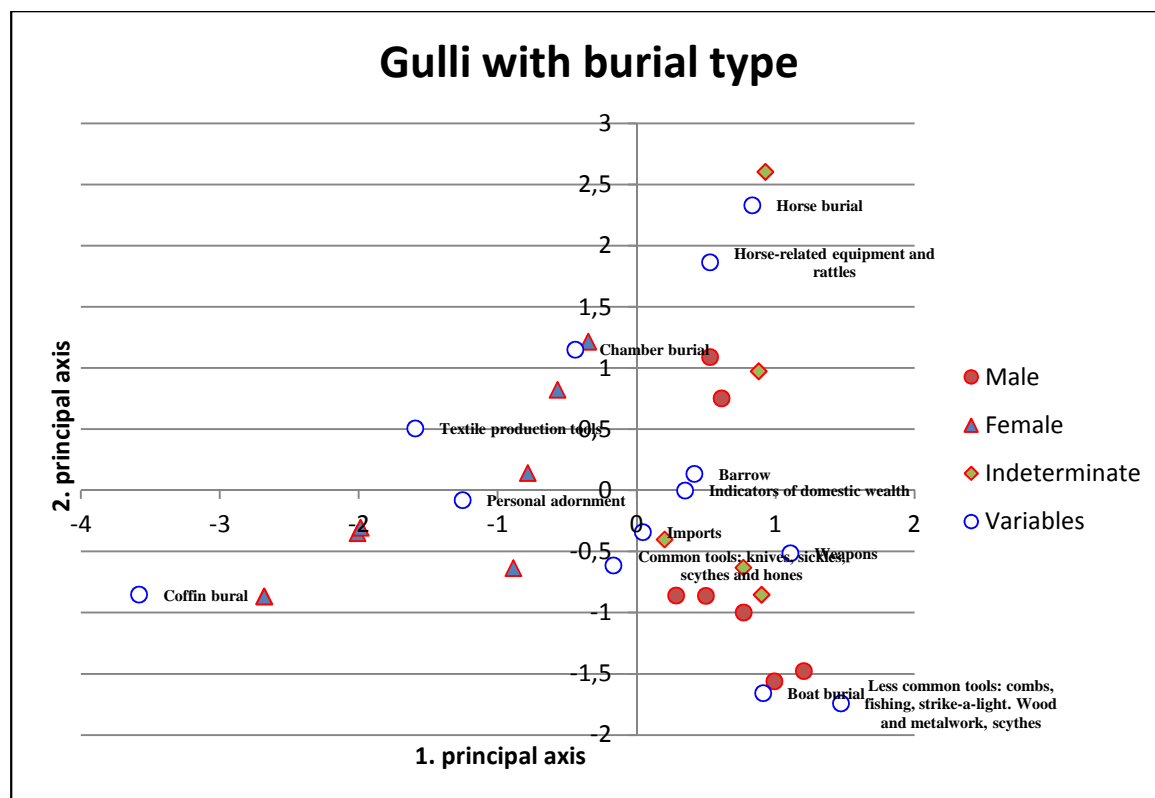


Table 8: the burials at Gulli with grave type added as variables

At this stage however, dates need to be examined in conjunction with the other variables. The dated burials in a gendered perspective will be touched on below, but we will first look at the implications of a pattern where grave types and dates are concerned:

With the exception of a boat grave which can be dated as the earliest burial on the site, it appears as if the oldest form of burial on the site was coffin graves and chamber graves. Boat graves then take over as the dominant form, before horse graves come in as the latest dominant phase (Gjerpe 2005:138). This means that at what stage in the cemetery's lifespan a person died was likely to determine grave type, rather than individual status.

This can be seen in the table below:

Burial name	External shape	Internal markers	Gendered	Date
S376	Flat grave	Boat	Male	700-800 AD
S1251	Flat grave	Uncertain	Indeterminate	Viking Age
S1030	Barrow	Boat	Indeterminate	Viking age
S1033	Barrow	Boat	Male	875-925
S1048	Barrow	Boat	Male	850-925
S1199	Barrow	Boat	Male	850-900
S1231	Barrow	Boat	Male	Viking Age
S1502	Barrow	Boat	Indeterminate	Viking Age
S393	Flat grave	Boat	Female	850-950 AD
S395	Flat grave	Coffin	Female	850-900
S1025	Barrow	Chamber	Female	850-900
S1039	Barrow	Chamber	Female	800-900
S1044	Flat grave	Coffin	Female	775-850
S1061	Barrow	Coffin	Female	800-850
S400	Barrow	Horse	Male	900-950
S1006	Barrow	Horse	Indeterminate	900-1000
S1036	Barrow	Chamber	Male	Viking Age
S1147	Barrow	Horse	Indeterminate	900-1025
S1594	Barrow	Horse	Female	900-1050

Table 9: a summary of the grave types and dates at Gulli

On the subjects of dates, it can be noted that the majority of female expressions are dated to the 9th century, though male and female expressions both occur throughout the site's usage. Indeterminate expressions however, are either not closely dateable, or belong in the 10th century. This is in keeping with the overall findings introduced at the start of this chapter, and which we will see echoed in the analysis to follow as well. Interestingly, two male expressions are not closely dateable, whilst none of the female ones fall within this category.

Evidence of looting

A substantial number of the burials at Gulli appear to have been looted, with seven burials showing clear signs, and another two being possibly looted but too disturbed to say with

surety (Gjerpe 2005:135). To this we can add that several graves are too poorly preserved to say anything either way. It seems that looting was a fairly common occurrence in other words, and the meaning behind this will be discussed in Chapter Ten.

Dating the looting shafts at Gulli is complicated because of the nature of the site. The best indication is gained from stratigraphy: a fire pit which must be younger than the looting placed on burial 10, and dated to AD 1290-1440 (Gjerpe 2005:144). To this we can add the tendency towards destruction that looters showed: several burials show evidence of valuable items having been destroyed, and only partly removed. This shows a targeted action, meant for something other than material gain.

Altogether, the evidence at Gulli may be argued to support an explanation tending towards looting as a symbolic action: the looting shafts were dug between the middle and the northern end of the burials, and it seems the looters had no need to search blindly; they entered the middle of the burial and retrieved what they came for. It does seem that the more prestigious forms of burials, such as boat burials and chamber burials were more often the object of looting. All of this points to that the looters may have had knowledge of what they were looking for (Gjerpe 2005:145), making the argument that they were somehow connected with the burials, or that the looting was part of the final ritual. Both male and female burials are looted, with three out of seven male, two out of seven female and two of the indeterminate burials.

This is considered significant in several regards: one is the evidence of ritual activity in the time after the deposition was completed, the other is the potential impact for the remaining assemblages.

Final comments on Gulli's assemblages

Gulli is at once a very complicated, and a very clear site when considering assemblages and internal traits only. We have clear gendering of the graves, with a definite majority (14 out of 20 graves) aligned with male or female markers. We also have a collection of reasonably wealthy graves, whose customs indicate that they were part of the elite of the area at the time. Finally, the dating is fairly straightforward, with 16 burials securely dated, and another four dated to the Viking Age in general.

However, there are a couple of qualifications that need to be made: first of all, all the graves are gendered archaeologically, which may account for the very clear-cut gender

alignment observable. Second, it can be conjectured that the excavated burials at Gulli only represent part of a larger cemetery of up to 60 graves in total, of which all trace has been removed by agricultural activity (Gjerpe 2005:15).

The Kaupang Case

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, Kaupang is often treated as somewhat separate from its surrounding area. The urban nature of the site means that it is indeed different in several significant ways and it is likely that there was more choice in social roles and occupations in an urban environment for example. However it is important to stress once again that though it may be different in terms of economic organisation, Kaupang still existed within the same social framework and parameters as more rural, contemporary sites.

As was described in the preceding chapter, Kaupang has a number of cemeteries which varies both in terms of the number of individuals buried there, burial custom as well as degree of excavation and level of documentation. The following sections will first present an overall analysis of the burials from Kaupang, before treating the cemeteries individually, where this is possible.

The complete material – overview and analysis

The initial analysis was run with the same variables as in the main analysis. In the case of Kaupang, there were no excluded variables at this stage. Only burials with finds and only finds with contexts, meaning in this case from burials, were included here, meaning several empty burials and casual finds were removed prior to analysis. As per usual, the analysis was run with a total of three axis, but the results have been read from the scattergram showing axis one and two. This is because these two axis demonstrate the highest level of variation, and also because they present a more accurate picture of the site's assemblages and variations: axis one and two are more representative in that the more common variables are better represented along these two.

The complete material contains 128 individuals in total, though several of these are found in double, triple and even quadruple burials. This presents a challenge in terms of accuracy in the correspondence analysis, as the question of whether or not they can be meaningfully analysed when taken out of context with the other individuals from the same grave is difficult to determine. I contend that for purposes of analysis they can, but only so long as there is explicit awareness of the limitations they impose.

As can be seen from the illustration below, the final scattergram presents a fairly large spread in terms of variables. It also demonstrates a less strict gender division than what was observed at Gulli, with a more diverse final result where gendered assemblages are found in all areas of the final picture, albeit to varying degrees.

In broad terms, we can see a concentration of female expressions in the top right, around the categories of textile working tools and personal adornment, which is to be expected, and indications of trade and imports, which is perhaps less expected (though see both Hofseth 1999; Pedersen 2014 for a discussion of Kaupang's women and trade). Further down on the right hand side, male expressions come more into focus, drawn by weapons, common tools and less common tools, though female expressions are also to be found in this group. To the left, the more find poor burials are concentrated with fewer variables, whilst indications of domestic wealth form a small concentration in the middle of the picture, drawing male and female assemblages both.

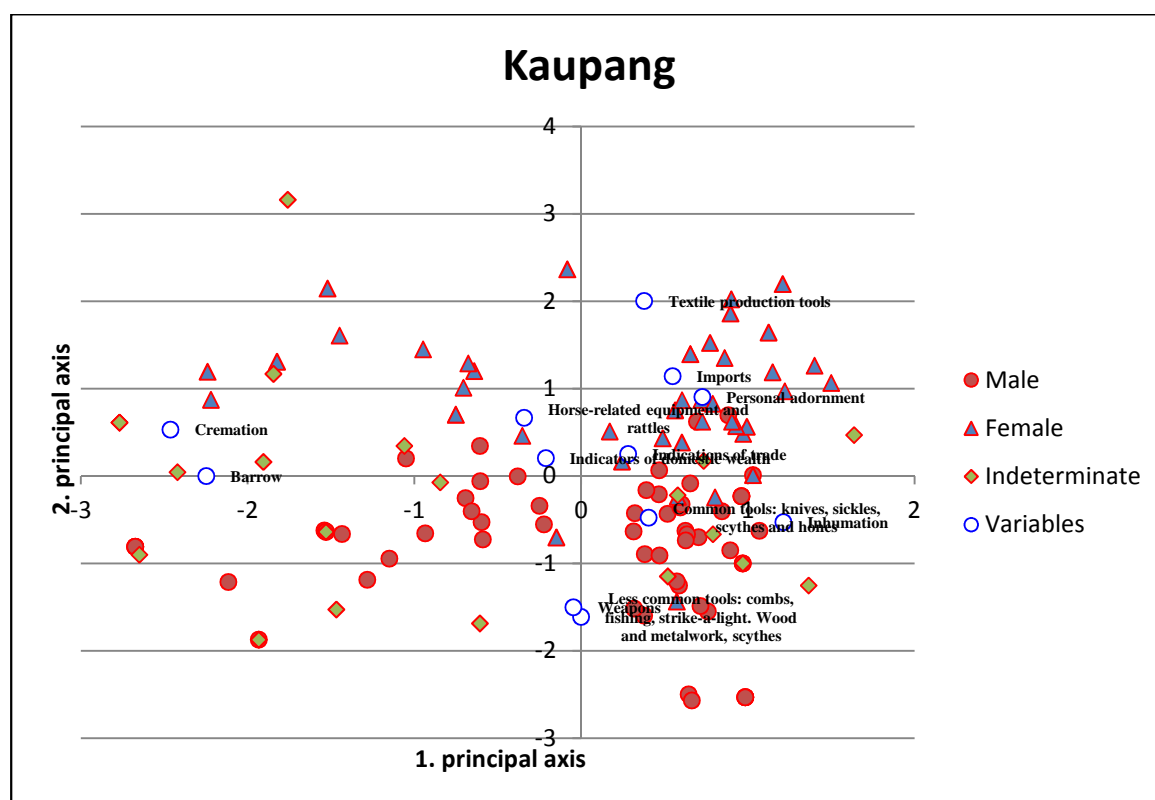


Table 10: the full Kaupang material

Looking at the variables, the category of “less common tools” is quite rare here, occurring in just over 10% of graves. Likewise, horse related equipment is not common, occurring in 20% of graves. The remaining variables all occur in higher percentages.

Taking gender out of the equation

As with the general assemblage, running a test with the typically gendering finds removed proved interesting here. Gender markers here mean the variables which are usually used to determine gender, whilst the gender assignment of the individual graves is kept. The removal of these variables took 10 burials out of the equation, one female assemblage, three indeterminate and six male. This does not significantly impact the gender ratios of the total material at Kaupang, which stands at around 35% female, 16.5% indeterminate and 48.5% male expressions. The resulting scattergram shows some interesting results, where the majority of the variables are still found on the right hand side of the scattergram. Here we can see that indications of trade and imports remains quite strongly associated with female expressions, whilst less common tools tends towards the male end of the spectrum. Indicators of domestic wealth and common tools however, draw both male and female expressions. On the left hand side are the poorer burials, where determining variables are body treatment and one or two other variables. What is immediately apparent when looking at this though, is that removing gender markers once again demonstrates how similar many of the assemblages really are:

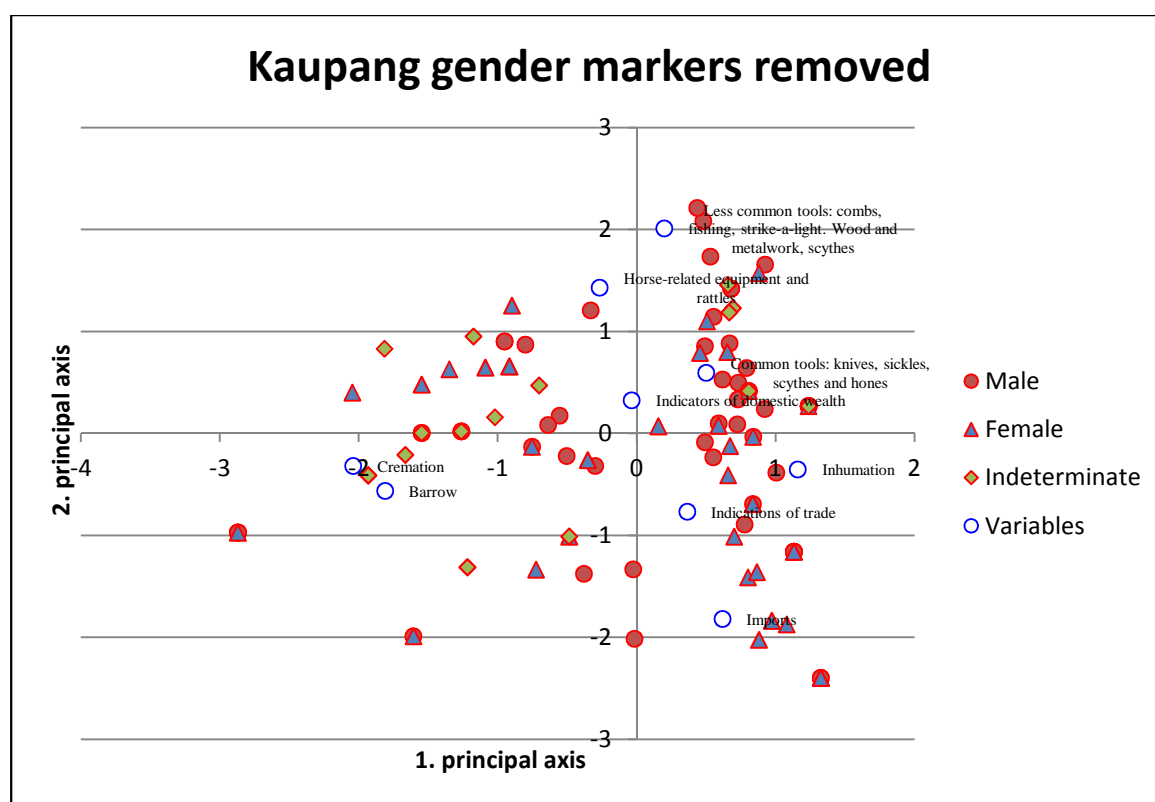


Table 11: the Kaupang material with typical gender diagnostics removed

The cemeteries at Kaupang are however, very distinctive. Hence, although it is interesting to treat all the material as one to give an overview, it does give something of a false impression of unity and common ground. As the following sections will demonstrate, the cemeteries need to be understood individually as well.

Nordre Kaupang – local gentry or dignitaries of the town?

Excavated by Nicolay Nicolaysen in 1867, this barrow cemetery is the largest in terms of land area of the Kaupang cemeteries. According to Nicolaysen's excavation notes, there were 115 barrows at the time of excavation, but there had originally been many more which had by then been removed by agriculture (Nicolaysen 1868:77). Out of the 115 remaining, Nicolaysen excavated 71 barrows, both long and round mounds. Quite a few of these barrows proved to be empty, or to contain nothing but layers of charcoal, but 39 barrows yielded cremated bone, and 32 of these contained finds suitable for further analysis. Since Nicolaysen's excavations, the cemetery has all but been destroyed through agriculture, though Blindheim's team excavated one further burial in 1965 (Blindheim, et al. 1981:221), increasing the total number of excavated burials to 72.

We will return to the external traits and location of the cemetery in the following chapter, but it is worth mentioning here that Nordre Kaupang displays strong uniformity in outer shape (almost invariably barrows, round or long) and in body treatment (cremations). There is one flat grave in the Hagejordet part of the cemetery, and three possible inhumations, though evidence is rather unclear on this.

Analysing the assemblages

32 graves at Nordre Kaupang are included in the analysis, leaving out a number of casual finds and empty, or nearly empty barrows. Out of these, 11 are female, 9 indeterminate and 12 male assemblages, meaning the site can be described as gender equal in terms of representation. There are also no records of any burials interpreted as multiple burials, which is especially interesting when seen in conjunction with Bikjholberget, which as we will see below has a proliferation of multiple burials. Of course, we do not know what the empty barrows may have symbolised or represented, but working from the evidence that we do have to hand shows a site where gender was not a determining factor in inclusion or exclusion.

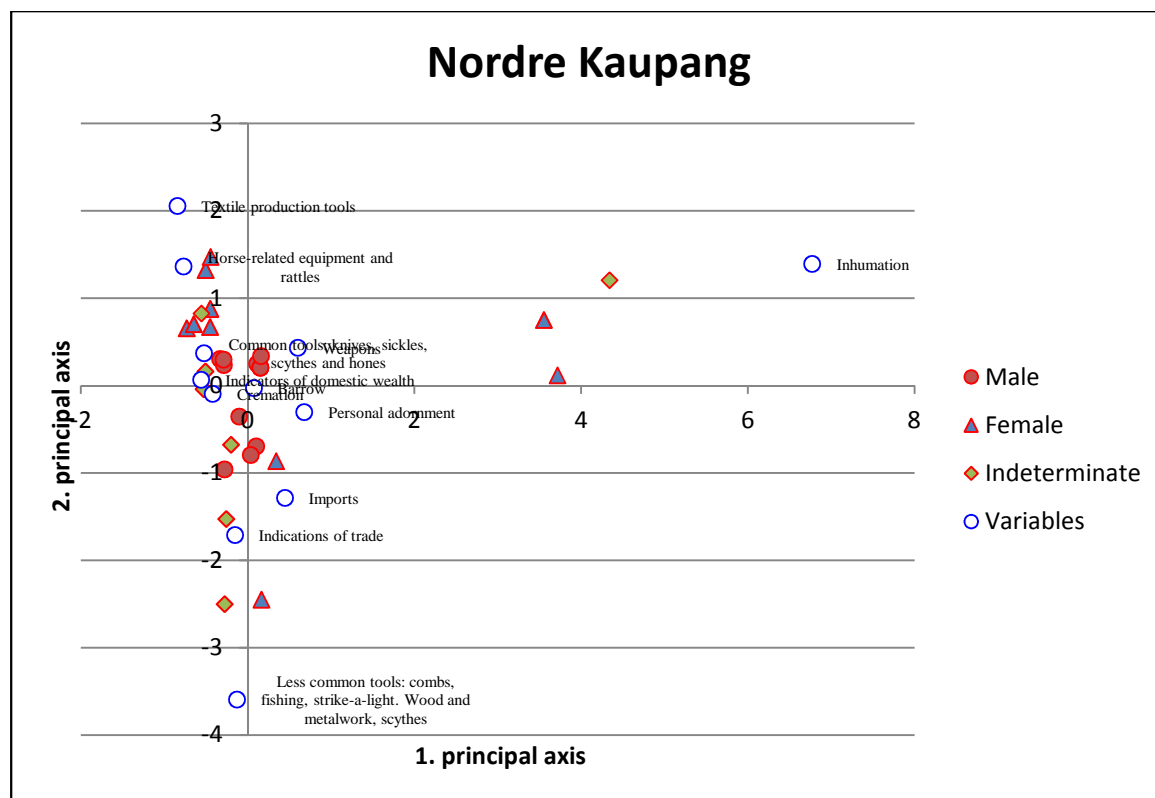


Table 12: the burials at Nordre Kaupang.

The Nordre Kaupang graves show a great deal of common traits, meaning we find male and female assemblages mixed with indeterminate in most areas of the scattergram. The exceptions are the far right, where the three inhumations are clustered. These are characterised by body treatment, and by containing few variables. To the left and middle where most of the variables are found, we see a trend for female expressions with textile working tools and horse related equipment to cluster towards the top left corner, whilst male assemblages tend to congregate round the middle of the scattergram, with common tools and indicators of domestic wealth. Down to the bottom right, indications of trade draw a combination of female, male and indeterminate assemblages.

What we can also draw from this, is the general impression that female expressions are less standardised than their male counterparts. Where the male assemblages all share a great deal of common traits, the female ones are more varied and scattered in terms of their assemblages and identifying characteristics.

Looking at the assemblages behind the scattergram further clarifies the trend for similarities at Kaupang. Aside from the typical gender determining categories, only horse related equipment and trade stands out as strongly associated with one type of expression

over another, with horse related equipment found mostly in female assemblages and indicators of trade more often in male. Several female burials at Nordre Kaupang contain weapons as well, mainly in the form of axes but also a possible spearhead and arrowhead. Thus, the final image is quite blurred when it comes to gender divisions, giving a more fluid impression. Nordre Kaupang then, testifies to a less rigid division than what was evidenced at Gulli. Here we have more mixed assemblages, such as typical female assemblages found with weapons, and even a male assemblage with textile working tools. Moreover, the graves generally have quite a high number of variables, meaning that the expressions are more complex in general.

Dates, grave types and other variables

Unfortunately, the quality of the excavations and resulting notes at Nordre Kaupang testify to them being a product of their time (Nicolaysen 1868). In the 1860s excavation methods and recording procedures were of a far more intermittent and less systematic nature than in more recent years, and so the resulting surviving records leave a lot of questions which simply cannot be answered. These questions include whether or not inhumation burials may have been missed: typically found in graves cut underneath barrows (Stylegar 2007:70), these are fairly common in Vestfold, and yet none are recorded from Nordre Kaupang, leaving a possibility that this is because they were simply not found during excavations. This may in part account for the uniformity in body treatment, though this can remain no more than speculation and will as such not be further elaborated on here.

Another side of the fairly perfunctory records from Kaupang is that we have little knowledge of grave types. The only recorded grave types are six boat graves, out of which three are gendered male, one indeterminate and two female. There is also a female gendered grave where an oval brooch acted as a container for some of the cremation ashes. These low numbers means we cannot draw much in the way of inferences and theories of grave types locally.

As regards to dates and gendered expressions however, Nordre Kaupang has some interesting contributions to make. Kaupang in general conforms to the trend noticed at the start of this chapter, where female expressions are more easily identified in the 9th century, as was noted by Stylegar in 2007 (Stylegar 2007:82). Nordre Kaupang however, does not conform with this trend. Out of the 32 graves analysed, 22 are dated more closely than

just to the Viking Age. Out of these, the distribution of male, indeterminate and female expressions is fairly equally distributed across the 9th and 10th centuries. Though there are more female than male expressions noted in the 9th century (with three to one), the numbers are equal in the 10th (with six female, six male and three indeterminate expressions).

Important imports

Imports feature in 8 out of 32 graves discussed, making them quite a common variable. Imports occur more often in male assemblages than they do in female, with five male, two female and one indeterminate assemblage. The artefacts themselves are interesting here though, as trading equipment is the most common form of imported object. Was it perhaps a way for tradespeople to demonstrate their success and status by conducting their business with high status and rare items? Other imports occur in the shape of brooches, beads, mounts and pottery.

Bikjholberget

Excavated under the direction of Charlotte Blindheim between 1951 and 1957 (Blindheim and Heyerdahl-Larsen 1995), Bikjholberget is a flat grave cemetery located on a relatively small outcrop which would in the Viking Age have jutted into the bay, overlooking the settlement to the South West of the cemetery, as will be further detailed in Chapter Nine. The site forms almost a complete contrast to Nordre Kaupang: situated on a hill where Nordre Kaupang is found on sloping ground at the foot of a set of hills, flat graves as opposed to Nordre Kaupang's barrows and inhumations where Nordre Kaupang has cremations. Blindheim's excavations uncovered 73 individuals buried, though many are in multiple burials. There was also an apparent horse burial, with grave goods and in a separate grave without any human remains. Frans-Arne Stylegar has estimated that the site contains another 85 burials which have yet to be excavated (Stylegar 2007:74). The dates range from AD 800 to AD 1000, which is in keeping with the lifespan of the town.

The site contains several multiple burials, as well as a wide array of grave goods which resist easy classifications, such as gender crossing artefacts and ritual expressions. In addition to the inherent complexity of the grave goods, comes the added complication that many of the burials have been disturbed by modern activities (Stylegar 2007:73), an unfortunate side effect of relatively shallow flat graves.

The multiple burials means the site is hard to analyse by statistical means. Before a correspondence analysis can be done, the decision on whether or not to keep the multiple burials as one unit, or separate them into individual units, must be made. Although both approaches are fraught with challenges, it was here decided to separate them, on the basis that if treated as one unit, the analysis would not be able to pick up on gendered differences, as many of the multiple burials contain both male and female expressions. By dividing them, there is the loss of their context to contend with, as a double burial carries an embedded significance in its nature: the decision of who was buried together has surely been significant. It has been worthwhile running the analysis to see the overall patterns, though in the case of this particular cemetery, the results can only be seen to illuminate a limited part of the site's total potential.

Analysing the assemblages

A few variables from the full material analysis were not represented here, and consequently do not feature in the below analysis. With only inhumations, and only one barrow, these variables were redundant. There were also three graves that were removed prior to analysis, as they contained no grave goods. These particular graves are often interpreted as the graves of slaves, or even human sacrifice (Lia 2004:303), and though undoubtedly interesting, they cannot be part of this analysis. This leaves a total of 68 burials, out of which 35% are gendered female, 56% are male and the remaining indeterminate.

The final analysis is based on the first two axis of the analysis, as these are the two which contain the most relevant variables. From this, we can see a general, though far from absolute, gender based division, where female expressions tend to concentrate on textile working tools, personal adornment and imports. Male expressions are more centred on weapons, tools and indicators of domestic wealth. However, these are broad brush strokes. There are female assemblages to be found in typical male territory and vice versa, which tallies well with the complex nature of the individual assemblages. As an example, as many as nine gendered male assemblages contain textile production tools, whilst 11 female assemblages contain weapons. The latter are often axes, but also arrowheads, spearheads and a shield boss. Björholberget has blurred lines in terms of gender assignment in many cases, but the wealth of the assemblages often provides expressions which fit more closely with one assumed gender over another.

Unfortunately, the soil conditions mean osteological material is rarely preserved, and so most burials have been archaeologically gendered, though a few here are osteologically sexed (Blindheim and Larsen 1995:115). As previously discussed, this imposes limitations on what can be said about the gendered expressions we see here, but it does not detract from the observation that Bikjholberget presents at best a very complex picture, so complex it could even be called confused if analysed with the expectation of binary and clear male and female expressions.

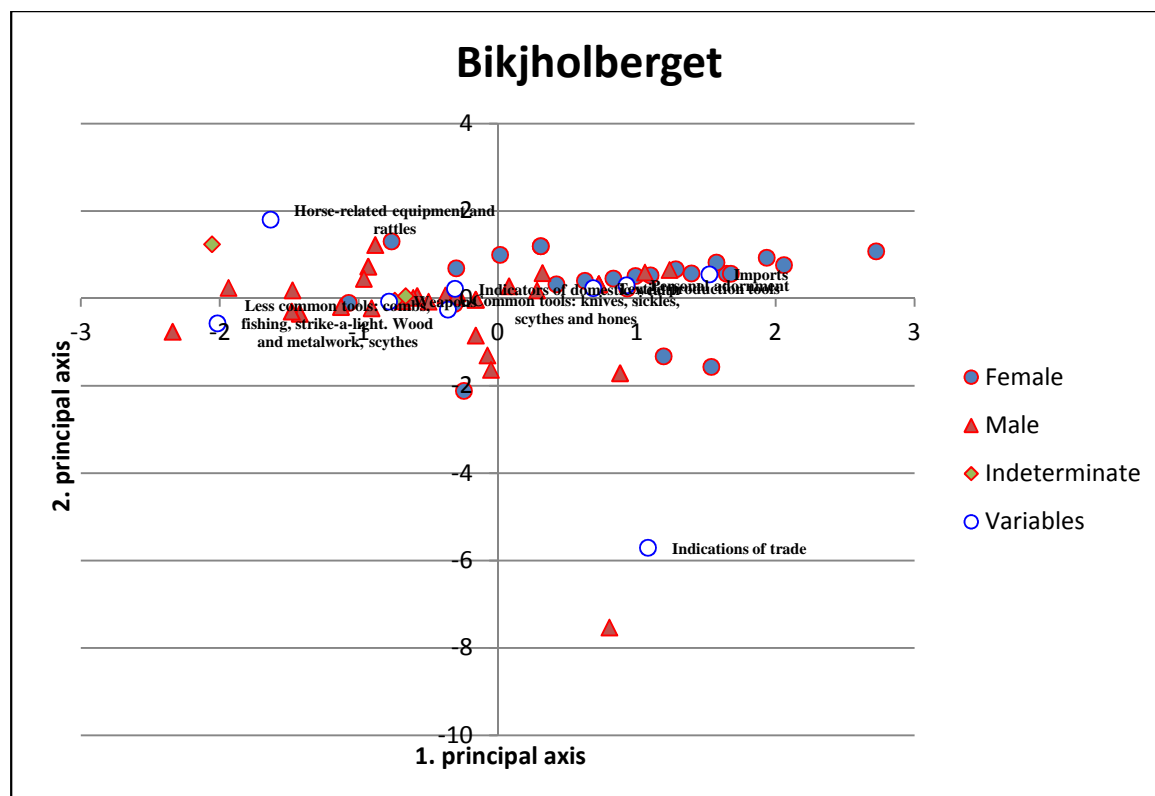


Table 13: the Bikjholberget material

Loosening these expectations however, and accepting the assemblages as expressions of individuals and their place in society, as well as the expressions of mourning and commemoration, means seeing the remains of a living community, where roles and identities were negotiable, rather than a rigid and static expression of ideals or stereotypes.

Dates, grave types and other variables

As previously mentioned, Bikjholberget contains exclusively inhumations, demonstrating an unusual level of uniformity. As we will see in the sections on the Hedrum graves below, it is common in the Viking Age to find inhumations and cremations in the same cemetery, and even sometimes in the same grave monument. Not so at Bikjholberget.

In terms of grave types however, Bikjholberget displays more variety. Boat graves are by far the most common variety, with 47 of the 68 individuals in this analysis found in boats. In total, there are 33 boats at the site (Stylegar 2007:73). In addition to these, there are also three chamber graves, one chest, six coffin graves, a stone cist, and even two burials in toboggans. Of the boat graves, 45% are classified as female assemblages and 55% are male, meaning that a proportionately high number of women were buried in boats. None are indeterminate, meaning all individuals in boat graves communicate a gendered expression. Of the three chamber graves, two are female assemblages and one is male, meaning again that here gender is communicated. Coffins can be assigned as 17% female expressions, 33% male and 50% indeterminate, whilst the cist and the chest are both male gendered. The two toboggans are both indeterminate. That indeterminate burials dominate coffins, with female expressions being rare, is an interesting contrast to Gulli, where female expressions are quite commonly found in coffins. The majority of multiple burials are found in boats, though there is also one occurrence in a chamber grave and one male buried with a child in the chest burial.

Bikjholberget's signature though, must be the prolific multiple burials. Though double burials are fairly common throughout the Iron Age, the sheer numbers at Bikjholberget makes the site stand out. With almost half of all individuals found in multiple grave complexes, it seems as if this was something of a custom at the site. Compare this with the lack of double burials at Nordre and Søndre Kaupang, and it does seem as if Bikjholberget had a special function as a place for multiple burials. Speculations around family groupings taking precedence over individual glory may possibly be something to ponder, and perhaps here belonging to a particular group was seen as more important than an individual memorial.

Imports

A substantial amount of the Bikjholberget burials contain imports, as imports are found with 36 individuals. The gender split here is more or less equal between male and female assemblages, though no indeterminate burials contain imports. The finds are varied, and there is no clear and distinctive pattern of dominant types of finds. In general, the items are found in wealthy graves, but then the overall level of wealth at Bikjholberget is high. The items are often of a decorative function, making a case for display and conspicuous consumption.

Søndre Kaupang and Lamøya

Søndre Kaupang and Lamøya are treated together here, and in less detail than the other two cemeteries, as there are source critical challenges with both of them: Søndre Kaupang, though excavated at the same time, is not as well documented as Nordre Kaupang, and Lamøya is only very partially excavated. Thus, the conclusions that can be drawn from these two locations are limited.

Nicolaysen's excavation report from 1867 states that he excavated 8 burial mounds, out of which six were round and two were long mounds. They all contained cremations, with no traces of chambers or body containers, but rather a layer of charcoal which also contained the grave goods where they were found (Nicolaysen 1868:86). He had earlier, in 1859 noted twenty burials on the same site, but some of these had been destroyed before his work commenced there (Stylegar 2007:69). There is also information about a further group of barrows south of Nicolaysen's excavations, as well as a flat grave cemetery from the area, but none of these have been examined or recorded (Heyerdahl-Larsen 1981:60). Other burials have been found to belong to the site in the years since Nicolaysen's excavations, bringing the total number of known and recorded finds from the site to 17, and the likelihood remains that the cemetery was originally much larger.

At the last count, Lamøya had 94 barrows, three stone settings, and a concentration of flat graves (Stylegar 2007:74), though the estimated number of original barrows has been suggested at around 200 (Stylegar 2007:77), making a strong case for this as cemetery of comparable size to Nordre Kaupang and Bikjholberget.

The main obstacle to doing an analysis of the area is therefore in the sample size: out of a possible 200 original barrows and several flat graves, only 23 grave finds have been recorded (Stylegar 2007:74). Out of these, only 15 can be placed in a context, making this a largely unexcavated site. Lamøya is different from the other cemeteries in that it does not have a dominant custom, with a mix of flat graves and barrows, and inhumations and cremations. Indeed, one could argue that Lamøya presents a range of smaller cemeteries rather than one large coherent one, but there are challenges with any sort of argument connected with this location: Lamøya, as the only cemetery connected with Kaupang has never seen a large scale coherent excavation campaign.

In light of these challenges therefore, though the individual burials from Søndre Kaupang and Lamøya are of interest to a researcher, the sites themselves cannot be analysed in a

meaningful way with the methodology used in this thesis. The compromise has therefore been to include the burials in the overall analysis for Kaupang, but to refrain from doing site-specific analysis of these two cemeteries. The two sites will be discussed again in the following chapter and in the discussion, but in terms of wider trends and individual burials only.

Final comments on the Kaupang cemeteries

The assemblages and internal organisation of the burials from Kaupang has been shown to be a rewarding material in the context of this thesis.

One of the many striking characteristics of the Kaupang burials, is their diversity and thereby the impression of variety and choice that they give: variety in burial customs and location, and as evidenced by the grave goods, variety in occupation and expression of status. As seen from the dating of the different graves, all the cemeteries were in use simultaneously. This fits with what one can assume for an urban environment, in that it describes a place of broader opportunities as opposed to more uniform, and smaller, rural environments.

This is where the gender aspect becomes crucial. As demonstrated in Chapter Four, the traditional model of Viking Age societies is one heavily dominated by men. Kaupang goes against this by showing physical manifestations of a more fluid gender reality, where few artefacts are gender exclusive, where burial customs are open to either gender, where no location or situation is reserved for either men or women. In short, the burials at Kaupang speak strongly for a society where gender was a secondary consideration with regards to what social functions and status a person could command. This section has shown how this is evident in the artefact assemblages, which speak against a set of distinct and clear boundaries between two clearly defined genders with strictly separated domains and social functions. The external traits will be discussed in the following chapter.

Kaupang is often held apart from society at large. This is particularly evident when the gender ratios are discussed (see for example Hofseth 1999) and Kaupang has become rather famous for being a place where there are more women than what is usual. This has given rise to a counter-productive view of Kaupang's women as different from their contemporaries from other contexts, and by which the gender expressions evident at Kaupang are removed from the equation when roles and governing norms for men and

women are discussed. Thus, where gender roles and Kaupang are discussed, there is a trend for an argument made of Kaupang as different: that women had less options than men, apart from at Kaupang (Hofseth 1999). There are several problems with this rhetoric, the first and greatest of which is that it effectively removes Kaupang from the social order of Viking Age Vestfold and indeed Norway, which is an unacceptably selective approach to material evidence. Kaupang's men and women must be considered alongside rural counterparts: even though the urban context would have provided more choice in occupation than in smaller contexts, the underlying ideology behind these choices can be assumed to have been fundamentally the same.

The Hedrum Area

As was mentioned in the introduction to the material, Hedrum is less of a demarcated area, and more a useful subheading for cemeteries in close proximity with each other. The following section will discuss the cemeteries excavated by Nicolaysen in descending order of relevance to this discussion. This relevance is determined by the quality of the reports and by the amount of burials with relevant dates and sufficient grave goods for analysis. The main sources of documentation are Nicolaysen's annual reports in *Aarsberetningen for Norske Fortidsmindemerkere Bevaring* (Nicolaysen 1884, 1886, 1887, 1888, 1894), as well as Christer Tonning's 2003 Masters dissertation (Tonning 2003) which sought to reconstruct the cemeteries in the landscape, and on which the maps here have primarily been based. The overall impression of the area will be discussed first, using a correspondence analysis of the entire material as a starting point, before going into more site-specific discussions.

The initial correspondence analysis was run according to the principles used above, and specified in the methodology chapter. A total of 72 individuals are included in the initial analysis, all of whom meet the criteria for correspondence analysis. Only graves from professionally excavated contexts, dated to the Late Iron Age or Viking Age have been included here. The gendered distribution here is interesting, in that the largest group is indeterminate burials at 36%, followed by male expressions at 33% and female at 31%. As we will see, this varies between sites in fascinating ways.

Some of the variables are few in number here, such as indications of trade which occur only in three graves. Further, imports are rare here in comparison with our previous two locations, found in only seven graves, in accordance with Hanne Aanestad's recent PhD

thesis (Aannestad 2015) which examines imports in the region. As all the excavated burials from this area were found in barrows, this variable has been removed from the analysis, but all other variables have been left in for the initial analysis, and then tailored for the individual cemeteries where appropriate.

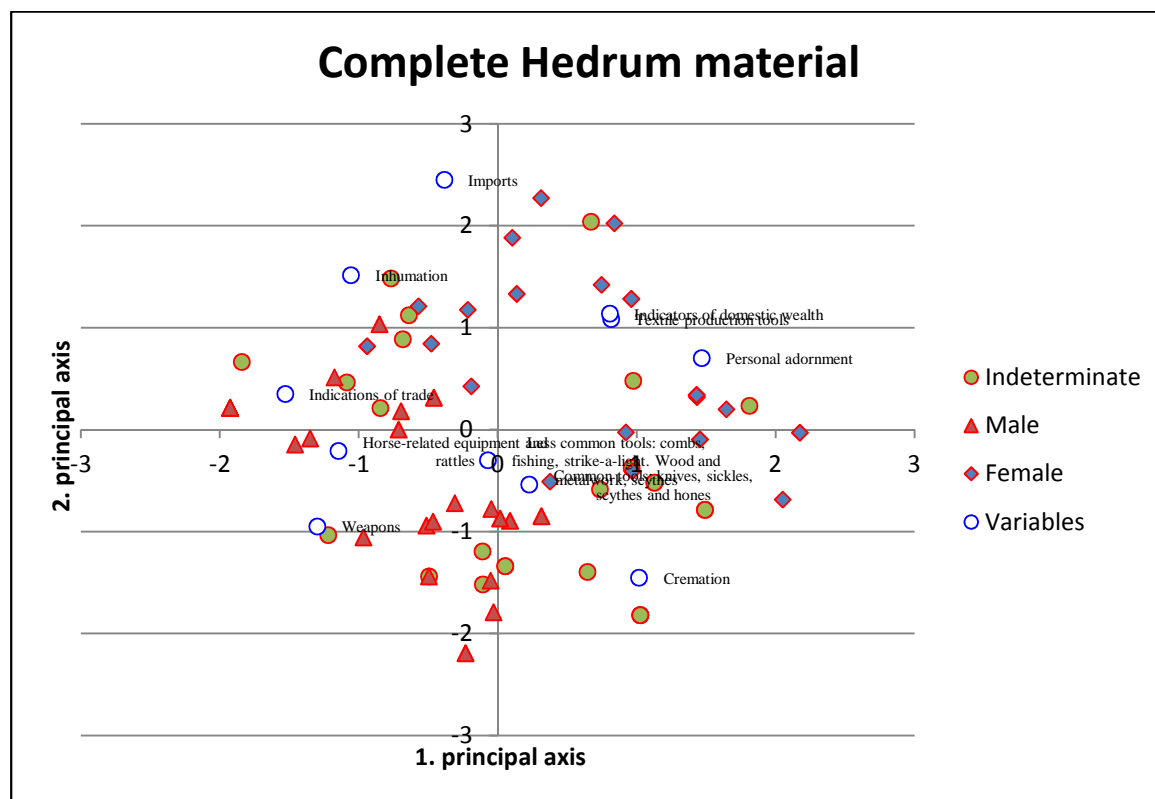


Table 14: the complete Hedrum material

As can be seen from the scattergram above, the material here divides into a female dominated right hand side (categorised by personal adornment, indicators of domestic wealth and textile production tools), an indeterminate and mixed male/female middle (categorised by tools, both common and uncommon) and a male dominated left hand side (where weapons and horse related equipment are strong presences).

It is important to note once again that the graves in question here have all been archaeologically gendered, and so what we have are only the gendered expressions of the material goods.

Taking gender out of the equation

Material of this size lends itself quite well to testing various factors, and so the exercise of removing stereotypical gender markers proved fruitful for the Hedrum material. The

result serves to illustrate the amount of common ground that male and female expressions share in this material.

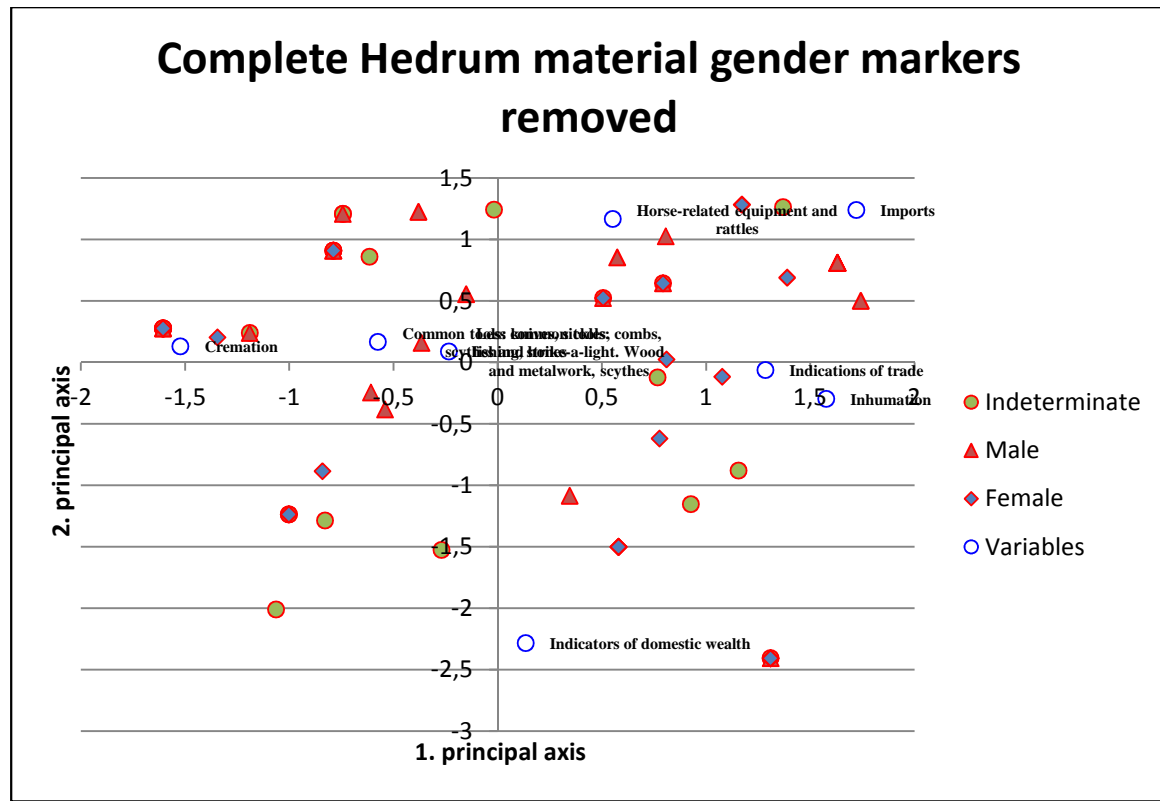


Table 15: the Hedrum material with typical gender diagnostic artefacts removed

Whilst there are some trends to be observed here, there are no clear gendered spaces. There are also some clear differences from the Kaupang material. Tools for example are found in almost equal amounts in male, female and indeterminate assemblages, though with a slight predominance towards female expressions in the category of less common tools. Horse related equipment shows a preference for male assemblages, with 19% female, 32% indeterminate and 49% male. Indicators of domestic wealth on the other hand, are weighted towards female expressions, with 48% occurring in female gendered assemblages, to 32% in indeterminate and 20% in male. Imports is a small category with only seven occurrences in total. It is also overwhelmingly female, occurring in six female assemblages and one indeterminate.

Cremation is the dominant form of body treatment, with 62% cremations to 38% inhumations. Interestingly, only 27% of cremations are female assemblages, and 29% are male, whilst 44% are indeterminate. Compared to inhumations, where 36% are female, 39%

are male and only 25% are indeterminate, this once again demonstrates that inhumations are statistically more likely to be gender determined in this material.

Unfortunately, the excavation records are not very consistent on recording internal markers, and as only around half of all the burials have this recorded, this has been left out of the overall analysis.

Nes

Nicolay Nicolaysen excavated a large cemetery of 52 burials at Nes in 1885. Of the several cemeteries excavated in the Hedrum area by Nicolaysen at that time, Nes stands out as particularly relevant in the context of this analysis, due to its uniform dating: as with Gulli, the dated burials here all belong to the Late Iron Age/Viking Age with no burials securely dated to earlier periods (Nicolaysen 1886:41).

The assemblages, body treatment and considerations of grave type

The overall impression of the site is not one of great wealth and variety in the grave goods, but rather of consistently furnished burials where textile working tools, common tools such as knives, sickles and hones, horse related equipment and indicators of domestic wealth all feature extensively, as well as weapons in male burials and jewellery in female ones. In keeping with the rest of the Hedrum cemeteries in general, oval brooches are not commonly found, and many female burials have been gender determined by the presence of beads and textile working tools. Of the 52 burials which complete the site, 31 could be dated to within the Viking Age, and these form the basis of the initial correspondence analysis.

This initial analysis has been carried out using the same variables as in the overall analysis, and subsequent tests have been done to see if the results can be clarified according to site specific details. Interestingly, all of the 31 burials contained sufficient finds to be part of the analysis, and all of the variables were present on the site, meaning the analysis could keep the same criteria as the main run. The resulting picture shows concentrations of burials, but no clear cut boundaries according to gendered lines:

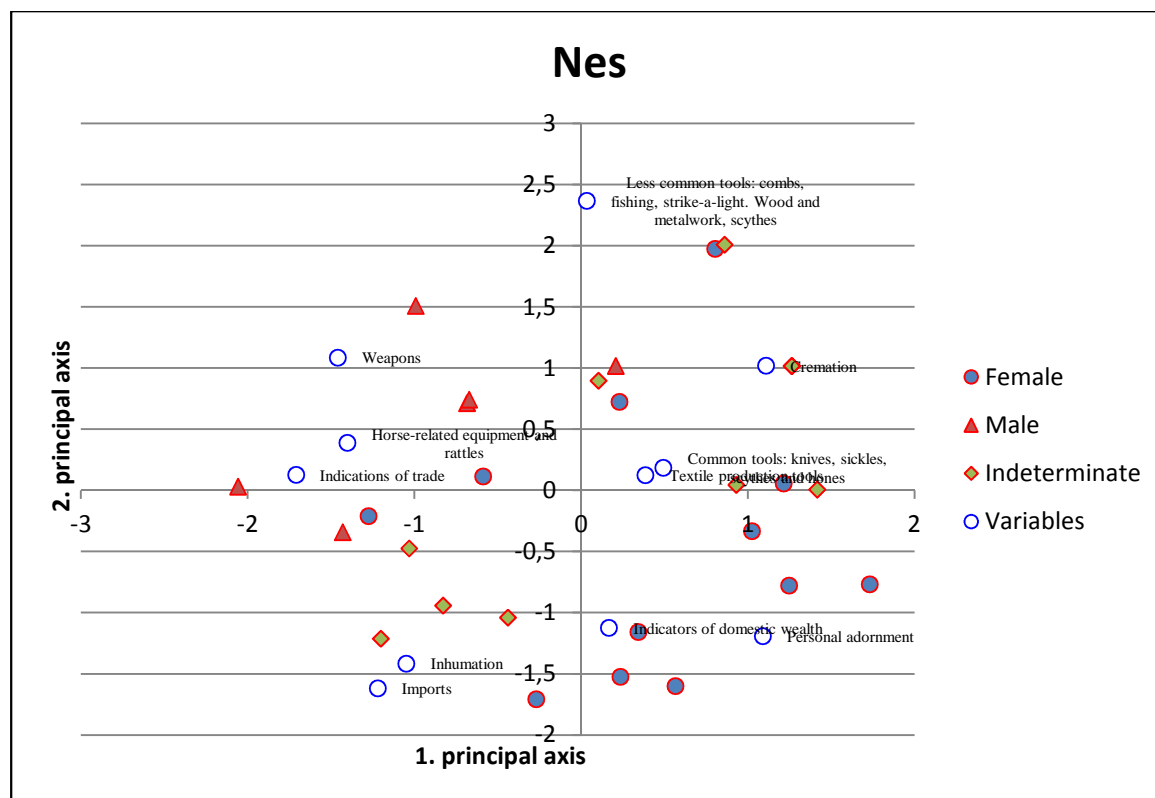


Table 16: the material at Nes

The demographic is also interesting, with 39% female expressions, 42% indeterminate and only 19% male expressions. The gender ratios on this site are therefore clear in that most gendered assemblages belong on the female spectrum, and indeterminate burials outperform both male and female expressions.

Body treatment is dominated by cremations, with 12 inhumations to 19 cremations. Interestingly, most of the male assemblages are cremations (four out of six), and as expected about 50% are indeterminate. Conversely, female expressions are stronger in inhumation graves.

Unfortunately, the excavation records do not give sufficient information about internal markers to allow us to draw many conclusions. There is one boat burial recorded and if we follow Frans-Arne Stylegar’s interpretation from 2005 of his re-examination of burial material from Vestfold (Stylegar 2005), there are several chamber graves found in the Hedrum graves, two of which are from Nes. This is of course interesting, in light of the traditional connection of chamber graves with the aristocracy (Price 2008:263), a point we will return to in the discussion.

Removing the gender markers from Nes removed only two burials, one female and one indeterminate burial. The result is interesting in its clear lack of gender demarcated areas: though there are tendencies and clusters here, the overall impression is one where the burials share a great deal of grave goods.

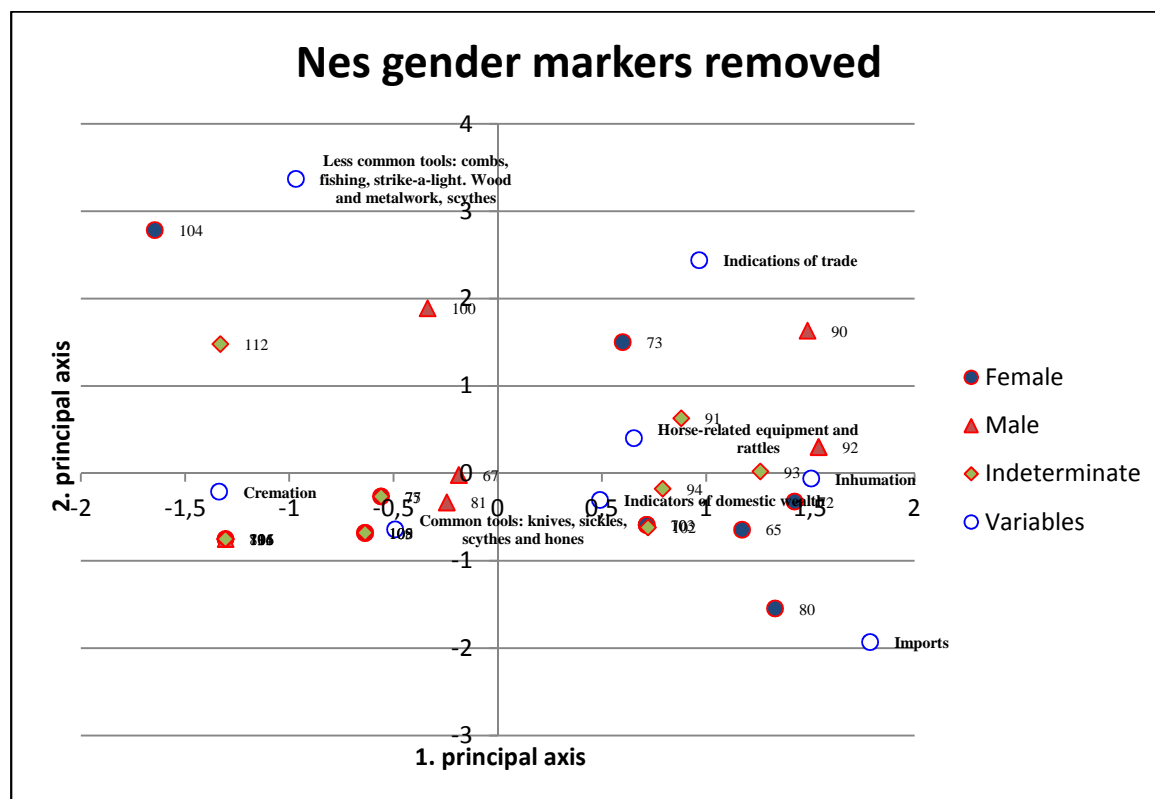


Table 17: the Nes burials with gender markers removed.

Only seven of the burials were dated more closely than to the Viking Age. Of these, six are male and one indeterminate, with no female expressions.

One thing that can be conjectured from the material at Nes, is that this was an affluent area, where a good number of people were afforded what we today call high-status burials for want of a better terminology. Further, gender does not seem to have been an exclusionary divide here, with a higher number of female than male expressions, and with indeterminate burials in the majority.

The Farmen barrows

During the excavation seasons of 1887 and 1888, Nicolaysen excavated a total of 44 barrows divided between the two farms of Farmen Søndre and Farmen Nordre (Nicolaysen 1887, 1888). Unfortunately, the documentation from Farmen Nordre does not allow for secure reconstruction in the landscape, and will therefore not feature in the

individual analysis here. The assemblages have been included in the overall analysis, but as the numbers are so small (six burials that can be dated to the Viking Age), no meaningful analysis can be done on an individual level according to the methods of this thesis. It is here considered that the distance between the barrows at Farmen Nordre and Farmen Søndre is such that they should be considered two separate, though most likely, closely related cemeteries (according to Nicolaysen's notes, there was an estimated 8 minutes' walk between the two sites (Nicolaysen 1887:25)). It is also worth noting however, that Nicolaysen mentions in his report that there had originally been a larger number of barrows, but that many had disappeared through river erosion by the time of excavation (Nicolaysen 1887:25).

The assemblages, body treatment and grave type

This leaves us with the 33 barrows excavated at Farmen Søndre, over the seasons of 1887 and 1888, 12 of which could be dated to the Viking Age. As one of these contains a triple burial, and another a double this makes 17 individuals in total. As with the burials from Bikjholberget, the multiple burials have been split into individual entries for the purposes of correspondence analysis.

The resulting final scattergram is once again read from axis one and two, as these contain the highest number of variations and are considered the most representative. The initial test run revealed that there are insufficient numbers of indicators of trade and of imports for these variables to be included in the analysis, and so they have been removed. In terms of the general assemblages, Farmen Søndre is strongly reminiscent of Nes, in that there is not a great deal of variety in the assemblages, nor are there many particularly wealthy graves.

The demographic at Farmen Søndre provides a good contrast with Nes. Where Nes had a clear majority of female over male expressions, Farmen Søndre corresponds better with the stereotypical image of Viking Age society, with 18% female expressions, 35% indeterminate and 47% male. Considering the proximity of these two cemeteries spatially, as will be seen in the next chapter, this is undoubtedly interesting.

The graves are in the main well equipped, but contain neither outstanding wealth nor any particularly standout traits of finds. In fact, the assemblages are very much comparable to Nes in terms of levels of finds and wealth.

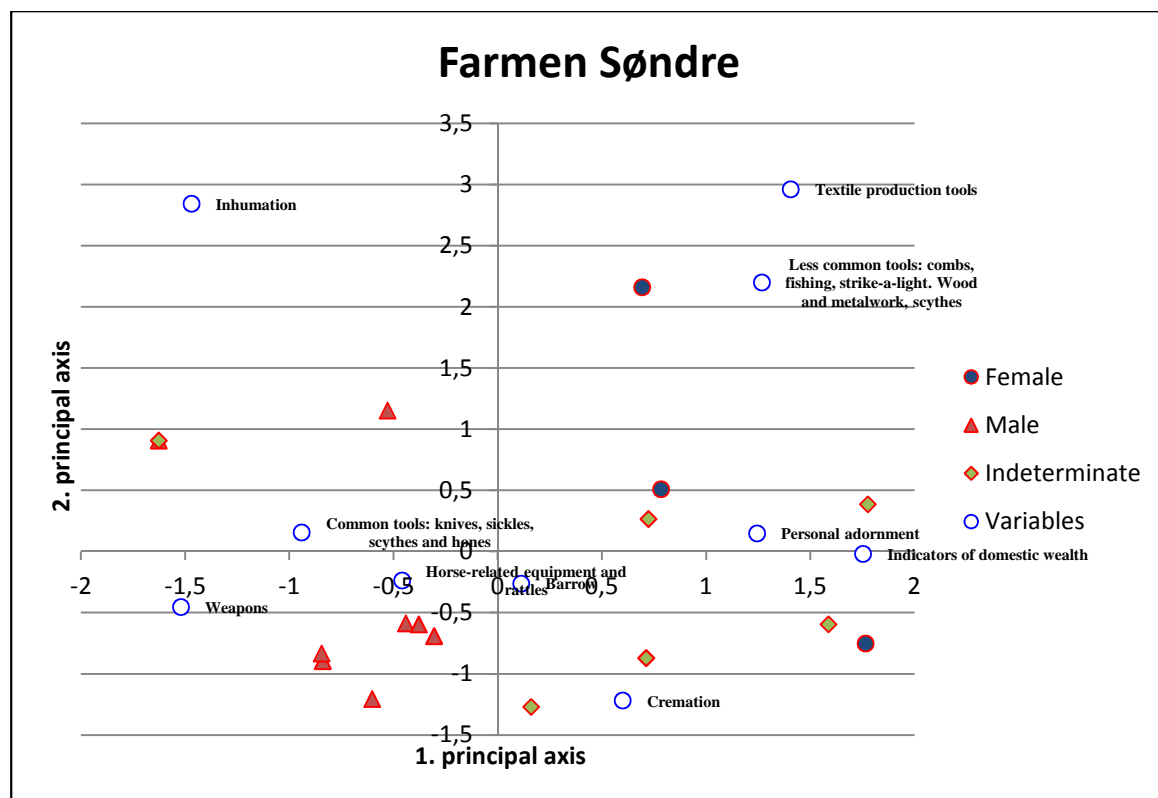


Table 18: the burials at Farmen Søndre

As can be seen from the scattergram above, the burials at Farmen Søndre displays clearer gendered patterns than many of the other sites discussed in this thesis. Female expressions are found aligned with personal adornment, indicators or domestic wealth and textile production tools, but also less common tools. Indeterminate burials are also predominantly found in this area, meaning these seem to be more aligned towards the female spectrum. On the other side of the picture, we see male assemblages, characterized by common tools, weapons and horse related equipment. This, along with Gulli, stands out as one of the sites with the most polarized gender expressions. However, removing the gendered artefacts here once again shows that the assemblages share a great deal of common ground.

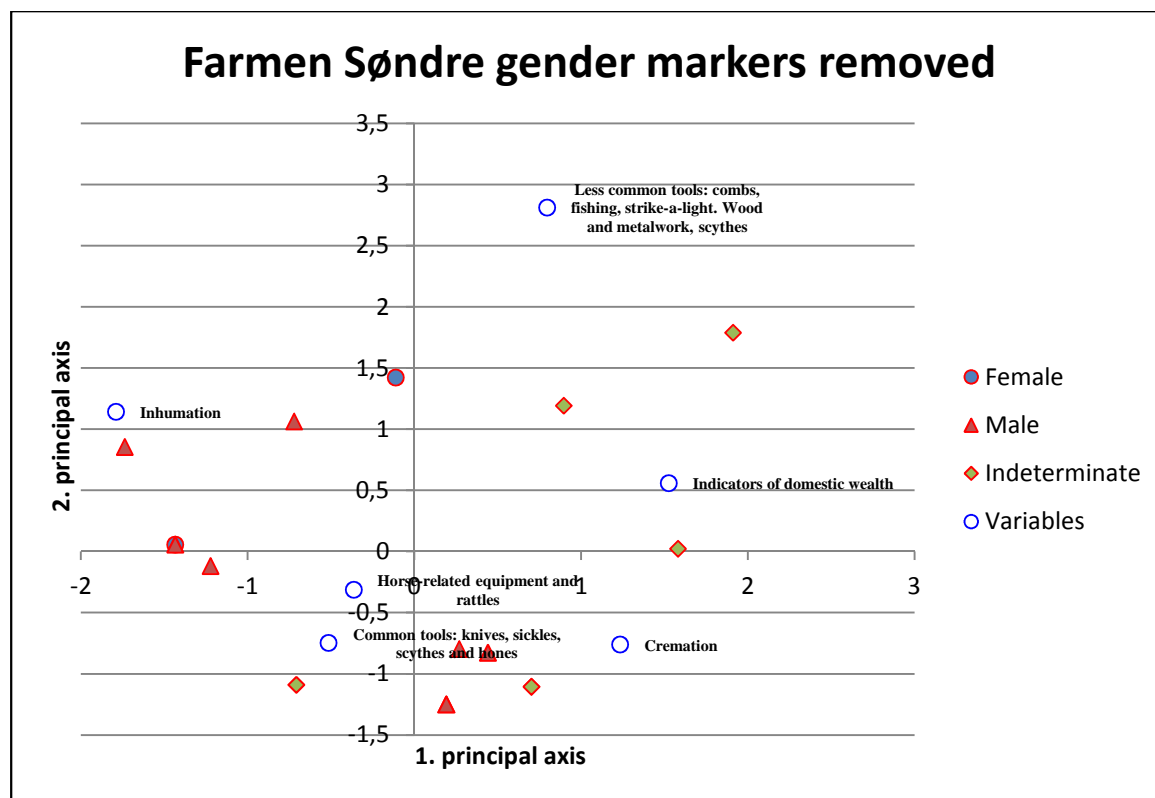


Table 19: the burials at Farmen Søndre with gender markers removed

In terms of body treatment, there is a majority of cremations with 65% to 35% inhumations. In keeping with the trends hitherto observed, indeterminate burials are mainly found in cremations, with 50% of cremations containing indeterminate assemblages. This of course makes inhumations overwhelmingly assigned to either a male or a female expression.

There are not a great deal of burial types noted here, though Nicolaysen recorded two boat graves, and by Stylegar's assessment of chamber graves, seven of the inhumations graves belong in this class. The boat graves are both male, and neither of them stand out as particularly well equipped. The chamber graves are also mainly male, though with two indeterminate burials (Stylegar 2005:170-172). These are quite mixed in the level of equipment, some are amongst the poorer graves, some more wealthy.

Only six graves are dated more closely than to the Viking Age. Of these, five are male, with two belonging to the 9th and three to the 10th century, and one is female, 9th century.

Melau and Bjerke – the smaller sites

Though both these sites are interesting in their own right, the size of the material samples from both are smaller than from the previous two sites, making a correspondence analysis

less applicable. The sites will therefore be discussed in terms of assemblages, body treatment and grave types here, but without the use of the correspondence analysis.

Bjerke

Excavated by Nicolaysen in 1894, the site consisted of 31 barrows at the time. All of these were examined, and 16 contained sufficient finds for dating, out of which nine were shown to belong to the Early Iron Age and seven in the Viking Age (Nicolaysen 1894). This sample is therefore considerably smaller than most of the other sites discussed in this thesis, and the dates show a longer period of usage than these other sites. Bjerke also has an interesting expression of gender in the Viking Age graves: out of seven, four are female and three are indeterminate: none are male.

Overall, the burials at Bjerke demonstrate uniformity in their equipment, and as can be observed to be a typical trait for the Hedrum graves, they are neither very wealthy nor strikingly poor in equipment.

Body treatment can take the form of both cremations (four) and inhumations (three), and there appears to be no pattern here of female expressions more aligned with one form or another. There is one boat grave, and two chamber graves (Stylegar 2005:169-173), all of which contain female assemblages. Only one grave is closely dated, a female assemblage from the 8th century.

Melau

Nicolaysen excavated 30 out of 38 registered barrows at this site in 1884, out of which only one is visible in the landscape today (Tonning 2003:52). 12 of these are dated to the Viking Age, where 25% are female, 17% are indeterminate and 58% are male expressions. Of the remaining burials, the vast majority are undated because they are too poor in finds to enable secure dating, meaning that the burials containing finds at Melau can predominantly be dated to the Viking Age. Overall, the Melau burials are not particularly wealthy, and as we have seen, the majority of them contained few or no finds. The ones which did contain finds are fairly well equipped, but not outstandingly wealthy or varied in their assemblages. Overall, they fall within the common range of finds found in the Hedrum burials: ranging from quite poor to fairly well equipped, with no outstanding burials.

Interestingly, there are no textile working tools found at Melau, nor are there imports or indications of trade (the last category being perhaps more predictable in its absence).

Body treatment is divided fairly equally between inhumations and cremations, with the latter being slightly more common. There are no gendered connotations connected with either form. There are two occurrences of graves underneath barrows, as well as two wooden coffins but no other containers or distinctive traits are known.

A proportionately high number of graves here are dated though, with nine set to either the 9th or 10th century. Six are dated to the 9th century, of which three are gendered male and three female. Three are set to the 10th century, of which two are gendered male and one indeterminate.

On the inside

This chapter has presented an overview of the different forms of assemblages and dominant forms of body treatment viewed with a focus on expressions of gender. So far, some interesting points can be made:

- Kaupang stands out, both in terms of having a wider amount of variables present, and also in that there is a higher frequency of gender-associated objects occurring in assemblages associated with the opposite gender, such as textile working tools in male graves and weapons in female ones
- Gulli conforms more with the traditional interpretations of gender roles and differences: The assemblages are neat and tidy in terms of their gender connotations. However, the assemblages also show a great deal of shared traits
- Nes contains burials mainly dated to the Viking Age, and contains more female than male expressions
- Farmen Søndre on the other hand, shows a longer life span and contains more male than female expressions
- Bjerke demonstrates the longest lifespan of all the sites discussed in this chapter, and contains no male expressions at all, only female and indeterminate
- And finally Melau's graves belong mostly to the Viking Age, and there is a dominance of male over female expressions

Overall, the emerging picture from the correspondence analysis shows that the burials often share a significant amount of grave good types. On top of this base of common features however, come gender distinguishing items, and these are often accorded high

importance in interpretations. This has contributed to them acting as a dividing line between assemblages which actually share a great deal of traits.

In rural communities, gender affiliation seems to carry more weight, whereas at Kaupang we can see a great deal of fluidity in the assemblages. I would argue we need to consider two explanations for this, both of which are likely to have played a role: firstly, Kaupang has a much greater amount of variables than the other sites. There is more common ground between gendered expressions simply because there is more ground: with an increased number of shared variables, the gender expressions will stand less clearly out in an analysis that looks for similarities and differences. But secondly, Kaupang was an urban site, with all which that entails. It is here contended that this would have entailed a greater degree of social mobility amongst other things. The Kaupang burials speak very clearly of a society where gender was unlikely to have been a determining factor in choice of occupation. I would also argue this is the case at the Hedrum cemeteries and at Gulli, but that Kaupang's urban nature provided a greater choice of occupations is unquestionable, and furthermore that this is evident in the grave goods. It is important to remember the point made in the Kaupang section here, that the social mobility and fluidity between genders in Kaupang must have resonated in its surrounding rural communities in order for it to exist. However, that Kaupang speaks the loudest for potential variation in who carried out what activities remains unchallenged.

A main finding of the analysis so far is that the material does not support a strict and complete division between men and women. The sites all present different expressions and site specific peculiarities, but there is also a clearly observable overall pattern of shared expressions of status and power across the sites. Discernible in this pattern is the trend for women and men to be buried with what must be called comparable levels of wealth and equipment, and further that very few status markers are gender exclusive. Similarly, internal markers and grave type does not testify to strict gendered divisions or affiliations. Body treatment does show some trends however, with inhumations more likely to be gendered. A significant number of the female expressions are found in inhumation graves as well, making an interesting case for the potential loss of traditional female gender identifiers in cremation rites.

Although local variations means there are differences between the sites in terms of the overall level of wealth, sex ratios, internal and external expressions as well as variety in

the grave goods, the overall conclusion is that status does not seem dependent on gender at any of these sites. In short, the grave goods assemblages do not support an idea of a binary division between male and female, nor does it testify to a society where women were less important socially, economically or indeed culturally.

The following chapter will examine external traits, using the findings from the internal analysis in conjunction with the organisation of the cemeteries from the external point of view.

Chapter Nine: External matters: shapes and sizes, locations and landscapes

This chapter will focus on the external traits of the burials and the cemeteries. It comprises an analysis of the external shape of the individual burials, the settings in which they are placed, and crucially, how they are placed in this landscape.

The geographical area which provides the material for thesis is limited in size, and the landscape dictates several overarching themes that repeat throughout the following chapter. Vestfold is characterised by large swathes of arable land, with valleys and ridges shaping the landscape and creating natural lines of communication. The large morainic ridge that runs through the county known as *raet* forms a main overland travel route which has remained in use from prehistory and up until the present day (Tollnes 1981:17; Stylegar and Nordseng 2003:292). There are several smaller ridges that run concurrent with the main one, and the map below gives an overall view of how the county is shaped in terms of an outer and an inner part, divided by the morainic deposits.

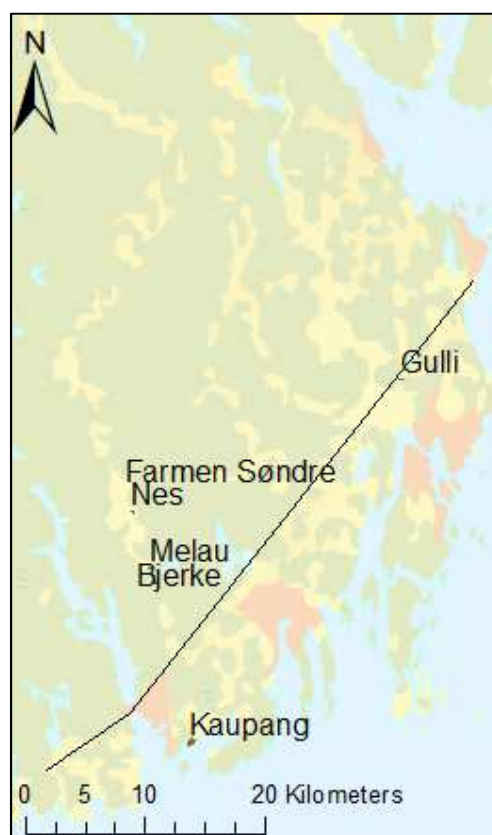


Figure 27: map of Vestfold with the approximate location of raet and the sites discussed here marked.

It also forms a focal point for the archaeological landmarks in the area (Hougen 1937:2-4) though it is worth noting this may be because this specific area has seen extended excavation activity and may not be an accurate reflection of the prehistoric landscape as such.

The area's good agricultural land has meant that much of the archaeological material has been damaged and even removed over time. However, arable land also tends to be accessible and traversable, meaning communication is often facilitated by the landscape. Though the individual sites have differences in terms of local topography, they are mostly found in modern-day fields, meaning the cemetery sites in themselves are fairly flat, accessible and open.

As with the previous chapter, the following will be divided into site and area specific analysis in order to create a comprehensible overview.

Gulli

The cemetery at Gulli is found in an area with relatively flat topography. At 44 meters above sea level, on what may be described as a plateau formed by moraine debris from the last Ice Age (Gjerpe 2005:14), the immediate surroundings have no especially imposing features, or natural focal points of particular note.

The site is placed on deep, sandy and well-drained soil, according to the University of Aas' online resource Kilden (Aas). This type of soil, though needing fairly intensive fertilisation, is easy to work, and was as a consequence considered attractive agricultural land in the Iron Age (Solbakken, et al. 2006:8-10).

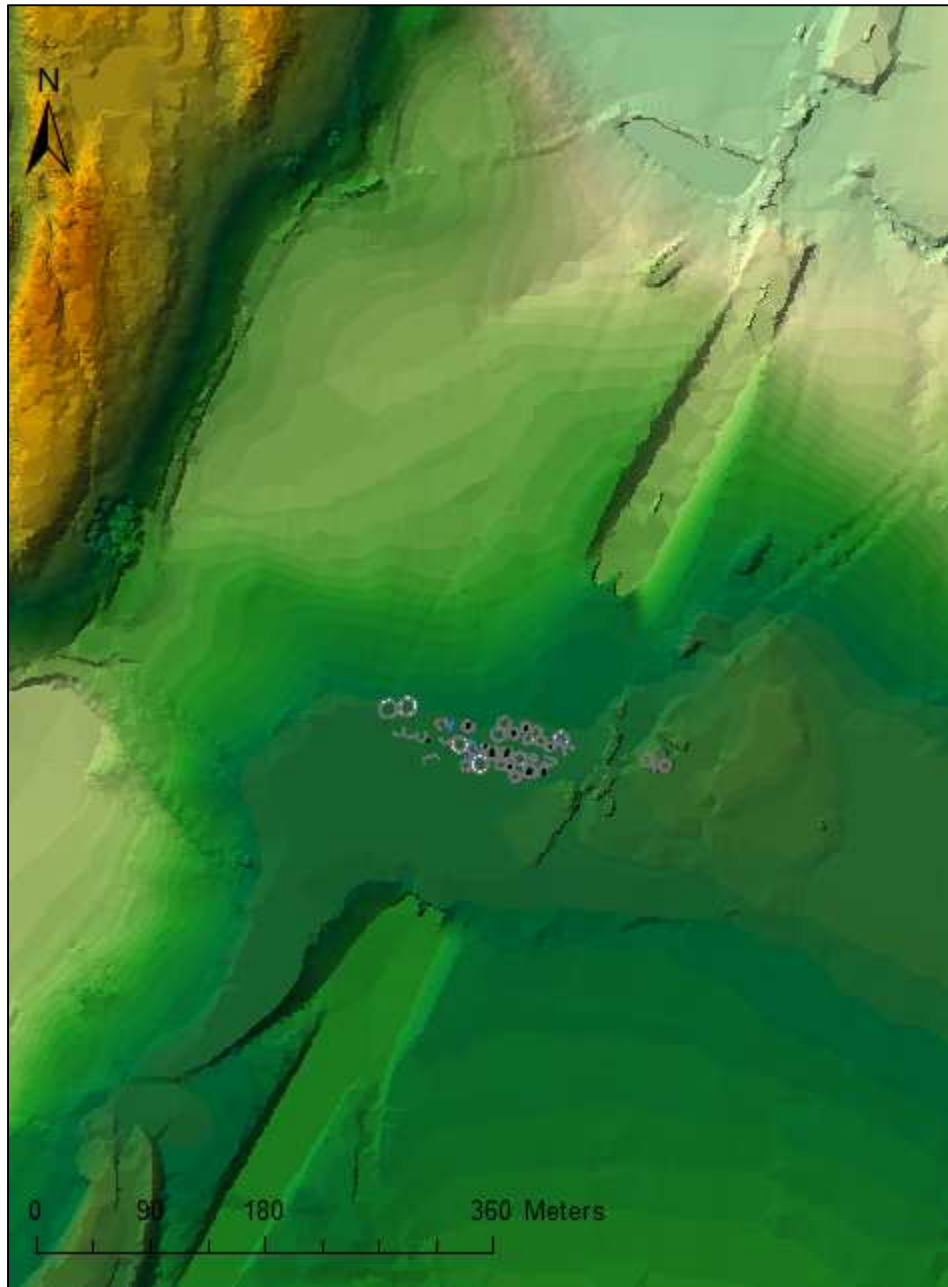


Figure 28: large scale overview of the landscape in which Gulli is found. The dip in the landscape is the modern day motorway, and to the Northwest we see the start of the Gulli hills.

There are no visible traces of the cemetery in the landscape today. Being placed on arable land, the barrows and other features above soil level were long since removed by agricultural activity by the time the site was excavated in 2003 and 2004 (Gjerpe 2005:11).

The shape of things

Gulli shows indications of both flat graves and barrows, where the presence of barrows is conjectured by the occurrence of ring ditches (Gjerpe 2005:14). It should be noted that

the absence of a ring ditch does not necessarily mean there was no mound, however assumptions about mounds without evidence to support cannot be safely argued in this case. There are also several ditches present where a burial has not been found, and it is suggested that these could have been cremation burials, typically placed on soil level and then covered by a mound rather than in a grave beneath the barrow, in keeping with documented Viking Age practice (Price 2008:262). This can remain no more than a speculation, but the ring ditches themselves and their prevalence on the site is of interest as a feature in its own right, and helps support the hypothesis that the site was originally larger.

Barrows dominate at Gulli, with four out of the 19 graves included in the analysis here considered probable flat graves. Out of these, one contains a male assemblage and three female, showing that flat graves are more common in the case of female expressions. The flat graves do not show signs of being less well equipped than barrows, and there is no apparent correlation between typical assemblages and outer shape. Similarly, there is no ubiquitous pattern between grave type and outer shape, with the flat graves containing two coffins and two boats. The dating may be of potential significance here, as the male flat grave is the site's oldest dateable grave, and none of the flat graves are dated to later than 850-950 AD. The remaining 15 graves are assumed to have been in barrows, out of which six contain male expressions, five are indeterminate and four contain female expressions. Thus we can see that more male than female assemblages are found in barrows, but with such small numbers, the differences do not manifest as strong trends.

The dividing line

A feature of special interest here is the presumed road that runs the length of the cemetery. During the site's excavation it became clear that the lack of any graves from this section was not a matter of preservation: other features which predate the cemetery, notably Early Iron Age cooking pits and fire pits, are found where the road runs. It can therefore be conjectured that the road was a contemporary feature with the cemetery (Gjerpe 2005:17). Further support to the supposition that the road predates the cemetery can be seen in that the graves all respect the line of the road (Gjerpe 2005:17). The road leads towards what is today the farm of Gulli, and it can be speculated that it led to either a farm, a hall or an assembly site or focal point of some sort in the past, though unfortunately these can be no more than conjectures without further examinations. Crucially, it can also be conjectured

that the road was not constructed because of the graves, but rather that the graves were consciously placed alongside an already existing road.

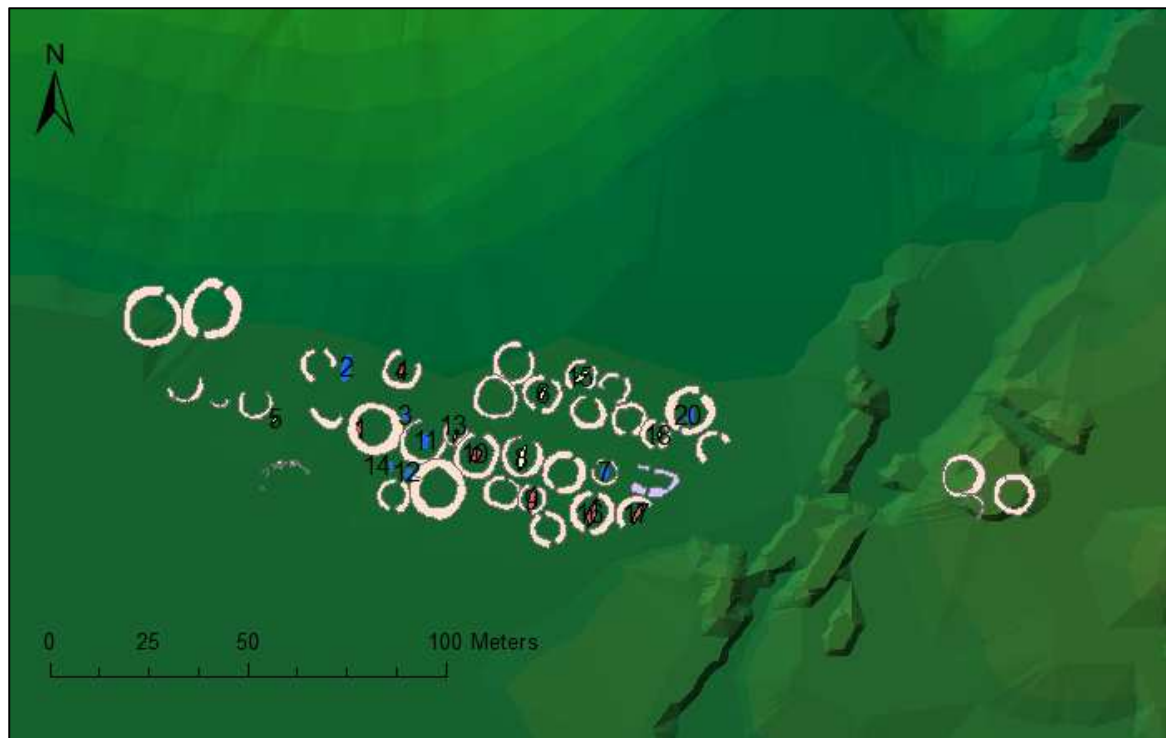


Figure 29: overview of the site at Gulli. Graves marked in blue contain female expressions, graves marked in red contain male expressions and the yellow ones are indeterminate. The road is observable in the gap between the southern and the northern burials.

From the earliest phases, the burials seem to have a direct relationship with the road, and it is conjectured that this was a conscious choice, to enhance the burials' communication with the landscape and with those who passed through it. Aside from serving purely practical purposes of communication, the road can also be seen as a conduit for ritual, for processions in connection with burials, and as a part of the wider symbolic ritual landscape. Ceremonial processions are known from the Oseberg tapestries for example (Ingstad 1993:234), and it can be proposed that roads through cemeteries may have served several potential purposes, as will be further explored in Chapter Ten.

The connection between roads and burials in the Viking Age landscape is a fairly well-known topic (Østmo 2005; Thäte 2009), and there seems little doubt that proximity to roads was indeed a consideration in the placement of burials. The graves at Gulli appear to follow a pattern determined by chronology, with the earliest graves placed on the southern side of the road, and the northern side only coming in to use once the southern side was considered full, or completed. This means that in the early phases of use,

travellers would pass *alongside* the cemetery, whilst in the later phases they would pass *through* it. Although the landscape where the burials is placed is not dramatic as such, the presence of this road does lead to the supposition that the burials fulfilled an important ideological function and that communicating their message was a crucial motivation behind their erection.

Related to the road, and very likely of significance in terms of the location of the cemetery, is the site's position on the above mentioned *raet*.

The assumed presence of a larger number of barrows supports the conjecture that the cemetery was intended to be a highly visible focal point in the landscape for those who passed through it. The construction of barrows requires considerable resources in terms of labour and time in order to create a lasting monument in the landscape. Here, the barrows are thought to have signalled a cemetery of high status burials.

However, it seems highly significant that there is no gendered division in number, or in placement of the burials at Gulli, as demonstrated by the layout of the cemetery, as can be seen in illustration 8.3. Whatever these graves symbolised in other words, it was not gender specific.

Temporal development of the site

In addition to the connection to the road, the site at Gulli can also be seen to reveal a more general pattern of temporal development. As the figure below shows, the earliest graves are found at the Western point of the site, on the southern side of the road. From there, the graves move to the Eastern point, adjacent to the cult house to be discussed below. This trend then continues, with the Western and Eastern points preferred for new burials, leaving the middle area of the site for burials which cannot be dated securely.

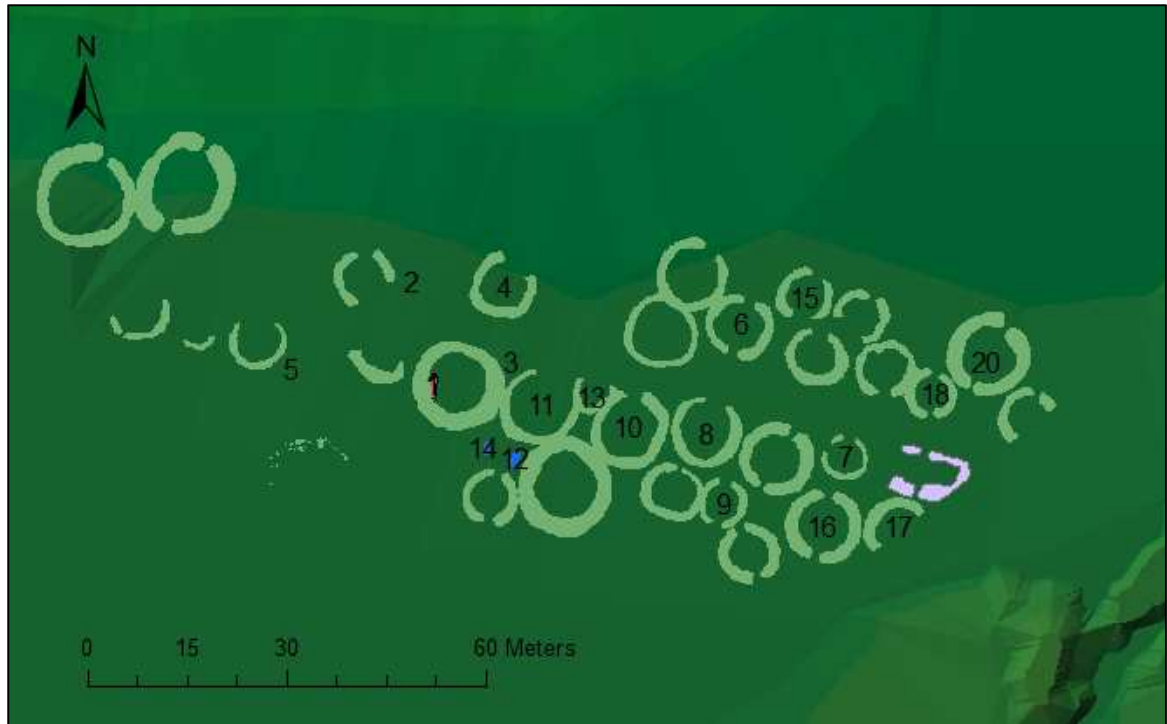


Figure 30: the cemetery as it appeared in 850 AD. Burial 1 is the earliest on the site, with 12 and 14 following.

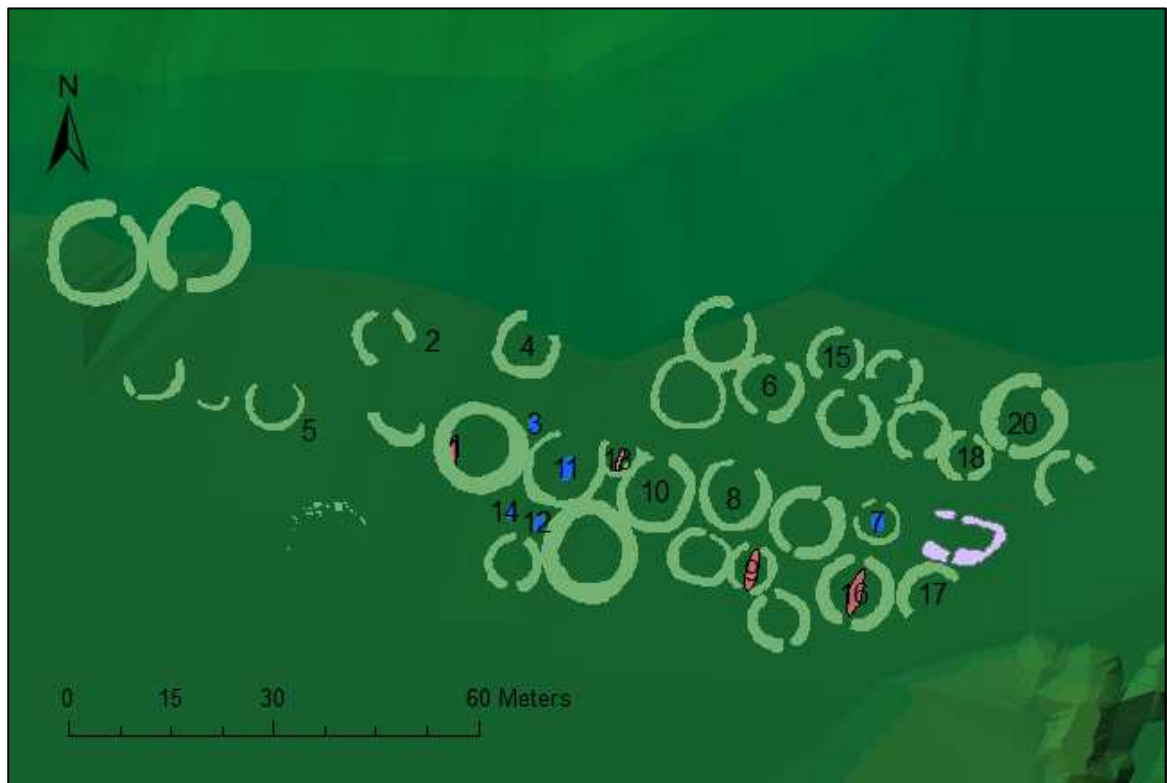


Figure 31: the cemetery at 900 AD. The development over the next 50 years saw more burials concentrated in the Western side, but also in the Eastern side.

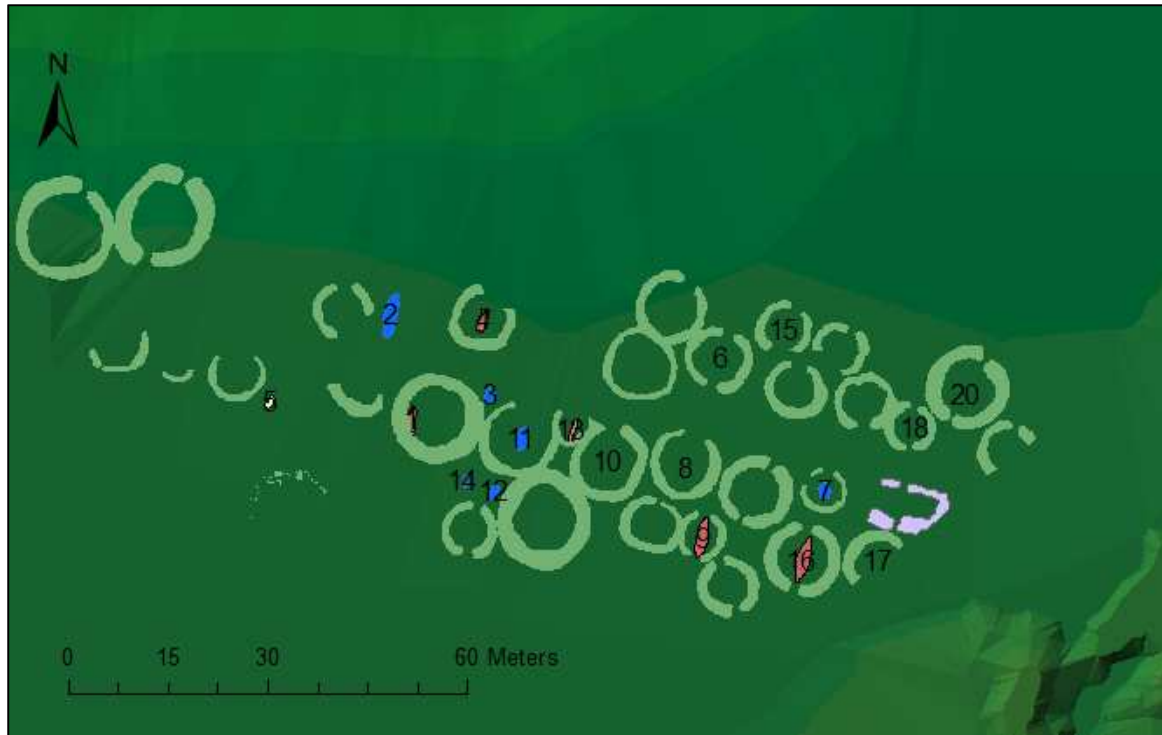


Figure 32: the cemetery at 950 AD shows the pattern seen in the last two illustrations continues here, with burials concentrated in the Western end of the cemetery

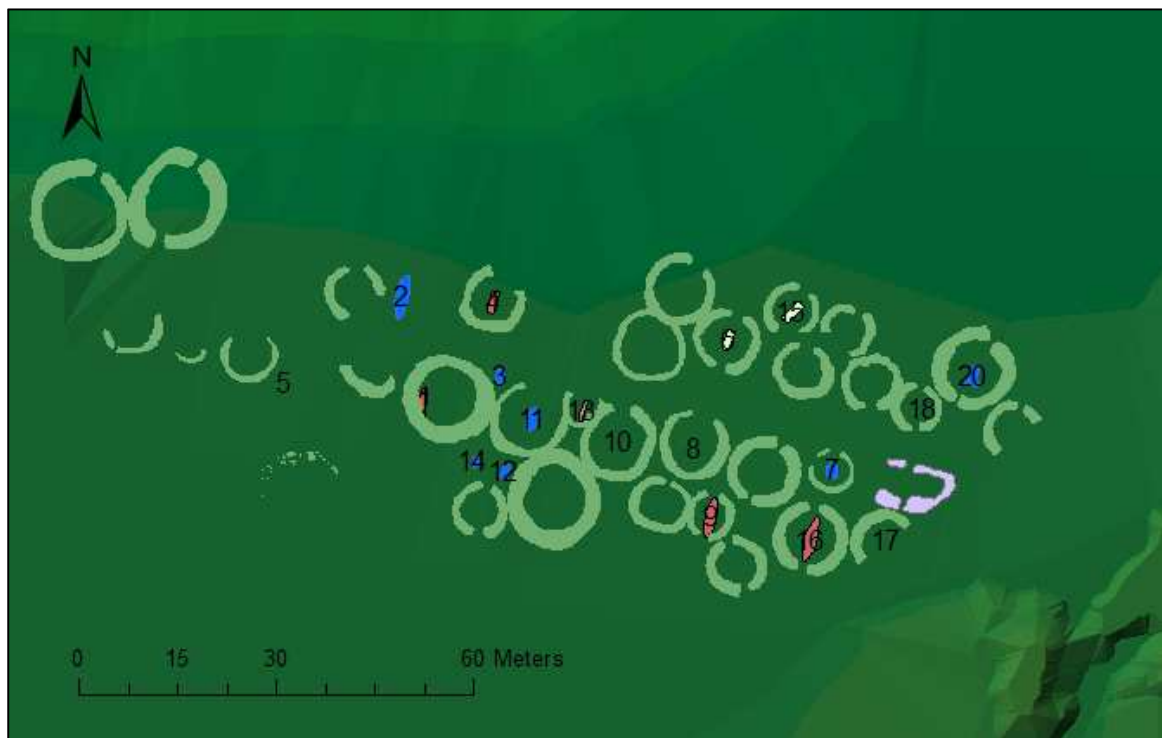


Figure 33: the cemetery at 1050 AD shows that the later stages uses the middle area to a greater extent. The final look of the cemetery can be seen above in figure 8.3.

There are question marks around the conclusions that can be drawn from this, as at least two of the burials which cannot be dated show evidence of having been looted, and so we

cannot discount that they would have originally been richer in finds than what they were at the time of excavation. However, the pattern as it appears at the time of excavation shows there was a distinct preference for the outer edges of the site for the wealthier burials, leaving the middle for those with less dateable grave goods, these graves being generally the less well equipped as well. Of these burials, two contain male expressions, three are indeterminate but none appear female.

Based on this, it could be suggested that there was a connection with the outer edges of the cemetery and those with higher status, but this remains no more than a speculation.

This sort of temporal mapping of the site is only possible here because of the high standard of the excavation and resulting publication (Gjerpe 2005). At some of the other sites described below, the high number of undated, unexcavated or empty graves make the exercise pointless as it does not give an accurate picture. Thus, this level of analysis has only been done at those of the sites where it yields a readable result.

A house for the dead?

The cemetery at Gulli also features a construction that does not appear to be a burial. On the eastern outskirts of the site, adjacent to the southern side of the road and with an east-west orientation, is a small construction, almost akin to a small house. A U-shaped ditch with four post-holes is what remains, presenting an enigmatic and unusual structure in a cemetery. The ditch contained a good quantity of burned bone: animals, both wild predators and domestic animals, and human skeletal remains were present. The positioning of the structure, adjacent to the road, and not infringing on, or infringed on, by any of the burials, indicates contemporaneity. This fits with the C¹⁴ dating yielded from the structure, which indicate a creation towards the end of the 8th century (Gjerpe 2005:149).

The specific use of the structure is open to interpretation. The excavation report speculated on the presence of burial chambers in ship burials such as Gokstad and Oseberg, or that the ditch could be a remaining ring-ditch from a now disappeared long mound (Gjerpe 2005:149). Against this last theory however, is the presence of the post holes, and the large concentration of burned bone in the ditch. More likely is that it is the remains of a house-like structure, and there are parallels to houses with u-shaped ditches found in the Norwegian Bronze and Iron Age (Gjerpe 2005:150). There are also parallels with cult-houses found in Sweden and elsewhere in Norway (Dommasnes 1991:59;

Eriksen 2015:281). The suggestion that it may have had a function related to death, burial and cult is therefore considered likely, and it is here suggested as a house used in connection with burials, either in preparation of the dead, or in the rituals themselves.

The cemetery and its wider landscape

Having summed up the cemetery's site-specific features, it is also important to consider the wider setting.

As stated above, Gulli is situated in a large open space, where the land dips and climbs a little, all without interfering with an overall feeling of openness. It is not a landscape imbued with dramatic shifts and contrasts, being instead characterised by gently flowing and fertile land. Around 200 meters to the north, Gulliåsen constitutes the nearest hill as it rises to 72 meters in height. There are no substantial bodies of water nearby, the closest river being 2 kilometres away.

This last point needs to be examined in light of the high number of boat graves found at the site. The closest one comes to a body of water nearby is a tendency to flooding in the low-lying plains to the north, which was likely to have been much stronger in the Viking Age (modern factors such as the redirecting of a stream, as well as the elevation of the land since, has contributed to changing landscapes). Possibly, these plains would have taken on the appearance of bodies of water when flooded (Gjerpe 2005:167). However that may be, the appearance of a body of water is not the same as the actual presence of one, indicating more a symbolic significance than a practical one. The curious fact remains that we are dealing with a site where boat burials were common, but which is not in communication with any substantial body of water where these boats could have been used.

There are traces of other cemeteries nearby, the closest one about one kilometre to the north (Gjerpe 2005:14). The rather well known Iron Age cemetery at Gullkronen (Grieg 1923) is around 3 kilometers South/South-East, which is certainly close enough for communication and mutual knowledge to be assumed, yet too far away to assume any sort of immediate impact. A hillfort is known to be located in the hills to the northwest, again around a kilometre away.

A noteworthy find is the remains of a house from the Early Iron Age, most likely the last part of the pre-Roman Iron Age, in the eastern part of the excavated area, which though

severely damaged by agricultural activity indicates domestic settlement at the site previous to the cemetery being established (Gjerpe 2005:18), albeit at a considerable distance in time. Interestingly, domestic debris is often found in the graves themselves, indicating the proximity of the cemetery to a farm, settlement or similar. There are also several cooking pits on and near the site, though their purpose can be conjectured to be connected with burial rites as much as with settlement activities.

Today's farm at Gulli can be traced back to the middle ages, first appearing in written sources around 1400. It is of course not impossible that a farm was found in the same area from an earlier date, but without further investigation this cannot be assumed, or used to make sound conjectures. Lars Erik Gjerpe's recent PhD thesis contains an in-depth discussion of the challenges of retrogressive research within settlement archaeology in Norway, and concludes that there is no evidence that such an approach provides dependable results (Gjerpe 2017:45-58). On the strength of this, and with the obvious challenges of relying on assumptions rather than on empirical data in mind, a retrogressive approach is not advocated here. That being said, historical maps have been used with the intention of ascertaining if they could reveal additional knowledge of roads, thoroughfares or any other such features that may have subsequently been lost. Historical maps of the area shows that the oldest available map of use here is the so called Amtskart from 1832 (drawn by Niels Arentz Ramm and Gerhardt Munte, and available through the historical map archives at www.kartverket.no). As it happens, this did not reveal any further information, though the exercise of superimposing the cemetery on to an older map proved interesting in itself in that it further shows that the area was designated agricultural land by then.

The graves in a gendered context

In summary, the Gulli graves serves to illustrate that gender does not seem to be a determining factor in where burials are placed in relation to either each other, or the wider landscape. From this, we can draw support for the suggestion that gender as we know it, as a binary opposition, was of less significance in the Viking Age than other social factors which determined status.

Male and female expressions are found both in flat graves and barrows, on either side of the road, and at both ends of the site. Unfortunately, the dimension of height is missing from the analysis of Gulli, but in terms of diameter, barrows containing male and female

expressions are of comparable sizes, with the average size for female barrows slightly larger. Whilst female expressions are more commonly found in flat graves than male ones, this is far from an absolute rule.

Male and female and indeterminate expressions are found both immediately next to the road, as well as further away from it. As stated above, the main differentiator here seems to be chronology, with older burials found south of the road. The cult house is flanked by two male and one female assemblage. In short, the gender of the interred cannot be seen to impact the location of the grave. We will return to the implications of this in the subsequent discussion chapter, once the internal organisation and wider landscape settings of the other sites have been examined.

Kaupang

The Kaupang landscape poses a different proposition from several of the other sites discussed here. The town provides a natural focal point at the centre of the cemeteries, and the coastal location makes for an open landscape in terms of views and vistas. The sea also impacts more than just sight, its presence is felt through smell and sound in all the separate cemeteries discussed here.

A challenge with regards to the landscape analysis here is that the higher shoreline of the Viking Age means the landscape has changed rather drastically, meaning the general impression and expressions of the cemeteries have changed considerably. The map below shows the landscape as it would have looked when the town was alive and in use, but a visitor to the site today would struggle to see this coastal landscape in the fields, roads and houses which are to be found there now. As can be seen from this, the cemeteries are all in close communication with the town in one way or another, and whichever way a traveller approached the town would have involved passing through or by one or more of the cemeteries.

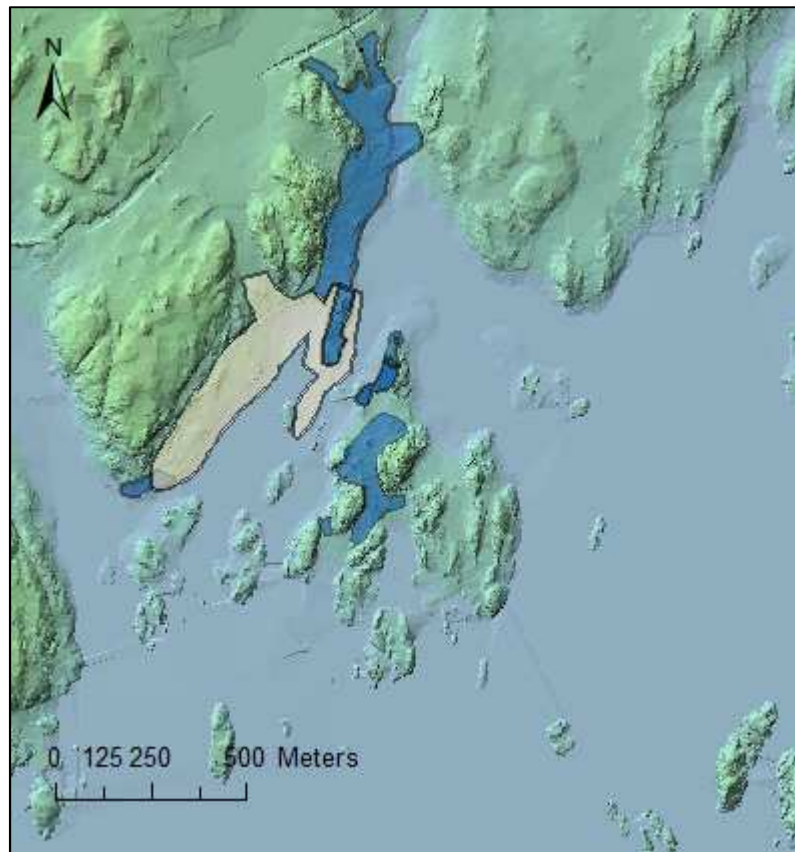


Figure 34: overview of the Kaupang landscape. The settlement area is coloured beige, whilst the cemeteries are represented in blue. The map has been created using site-outlines downloaded from the Askeladden database.

The following sections will discuss the landscape at Kaupang in terms of the individual cemeteries, whilst at the same time keeping the connection with the town and the other cemeteries at the forefront of the analysis.

Nordre Kaupang

Nordre Kaupang was located on a relatively narrow strip of land, ranging from 80-100 meters in width, between the Kaupang hills to the West and an inlet of the sea to the East. With the hills reaching a total height of over 180 meters, and the sea cutting off the site at the other side, Nordre Kaupang is neatly delimited on two sides. The other two sides being much shorter, this means the site is in effect contained on its land. This strip of land is also assumed to have been the main overland route into and out of Kaupang (Tollnes 1981:21), thus obliging travellers via the land route to pass directly through the cemetery, a consideration which must surely have been crucial when the cemetery was planned. As can be seen from the map below, there is also a gap between the hills at around the middle point of the cemetery, opening for communication to the north-west. A farm-road

still runs up this gap (Tollnes 1981:22), and it is possible this was a route used by the Viking Age population as well.

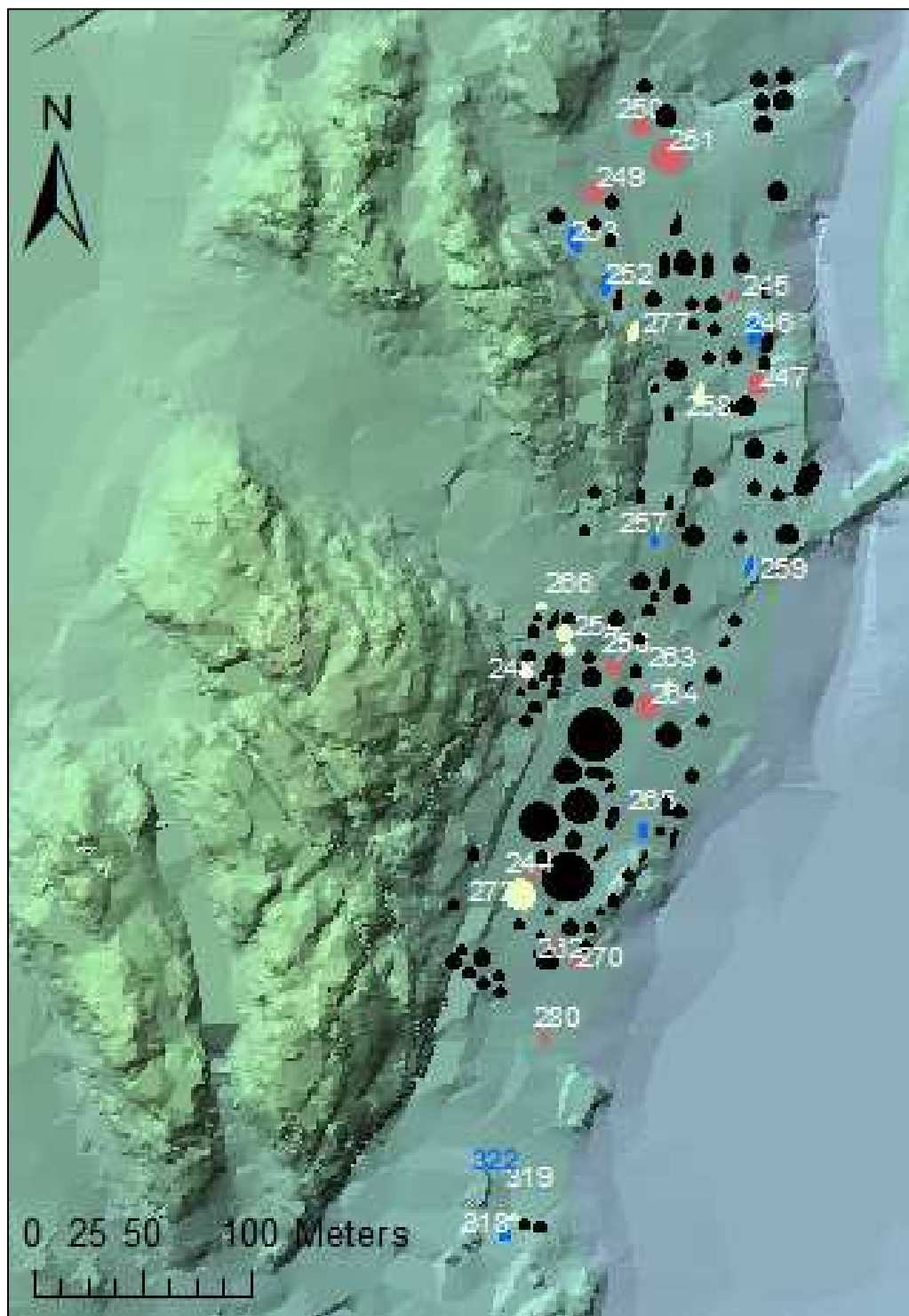


Figure 35: map of Nordre Kaupang. Female expressions are marked in blue, male expressions are marked in red and indeterminate in yellow. All empty or otherwise undated mounds are marked black. A few burials included in the overall analysis in the previous chapter could not be accurately located on a map, and are therefore not found here.

The land on which the cemetery is placed is a cambisol, and is viable for agriculture and several types of crops (INIBIO Kilden at Aas). Consequently, in addition to the site's monumentality, and its location along a main road, the soil itself must be considered an attribute of these burials. The act of devoting arable land to the dead shows a display of status on a very basic level. The removal of arable land from circulation in a country such as Norway, where viable agricultural land is not in plentiful supply, shows amongst other things that those who created the graves had sufficient wealth not to need all their land. It also shows that the dead were considered of sufficient importance to be honoured in such a way. This route of viewing the land as an offering, as part of the grave goods even, has in the past been explored by Terje Gansum (Gansum 2004:233-235), and this way of understanding the vital importance of the earth and thus the importance of the act of dedicating the earth to burials is a potentially fertile avenue into understanding more of the symbolism and rituals behind burials. Though Vestfold is one of the few counties in Norway which has a reasonably good ratio of arable land, the argument of land-as-attribute is further strengthened here in that a town population would have depended on food and resources from outside communities. Nordre Kaupang is placed on one of the few places where crops could have been grown, and giving this up for other uses should be seen as a potent symbolic action.

Sources¹² indicate that the cemetery must be assumed to have been larger at the time of use, but Nicolaysen's excavations represent a sizeable sample, certainly large enough to allow for analysis.

Nordre Kaupang shows considerable uniformity in that it consists in the main of barrows containing cremations. It is worth noting here that we cannot discount that some of the supposedly empty barrows might actually have contained inhumations, as these may have been missed by Nicolaysen's excavation methods – there is a marked tendency for inhumations in barrow graves to be contained in graves cut into the ground (Stylegar 2007:70), which might well have been overlooked as was mentioned above in the discussion of Gulli. However, this can remain no more than a conjecture as the remains of the site today do not allow for further investigation, having been removed through extensive agricultural activity and archaeological examination.

¹² Including earlier maps, surveys and indeed Nicolaysen's own notes.

The shape of things

The barrows at Nordre Kaupang vary in size from 3 meters diameter and up to 25 meters, as well as in shape, with 25 long barrows recorded and the remaining ones round. All the long barrows which can be gender assigned contain female assemblages, though there are also two indeterminate and several unexcavated or empty ones recorded.

The round barrows are less easily classified, containing male, female and indeterminate assemblages, though fewer female than male and indeterminate ones are found.

Overall, the long barrows are much more likely to contain finds: out of 25 recorded at the time of excavation, eight had finds which allowed them to be included in the analysis in this thesis. Conversely, out of 90 recorded round barrows, 22 had finds. In percentages, 32% of the recorded long barrows had finds, against 23% of round ones.

There is also a flat grave recorded, from the Hagejordet section of the site (Stylegar 2007:72)

One of the earliest surveys of the site, drawn up by Christian Olvavius Zeuthen in 1845 shows the presence of a small ship setting, as well as seven barrows with kerb rings (Skre 2007e:370), though no mention of this is made in Nicolaysen's subsequent excavation report. From this we can deduce that these features may have been removed in the time between the sketch was made, and when the excavations took place, and this makes the survival of other, similar features on the site quite uncertain. It is not easy to match this map to newer ones, but an attempt shows that the barrows marked with a kerb ring are all recorded as empty of finds, bar one, containing a well-equipped male assemblage.

The barrows betray a curious pattern regarding wealth and size: in long mounds, the wealthiest graves are found in the largest mounds, whereas in round mounds this is not the case. Out of the seven wealthiest burials on the site, the two in long mounds measure 12 meters (the longest recorded on the site is recorded as 12.60 meters). Of the remaining round mounds, two were not recorded as other than "small", and the remaining three average 11 meters diameter. Compare this to the site's largest recorded barrows, which stand at 25 meters diameter and which are empty and it becomes clear that size was not correspondent with wealth in round mounds. What these empty barrows mean is certainly an open question, and arguments have been made that they were potent symbols in their own right, whose meaning is now inaccessible to us (Skre 2007e:381). However, working

from material evidence means that presence/absence becomes important, and wealth as expressed in burials must take precedence over suppositions about cenotaphs, when the site otherwise contains such varied assemblages.

The question of whether or not there are gendered patterns with regards to size is naturally also interesting. As it turns out, barrows containing male and female assemblages are not differentiated by size, but are both are equally well represented in smaller as well as bigger barrows.

The road and the cemetery

As mentioned, Nordre Kaupang dominates the main overland route into the town (Tollnes 1981:21), the direct result of which is that travellers would need to pass through the cemetery. It needs hardly be added that this is likely to have been of first importance when the site was planned and in use. The outer shape of the graves in the form of barrows means they dominated the landscape and thus also the road, and the reason why barrows were favoured can be conjectured to have been to strengthen the site's imposing and dominating nature.

The conjectured road runs closer to the shoreline than it does to the hills, meaning there are more burials found to the western side than the eastern. This route and its functions has been extensively discussed in many publications on the Kaupang cemeteries (Skre 2007e:380) which often highlight its significance. Dagfinn Skre for example, suggests that the "people who buried their dead in the Nordre Kaupang cemetery seem to have preferred the areas along the road and to have avoided the areas further from it", drawing attention to that none of the burials are further than 75 meters from this road (Skre 2007e:380). Whilst this is true, it is also worth considering that the strip of land on which the cemetery was placed rarely exceeds 80-100 meters in width. An alternative way of seeing this is that the burials are therefore spread out across this strip in all directions, but avoids climbing the hills, which may be significant.

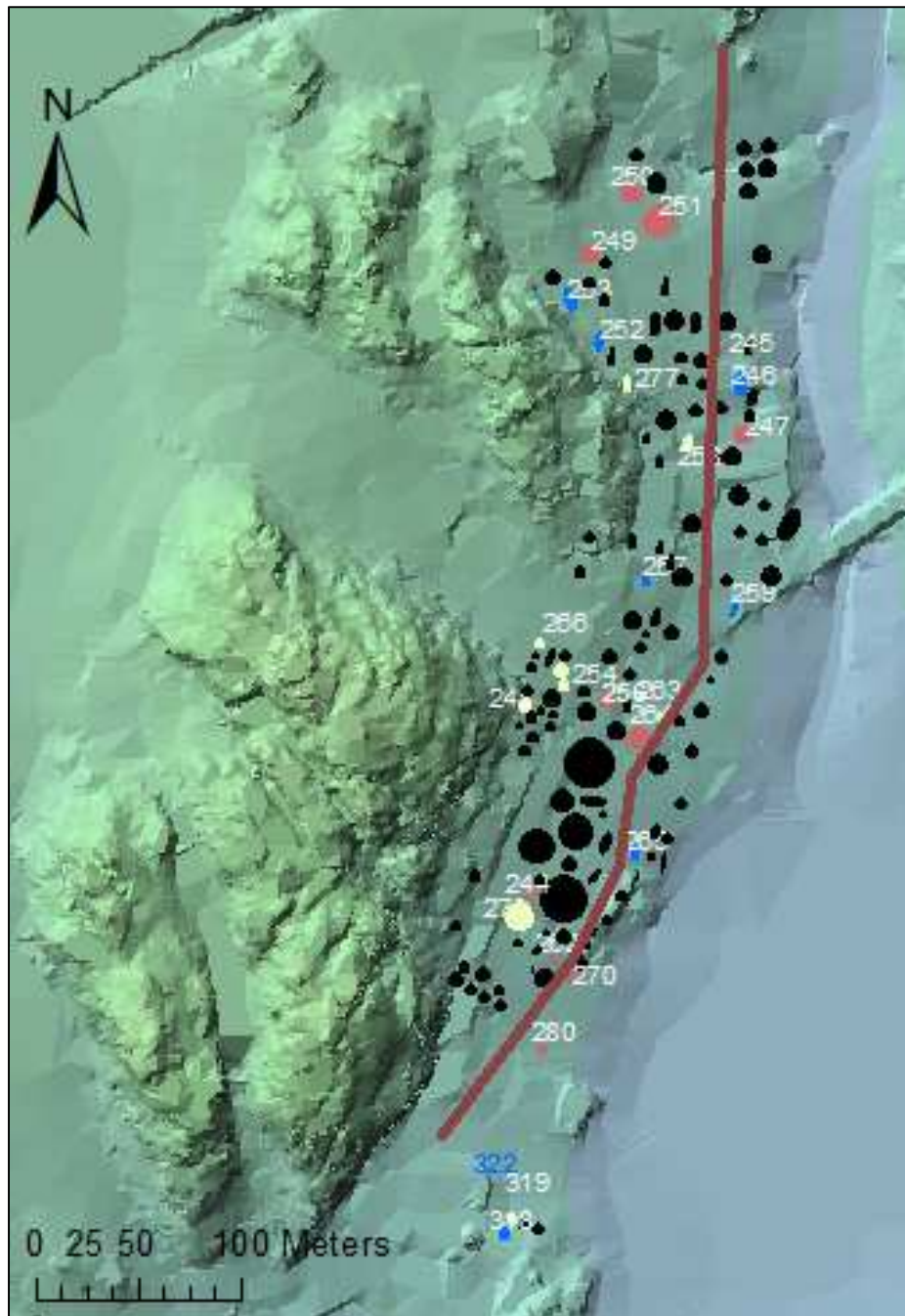


Figure 36: Nordre Kaupang with the road indicated. This is an approximate location, meant for illustrative purposes, and is not to be taken for the definite placement of the road. The map is based on Figure 16.11 in Skre 2007.

That the hills have not been utilised is an interesting aspect of the placement in the landscape, and burials placed on the hillsides would immediately take on a different aspect from the ones on lower ground. It is also in keeping with what we see in the other cemeteries discussed in this chapter. Most of the cemeteries are placed *near* hills, but not actually *on* them. I would argue that this is a deliberate action, that the burials are placed on a similar canvass in terms of topography and landscape. As regards the road, it is

interesting to note that the burials which flank this do not stand out in terms of wealth. It is also noteworthy that there is no discernible pattern in terms of gender, meaning it is likely that gender was not a determining factor in who was buried alongside it.

Temporal development

Nordre Kaupang is one of the sites where a development through time would be hard to track with the level of knowledge that we possess. With only 32 graves dated out of such a large site, it would be inadvisable to draw general conclusions about the spatial development of the site. An exercise of creating chronological maps proved this was futile, though from what emerged the distribution of the dated graves show no pattern where specific areas appear preferred at any one time. Bearing in mind the limited sample of dated graves at this site though, this cannot be used to draw any useful conclusions.

The cemetery and the landscape

The site's position between the hills and the sea means it is manifested as quite a contained presence. The changing shoreline, now about 3.5 meters lower than it would have been when the site was in use (Sørensen, et al. 2007:268), means the site cannot really be meaningfully experienced by a modern observer. A visit to the general area confirms the coastal nature, but analysis must in the main rely on maps and models here, as the whole experience of the space will have changed with the effective removal of one of its borders, as well as the loss of the direct relationship with the water.

The very southernmost area of the site, designated as Hagejordet by Frans-Arne Stylegar, has shown traces of settlement evidence, including a well (Skre 2007e:382; Stylegar 2007:72), showing that this area was possibly used for settlement prior to the cemetery reaching this area.

Around 400 meters north of the northernmost barrow is the Huseby Hall complex, excavated between 1999 and 2001 (Skre 2007a:223), which has shown a hall building along with dates from the 8th to the 10th century (Skre 2007a:242). This hall has been connected with the Skiringssal petty kings, and the recent Kaupang publications has furthered a theory that the cemetery was the burial place of the petty kings of Skiringssal and their supporters from surrounding farms (Skre 2007e:363). Although a well-reasoned theory which certainly cannot be discounted, my analysis has yielded no grounds for separating it from the town in this manner.

Rather, my analysis shows that the assemblages do not differ significantly from other known Kaupang burials, nor does the landscape lend itself to such an isolated interpretation. The argument rests on differences in burial practice between Nordre Kaupang and the other cemeteries, and through this aligns it more closely with other, more rural cemeteries in the wider region (Skre 2007e:382). The idea draws on the *uniformity* of burial practice here, as opposed to Lamøya which is more mixed, and Bikjholberget, which has a wide range of internal expressions. However, I would argue that Bikjholberget is very uniform indeed in many fundamental aspects. Other than choice of body container which shows some variation, the previous chapter demonstrated that Bikjholberget is a site with several distinctive internal customs and traits.

Some further points ought also to be mentioned here, the first of which is the previously mentioned suspicion that Nicolaysen may have missed inhumation graves, which tended to be buried below soil level (Stylegar 2007:70). This also opens the possibility that flat graves may have been overlooked, as further evidenced by the discovery of a flat grave by Blindheim's team (Blindheim, et al. 1981:221). Further, the distance between the cemetery and the hall, at over 400 meters, is considerably larger than the distance between the cemetery and the town, which is less than 150 meters. Thus, the town is visible from the southernmost end of the cemetery. The hall on the other hand, is not visible from the cemetery. On the strength of the landscape and the site's location therefore, I argue it makes more sense to see the site as connected with the town rather than the hall. That being said, the potential of a connection with both of these localities must be considered likely.

The same publication also cites Nordre Kaupang as "the most important cemetery at Kaupang" and the "main burial ground" (Skre 2007e:363), both statements which can be questioned, as Bikjholberget has a comparable number of burials which are in fact wealthier in terms of grave assemblages, and there are other areas with large groups of barrows around the settlement. Heyerdahl-Larsen furthered a suggestion that Søndre Kaupang was once of a comparable size and importance to the town, a theory that cannot be discounted (Heyerdahl-Larsen 1981:61). My proposition therefore, is that we interpret Nordre Kaupang as we do the other cemeteries belonging to the town: as an extensive cemetery containing a large number of wealthy burials from a busy trading and crafts centre, albeit with the likelihood of connections to the surrounding areas which may indeed be stronger than at some of the other cemeteries.

However, that the site was placed where it was, and that it was formed and shaped as it was, for a specific and deliberate reason is not called into question. Rather, it is conjectured that the point of the cemetery was to communicate a status connected with the town. By placing it along the overland route, and by choosing barrows as the external expression, this message of status and influence was further reinforced.

The graves through a gendered lens

The question of internal organisation is significant when discussing gender and status, as was discussed in Chapter Four. A look at the map above where gendered expressions are highlighted serves to illustrate the point that location, size and gender do not appear to be traits that correlate with each other at Nordre Kaupang. The largest barrows on the site are empty, whilst male and female expressions are found in all areas of the site: flanking the road, facing the sea, hugging the foot of the hills and placed right next to each other, all without any discernible general patterns.

What can be made of this depends on the eye that sees. I argue that this randomness reflects a society where gender was not a divider in terms of status and social importance. If burials are commonly assumed to show social significance and status amongst other things, then the lack of differentiation between male and female expressions in a site such as this ought to be acknowledged as significant.

Bikjholberget

As the previous chapter made clear, Bikjholberget contains some of the decidedly more interesting, but also more complex assemblages discussed in this thesis. With several multiple burials and several confused and disturbed contexts, the cemetery presents a wide array of assemblages and expressions.

The peninsula which houses the cemetery is fairly small, at around 50 meters wide and 200 meters long. It is also, unusually in this thesis, not typically arable land, showing that whilst this is a common trait, it is not a prerequisite for a high-status burial ground.

The shape of things

Bikjholberget is a flat grave cemetery, though there is one low barrow present in the southern end of the site. The burials are marked with stone packings in most cases, so we know there was some form of external markings of the graves (Blindheim 1995:92-93). Furthermore, the shallow nature of the graves makes it possible and even likely that some

of the boats mentioned in the previous chapter were partially visible at the time of interment (Stylegar 2007:66), a fascinating prospect, with considerable emotive pull.

In other words, the burials will have been clearly visible in the landscape, both from the town and from the sea, and certainly imposing in their own way.



Figure 37: illustration photo from Bikjholberget as it looks today, picture dated 14.05.2017. The information plaque and map of the site is at towards the centre-top of the picture, whereas the low chain fence surrounds a few excavated graves. Looking N-N/W towards the hills, the settlement would have been to the left in this picture, the fjord behind and Nordre Kaupang cemetery to the top right.

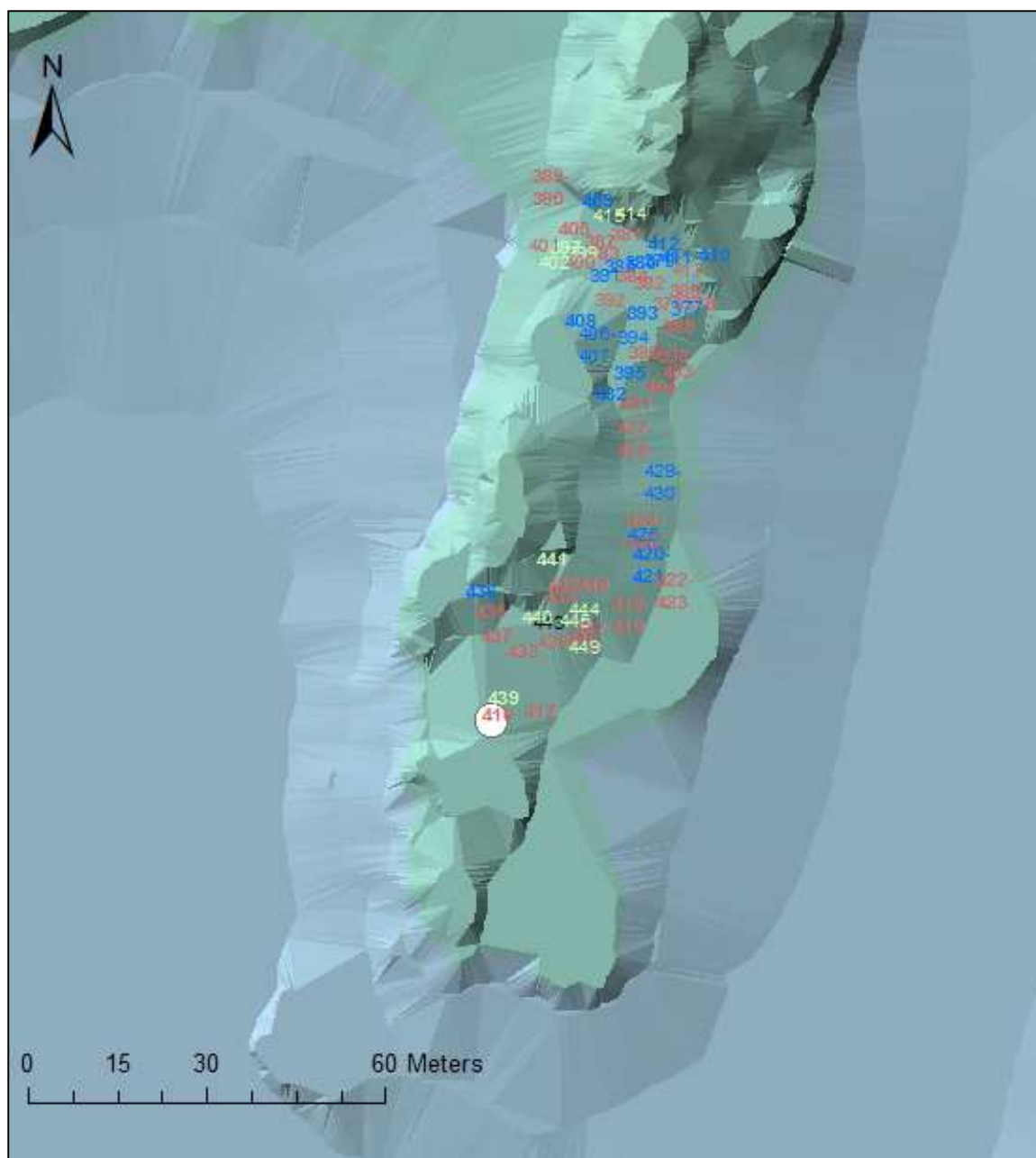


Figure 38: overview of Bikjholberget cemetery, with individual graves marked.

In light of the tendency to equate monumentality with wealth and status in interpretations of Viking Age burial practices, it may be tempting to follow the theory that Nordre Kaupang was somehow more aristocratic than Bikjholberget (Skre 2007e:382). However, as the previous chapter will have made clear, Bikjholberget surpasses Nordre Kaupang both in terms of sheer numbers of individuals, as well as in the wealth and variety apparent in the assemblages with which they are buried. Bikjholberget covers a much smaller physical area, but the finds there are amongst the richest we have from Viking Age Norway. They are also amongst the most complex burials known from the period in

Norway, and the cemetery as a whole therefore presents a fascinating study of wealth, status and ritual complexity. It seems therefore, that size is not everything, and we must consider Bikjholberget from different angles than co-existing barrow cemeteries.

Temporal development of the site

Bikjholberget is something of a rarity in that the majority of graves are dated, thus enabling a spatial analysis of the development through time. Maps were therefore created to show the cemetery's development from the first grave, dated to around 800 AD, and up to the final look at 1000 AD. This revealed that after the first grave, which was placed in the southern part of the cemetery, the site developed with clusters in the south, north and middle respectively. There seems to be no preferred pattern according to date, showing that the different areas of the cemetery developed at a more or less equal rate. The chronological sequence of maps is included in appendix III.

The cemetery in the landscape

At the time when Kaupang was a living, busy port, Bikjholberget was placed on a small peninsula, a continuation of the strip of land on which Nordre Kaupang was placed, but overlooking the town.

It can be argued that Bikjholberget is the cemetery with the closest physical relationship to the town itself. The town can be clearly seen from the cemetery and vice versa, and the curve of the peninsula means it is physically close to the settlement. The cemetery also has a very direct relationship with the fjord, meaning water and town are the two main influencers here. As with Nordre Kaupang, these observations rely on reconstructed maps, as the changes in the shoreline has made the nature of this site significantly different from what it once was.

The selection of flat graves rather than barrows as external markers here may be because the location in itself acted as place marker, thus voiding the need for individual barrows. The cemetery is accordingly seen as demonstrating a close connection with the town, and with sea based travel, which may be caused by the presence of individuals and possibly family groups connected with trade and commercial activities. This tallies with the fact that though they do occur elsewhere, most of the indicators of trade from Kaupang are from Bikjholberget.

A gendered view of the site

Going against the trend of what we have seen in the two sites discussed previously, Bikjholberget does show tendencies of a gendered pattern for location on the site. There is a firm dominance of male burials in the southern end of the cemetery, a more equal mix in the middle part, and proportionately, most of the female assemblages are found in the northern part. All parts of the site appear to have been in use simultaneously, meaning horizontal stratigraphy is not the key factor here.

This means we find more male expressions than female in the sea-facing end of the site, though it is also worth noting that this end contains fewer burials in total than the northern end. The northern end has more equal numbers of male and female expressions, but most of the female assemblages are found here. Of course, with a higher overall number of male assemblages, this is not a very firmly expressed trend. However, by adding the aspect of the southern end being sea-facing, and the northern one being more closely connected with the trade and craft of the town, there may be some thought-provoking connotations here. One could from this construct an argument of closer connections with travel for some of the men, and closer connections with trade or other activities of the town for the women buried closer to it. It would have been interesting if the grave goods had shown any grounds for carrying such a conjecture further, but unfortunately they do not. Tools of trade are found slightly more often in the northern part, but also occur in the middle, and the southern part of the cemetery. Boats are found in all sections of the site. All in all, it does not seem very secure to try and draw conclusions on such a scant base, and this is left only as a point of interest at this stage.

With Bikjholberget therefore, the conclusions that can be drawn tend to speak for the site as a whole. Its positioning on a peninsula speaks of a relationship with the sea, which the high number of boat burials backs up, but the fact that it overlooks the settlement also speaks for a close connection with the town.

Lamøya and Søndre Kaupang

In keeping with the previous chapter, these last two cemeteries are treated in less detail than the previous two, due to the relative shortage of documentation and excavated material.

Søndre Kaupang – a landscape in broad brushstrokes

The main challenge with the Søndre Kaupang material is that no detailed plan exists of the site, and that due to the conflicting nature of Nicolaysen’s excavation notes, reconstruction is not really a viable option. That being said, Blindheim’s project deduced the approximate location of the burials, and so we do at least have information about the general area of the cemetery (Heyerdahl-Larsen 1981:59). In addition to this, Nicolaysen recorded the barrows’ positioning in relation to each other. However, this is only applicable to Nicolaysen’s material, and the remaining finds which have since been attributed to the site cannot be located any more specifically than that they belong to the same general area. The specific location of barrows can therefore not be included in the analysis of this site, and the map below is based on what is available through Askeladden, meant for illustrative purposes only.

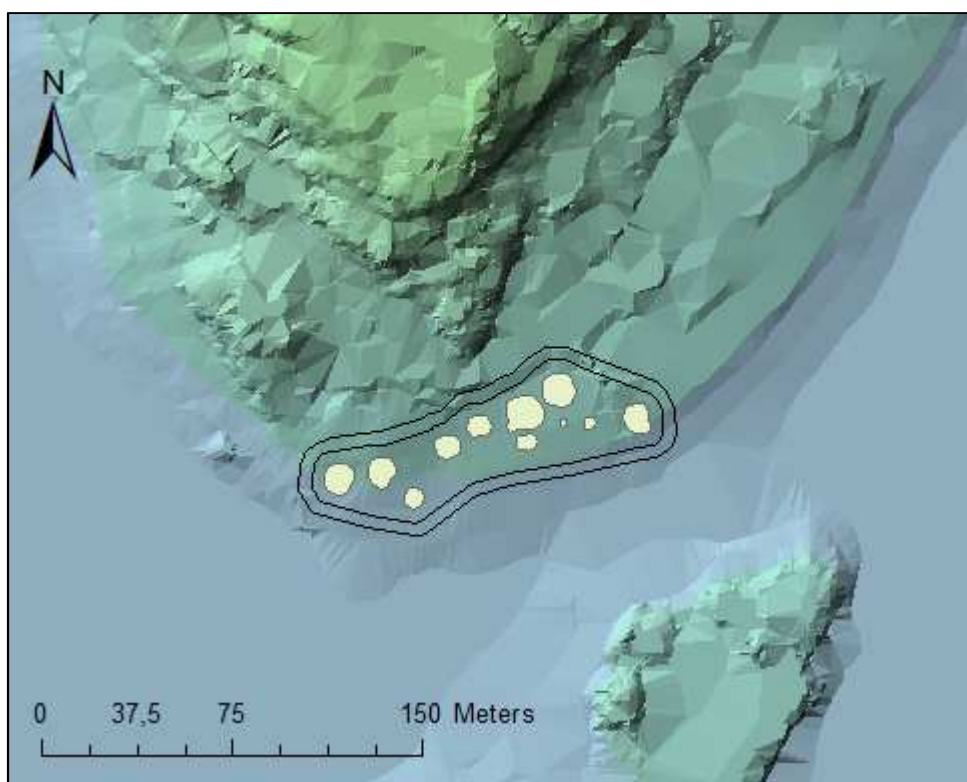


Figure 39: an overview of the location and rough outline of what was excavated at Søndre Kaupang. The town stretches up to the right. The approximate location of the graves is taken from Askeladden.no

The cemetery is found, as the name might suggest, directly to the south of the town, and therefore in direct communication with it. Further, the location is reminiscent of both that of the town and of Nordre Kaupang cemetery: between the hills and the sea, on a narrow strip of land. Indeed, Blindheim and Heyerdahl-Larsen speculated that Søndre Kaupang could in many ways be regarded as similar to Nordre Kaupang: the same topographical

location between the hills and an inlet of the sea, as well as the presence of burials on an island (at Vikingholmen) in a corresponding way from what Lamøya is to Nordre Kaupang (Heyerdahl-Larsen 1981:61). Their suggestion was that Søndre Kaupang had in its time been a large cemetery, a parallel to Nordre Kaupang. This is certainly an interesting proposition, but one which at this stage remains unsubstantiated.

Lamøya – a landscape of hills, barrows and beaches

Native Scandinavian speakers will realise from the name that Lamøya was an island at some point, and the higher shoreline of the Viking Age means it certainly was an island at the time when it was used as a cemetery (Heyerdahl-Larsen 1981:61). The island is characterised by a range of sharply inclined hills, with plains and wooded areas in between.

At the last count, Lamøya had 94 barrows, three stone settings, and a concentration of flat graves (Stylegar 2007:74), though the estimated number of original barrows has been suggested at around 200 (Stylegar 2007:77). The excavated burials at Lamøya show a tendency towards female expressions, with 50% female to 33% male expressions and the remaining indeterminate, though the sample size is too small to make much of. It would seem sensible to view Lamøya as a location for a range of smaller cemeteries rather than one large coherent one, but there are challenges with arguing anything much for Lamøya as a location: Lamøya, as the only cemetery connected with Kaupang has never seen a large-scale, coherent excavation campaign.

Lamøya is now the best preserved part of Viking Age Kaupang for those seeking to visit it, as it remains largely unexcavated. A walk through the woods here will reveal a wealth of barrows still to be seen in amongst the vegetation, giving a powerful impression of what it may have looked like when the cemetery was in use.

A point to note is that the burials here are not placed on hills either, but rather on the flat land in between the hills. This conforms to an emerging pattern for the sites discussed in this thesis, where lower lying land is the preferred topography.

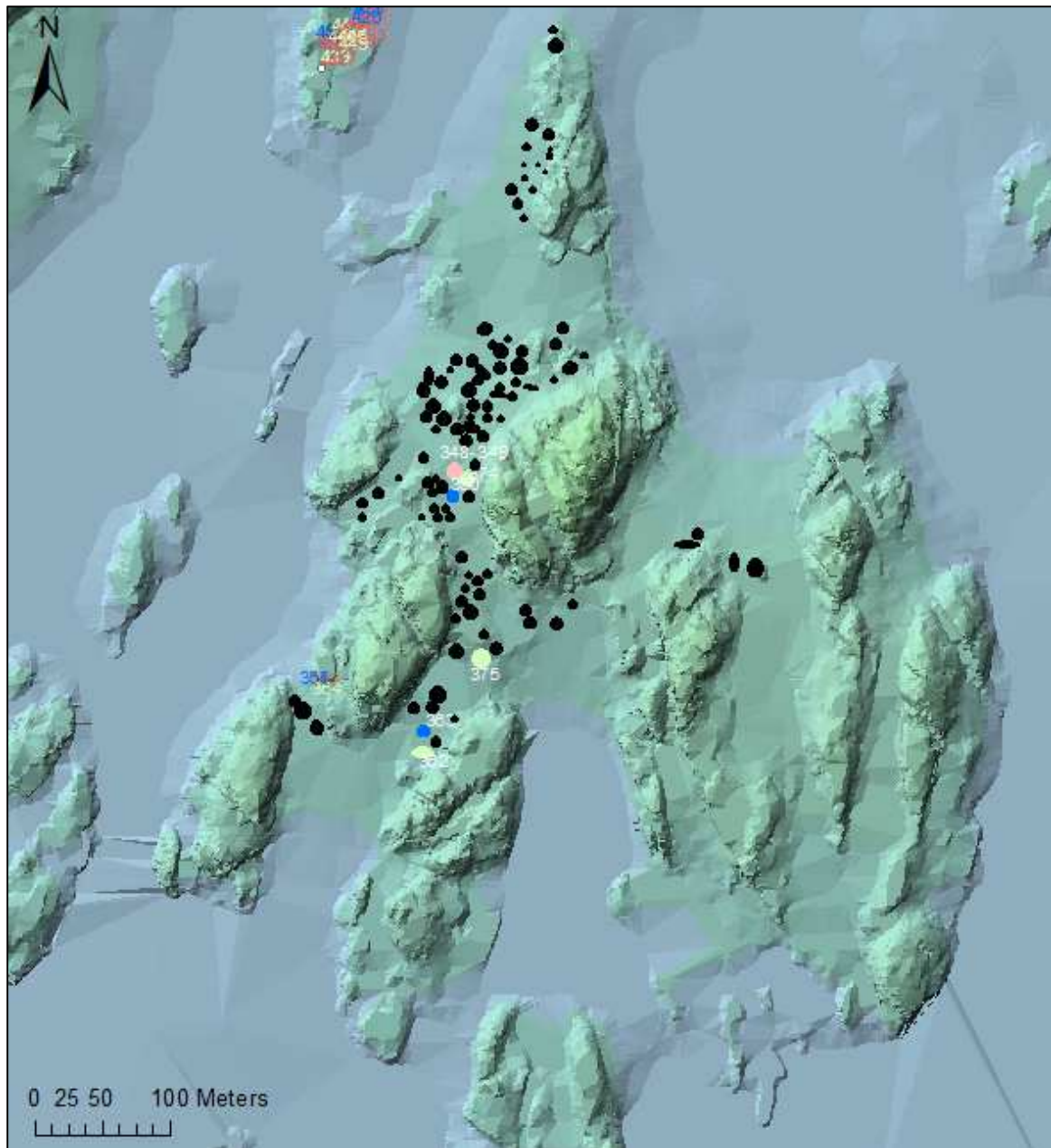


Figure 40: map of Lamøya. Based on figure 5.10 in the 2007 Kaupang publication (Stylegar 2007:77). Bikjholberget cemetery can be seen at the top of the map.

The separation of the cemetery from the town by a physical barrier, a body of water, may be argued to be significant, as I have in fact done in a previous publication (Moen 2011:35). In effect, the burial rituals which took place here would have necessitated travel over water, perhaps as part of the ritual procession. But it can also be argued to be a *connecting* body of water, a potentially significant part of the death rituals. In either case, the island is clearly visible from the town, and would also be visible for travellers to and from the town. Exactly what Lamøya represents however, must remain an open question until more of the evidence from there has been recorded.

The Hedrum area

The Hedrum area does not present a simple, coherent and delimited area. Rather, this collective description is used because the sites all belong to the river valley, and because they share a great deal of common traits in terms of the landscape in which they lie, and presumably in terms of the populations which were buried there.

The four cemeteries discussed here are distributed over an area stretching 8.5 kilometers, so they are all fairly close to each other. They all also share a fundamental trait in their proximity to the river Numedalslågen, which must be considered of first importance when describing the landscape both in terms of the visual impression, impacts on climate, potential flood risks, and indeed the communication landscape. That the river has impacted the landscape on the most basic level can be observed through the soil conditions: according to the NIBIO resource from the University of Aas which maps out information about amongst other things soil types in Norway, the plains on which all the cemeteries are found are found is made up of fluvic cambisol, meaning it is young, due to being constantly renewed by the river sediment (Aas). Thus, the river impacts the landscape in the most fundamental way through being an active agent in it.

A river of this size would also have provided a food source, and of course water in quantities that would be useful for agriculture. In addition to these fundamental influences, the river will also have fulfilled important functions as a transport artery, by allowing boats to travel upstream and downstream, though infrequent rapids would have necessitated occasional breaks in any water-based travel. That the river should be considered a major transport route has been highlighted by other archaeologists (for a discussion of this, see Aannestad 2011a), and it is here considered a fundamental feature of the communication landscape. The river will also have enacted more esoteric roles in connections with soundscapes, with sectioning and dividing the landscape, and potentially with beliefs and superstitions.

The four cemeteries will be discussed in separate sections below, in order to take into account the full scope of the landscape in relation to each site.

Nes

The land at Nes is today split into several farms. The cemetery is found on a gently sloping plain bordered by Numedalslågen which curves round in a large bend, giving the site its name:

Nes, or Nese as it was listed as in 1393 (Tonning 2003:41), is descriptive of the site's shape and nature. It is also worth noting that Nes-names are often very old, indicating farms that often were amongst the earliest to be cleared (Jacobsen and Follum 1997:72 in Tonning 2003:41). However, we have no secure information regarding the placement of a Viking Age farm at this site, and so although it is considered more than likely that this was the site of an affluent farm community, we have no secure information allowing conjectures about placement in the landscape.

The plain on which the cemetery was placed slopes gently west towards the river. To the east, north-east and south are several low hills. None of these hills form a continuous line, meaning they do not create a barrier as such, and as a result the location retains an accessible aspect. Fertile land and good transport connections contribute to this. The image below is taken from the site where the cemetery once stood, to illustrate the general impression of the site's surroundings. As mentioned above, the use of such good arable land as a burial ground is considered symbolically important, and the land itself should be considered an attribute of the burials.



Figure 41: illustration photo taken standing near Tussehaugen, looking north. Taken 23.10.2017

The wider area is, as previously mentioned, very rich in archaeological finds, with a large degree of Iron Age activity evident. Amongst features of note are an Iron Age hillfort in between the cemeteries of Nes and Farmen, and other known barrows in the area.

The shape of things

Nes is a barrow cemetery, with five long barrows and the remaining ones round. A map-based analysis of the cemetery layout demonstrates no identifiable pattern to where round and long barrows respectively are placed in the landscape. Further, inhumations and cremations are found side by side. The only significant pattern is the before-mentioned affinity of female gendered assemblages and long mounds, which remains in place here.

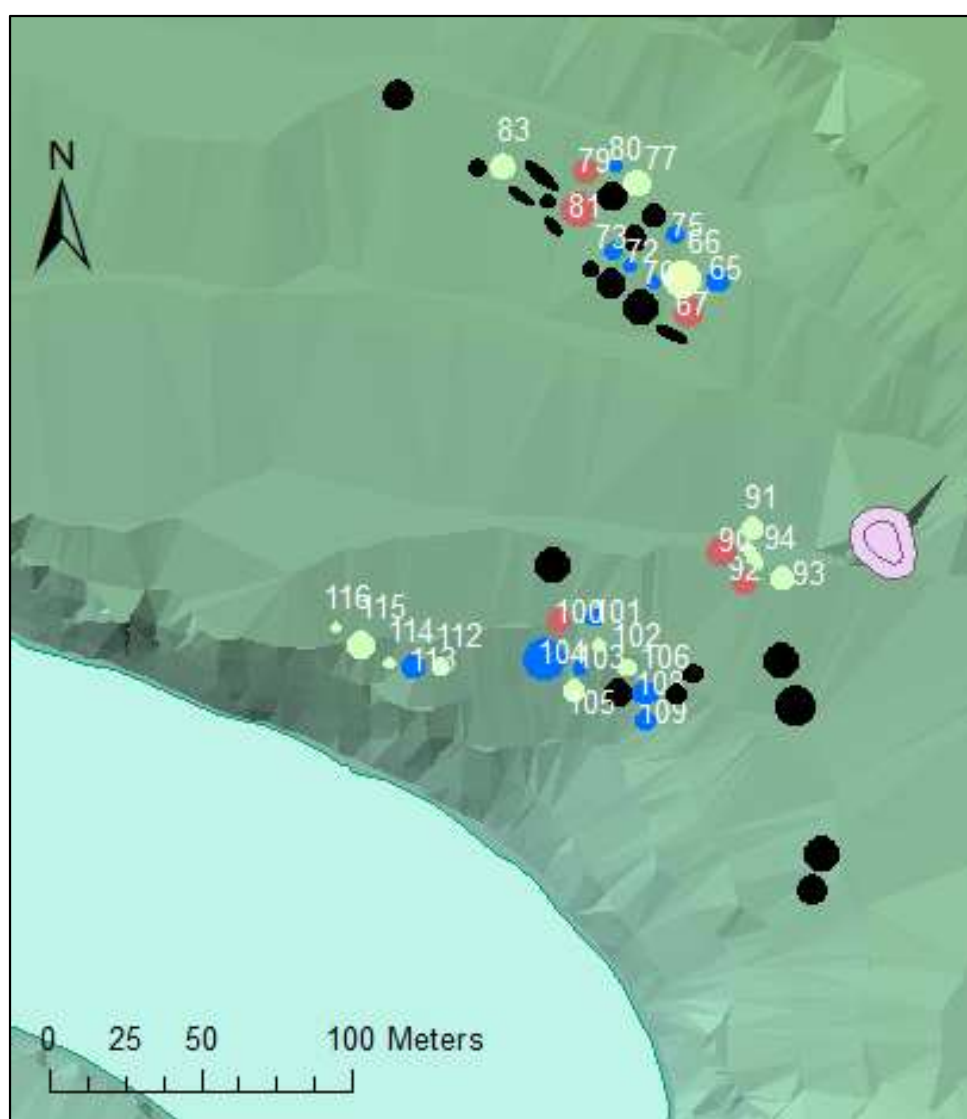


Figure 42: overview of Nes. Burials containing female expressions are coloured blue, male expressions red and indeterminate yellow. Undated or Early Iron Age graves are left black. The large mound marked in pink is the remaining unexcavated Tussehaugen, location downloaded from Askeladden.

In terms of barrow size, the cemetery is in the middle range, with the largest barrow listed with a diameter of nearly 15 metres (Nicolaysen 1886:34), and the tallest at 2.3 metres in height (Nicolaysen 1886:23). The smallest was measured at four metres diameter, and 0.5 metres high (Nicolaysen 1886:40). The average size is 8.5 metres and most burials fall within this medium size category. Height-wise, most barrows measure between one and two metres. There is no apparent correlation between size and wealth, with the smaller burials containing assemblages comparable with the larger ones.

However, there seems to be a correlation between larger mounds and male assemblages on this site, with barrows containing male assemblages on average two meters wider than ones containing female expressions. That being so however, the largest barrow dating from the Viking Age contains a female assemblage.

Furthermore, the site has a distinctive layout, with several smaller clusters of barrows clearly separated from each other making up the larger whole. This inevitably raises the question of whether or not this corresponds with any trends in terms of assemblages, which might allow us to discern a pattern of who was buried where. Unfortunately, it does not. None of the clusters are gender-exclusive, and none stand out in terms of wealth or particular distinguishing traits. As previously noted, the dating has not been reexamined in this thesis, and the dates that are noted from the excavations show few clear trends. The two earliest burials known from the site are found in the two largest clusters respectively, one Early Iron Age in the northernmost cluster and one 600-700 AD in the cluster found more or less in the middle. Outside of this, the clusters show a range of dates within the Late Iron Age (Nicolaysen 1886). The exercise of creating chronological maps was incompatible with the data from this site, as the number of securely dated graves is insufficient to show a meaningful pattern. One interesting note is that all the graves which are given specific dates are male or indeterminate, though it is hard to see that this indicates anything other than insecure diagnostics.

However, two of the clusters do show uniformity in burial customs: the westernmost cluster contains exclusively cremations, whilst the middle cluster (with burials 90-94) are all graves cut beneath barrows containing inhumations. Apart from these two clusters, none of the others show uniformity in internal designs, which makes it hard to argue for this as a governing principle in the design and layout of the site as a whole.

A possible explanation for the clusters may be found in family affiliation – maybe being connected with a certain family allowed burial in a certain cluster. However, this can remain no more than a conjecture, as we lack the skeletal remains which could allow for further testing.

The burials in the landscape

The landscape at Nes has a couple of features which need to be taken into account when analysing the site, and the barrow known as Tussehaugen or Tinghaugen is one such feature. It was left unexcavated by Nicolaysen, and is now the only visible feature connected with the cemetery. Covered in birch trees, it makes a focal point in the field as it stands today, though at the time the cemetery was in use, it will have been one of many barrows. Locally known as a *Pinghaug* (Tonning 2003:42) one can of course speculate around this as a focal point, an important gathering place with legal functions, though nothing definite is known other than the local tradition. This has been sufficient to allow for conjectures about Nes as the site of a local legal assembly however (Østmo 2005:99), a supposition which is tentatively furthered here. The barrows closest to Tinghaugen are in the middle cluster, meaning they are all graves underneath barrows. Of these, two are male and two indeterminate. Again, they do not stand out in terms of wealth, bordering between low to average.

The river was mentioned in more general terms above, and as can be seen from the map in Illustration 8.17, can be seen to have played an important role at Nes. The cemetery slopes towards the river, which would be visible from several viewpoints on the cemetery. Though it flows gently past this particular location, a large body of water will also inevitably contribute with sounds and general atmospheric influences. The barrows closest to the river belong to the westernmost cluster, which are all cremations. Of these, one is female and the remaining indeterminate. They are not particularly wealthy, falling within the low to average wealth-span of the site.

The three wealthiest burials, of which two are male and one is female are also found at different parts of the site.

In summary, the internal organisation of the site shows a tendency to apparent randomness which is here taken as evidence that it was the selection of being buried *on* the site, and not *where on the site* which mattered. A final reminder seems in order, that

Nes showed a definite dominance of female over male graves, as is obvious in the map above.

Farmen Søndre

As mentioned in the preceding chapter, the burials at Farmen Nordre, which were excavated at the same time as Farmen Søndre will not feature in this analysis, on grounds of poor documentation. Thus, references to Farmen in this text can be read as Farmen Søndre.

The burials at Farmen were found on a sizeable stretch of land bordered by Numedalslågen to the west. There is a small lake to the northeast, and a series of hills to the east, rising up to around 200 metres in height. The plain on which the burials are found consists of good arable land, and the size makes it a very viable field. The general impression of the site is of it as being less accessible and more closed off from its surroundings, than what can be seen at Nes. The hills are closer, the field is not so large, and the river is not so immediately close by.

However, the river provides an obvious transport route, and overland travel is also accessible, making the landscape both accessible and well suited to settlements reliant on agricultural activities.

Before delving into the site in more detail, it is worth highlighting the place name Farmen: in 1363 it was listed as *Farmeimum* (DN XI 50, 1361 from Tønning 2003:29), and according to Oluf Rygh's *Norske Gaardnavne* the modern name of Farmen comes from *Farmeimar*, which can be connected to transport or distribution of goods – a possible link with trade (Rygh 2015:2082). The name is often taken to mean a place of embarkation, and is thus a strong indication of the Hedrum areas' role as connection between the wider world and the inland areas beyond.



Figure 43: illustration photo of Farmen looking NE. Taken 23.10.2017

The shape of things

As has been noted previously, Farmen Søndre is a barrow cemetery. The majority are round barrows, though there are three long barrows as well, two of which contain female assemblages and the last one indeterminate. As with the former sites, the internal organisation does not betray a specific pattern. The two long barrows with female assemblages are found quite far apart. The two barrows containing multiple burials are placed next to each other, in the middle part of the site, perhaps showing some sort of affinity or similar content of meaning. The two largest barrows on the site are centrally placed, and they are dated to the early Iron Age. An argument can be construed around these being two central early graves, around which later generations are clustered, though neither grave contains gendered assemblages.

Cremations and inhumations are found across the site. In short, there is no pattern based on gender, body treatment, internal markers or wealth that can be observed here, other than the proximity of the multiple burials.

Further, there appears to be no direct correlation between wealth and size, as can be identified as a recognisable pattern as regards Viking Age barrows in Vestfold. In fact, the barrows which contained finds at Farmen Søndre were all of a comparable size, with

round barrows ranging from 7.8 to 12 meters in diameter, and the two long barrows measuring 13.4 and 11 metres respectively. The site's largest barrow by far measures 25 meters in diameter, and is a relatively find-poor Early Iron Age grave. Because Farmen's female Viking Age assemblages are found in long mounds, there can be no direct comparison on assigned gender and size for the round mounds. This may in itself be said to constitute an analytical point however, as female assemblages are differentiated in terms of outer shape.

The exercise of creating chronological maps was tested at this site as at the others, but the dated material proved too scarce to give any meaningful results.



Figure 44: map of Farmen Søndre. The body of water in the top of the map is a small lake, the river is visible to the south. Female expressions are coloured blue, male red and indeterminate are yellow. All others are left black, both undated and Early Iron Age.

A road from the river to the dead

A feature of interest in the landscape of this cemetery is the existence of an old road (Tonning 2003:63). Running from the cemetery to the river, it is likely this road was contemporary with the use of the site. Unfortunately, Nicolaysen made no comment or recording of it, and not enough of the site remains today to allow any conjectures about the exact relationship between the burials and the road. Nevertheless, it cements the cemetery's status as a feature of significance in the landscape, and it also points towards links between river and land transport.

The burials in the landscape

Farmen Søndre is well grounded in the Hedrum context of being placed on arable land, adjacent to the river. In the wider landscape, there are several other features that are worth noting, such as Iron Age hillforts and nearby cemeteries, though none that bear a direct influence on the site itself. The main features therefore, remain the river, the road and the overall landscape of hills and plains.

The internal organisation shows that there are no differences in where female and male assemblages are placed, and the placement of individual burials appears random rather than following a fixed pattern, again lending strength to the argument that supposed stereotypes of male and female social roles are not reflected in the mortuary landscape.

Bjerke

Bjerke displays many of the "typical" Hedrum traits, placed as it is on a plain sloping towards the river, with an open and accessible impression. However, it does differ from the other three sites in one significant regard: it is found on the western bank of the river.

The name Bjerke is likely to be very old, and to have originated from a *birk* name, meaning a place covered in birch trees. Potentially significantly, *birk* names are commonly assumed to have a connotation connected with trade (Tonning 2003:66). Despite the name none of the burials dated to the Viking Age contain indications of trade, though one dated to the Early Iron Age does. Another potential avenue of interest as regards the name is that it could be perceived as linked to a particular tree, in which case it can be conjectured to have been a holy tree (Østmo 2005:101). This can in turn be connected to the triangular barrow found on the site, which may be linked with Anders

Andrén's argument that triangular barrows indicate a connection with the world tree and thus with cultic significance (as discussed in Østmo 2005:101). As none of the assemblages give any strong indications of cultic or ritual connections however, this is hard to carry further than leaving it as a suggestion.

The cemetery has the closest physical links with the river out of the sites discussed here. It is placed in direct communication with it, so much so that one must suspect several barrows may have disappeared through river erosion. The landscape is open, with low lying hills to the west, and it feels accessible. Three barrows still remain in the nearby area to this cemetery, though these are too far away from the cemetery excavated by Nicolaysen to be assumed part of this. They have not been excavated, and can therefore contribute no more than a general comment on the wealth of finds from the area.



Figure 45: illustration photo from Bjerke looking North. 23.10.2017

Outer shapes and sizes

A barrow cemetery, Bjerke contains both round and long barrows as well as a distinctive triangular shape, though round barrows dominate the picture. Only two out of 31 total barrows are long barrows, and 28 are round. Neither the two long barrows, nor the triangular one contains assemblages that can be assigned to either male or female

expressions, meaning that the burials which are treated here are all found in round barrows.

Size varies between the very small at less than a meter diameter up to very large at 26 meter diameter, but the furnished Viking Age burials tend towards the small side.

A test of chronological maps makes it clear that once again, the data does not allow for a meaningful analysis of this.

The burials in the landscape

Bjerke contains quite a high proportion of burials that can be dated to the Early Iron Age, meaning we are dealing with a site with a relatively long lifespan. The burials which fall within the Late Iron Age and Viking Age however, are found placed throughout the site making it clear that we cannot expect a horizontal stratigraphy to be identified here. Indeed, the site conforms to what we have seen in the majority of the other sites, where there is no apparent pattern discernible in terms of where burials are placed.

The gendered assemblages at Bjerke are very interesting however, in that there are no male expressions found at all, neither from the Late Iron Age nor from the Early Iron Age. Thus, no analysis can be made in terms of gender and size or gender and position, because there are only female and indeterminate expressions present. However, the point can be made that there seems to be no differentiation between female or indeterminate burials, these are found intermingled. A possible avenue for enquiry which was examined is whether or not the burials flanking the river may be distinguished in some way, but these do not appear wealthier than their counterparts, nor are they noticeably different.

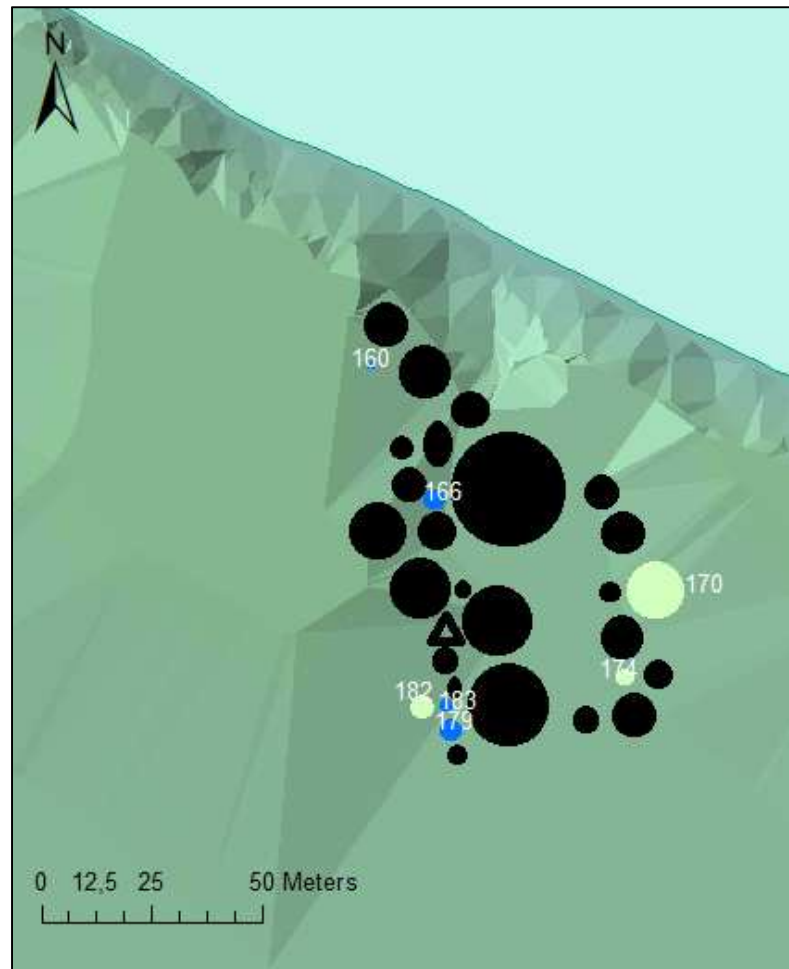


Figure 46: the Bjerke cemetery. Graves with female expressions are coloured blue and indeterminate are yellow. All older burials and undated are left black. The river runs in the N-E corner of the map.

The burials conform to the general Hedrum pattern of relatively well equipped, but not very wealthy burials. The most distinctive burial is the triangular barrow which contained no finds at all, but which certainly stands out from the norm of outer barrow shapes.

Melau

The name Melau, or Međalhaugr, meaning “hill in between” goes some way towards explaining the local topography: the farm is placed on a low hill, in between Numedalslågen and the small lake Åsrumvannet. There was originally another small lake, Melauvannet, which could also be the “in between” the name refers to, as the farm was also in between this lake and the river. This lake is now gone, due to an ill-advised attempt at industrial improvement in the 18th century (Tonning 2003:52), which led to the lake draining into the river.

Though the site is placed in proximity to the river, it is fair to conclude that it was less of a feature at this cemetery than at the others – there is no direct line of sight between the two for example, and the elevation on which the cemetery is placed differs from the gently sloping ground of the others which communicates directly with the river. In fact, when walking the landscape, it is easy to form the distinct impression of this site as distinctly different from the other three sites, which all give a similar experience of belonging to the same river valley. Melau however, is on higher ground than any of the other cemeteries, it is less connected with the river. Though it is still on arable land, it is not found on the, by now, customary sloping field, but rather a plateau in more varied terrain.



Figure 47: illustration photo taken from the Melau area. 23.10.2017

These differences notwithstanding, the overall landscape still has many common traits with the other cemeteries: arable land and good communication links to the outside world makes it reasonable to expect an affluent local population.

The shape of things

In keeping with the other sites discussed from the Hedrum area, Melau is a barrow cemetery. Out of a total of 38 barrows, five are long and the rest are round. If we look purely at the barrows that contain assemblages dateable to the Late Iron Age or Viking

Age however, only one is long and 11 are round. The long barrow contains a female gendered assemblage.

Traces of a road

Melau is the second of the Hedrum sites to have the remains of a road running through it. Again, it has not been properly examined or excavated, but rather was only mentioned in passing by Nicolaysen as a pathway. It was also marked on the map drawn of the site by Larsen and Scheen in 1975 in connection with a survey done of the area then. This map was later complemented by Gustafson during her excavations on the site, and the two maps were consolidated by Tønning in 2003 (Tønning 2003:55), and formed the basis for the figure below.

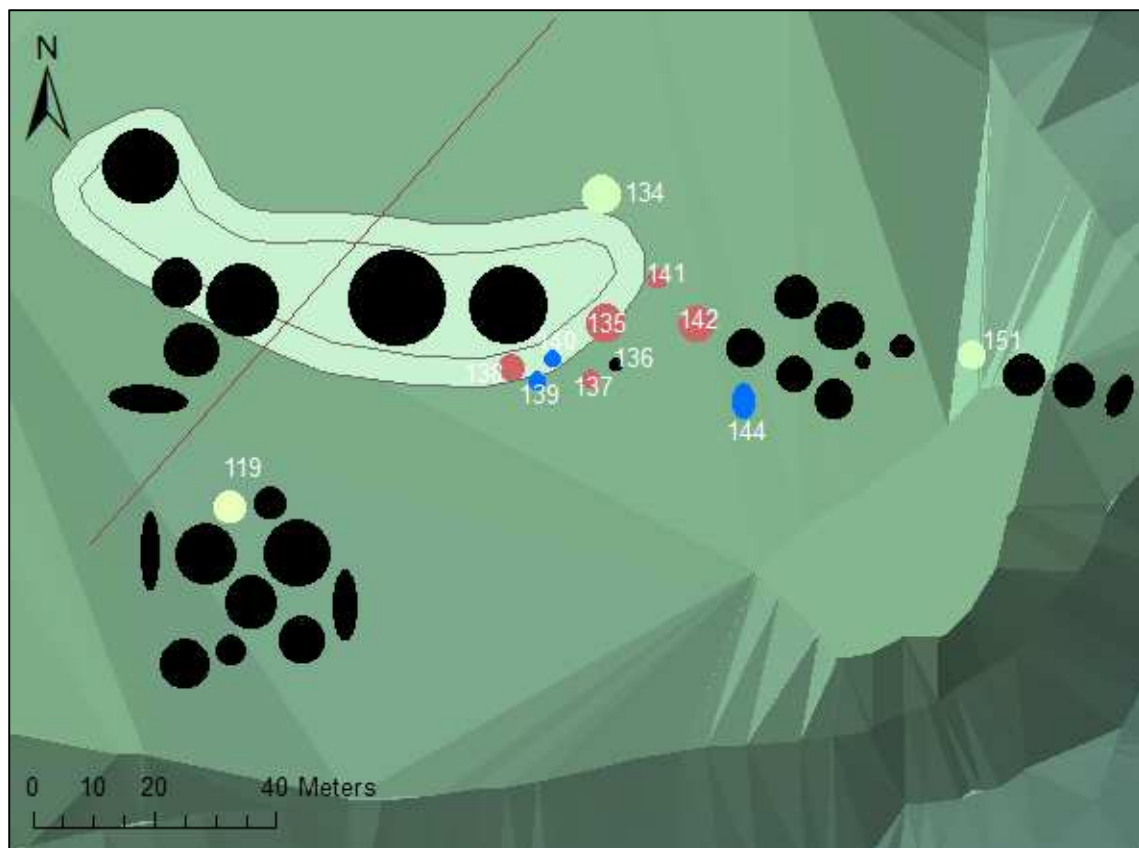


Figure 48: the cemetery of Melau with the road indicated on (after Tønning 2003:55)

Though the road has not been excavated, certain conjectures can be made: it runs through the cemetery without cutting any of the burials, and the burials all respect the road, giving a good indication that it may have been in use simultaneously as the cemetery. Further, this pathway was known to be a thoroughfare in local tradition (Tønning 2003:63).

The road runs directly through a cluster of large burials, none of which were dated to the Viking Age, and most of which were empty of finds. However, the largest burials are found flanking the road, making a case for the burials exerting symbolic dominance over travellers through the site.

The burials in the landscape

Melau further differs from the other Hedrum cemeteries examined here in that the burials which contained dateable finds are all found in a relatively small area, concentrated in one part of the cemetery, with the exception of one outlier. As was highlighted in the preceding chapter, the burials with sufficient finds for dating fall predominantly in the Viking Age period, meaning we can see a clear “Viking Age” part of the cemetery, which is rare indeed in the context of this thesis. This speaks to a potential for a horizontal stratigraphy on the site, where burials were placed together according to when they were created, rather than other considerations such as visibility and status, providing a nice comparison with Gulli’s internal organisation. The potential for a chronological sequence of maps was tested here as at the other sites, but it did not reveal anything other than the already noted cluster of Viking Age burials.

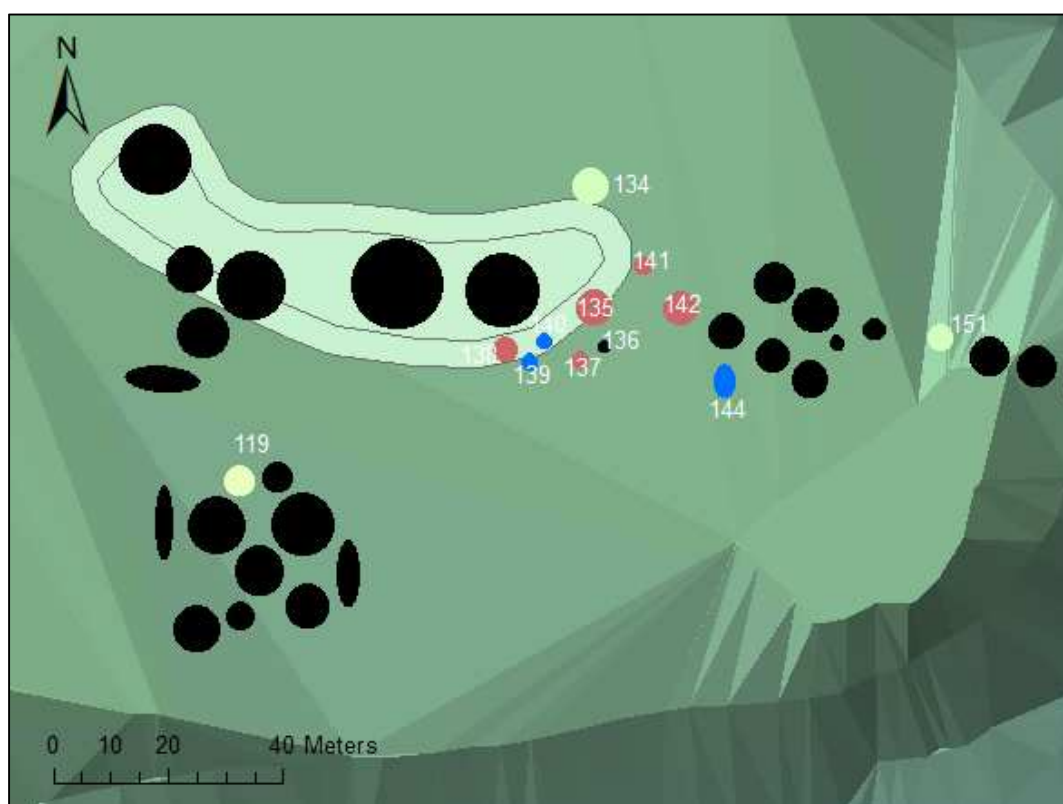


Figure 49: map of Melau. Blue burrows contain female expressions, red male and yellow are indeterminate. Earlier and undated burrows are left black.

Looking further into this, the furnished burials are also among the smaller on the site, with none measuring over 6.4 meters in diameter. With the largest burials on the site measuring 13 meters diameter, it underlines the important point for Viking Age burial mounds in Vestfold, namely that size and wealth rarely correlate.

The landscape summarised

There are a number of interesting points to take away from this chapter:

- Most of the cemeteries discussed here are placed on arable land, which one could assume would otherwise have been used for the growing of crops. The land itself ought therefore to be considered an asset and attribute of the burials. The use of valuable farming land for burials can also be seen as power play at a fundamental level: by placing burials on this land rather than tilling it, the creators of these graves were in effect stating they had sufficient resources not to cultivate their land. Rather than exploiting the land as a valuable resource for food and wealth, they chose to place their honoured dead upon it. Thus, we must consider the land itself on which burials are constructed when we discuss the symbolic meaning of burial monuments.
- Most of the cemeteries, with Bikjholberget as the notable exception, show no tendencies towards a gendered pattern in where burials are placed, their size, outlook, exposition and general visibility
- Considerations of communication seems to have been important, with several of the sites containing traces of roads (Nordre Kaupang, Gulli, Farmen and Melau), and others placed near ports or rivers (Bikjholberget, Nes, Bjerke)
- Monumentality is manifested at most of the sites (Bikjholberget and part of Lamøya excepted), though not to the full extent that would have been possible, had nearby hills been utilised. The barrows are in general found on low-lying land
- The external traits of the cemeteries all serve to support a theory of a culture where gender was not an absolute divider and status determinant or deterrent. Where male and female expressions are found intermingled on the sites with (in many cases) no distinguishing traits to tell them apart from the outside, the possibility that these expressed *the same message* of status and symbolic meaning must be allowed.

- The exception to the above is that long barrows are never found to contain male assemblages, thus marking out some of the female (and indeterminate) expressions as worthy of differentiation in the landscape. As many round barrows contain female expressions however, this is not a universal rule for female expressions

This final point, of the lack of gendered differences in the burials over all, is the most pertinent here, the ramifications of which will be discussed in the subsequent discussion chapter.

In summary then, there are many common traits to be found when we compare these cemeteries, speaking in support of an overarching shared ideology. There are internal variations, to be sure, but the cemeteries all share fundamental traits, assemblages and expressions.

This chapter has concluded the material section of the thesis, and the thesis will now move on to its final section of discussion and conclusion in light of the material and the foregoing theoretical chapters.

Chapter Ten: Widening the context - comparing the material analysis with written sources

This chapter will elaborate on the results of the material analysis in light of the context introduced in Chapters Four and Five. Thus, the aim is to try and bring together gender as it appears in research history, and as it can be interpreted from the archaeological record and the written sources. The chapter will begin with a discussion of written sources and the use thereof, before moving on to a summary of the material. This summary of the material will expand discussions of certain features where relevant, such as the potential symbolism of long mounds, and the potential significance of roads near cemeteries.

The foregoing three chapters have detailed the analysis of selected cemeteries in Vestfold. These sites, containing as they do over 200 burials in total, are chosen with the ambition of finding a representative sample to build interpretations on. The limitations of the material are recognised at the outset: firstly that Vestfold is a county which is particularly rich in burial finds, and that the area selected is limited geographically. Secondly, that the finds used for this analysis are all distinctly elite in the sense that they must be considered to be the memorials of people who were above average in wealth and/or social standing. The first concern is justified by the argument of proximity in time and space, which ensures the results are as closely comparable as possible. The second is considered justified by the explicit statement that the results presented here cannot be taken as universal social laws pertaining to all sections of society, but are rather specific, relating to a small segment of the population. It also necessitates a recognition that the mortuary monuments are reflections of constructed identities, wherein expressions of status and wealth may have been heightened, but it is argued that they are nonetheless based on a reality.

Having stipulated the above, this chapter will draw together the tentative conclusions from the material sections, set into context with comparative evidence. In order to provide further context for the results from my analysis, the chapter will first turn to look at written sources and the legacy thereof, before recounting the tentative conclusions and potential interpretations of the material analysis. The reader is also asked to bear in mind

the context provided by chapters Four and Five, as regards typical representations of Viking Age social order.

Written sources: the historical legacy

This thesis has been written from an explicitly archaeological starting point, meaning that primacy has been given to the archaeological material, rather than written sources and interpretations thereof. However, the written sources and their legacy have formed an integral backdrop to my research, with research traditions informed and shaped by their legacy as an inevitable context.

The traditional representation of gender as divided neatly into manly men and house-proud ladies was discussed in Chapters Four and Five, but the subject merits further discussion in light of the material presented in the three foregoing chapters. As my investigations have made clear, the material examined here gives grounds for a distinctly different interpretation of society, one where gender was but one part of complex social identities rather than the overall ruling determinant.

This following segment will refer back to Chapters Four and Five in places, and will constitute no more than a brief delve into the vastly complex field of written sources. The issue of gender representation in written sources is immense, as evidenced by the array of scholars working within the subject (to mention but a few Jesch 1991; Jochens 1995, 1996; Mundal 1999; Magnusdóttir 2008; Bek-Pedersen 2011; Friðriksdóttir 2013; Mundal 2014). The following sections aim to highlight the need to ensure sources support each other when constructing theories of social organisation. This pertains especially to gendered identities in this thesis, but is an equally valid point as regards other aspects of the distant past.

A cursory introduction to the main sources will feature first, in order to provide a general overview, before a review of selected research anchored in written sources, and finally a discussion bringing the conclusions from the material into play.

The texts: a fragmented collage

The texts and fragments that make up the cannon of Old Norse sources which tend to be used for elucidation of gender roles are diverse, made up of Eddic and Skaldic poetry (The Poetic Edda 2014), sagas (Jørgensen and Hagland 2014b, 2014c, 2014d, 2014a; Sturlason [Approx. 1220] 1943), legal texts, rune stones, ethnographic accounts by Arab

travellers (Ibn Fadlān 2011) as well as early historical works such as Saxo Grammaticus's *Gesta Danorum* (Grammaticus [Approx. 1200] 1996). Most of these categories are again characterized by subcategories, and most have survived as copies (and sometimes copies of copies) of early medieval texts (Bek-Pedersen 2011:2). Moreover, they all carry certain source critical issues, where some are more insurmountable than others.

A brief description of the main sources

The *Edda*, or poetic Edda as it is often known (The Poetic Edda 2014), is a collection of mythological and heroic poetry, which has survived in a number of different manuscripts, the earliest one of which dates to around 1270 (Bek-Pedersen 2011:2). The *Edda* is a main source regarding pre-Christian mythology, dealing as it does with stories of the gods and of ancient heroes. There is general acceptance that the motifs and subject matter date back to pre-Christian origins (Steinsland 2005:37; Lund 2009:20; Harris [1984] 2005:93), with the fixed formulas indicating their origin as orally transmitted knowledge, and mythological motifs which can be found in pictorial evidence dating back to the Early Iron Age (Steinsland 1997:45-46; Hedeager 1999; 2004:228; Mundal 2004a:220). From a source critical perspective, we do well to remember that the *Edda* can make no claim to being any sort of complete holy book: the oral transmission of the poems means there must have been a wide variety of different interpretations of these, and furthermore we have no way of knowing how many poems were *not* recorded (Bek-Pedersen 2011:3). Treating this as a canonical text is unwise in other words, but that it does contain a great deal of information that we would otherwise not have access to, is certainly true. The *Edda* remains a gateway into understanding mythological motifs and beliefs, though equally we ought not dismiss traces of motifs that are not reflected in this text.

Snorre-Edda also deals with many of the same themes of myths and gods, but is a different proposition altogether as it is attributable to a specific author and date ((Sturlason [Approx. 1220] 2005). The trace of Christian influence is therefore more easily discernible in this text, composed and recorded as it was by a Christian, upper class man, dealing with themes of heathen, and presumably to him rather outlandish, beliefs (Steinsland 1997:16; Lund 2009:21). His text was meant to preserve earlier poetry, and to act as a manual for aspiring and future poets (Bek-Pedersen 2011:4). Although the text is best seen as a Christian interpretation, the presence of the same motifs and themes in other sources strengthen the argument that although Snorre certainly interpreted his material, he did not fabricate it (Lund 2009:21).

Skaldic poetry is different from Eddic poems in that it is not anonymous, and is thus often attributable to specific poets and thereby also roughly dateable (Bek-Pedersen 2011:5; Lindow [1985] 2005:24). We know these poems mainly through their preservation in sagas, both King's sagas and the Icelandic sagas (Bek-Pedersen 2011:5). Skalds were held in high regard, and the perfection of proficiency in the skaldic arts was something to be desired (Mundal 2004a:233). Skaldic poetry is generally regarded as amongst the most reliable sources, with few controversies regarding their dating (Mundal 2004a:222), though it may not be the most prolific source on issues of social order and gendered roles.

Moving on to the saga literature, this term covers a wide array of different styles and groups. Without going into too much detail, the corpus can be broken down into three main groups: *Snorre's King's Sagas*, the *Icelandic sagas* and the *Fornaldersagas*. Of these, the *King's sagas* are the oldest recorded part of the corpus (Mundal 2004c:272), best known through Snorre's *Heimskringla* (Sturlason [Approx. 1220] 1943). The *Icelandic family sagas* can be broken down further into smaller subgroups, but in general can be described as the histories of influential families on Iceland from the settlement period onwards (Mundal 2004c:289-293), recorded in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries on Iceland (Bek-Pedersen 2011). Finally, the later *Fornaldersagas*, which can also be broken down into subgroups, are often seen more in the light of entertainment as they contain supernatural elements and stories with magical elements (Mundal 2004c:294). In addition to the full-length saga texts, there are also a number of shorter stories, *Tåtter*, which often supplement the longer sagas (Mundal 2004c:294-295).

The subject of whether or not the sagas are in any way useful to understanding Viking Age society is so well-debated as to have become a byword for the inaccuracies of written sources (Mundal 2004c:270-271). However, as written sources still dominate many perceptions of social order, the subject must be once again raised here. The sagas were written down in the early Middle Ages, well after the end of the Viking Age, and over two centuries after the introduction of Christianity. Thus, whilst the sagas can certainly be seen to contain traces of information, we cannot in any way assume that they provide a source to understanding the internal workings of a society that was distant not only in years, but also in cultural language and ideological expressions. This has been extensively pointed out with regards to gender questions (see for example Damholt 1992; Mundal 1992; Øye 2006; Pedersen 2017b). For my part, I would like to contribute the caveat that if what the sagas tell us is directly contradicted by archaeological sources, as can be the

case, we can assume that what they tell us is not universally applicable to the Viking Age. Hypotheses drawn from these sources must be carefully tested against both archaeological material as well as other written sources before it can be taken as reliable.

In addition to the above texts, which can be broadly characterised as literature, there are other sources of a more directly historical character. Early medieval legal texts are sometimes used to elucidate legal culture and social praxis in the Viking Age (Brink 2002:90; Vestergaard 2002:60; Rindal 2004), as was exemplified in Chapter Four regarding the sexual division of labour. It must be remembered however, that the earliest laws are Medieval and Christian, and there is also often a considerable gap between legal proceedings as described in the sagas and what we find the law codes (Odner 1973:30; Sigurðsson 2008:62). Again therefore, with the use of legal texts, a careful cross-referencing with other sources is necessary before they are taken as read.

Ethnographic accounts by Arab travellers is a particularly intriguing form of source, as it constitutes one of the very few contemporary accounts available (Ibn Fadlān 2011; Ya'qub 2014). These colourful accounts are not written with any sort of guarantee of anthropological best practice, and so ethnocentrism and potential cultural misunderstandings are indeed rife. However, they are amongst the very few contemporary accounts we have, and when substantiated by other forms of evidence, they can provide a wealth of useful information.

Other contemporary sources include the Anglo Saxon chronicles, which mention raiders, Norsemen and Danes. These are often brief mentions, and their intention is to note the presence of foreign entities, not give information about their ideologies and customs. Similarly, the Royal Frankish Annals and the Annals of Ulster contain information of contact with the Danes, though once again the information yielded is not necessarily of a nature that gives insights into social organisation and norms.

Adam of Bremen is another much used source: his *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum* from around 1070 (and as discussed in Sundqvist 2007:115; Bremen [1070] 1959) contains passages concerning the customs of the *Svear* and on their ritual acts and beliefs. However, there are concerns about whether or not Adam's writings are the result of first hand observation (Sundqvist 2010:474). Moreover, there is the concern that he was certainly not objective in his views (Näsström 2001:12; Sundqvist 2007:113; Bek-Pedersen 2011:8). Some further concerns about the reliability in Adam's works were

raised in Chapter Five, as he includes a deal of quite fantastic tales in his accounts that makes it hard to take them as literal descriptions of witnessed events.

Finally, historical works such as Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum* (Grammaticus [Approx. 1200] 1996) are another type of document of interest. This was written a considerable time after the end of the Viking Age, and with the express aim of creating an origin myth for the Danish nation (Hedeager 1999:39; Bek-Pedersen 2011:8). The writings are highly coloured by Saxo's Christian beliefs, and by his aim to turn what he considered heathen barbarians into palatable heroes for a Christian audience (Bek-Pedersen 2011:8). Nevertheless, his writings can be correlated with other sources, thus adding to a corpus of texts that are, to some extent, mutually supportive.

The written sources in action

The use of written sources by archaeologists in pursuit of an understanding of the Viking Age has a somewhat chequered history. In the early days of Viking Age research, the sagas were considered more or less historical documents, detailing actual people, attitudes and events (Price 2002:53; Steinsland 2005:37). A gradual process led to a change in attitudes, and from the middle of the last century, written sources were generally discounted as literary constructs (Price 2002:54) and viewed with a fair amount of suspicion. In keeping with the shifting nature of theoretical paradigms however, this trend has now turned, and written sources are more in vogue again (Price 2002:54; Steinsland 2005:37; Lund 2017:91). No longer considered reliable documents of historical events, they now often feature as sources to the time in which they were written, often early Medieval Iceland and Old Norse society, which are believed to contain traces of Viking Age culture as relayed through oral histories and traditions. Thus, written sources are frequently used in archaeological works, though tempered by source criticism and correlated with archaeological examples (examples of such an approach includes Price 2002; Solli 2002; Lund 2009; Hedeager 2011). The *Edda* is often referred to, as are the Arabic sources, and legal texts, though again with an emphasis on cross-referencing.

Archaeologists are however, not the sole custodians of the Viking Age. Historians, historians of religion, art historians and philologists are also prominent in the field of Viking Age Scholarship, and use rather different approaches to the source material. Whilst these other disciplines tend to rely in the main on written sources, referencing the more well-known archaeological examples from time to time, archaeologists have a

stronger tradition of using written sources in combination with the archaeological material. This has led to something of an imbalance in the way the sources are credited: because archaeologists use historical sources, but historians and others tend to not engage with the archaeological material, the written sources have ended up being the link which holds Viking Age studies together. It should be noted that whilst many historians and others tend to write about Old Norse society rather than the Viking Age in particular, this distinction can often become blurred, meaning that sources which may relate more to Medieval mind-sets become transferred back onto the Viking Age. This, in my opinion, is problematical, especially in light of the above highlighted source critical challenges inherent in these sources.

Written sources have the power to give insights into things that are harder for archaeology to access, namely a glimpse into shadows and remnants of past mind-sets and cultures. The written sources do not however, negate the usefulness of archaeological material: rather, the two need to be combined.

All texts are written with an agenda, in a specific time and context, and they cannot be divorced from this context. Thus, both the composition of the written sources, and our subsequent interpretation of them, are subject to their distinct social contexts, a point which can be linked with the discussion of the illusion of objective knowledge production discussed in Chapters One and Two. As regards the Viking Age, none of the sources now available to us, bar rune stones, are contemporary or local, and this makes it even more necessary to examine the motives behind their creation as it adds additional layers of potential obscurity.

The archaeological interpretation of a grave assemblage may at first glance appear more diffuse and uncertain than the reading of historical texts, and yet the same source critical questions must be asked as regards agendas, symbolic language and elite practices. That there are legitimate concerns regarding certain research traditions can be put into context with the historical approach, rather explicitly crystallised in Preben Meulengracht Sørensen's *Saga and Society*. Here he states that "the knowledge of Icelandic society in the oldest period, before 1100, is founded chiefly on the historical accounts dating from the high Middle Ages a couple of centuries later" (Meulengracht Sørensen 1993b:1), before going on to state that "archaeological finds do not contradict written material, but add little to it" (Meulengracht Sørensen 1993b:5). These statements are both incorrect and,

if one may say so, rather supercilious. Such unequivocal disregard for archaeological sources is less common in today's academic climate, but the reliance on written sources persists and the legacy of written sources is particularly evident when it comes to questions of gender, as was highlighted in Chapter Five. The sense remains that written sources provide the superior avenue to understanding the Viking Age, when they are in fact as diffuse, if not more, than many archaeological finds.

A further concern is the recurring theme of elitism. The sources we have are all written by the elite, for the elite and about the elite. Thus, whilst they can indeed contribute invaluable information, the story they tell is only one out of many. They throw little to no light on life outside the narrow social bands to which they belong, and to use them outside of this becomes problematic. In this sense, they are much like the mortuary contexts examined here: they contain valuable information, but not *universally applicable* information. Thus, the famous poem *Rigstula* which details the origin of social segregation tells it from the point of view of the uppermost class (Steinsland 2012:78), and that in itself means that we must distrust the messages with regards to them being universally applicable. They tell us nothing of how life was perceived outside of the social class to which they belong. In other words, they give only the perception of society from the top down, not from the bottom up.

Historical sources, historical gender

Elisabeth Arwill-Nordbladh's work on how interpretations of gender from written sources are traceable to 19th century norms, ideologies and standards must be referenced again here (Arwill-Nordbladh 1998), as traditional accounts of gender from written sources cannot be understood without bearing this in mind. Not only are they distinctly Victorian in their outlook, but these early interpretations were also liberally sprinkled with ethnographic comparisons to rural Scandinavian societies (Mortensen 2004:100), which adds another layer of complications on to these already contentious interpretations. Consequently, early interpretations of written sources sought parallels in rural, contemporary Scandinavia, meaning the overall image we get from these readings is drawn in part from factors outside of the written sources themselves.

Another factor is the tendency for canonisation of early interpretations, which can become increasingly cemented as true through repetition. Thus, unquestioned and repeated referencing to early interpretations may lead to accepted "truths" which are in

fact nothing of the kind, but are rather repeated reiterations of one interpretation out of many other possible ones.

This needs some further elucidation here, as it is directly relevant to the research aim of this thesis of probing the divergence between representations of gender as fixed and binary in mainstream archaeology on the one hand, and the mounting evidence against this on the other. As was shown in Chapter Five, and as has been made clear by the material presented in this thesis, these notions are not, in general, corroborated by archaeological evidence. Thus, the assertion that women could not carry weapons (Sigurðsson 2008:21) now needs addressing in the light of recent discoveries such as the Birka grave BJ581 and the numerous other graves containing women and weapons as discussed in Chapter 5. Similarly, discussions on whether or not women could have honour must be admitted to be problematic, and seemingly based on readings of written sources which are contradicted by others (for an argument they could not, see Meulengracht Sørensen 1993a:217; whilst arguments for can be found in amongst others Steinsland 1997:71-72; Solli 2004:277; Friðriksdóttir 2013:45).

Overall, as was discussed in Chapter Four and Five, it is hard to find purchase for the idea that women were barred from public life, or that they had access to only a limited range of domestically centred social roles. Rather, this can be traced to the meeting of written text and modern mind-sets, the latter having been conditioned in a society where women are defined as *Other*, and characterised largely by that they are not men, as was discussed in Chapter Two. Thus, evidence of female social actions and agency in the archaeological record are often read through obscuring optics shaped by minds already made up by interpretations of written sources. At least, this seems the most likely explanation why the Oseberg mound is consistently dismissed as something other than the memorial over one of the big power players of her day, or why the women at Kaupang are often left out discussions of production and trade (though for an exception to this, see Pedersen 2014, 2017a). These interpretations come from a reading of the material, not the material itself. It follows that other readings are also possible.

That this overriding image of women as subordinate is not always easy to uphold even in the written sources is another contention. Thus, Gro Steinsland writes that free men and women were equal in the eyes of the law, and that creation myths, as known from the *Edda*, shows that men and women were created equal and with the same innate

characteristics. Leaving these things aside however, she then goes on to reinforce the idea of a sexual division of labour (Steinsland 1997:55-71), which as we have seen in Chapters Four and Five is not without challenges.

In a more recent publication, Steinsland highlights how archaeological evidence in the form of burials show women had a place in the elite, and yet concludes that “nevertheless, on balance, a milieu which created a strong warrior-ideology must have been a male-dominated culture in which women played subordinate roles” (Steinsland 2011a:6), which arguably is not supported by the archaeological material analysed in this thesis, and which shows rather a reliance on Western ideals of women as nurturing rather than aggressive. A recent publication which seeks to examine women in Old Norse literature similarly dismisses anything outside of written sources, and upholds the idea of a strict sexual division of labour as representing a fundamental, binary divide on an ideological level (Friðriksdóttir 2013), which does not take the archaeological record into account.

Real men and made up women?

A point of particular interest which was also raised in Chapter Five is the ingrained idea that the “strong women” found in the sagas are fabrications of medieval men (Clover 1993:148; Sigurðardóttir 2002:282). In this school of thought, portrayals of women in sagas are not to be trusted, and are not considered based on any sort of reality. This is a valid concern, and yet the same questions are not raised with regards to their men. This goes back to how comparable evidence is treated in different ways according to the gender of those it relates to. In this manner, we can read about how, in an account of friendship in Viking Age society, women were unlikely to have had the power to enter formal friendships on a large scale, as supported by the fact that it is so seldom mentioned in sagas (Sigurðsson 2010:132). It is noted that some are mentioned as having friendships, but that it is “hard to explain why these women could enter friendships” (Sigurðsson 2010:132). Flick back to an earlier chapter in this same book though, and the friendship between Njál and Gunnar in Njálssoga is commended as the *only* example of friendship between farmers described at length, and how it can therefore be used as a source of information for the nature of these relationships (Sigurðsson 2010:58). That farmers had friendships is not questioned, though it is not in general described in the sagas. Thus, the presence of few examples regarding female friendships is deemed evidence of how rare such relationships were, and yet one example regarding male friendships is used as a template for all other comparable relationships. As an archaeologist, I question the

different interpretations of these sources and the historical tradition which opens for these. The archaeological record does not lend support to such different interpretations according to gender, and I suggest that the practice whereby sources are deemed credible if they support the idea of Viking Age social order which has prevailed for the last 200 years, where men rule and women support, may need juxtaposing with contradictory evidence before they are fixed.

As was discussed at length in Chapters Four and Five, this tendency to dismiss sources which do not fit with a model in which men were dominant is concerning. Sagas mention female farmers often for example, and in such a way as to suggest it was nothing out of the ordinary (Sigurðardóttir 2002:283). Such women farmers are also described as giving feasts and gifts (Sigurðardóttir 2002:283), and yet women are often represented as having had no formally recognised social standing (Jesch 1991; Jochens 1995; Øye 2006; Barrett 2008; Raffield, et al. 2017). Thus, for some proponents of the Viking Age being a polygynous society, two instances of polygynous kings mentioned in the king's sagas (see Harald Hårfagre's and Harald Sigurdsónn's saga respectively Sturlason [Approx. 1220] 1943) is considered as sufficiently strong evidence to suggest these sagas supports it as a general practice (Raffield, et al. 2016:317; 2017:176-177). It is worth pointing out that two instances are not in the overwhelming majority, in a work containing over a hundred references to monogamous marriages (Sturlason [Approx. 1220] 1943). In fairness, the article seeking to suggest polygyny as a common practice does also cite additional evidence (Raffield, et al. 2016), but it must be said that it is in the main circumstantial, far from commonly found, and overall not convincing of polygyny as a customary practice.

It is tempting to put this into context with the treatment of female social and sexual freedom by these same authors, which can be summed up as *dismissive* at best. In one article, the authors admit to there being substantial evidence that women had a fair degree of sexual freedom, and yet dismiss this on the grounds that the evidence is difficult to interpret (Raffield, et al. 2016:318), when arguably it is not so much difficult to interpret rather than directly contradictive of the argument the authors wish to further. In another article, they conclude that there exists evidence for female social and sexual freedom, but that this pertains to the upper classes and not the vast majority of people, hereby implying that previous research which have argued for women as social agents alongside men has misinterpreted the material (Raffield, et al. 2017:198). This is a valid point, as the sources which we deal with do tend to pertain to upper classes only. However, it fails to

acknowledge that the sources employed to construct arguments of polygyny and male sexual dominance are all subject to the same restrictions.

An important part of the preconceived ideas of women and their social status in the Viking Age, is the proposition that women were part of the exchange network between powerful men (Sigurðsson 2010:133). That women were no more than pawns in political games with little control of their own destiny (Magnusdottir 2008:72; 2014:64) is more or less accepted, and that women were not free to choose who to marry is often brought up in the same vein: the idea being that they were traded by their fathers or their brothers to seal useful alliances (Magnusdottir 2014:64), an idea which can be supported by saga references. However, written sources can also be used to support ideas of sexual freedom, and of divorce as an option open to both men and women, as was pointed out in Chapter Five. Similarly, as was discussed in Chapter Five, there appears to have been several options for women to participate in public life as can be argued from written sources.

It is also common to hear about how fosterage of sons amongst elite families helped create alliances and bonds (Steinsland 2011b:7), whilst very few have explored the implications of the numerous mentions of girls being fostered (to mention but a few, Hallgjerd in *Njálssoga* 2007; Signy in *Grettes Saga* 2014:56; Gudrid in *Gisle Surssons saga* 2014:11; Hungjerd in *Gunnlaug Ormstunges saga* 2014:266), a point which surely deserves some consideration.

The question this raises is simple, and is one that ought to have been addressed by now in mainstream scholarship: how is it decided that one source is more valid than another? Or in more extreme cases: how is it decided that one episode in a document is more trustworthy than another? It is, in short, necessary to question the practices that allow the assumption of women as less socially prominent and academically interesting in the Viking Age to persist.

The idea of women as accessories to men persists in some interpretations of written sources. Thus, statements such as that the settlers of Greenland were “accompanied by their women” (Jochens 2002:141) or that “women were brought to Ireland for cementing (such) alliances” (Mytum 2003:118) makes it sound like these women had no choice in the matter, and were brought along for the ride much in the manner of a dog or a horse being brought on a journey. It fails to examine what the implications are of sources that explicitly detail women as taking part in pioneer settlements and travelling, and

constitutes a further example of making the evidence fit with preconceived ideas. In this case, the idea that women did not travel is protected by robbing any travelling women of free will and choice in the matter. Thus, the removal of agency from these women makes it so that they were not active travellers themselves, but rather were brought along by male decree.

An Age caused by angry men?

The idea of the Viking Age as a male phenomenon was discussed in Chapters Four and Five, and will be expanded upon here. The belief that women are naturally less inclined to violence and more inclined to be nurturing and caring is a modern concept, and not one that ought to be applied to the past without question. Thus, it is modern readers who squirm at the idea of mothers carrying out their children, it comes from modern sensibilities, and not from reliable sources and information we have regarding past practices (as discussed in Scott 2001:70; Näsström 2002). Hence, when a scholar suggests that a mother might find it particularly hard to dispose of *female* children (as Jochens 1995:86 suggests), it should be considered that this cultural trope may need examining before being accepted as a universally applicable truth: we cannot assume that women have preferred female offspring throughout prehistory and in all cultural settings. Nor should we transfer our modern cult of motherhood on to past societies without question: disposing of children need not be considered any harder for mothers than for fathers.

Similarly, the idea that an absence of women will lead to male aggression (as argued in for example Barrett 2008, 2010; Raffield, et al. 2016), is problematic on many levels. First is the inconvenient lack of archaeological support for a lack of women, aside from the previously discussed ratios of male to female burials in Norway. Second however, is the innate assumption in this: that if men are deprived of women with whom to have sexual congress, they will naturally incline to anger and aggression. In this lies a host of serious issues, one of which is the modern western belief that men are the natural instigators of sex, whilst women rarely care about it. As Laqueur has pointed out (Laqueur 1990:4), the opposite was believed to be true in Western European culture up until the late 18th century, until when women were generally assigned voracious sexual appetites, with men as the more rational and reasonable creatures. Thus, the idea that a lack of sex will make men aggressive, and that men are naturally more promiscuous is not a cultural universal, it is a culturally specific trait and pertains to our own peculiar legacy

of sexual repression together with ideas of male entitlement to female bodies. It is also an assumption that has been called into question by anthropological studies, and indeed by biological studies which have shown that this is not a universal truth (for a discussion of sex-divisions in promiscuity, see Brown, et al. 2009; see Schacht, et al. 2014 for an argument against male aggression in the case of a lack of women). That it is in addition a deeply troubling part of our modern culture is another matter.

This inherent belief in bodies as truth, in biology as the dominant factor in determining personality and natural tendencies have coloured these ideals. The rejection of such ideas was outlined in Chapter One, and instead gender was proposed as something performed, fluid and highly culturally dependent. It is necessary to truly grasp the fact that it is not the chromosomal make-up of a person that determines whether or not they are naturally aggressive (for a thorough discussion of this, see Fine 2016), and that the modern cultural ideal of aggressive men and passive women is not a universal that can be expected to be found in any culture at any time. By understanding this, it becomes clear that the assumption that the Viking Age was caused by men feeling angry because there were not enough women is a banally simplistic projection of modern ideas on to the past.

The complicated nature of sexuality

A fundamentally limited understanding of expressions of sexuality is also evident in Jenny Jochen's argument for women as a scarcity, wherein she suggests that a shortage of women is indicated in references to homosexuality, and innuendoes of bestiality (Jochens 2002:144). The inference is that it is the absence of women that causes homosexuality and that anything which diverges from heterosexual relations is deviant and traceable to a similar source. Not only a highly offensive reasoning, but also a flawed one, as it is based on ideas specific to modern western culture. An obvious example here would be Ancient Greece, with its socially sanctioned, and indeed expected, sexual relationships between men, in which the fluidity in expected male gender roles is also an interesting example: old men entered relationships in the capacity of men, with younger men who were seen to function in these relationships as "non-male" (Halsall 2004:291-292).

A similar inference can be found in Preben Meulengracht-Sørensen's *The Unmanly Man*, where it is noted that ideas about homosexuality "are commonly linked to ideas of cowardice, immorality or other despicable qualities, in every society with a pronounced masculine ethos" (Meulengracht Sørensen 1983:85), a statement which can be argued to

be founded modern western ideals rather than based in cross-cultural comparisons, and where one might be justified in asking for those cross-cultural comparisons to provide support to such an opinion.

A final note of caution

It seems pertinent here to state that it is not the use of written sources that gives rise to concern. It is the use of written sources *to the detriment* of other available evidence that is limiting to our understanding of the Viking Age, combined with the selectivity in interpretation which gives occasion for certain parts of a source to be dismissed. A further issue are the modern lenses which are so often deployed in interpretations of these sources, whereby the medium of writing conveys a false idea of cultural closeness. Reading as an act implies intimacy, and the false notion that we gain insights into past perceptions through reading, which nullify the need for source critical approaches, needs addressing.

Bearing these points in mind however, written sources have the potential to compliment archaeological material in invaluable ways, as long as the precautions of cross-referencing and correlating with other sources are taken before conclusions are drawn. It is when sources are used uncritically, often to support accepted truths for which there is actually little evidence that we need to take note and examine the supposed evidence.

Thus, the trope of the key-bearing lady of the house, the women who could not fight or carry weapons, the women who had no active part in trade, in production or in legal matters; need to be questioned as viable interpretations. It is not necessarily the armed women of the Viking Age that are fabrications of modern minds in other words, but rather the passive housewives, universally content to busy themselves with cooking and childcare.

Fluid gender and the written sources

Scholarship focusing on women in written sources tend to take one of two directions: the first leans on the fundamental divide between men and women, as has been described at length in Chapter Four and Five. Research from this school of thought tends to focus on men's and women's roles as complimentary, but undeniably different (Bagge 1992; Friðriksdóttir 2013). The second direction is to look at the similarities and overlaps between the genders, with an overall belief in gender in the Viking Age as contextual and fluid. The first approach has been critiqued in earlier sections in this thesis, whereas the

second approach finds support in the material discussed here. This section will therefore focus on the consequences of an emphasis on gender as fluid in the written sources, which will then be further explored through a summary of the material analysis. A reminder is due here though that the material can be interpreted in different ways according to the eye that views it, and that the interpretation offered here must be understood as one out many possible.

Starting with the mythological landscape, we can draw certain conclusions from the creation myth described in *Voluspá* (The Poetic Edda 2014). Creation myths can divulge significant information about how a society perceived itself: they often play a key part in legitimising gender roles and social inequalities for example (Steinsland 1997:64). It is worthy of note therefore, that the Old Norse creation myth shows men and women created as equal, simultaneously, and with the same characteristics and traits (The Poetic Edda 2014:6).

Contemporary Arab sources often feature in discussions of sexual exploitation of female slaves (Raffield, et al. 2016, 2017), but they also contain information of how divorce was a woman's prerogative (Ya'qub 2014:168) and on how both men and women enhanced their looks with cosmetics (Ya'qub 2014:168). The poet al-Ghazal also left behind records of how the queen at the Danish court told him "*our women are with our men only of their own choice. A woman stays with her husband as long as it pleases her to do so, and leaves him if it no longer pleases her*" (as cited in Allen 1960:50). This is commonly described as an exaggeration, though the right to divorce is also well-supported in saga material which gives ample reason to suppose that divorce was indeed an option to many.

The supposed strict gender-binary nature of Norse mythology has also been questioned, notably by Britt Solli, who has pointed out several aspects in the lore of the gods that sits badly with the strictly heteronormative society which we are often led to imagine (Solli 2002, 2004, 2008). There are, as she has highlighted, queer aspects to gods such as Odin, which opens up for a potential questioning of the rigidity of gender roles.

Another crucial point is the lack of shame and pollution regarding sex and erotic acts in Old Norse mythology. The body was, as far as can be gleaned from written sources, not a source for shame, and neither was the body and its functions something intensely private (Hedeager 2011:104). Significantly, nor were the later Christian dogmas of impurity attached to sex (Steinsland 1997:61; Mundal 2004b:208; Solli 2004:268; Danielsson

2007:41). Nudity was not shameful, nor were sexual acts anything to be hidden (Solli 2004:268; Hedeager 2011:104) and if we are to judge from written sources such as for example *Volsa þattr*, female sexual desire could be openly acknowledged and discussed (Price 2002:217-219; Steinsland 2005:350-352). Not only that, but sagas testify to women displaying sexual aggression and possessiveness (Hedeager 2011:102-121), and extra-marital affairs were common by many accounts (Sawyer 1992:38). It was the advent of Christianity that brought ideas of female impurity with them, transforming Frigg and Freyja into common whores when previously their sexual nature had not been a negative attribute (Steinsland 2012:16). Arguments constructed around male control over women's sexuality in other words, do not take into account that the Old Norse sources give little evidence to support this. They also ignore the indications that sexuality, sexual relationships and expressions of sexual desire and sexual acts were understood quite differently in the Viking Age, as the above has testified to.

Shared characteristics and complimentary roles?

As has been previously mentioned, the philologist Else Mundal has argued convincingly that written sources give substantial indications that men and women were seen as embodying the same set of characteristics (Mundal 2014). Thus, whilst there were certain roles that were associated with men and certain with women, the inherent characteristics of men and women were not seen as fundamentally different (Mundal 2014:330). Thus, the idea of the *weaker sex*, of women as a soft foil to male power, is not found in the Old Norse sources, because it did not exist as an ideal (Mundal 2014:332). Thus, whilst men could be accused of being soft, often termed *womanish*, women were not seen as necessarily embodying these soft qualities by natural order (Mundal 1999:75).

In this vein, it is essential to note that the opposite of *manly* need not be *womanly*, it can be *unmanly* (Malm 2007:305). These unmanly characteristics were therefore not automatically something women lived and enacted, they were what was to be avoided for all who wanted to garner praise for their behaviour. An interesting aside here is found in a recent article by Hans Jacob Orning (2017) which argues that the perception of women as soft and feminine came with the rise of the cult of the virgin Mary, and was opposed to the earlier, hard and strong Old Norse ideal woman (Orning 2017:260). Crucially, this opens for interpretations regarding the meaning of a person's gender. It can be argued to hint at a social model similar but different to our own, where gendered bodies determine gendered lives, though in this case with different values attached to them where women

were not governed by fundamentally different personality traits than were men. It can also, however, be seen to support gender as fluid, where gendered bodies *need* not determine gendered lives, though could of course do so.

Delving further into this, a return to Carol Clover's seminal article from 1993 (Clover 1993) is necessary. By questioning how real the supposed dichotomy between male and female in the Viking Age was, and simultaneously questioning the gendered division of labour, she paints a picture from written sources of gender as largely contextual in the Viking Age. Using descriptive language such as how the epithet of *ðrengr*, which is often seen as the very epitome of maleness, can be applied to women (Clover 1993:372), she refers to Laqueur's one sex model to explain a society where biology was not necessarily a determinant of social categories.

Another consideration in support of this may also be seen in that the word *maðr*, which directly translates as "man", was used for people in general, including women (Sigurðsson 2017:118). There does not appear to be a feminine ideal as such, women are praised for strength of character and for exhibiting masculine characteristics in written sources (Mundal 2014:330). A society where the desired characteristics were the same for both women and men does not necessitate a society with only one gender: as Else Mundal has argued, you could have different roles, but with shared ideal characteristics (Mundal 2014:331).

These points can be put into context with the discussion in Chapter Five which highlighted female involvement in supposed male spheres. That women were considered legally responsible for their actions is another point of interest, as evidenced in *Svarfdæla Saga*, where Yngvild encourages her husband to kill another man, only for the sons of the murdered man to enact vengeance upon her (Kress 2002:88). These considerations can be used to argue for a society where biology was not what determined your social function and standing in the same way as it is today.

The concept of *nið* needs a brief introduction here, as it is often used in connection with the subordinate nature of women in the Viking Age. Generally speaking, *nið* was an insult, the worst insult that could be directed at a man, with a meaning usually termed as calling him unmanly, or accusing him of unmanly behaviour (Meulengracht Sørensen 1983:11; Hedeager 2011:116). Another such concept is *ergi*, linked with the male practice of *seiðr*. *Seiðr* was, according to Snorre, a female pursuit, and to engage it was shameful for a man

(Meulengracht Sørensen 1983:19; Hedeager 2011:117). This is where things can get a bit confusing, as Odin was known as a god of *seiðr*, and written sources testify to there having been such a thing as *seiðmen* (Solli 2002:140). *Ergi* is commonly understood as unmanly, equated with letting oneself be used as a woman, that is to let oneself be penetrated (Solli 2008:276). For a woman, it implied unbridled sexual appetites (Solli 2008:276). Note that to be the penetrator was not considered an insult, which implies that the state of passivity is what is stigmatised here (Solli 2002:140). However, Carol Clover has argued that *ergi* was more a state than an action, a state of passivity and weakness (Clover 1993:377). She points to Hrofnkel's Saga, where it is told that "everyone gets argr who gets older", and to Egil Skallagrimsson's Saga, where it is described how old age brings ignominy and weakness (Clover 1993:384), which is lent further support by the idea that social worth was measured by capability to work (Sigurðsson 2008:197). The crux of this argument is that it is not male or female that is the decider here, it is not that to be female was to be weak, it is simply a division based on strength: the powerful and the weak, regardless of sex (Clover 1993).

Fluid gender supported in pictorial evidence

The use of Laqueur's one sex model has also been demonstrated by Ing-Marie Back Danielsson, who has examined gold foils with a critical view of the tendency to term them "loving couples" when the gender-determination of these figures is quite uncertain (Danielsson 2007). She has called in to question the tendency to affix known categories, in this case gender, on to a past which does not necessarily fit within these parameters.

Though the one-sex model has been criticised as not being universal, what remains is the demonstration that the definition of sex is discursive (Danielsson 2007:52). This means that the rejection of a two-sex model is equally valid, and that we need to be open to other ways of understanding sex and the relationship between sex and gender.

Carrying on the theme of images and depictions, a number of interesting cases can be mentioned in support of gender as more complex and potentially fluid: The Gotlandic picture stones often feature heavily in interpretations in the school of Enright's *Lady with a Mead Cup*, as was discussed in Chapter Five (as seen for example in Løkka 2017:128). Images often show women carrying drinking horns, greeting arriving warriors, generally interpreted as arrival scenes from Valhall (Snødal 2010:446). At least one such stone however, shows a woman arriving (Snødal 2010:446).

The above mentioned gold bracteates also occasionally depict same-sex “couples” (Danielsson 2002:193), bringing to mind fluid gender roles and queer interpretations. Other items of obvious interest are the numerous figurines of armed women, collectively known as Valkyrie figurines (though this generic interpretation has been challenged by amongst others Price 2006:180). Several of these are known, though they are not really a collective group in any sense other than that they depict women carrying weapons. They can be two-dimensional or three, of silver or bronze, and have been found in a number of contexts (Gardela 2013:303-306).

One final figurine of interest is the seated figure often interpreted as Odin from Gamle Lejre in Denmark, which Unn Pedersen has pointed out is actually wearing female dress (Pedersen 2017b:116), making it either a manifestation of the queerness of Odin, as can indeed be argued from his at times contradictory nature (as per Solli 2008), or a manifestation of a female figure in a seat of power. The figure can be seen in the illustration below:



Figure 50: silver figurine of a seated figure in a seat of power

What all these images have in common, and what they share with the interpretations of written sources discussed above, is that they depict gender as something more complex than a simple divide between domesticated females and aggressive males. They bring nuance, fluidity, contradictions and complexity to the table. As will be seen below, the

material analysis reflect these traits. By embracing the plurality of these sources, we may be able to approach a better understanding of past social realities.

What happened after death? A brief delve into gendered aspects of life after death

The question of life after death is inextricably linked with a study of mortuary practices, and through comparative material in written sources and imagery, there is a substantial amount of scholarship on this particular question (Hultgård 2008; Price 2008).

There is a legitimate concern that it is hard to deduct reliable knowledge from sources written by adherents of a new religion (Hultgård 2008:212) which is perhaps especially pertinent here, though the above presented arguments for usage of these sources justify the cautious drawing up of a partial framework. As long as we accept that the image we have of pre-Christian ritual and religion is patchwork and fragmented, a basic foundation from which to work can be envisaged. It is not a primary consideration for this thesis, as the object has been to examine the material expression of status and position, but a cursory delve into the question from a gendered perspective is interesting.

The Viking Age realms of the dead as we know them are varied, and are documented to varying degrees. Questions of who were destined for which realm however, can be quite difficult to detangle (Steinsland 2005:349; Hultgård 2011:298).

Odin's hall, Valhall, is without question the most famous of these realms, where fallen warriors came to feast and fight (Sturlason [Approx. 1220] 2005:31), and it is often presented as the destination of choice for the elite (Steinsland 2005:349). Certainly, Odin is known as the elite god, the protector of warriors, whose Valkyries act as choosers of the slain and brings fallen warriors to his hall for an afterlife of feasting and fighting (Hultgård 2011).

However, Valhall was not the only potential destination for dead warriors, as Freyja's abode Folkvangr also housed fallen warriors. The presence of two separate realms for fallen warriors underscores the fundamental importance of war in the mentality of the Scandinavian Viking Age, as pointed out by Sigurðsson (Sigurðsson 2017:14). In fact, one source details how Freyja had first choice amongst fallen warriors (Sturlason [Approx. 1220] 2005:35). Little is known about life at Freyja's though, and another source (Soga om Egil Skalla-Grimsson 2014:ch. 79) indicates this could also be a destination for women after death (Raudvere 2004:298; Hultgård 2011:298), with no mention of a

violent death necessary. Folkvangr may have been more inclusive in its entry requirements therefore, being an abode both for fallen warriors and for others with a relationship with Freyja.

A third known destination for the dead is Hel, ruled by the goddess of the same name (Sturlason [Approx. 1220] 2005:39). Little is known about this place, other than that the road there went “northward and down”(Steinsland 2005:348), and it is often portrayed as a place for those who died ignoble deaths, from decease or old age (Sturlason [Approx. 1220] 2005:39)

Mentions of mound-dwellers in written sources also testify that the dead could continue existing within their burial mounds (Steinsland 1997:98; Raudvere 2004:198) living a life connected with their descendants but separated by death. Whether or not this was at odds with an afterlife in one of the realms mentioned above however, remains uncertain, with the possibility that existence in both could be an option. This testifies to the duality and complexity in beliefs of the afterlife amongst the Viking Age populations, where the dead are not necessarily eternally fixed in their afterlife, but also retain links with the grave itself, and through it, the land in which they were placed and the people amongst whom these graves are to be found. That Viking Age burials reflect a different relationship with and understanding of death and the afterlife than subsequent Christian ones (Lund 2013), is however clear.

The mysterious *Hegafjell* is a similar proposition, a place where a family’s dead would gather (Steinsland 1997:100; 2005:349). Some sources mention the goddess Ran for those who died at sea, who reigned over a hall similar to Valhall (Raudvere 2004:198), and there are indications that Thor and Frey also welcomed the dead to their respective halls (Raudvere 2004:197), the former idea strengthened by the presence of Thor’s hammers in graves (Nordeide 2004; Hultgård 2011:300; Gräslund [2003] 2005). Thor’s hammers are more common in female than in male graves (Staecker [2003] 2005:469), which becomes a point to ponder when considering the nature of the warlike aspects of Thor (Schjødt 2011:270). On a similar point, a common interpretation of wagons in female burials is to connect these with Freyja (Snødal 2010:447; Staecker [2003] 2005:471), but it is worth remembering that Thor was also known to travel in a wagon (as discussed in Solli 2002:230).

The question which looms over this is of course whether or not gender decided the final destination. Every so often, someone will speculate on whether or not women were allowed in Valhall, often with the conclusion that there were probably some women there to serve the unceasing flow of food and drink, or to act as companions (Schjødt 2011:278). In other cases it is simply noted as a male-only realm (Steinsland 1997:102). Assuming Valhall was a domain exclusively reserved for warriors however, does not automatically exclude women, as women warriors would presumably have the right to entry there. Freyja's Folkvangr is sometimes referred to when noting where women were destined after death, as mentioned earlier, and the above mentioned Thor's hammers occur in both male and female graves. Hel is usually assumed open to all, and the enigmatic Helgafjell likewise (Steinsland 1997:100; Hultgård 2011:298).

As will be seen below, the graves testify to that both women and men were equipped in similar ways, presumably for a life after death, and that we can draw no universal conclusions on gendered differentiation on the basis of this material.

The material implications – intersecting roles and composite identities

The comprehensive analysis of the material assemblages presented in Chapter Eight revealed several interesting points of similarities and differences in the typical burial assemblages. Chief amongst these is the conclusion that the determining factors of what made up a burial context were far more complex than a simple divide between male and female opposites. By considering the assemblages in their entirety, and by avoiding fixating on brooches and swords as if they are artefacts of paramount importance, a picture of overlapping and shared identities emerges. In many cases, these must be seen in conjunction with communicated gender, but equally, in many cases, these gendered identifiers are missing, as evidenced by the large body of indeterminate burials.

In essence, this means that a typical male or female gendered assemblage as determined by traditional methods have much more in common than what may be apparent at first glance: in many cases they share a base-assemblage of typically shared find categories. Thus, if we can lift our eyes past the alluring brooches and swords, we can see that there is a great deal of common ground between average male gendered and female gendered assemblages. Tools, vessels, chests and keys, domestic animals, horses and horse related equipment: these are all find categories more or less equally distributed with burials that can be termed male, female and indeterminate expressions.

As an interesting juxtaposition to the typical correlation of women and cooking, which was discussed in Chapter Four, it is worth mentioning here that in the 218 burials assessed in this thesis, cooking equipment appears *more often* in male graves than it does in female. It has also previously been pointed out that it occurs fairly frequently in male graves as well as female elsewhere in Norway (Dommasnes 1982:76). The chart below shows a breakdown of the category of indicators of domestic wealth according to gender, and serves to underline the degree of shared artefact categories across assumed genders here:

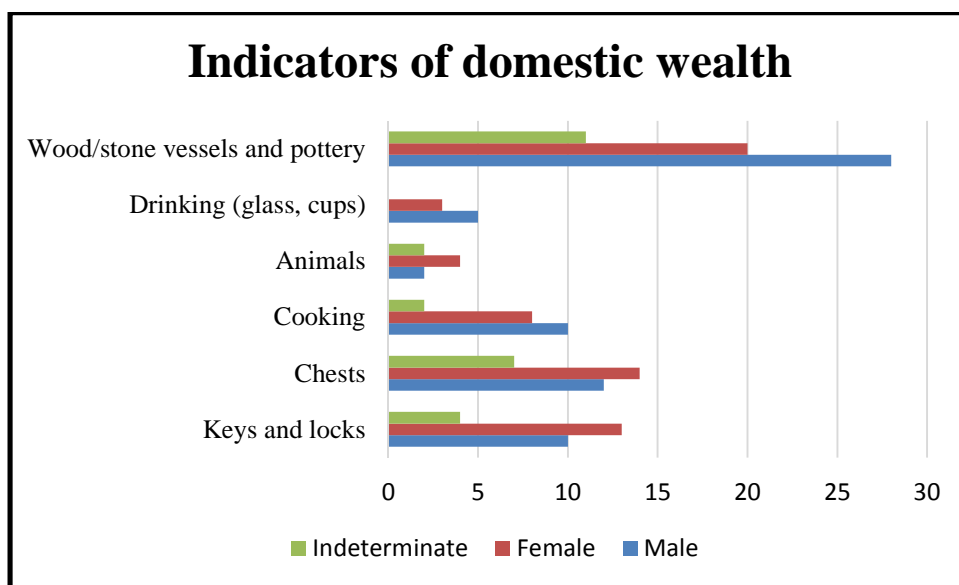


Table 20: chart showing breakdown of indicators of domestic wealth

Another interesting presentation of the finds can be seen in the below chart, in which all the find categories are represented in percentages (the percentages here calculated based on find occurrence according to gender):

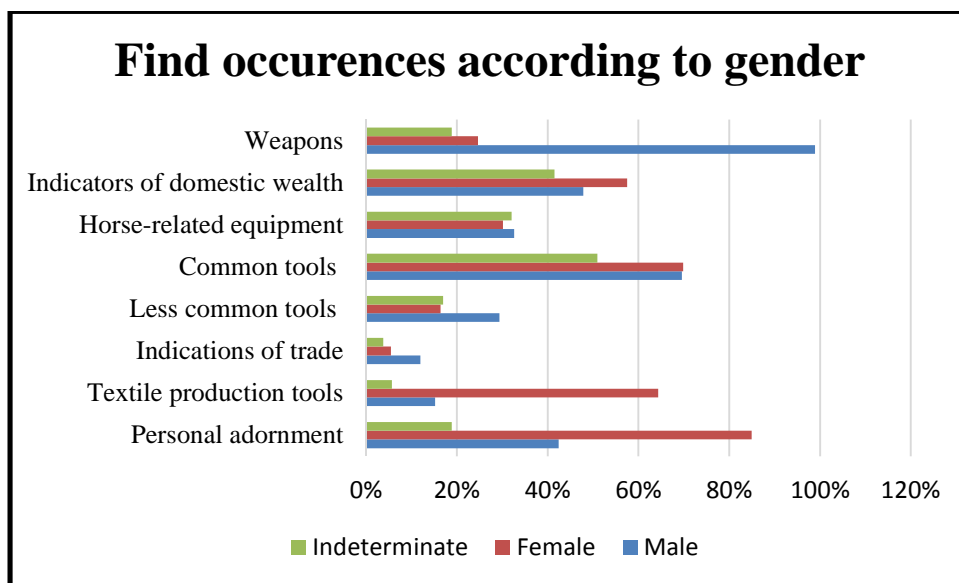


Table 21: showing the percentages in which certain grave goods appear in graves according to gender.

The correlation between certain types of jewellery and expressions of a female identity is not necessarily questioned, but rather what is challenged is the tendency to focus solely on these items to the detriment of other expressions in the assemblages. In classifying jewellery as a female artefact, we disregard the fact that items of personal ornamentation were common in male graves as well, though not to the same scale and often not the same type of items. This serves to uphold two negative stereotypes: firstly one of vain women that are primarily reflected by their interest in pretty ornaments, and secondly one of men as envisaged as being above such frivolities. When considered, what the actual assemblages reflect is that this divide is, in part, artificial. It is imposed by modern eyes, which leads us to judge the presence of jewellery in male gendered graves as insignificant in the construction of their identities, and simultaneously discount the wider assemblages, and their meaning, in female gendered graves.

That there is a cultural interest in upholding the binary divide between men and women was discussed in the first two chapters of this thesis, and it is something that needs to be brought back into focus here. The idea that sex correlates with natural gendered behavioural patterns is highly politically charged, and one that was rejected at the outset of this thesis from a theoretical perspective. The material discussed in the foregoing chapters has shown that we need to look beyond simple categories of weapons and jewellery if we are to gain a broader understanding of the complex social roles that made up Viking Age identities.

It also means that we need to address what it means that such a significant proportion of the population were buried without a recognisable gendered identity. Both of these findings can be used to support a proposition of a society where communication of gendered identities was more complex than a simple equation of weapons and violence with men and jewellery and domesticity with women. This poverty in gender roles, where men and women are consigned to supposed natural behavioural patterns is more attributable to modern Western modes of thought than to what we can surmise about gender roles in the Viking Age. Thus, it is not the nature of the evidence that leads scholars to conclude that scales and weights in female burials are *not evidence* of their participation in trade (Christiansen 2002:19), it is rather the nature of the scholars inherent, socially conditioned, biases which judges certain activities unsuitable for women. Similarly, it is not the nature of the Oseberg find that gives rise to the tendency to highlight items of a domestic nature, rather this is occasioned by the physical sex of the two interred women (as succinctly argued by Pedersen 2008).

When brooches and swords are missing: is gender not communicated?

The fact that such a large body of the burials known to us contain no recognisable gender markers ought in itself to be a strong argument for that we need to question the tradition of dividing the Viking Age population into strictly segregated categories of male and female.

This argument can be taken in a number of different directions: firstly, if communicating gender was of such high importance, why did such a large proportion (almost 25% in the sample in this study. In the aforementioned control data for Denmark, a very large number of burials showed non-diagnostic grave goods in terms of gender, with more than 35% (Sellevoid, et al. 1984:35-140). Conversely, Svanberg notes in his study of Viking Age burial customs in South-East Scandinavia that around half of the securely dated graves in this area do not contain gender diagnostic finds (Svanberg 2003b:21)) not signal any gender identity at all? Secondly, we can turn this around and ask if we have constructed gendered identities based on incomplete pictures, and maybe brooches and swords are only parts of greater and more composite identity expressions, many of which may have been lost through poor preservation of organic material for example. Thirdly, we must consider the possibility that the binary male and female expressions which we like to assign to burial assemblages reflect more on modern ways of ordering data, than

the actual expressions of social identities in the societies which we purport to study which may not have shared our modern preoccupation with sexual differences.

As was discussed in Chapter Three, the interpretation of mortuary contexts is not straightforward. Burial contexts as they are known to archaeologists are the final results of a number of processes, including ritual actions and depositions, sometimes later action such as break-ins, as well as being an expression of mourning, and a memorial. The selections, choices and rites employed in a specific burial ensures that the complex final result needs considering from multiple angles. However, as was also discussed in Chapter Three and Chapter Six, this thesis builds on the assumption that burials contain something of the social identity, role and status of the deceased which it was created to commemorate.

As an interesting aside regarding the apparent strict outward communication of gender, the case of Auðr trousers is worth noting here: in *Laxdøla saga*, Auðr is divorced by her husband on the grounds that she wore men's clothing. This took the form of her wearing breeches specified as having some kind of triangular insert in the crotch area, and with the lower legs wound with bands down to her shoes (*Laxdøla saga* 1989:79; Jesch 2015:94). The possibility of breeches in general as viable clothing options for women is thus raised, however faint. This one mention in a written source cannot be argued to mean much, nor can the option of trousers for women be taken as any sort of evidence of their basic social standing. It merely raises the thought that perhaps the depictions of Viking Age women in long gowns which we encounter in reconstruction drawings and museums are not always accurate.

Returning to the potential interpretation of indeterminate burials, I propose a combination of the factors outlined above as an avenue through which to expound our understanding of the Viking Age, namely that gender as signalled by swords and brooches was not the only options, that these categories were not locked and binary. This means that we must consider the likelihood that we are missing a large part of the picture when it comes to the expression of social identity, and thus that we ought to exercise more caution in the promotion of the Viking Age as a strictly gender-divided society. As Ing-Marie Back Danielsson has suggested, the tendency to gender burials may rest on little more than our own cultural context where we assume that individuals buried conform to either male or female identities, and so that is what we look for and consequently find (Danielsson

2007:27). This is a direct reflection of the ingrained cultural beliefs in how a sexed body could and should appear, and what roles are open according to sexual characteristics (Danielsson 2007:49), which rests to a large degree on modern hierarchies and ideologies. The suggested interpretation here is that a binary understanding of gender in the Viking Age is not the most fruitful starting point, and that there is evidence to support alternative models. As discussed in Chapter One however, this is an interpretation, not an absolute conclusion: in light of the material presented in this thesis, it is however offered as a viable knowledge claim.

That absence of evidence is not evidence of absence is a valid concern, but in this case the absence of evidence can be taken as evidence in itself: evidence that gender was not a first concern in all walks in, or levels of, life. It is hard to justify why we feel we can draw such inviolable conclusions which divide the population according to strict rules, when a significant proportion of the population quite clearly falls outside of the accepted manifestation of these rules.

Rather than focusing on a narrow range of gender indicators which correspond to modern western expectations of gendered behaviour, we need to examine burial assemblages as a whole. This means following the intersecting lines of overlapping identities indicated by diverse finds, and challenging what makes up a person's identity in graves that contain both diverse expressions, and those that are more restricted. The final outcome of such an approach, is the realisation that identities are made up of more than simple gender markers.

Cremations as the poor cousin of inhumations

As was apparent in Chapter Eight, an examination of the correlation of grave goods with burial custom yielded interesting trends:

Firstly, it can be noted that indeterminate burials tend to contain less variables in general than those that are assigned a gendered identity. Of those that are gendered however, there generally is no discernible difference in wealth between male and female. Variations occur, but overall, wealth seems to be distributed equally between those termed female and those termed male expressions. As evidenced most clearly at Gulli, indeterminate burials need not always be find-poor, thus strengthening the argument for communication of gender as not necessarily a first concern in the construction of burial identities. When the material is seen as a whole however, there is a tendency for the

indeterminate burials to display less variables than those who can be assigned a male or female expression.

Secondly, there is an interesting correlation between wealth and inhumations, which goes hand in hand with gendered expressions and inhumations. In general, more inhumations are assigned a gender, and moreover inhumations contain more variables than cremations. Whether or not this is by design or by accident, or indeed by preservation or excavation methods which may have taken less care with cremations in the past, is another question. The possibility that cremations were more often chosen as a burial rite in cases where gender would not have been communicated cannot be overlooked, but it can likewise be attributable to natural causes of preservation.

An interesting comparison can also be drawn with the Birka material here, where oval brooches, the most easily recognisable marker of female dress, are found in almost all inhumations, but in less than 30% of cremations (Gräslund 1980:81). The conclusions we can draw from this are limited, but it is nevertheless a fascinating prospect that perhaps burial rite corresponded with aspects of a person's identity on a gendered level.

The gradually shrinking female contingent

There are some significant findings in terms of dating, where the expression of gendered identities seems to become less marked as the Viking Age progresses. As was evident in Chapter Eight, indeterminate burials increase whilst female burials decrease towards the 10th century. This may be from several causes, such as the decline of the use of oval brooches in the 10th century (Stylegar 2010:76) or other changes in customary dress. It could however also be attributable to a lessened interest in communicating gendered difference, which opens interesting possibilities.

This can be put into context with the perceived lack of women in Norwegian burial evidence (Stylegar 2010), a conundrum which has puzzled many scholars and which was discussed in Chapter Six. Perhaps the most succinct and clear summary of this is found in the previously referenced article by Frans-Arne Stylegar, which addresses this question of why there are comparatively so few female burials known from the Norwegian material. As he points out, this is not the case in Sweden and Denmark, where skeletal preservation more often allow for osteological sexing (Stylegar 2010:71), and so the causes for this must be sought either in the way in which Norwegian material is gendered, or in societal factors which caused fewer women to be interred in archaeologically recognisable ways.

Having reviewed the material used in this thesis, I side with Stylegar on this, in that the most likely causes are to be found in the ways in which our material is gendered. Archaeological gendering relies on specific artefacts, and when these are not present, as is the case with the diagnostic oval broches in the 10th century, we are left at the mercy of other fragmented evidence.

Significantly, the material presented in this thesis clearly demonstrates a simultaneous rise in indeterminate burials with a decline in female expressions, from which the conclusion can be drawn that as the Viking Age progressed, female identities were either expressed differently, or were less important to express.

This last point is integral to the conclusions drawn here, in that it lends support to a society where gender was not a binary proposition of either/or identities. The evidence here is strongly in favour of gender as only one part of more complex expressed identities. If gender was not always communicated, it may be because gender as we now recognise and think about it, as paramount and a main differentiator along with skin colour and age, is not directly applicable to all sections of Viking Age society. Thus, our modern ideas of male and female identities may have proven a hindrance rather than a help when it comes to structuring ideas of Viking Age societies, as modern mind-sets struggle to divorce expressed identities from what we consider innate characteristics determined by born sex. A culture with a wider array of possible identities however, or with a different way of assigning identities, may thus not be easily translatable into modern terminology.

The site of Store-Dal in Østfold was mentioned in Chapter Five, a large burial site where Early Iron Age material dominates (Petersen 1916). The lack of male burials in this material has occasioned the proffered interpretation that indeterminate burials can be assumed to contain the missing men (Stylegar 2006:29). If this is an acceptable explanation when there are more women than men in conjunction with a high number of indeterminate burials, it ought to be considered a viable possibility in cases where there are more men than women as well, which would of course tend to equalise the balance at many cemeteries.

Though I am wary of claiming indeterminate burials as female as a rule, the evidence here is in favour of such an interpretation. This is justified in the conspicuous rise in indeterminate burials together with the decline in female expressions. This does not mean that the solution is to be found in indiscriminately terming indeterminate burials female

expressions in order to balance the gender ratios, that would be counterproductive to the overall aim of looking past simple male/female categorisations. Instead, what I suggest we can take away from this is a sense that gender was but one small part of a larger whole, and that the communication thereof was but one part of the expressions created by Viking Age elite populations.

Entering the abodes of the dead: looting and dishonouring the dead, or connecting with them?

That some graves were looted is a well-known aspect of Viking Age burials, evidenced in this material by the signs of looting at Gulli. Unfortunately the information concerning the other sites is too fragmented give information about potential break-ins, but a brief discussion of this theme is considered significant here.

The Norwegian word, *haugbrott* (literal translation: mound-break), used to describe these acts is rather more evocative than the prosaic English *looting*. It is also a more accurate description in many ways, as we cannot be sure of the intent behind them: it may have been for reasons other than financial gain, as “looting” would suggest. These acts have garnered significant academic interest since the excavation of the large ship mounds in Vestfold alerted archaeologists to them (Brendalsmo and Røthe 1992:84). The research history surrounding this will not be delved into in detail here (for a discussion thereof, see for instance Brendalsmo and Røthe 1992; Bill and Daly 2012; Lund 2017), but some context is necessary. Many of the large burial mounds show signs of having been entered in the years after the burial was completed, including Oseberg, Gokstad, several of the Borre mounds as well as burials in other parts of the country, and indeed across Scandinavia (Brendalsmo and Røthe 1992:92; Lund 2017). The question of the motivation behind these acts is fascinating in many regards: there are textual sources that indicate that they were founded in more than greed for material gain, and a number of explanations can be offered.

The wish to connect with powerful dead, to gain knowledge that they might possess is a recurring theme in Eddic poetry, seen in amongst others *Hyndluljóð* where Freyja wakens and communicates with a giantess, and in *Balder's dreams* where Odin seeks information from a dead seeress (The Poetic Edda 2014:235). In saga literature, the entry of the living into mounds can be for a number of reasons: for material gain, to retrieve a particularly powerful object, to communicate with the dead, to stop the dead harassing the living, or even for sexual congress between spouses (as discussed in Brendalsmo and Røthe

1992:186-101). Further theories have focused on the wish to rebury the dead in Christian soil, acts perpetrated by Christianised descendants who wished to right the pagan ways of their ancestors (as discussed in Lund 2009:246-247).

One of the more recent contributions however, propose the break-ins as political acts, whereby a new player seeks to actively diminish the power symbols of their predecessors (Bill and Daly 2012). This article links the breaks in Gokstad and Oseberg to Harald Bluetooth's reign in Vestfold, and draws lines between the dates of these events, with his need to establish his rule (Bill and Daly 2012). It is a persuasive argument in the sense that break-ins into such large mounds was the work of days, not hours. It was not something that could be carried out under the cover of darkness; it was labour-intensive work that would have spanned several days. This means that the break-ins would have happened in full view of the local population, and thus they can be conjectured to have either been sanctioned, or carried out by someone with the might and power to stop or quell any interference.

In the case of Gulli, the scale of the break-ins are smaller, but they are comparable in many ways. As with the larger mounds, the looting shafts seem to know where they are going: they target the part of the burials where the most finds are found, and they are carried out relatively shortly after the burials were completed (Gjerpe 2005:142-145). As was seen in Chapter Eight, although they are more common in graves containing male expressions, they also occur in female and indeterminate ones as well.

Considering the variety of potential reasons offered by written sources, together with the different burials in which such acts were perpetrated, it may be sensible to consider that there is no correct answer that fits all instances: perhaps we should instead consider that such acts may have been done for several different reasons. Whether this was about communing with the dead, gaining powerful artefacts, or demonstrating a new power to be reckoned with, it must be seen as a powerful symbolic action, and one that was not reserved for male expressions only, as one might have expected had they been the sole proprietors of power and status.

Boats and chambers: the symbolism within

As a final consideration before moving on to the external traits of the burials, the internal structures of the burials do not appear to be gender-linked. As was mentioned in Chapter Eight, both boat burials and chamber burials are often described in aristocratic terms.

Neither of these forms are linked to male expressions only, nor do they appear linked with any particular form of assemblage or artefact types.

This evidence is corroborated by studies in other areas: a high proportion of the numerous chamber graves at Birka for example are gendered female (37%, to 47% male (Gräslund 1980:27; Bolin 2004:180)), and in Denmark they are known to contain both male and female expressions (Jensen 2003:361-367). This, together with the Norwegian material, shows that chamber graves were not linked with any particular gendered expression, which becomes significant when put into context with the traditional interpretation of chamber graves as elite burials (Stylegar 2005:161; Price 2008:263).

Boat graves, as was previously pointed out, have been shown to occur as often in female burials as in male in Norway as a whole (Aannestad and Glørstad 2017). In Sweden, they are likewise shown to have contained both men and women, though significant regional variations are observable and different cemeteries are shown to be ruled by different trends (Arrhenius 2002). Boat graves containing Viking Age expressions in Scotland are also known to contain both typically male and female expressions (Norstein 2014:31), and in Russia, there are more female gendered Norse boat burials than there are male (Hillerdal 2009b:281), adding to the clear impression that the particular rites of boat and chamber graves were not reserved for gender-specific status.

Matters of size, shape and location

Though the cemeteries discussed in this thesis all have individual traits that set them apart, they also share a great deal of common features that justifies description as regional tendencies.

These include, as summarised in Chapter Nine, the choice of flat, arable land for the burial sites and the proximity to roads and rivers or other forms of communication channels. They also include the placement of round and long mounds alongside each other, and the lack of gendered patterns at all barrow cemeteries discussed here.

Most significant here, is the general lack of any gendered pattern in terms of location and external expressions. Symbols gain their power by repetition, thereby becoming potent through being generally understood and imparting their message to a broad contingent of people. If a burial mound is a symbol of status, ownership and social significance, then it can be conjectured that this content of meaning is communicated through size, form,

location and potentially also relationship with other features in the nearby vicinity: variations on fixed and knowable themes which make them recognisable to those meant to see and understand these symbols. As burial mounds which contain male, female and indeterminate expressions do not necessarily divulge this through any of the aforementioned traits, it follows that we need to consider these symbols of the same inherent messages. If there is no outward communication of difference, the logical conclusion would be that these are symbols of the same thing, regardless of the gender of the interred.

There are some exceptions that need to be given consideration here however. Notably, these include the affiliation of long mounds with female burials. It also includes flat graves, as these fall outside the discussion of monumental burials. Both of these will be further dealt with below.

Roads, rivers, lines of communication

The preoccupation with lines of communication in connection with cemetery sites was briefly remarked upon in Chapter Nine, but deserves further elucidation here. It is a connection that is widely documented and indeed discussed in connection with many prehistoric societies (Rudebeck 2002:182; Lund 2009:231; Thäte 2009:108), and certainly not reserved for Viking Age Vestfold.

In the case of Norway, any systematic study of this is complicated by the lack of formal roads, as most remnants of prehistoric roads are in the form of hollow ways meaning depressions in the landscape formed over natural pathways through repeated use, and indeed erosion through their tendency to become drainage channels (Gansum 2002:16). Thus, by their very nature they can be hard to discern, fragmented and vague (Gansum 2002:16). In some cases, they are clearly discernible, as at the still-standing cemetery at Bergene in the Hedrum area, illustrated in the photo below:



Figure 51: the road leading up to Bergene cemetery. Photo taken 23.10.2017 by Rebecca Cannell.

In others however, they may be all but gone through ploughing, or through natural erosion. These types of roads are not unique to Norway, but Norway does stand out somewhat due to its lack of other types of reinforced and formal roads (Gansum 2002:9). The use of historical maps is a common method of reconstructing past roads and pathways, and several studies have demonstrated that roads and thoroughfares across Scandinavia can indeed be old (Johansen 1976; Gansum 2002; Rudebeck 2002; Moen 2015). However, the earliest maps we have available from Vestfold date from 1815 to 1818 (Moen 2015:74), meaning they are fairly recent. Further, the Norwegian road network is likely to have seen considerable change after the 17th century, at which point new legislation was passed regarding road maintenance (Hvattum 1993:19). The overall network of roads and thoroughfares in Viking Age Vestfold is consequently not easily accessible.

Whilst we can be confident that not all roads run by cemeteries, nor are all cemeteries placed by roads, this picture is somewhat clouded in Norway, as we cannot be *sure* that there has not at some point been a road running nearby. However, no useful arguments can be constructed on hypothetical roads, and in the case of the material used in this

thesis, several of the sites show clear indications of roads running either past, or directly through, the sites.

The explanation of the correlation between lines of communication and cemeteries can be sought in a number of places, both of the esoteric and the mundane kind. Amongst the first are ideas of death as a journey, of assisting the dead on their travels to the realm of the dead (Rudebeck 2002:191), and of the road as a liminal space (Thäte 2009:108). More concrete and practical reasons can be found in the wish to broadcast status and power to travellers (Rudebeck 2002:191), and in the factor that if you want to ensure broad visibility for your memorial, proximity to a road is a good way of doing so. Another potential reason can be found in that roads link people and communities, and that cemeteries may have acted as gathering places, and places where people returned to and visited, even when no funeral was taking place (as suggested by Danielsson 2015:69). A further possibility can be found in Julie Lund's argument for an aspect of *control* which is significant here; that by placing burials by thoroughfares, there was an aspect of intimidation of travellers that can be read as a form of control and regulation (Lund 2009:231). Thus, if passing a cemetery was seen as involving any form of risk, forcing travellers to do so would enable the transmission of a potent message of power.

The aspect of commemoration is also considered a likely motivation behind the proximity of roads and cemeteries. In a recent paper, Ing-Marie Back Danielsson uses the case of rune-stones to argue for acts of commemoration manifested in the landscape as a way of understanding a collective understanding and experience of this landscape (Danielsson 2015:81). She shows how rune stones were placed near where people met, walked and travelled, and that this was a part of their function (Danielsson 2015:79). Rune-stones and cemeteries often have similar placements in the landscape. Thus, the argument of commemoration can be easily transposed to apply to cemeteries as well.

Interesting examples of roads and cemeteries are too many to be recounted here, but one particular site deserves a mention in that it provides a counterpoint to the trends seen here: at Fyrkat, in Denmark, a wooden trackway is bordered by burials, with a clear pattern where the wealthiest graves were placed immediately next to the track (Thäte 2009:113). As can be seen at Nordre Kaupang, Melau and Gulli, this does not hold true as a general rule in Vestfold, where proximity to a road is no guarantee for a higher degree wealth. This serves as a reminder that the same considerations may not apply to all cases of roads

and cemeteries, and that different governing principles may have produced, in essence, the same visual end result.

The material discussed in this thesis demonstrates a shared preoccupation with visibility, as manifested by proximity to communication routes. It is suggested here that this was due to a complex amalgamation of motivations: in part as a way of honouring the dead, in part as a way of asserting social power and status, but also as a way of creating a shared sense of commemoration and remembrance.

The case of long mounds

Long mounds are a fascinating prospect, both in a research historical sense, as well as in an archaeological one. In terms of research history, their interest lies as much in the *lack* of specific enquiry, as in anything else. Trond Løken was the first to point out that long mounds have a strong connection with female burials (Tsigaridas 1998:2), and since then this connection has passed into the general canon of mortuary Iron Age archaeology in Norway. As it stands today however, this is an area that would benefit from further study.

The most thorough research has been in the form of unpublished master's thesis, as well as a few articles, these last mainly from the surge of interest in gender and feminist archaeology in the 1990s (Farbregd 1988; Gustafson 1993; Stylegar 1995; Tsigaridas 1998; Damlien 2002) though references to the association are to be found elsewhere without much discussion or contemplation.

The connection between long mounds and female expressions persists through 700 years, throughout much of the Iron Age (Damlien 2002:3), and it is found across Norway (Farbregd 1988), thus demonstrating it is a phenomenon that spans both space and time. In general, very few male gendered burials in long mounds are known (Gustafson 1993), though there are quite a few indeterminate. Considering the fact that women were also buried in round mounds, the general conclusion concerning long mounds is that they are reserved for a particular group of women, rather than simply signifying women in general. The question of what this role might be remains open, although various explanations have been offered.

Trond Løken argued the mounds were a symbol of the house, weighting women's association with the domestic sphere (Tsigaridas 1998:2), whilst a more elaborate explanation was offered by Grethe Lillehammer who saw them as a symbol of the *lady of*

the house, women responsible for the daily running of their farms (Lillehammer 1988). Oddmund Farbregd on the other hand, offered the suggestion that they were symbolic ships, either referencing husbands who had died at sea, or potentially foreign women brought back as *friller* or wives (Farbregd 1988:20-21), an explanation that essentially reduces these women to symbols of male action, and which is not considered satisfactory in light of the longevity and wide geographical spread of these mounds. Connections with fertility cults have also been drawn, where the outer shape is seen as reminiscent of female genitalia (Gustafson 1993), though this is not an explanation that has caught on much. Nor, considering that the assemblages do not point towards any clearly religious or ritual role any more than female assemblages in round mounds, is this considered a likely explanation. Frans-Arne Stylegar raised the idea of the long mounds as markers of land-ownership (Stylegar 1995), in an article which also highlighted the dominance of women in many cemeteries in the Early Iron Age, and the relative lack of research this interesting point has generated (Stylegar 1995:46). Though the premise that the long mounds did symbolise ownership cannot be rejected, it leaves the question of what women in round mound then symbolised. Both Hege Damlien and Zanette Glørstad suggest the long mounds as connected with inheritance rights (Tsigaridas 1998; Damlien 2002:79).

The sample of long mounds in the material used here is relatively small, with merely thirteen definite occurrences dated to the Viking Age. A trial correspondence analysis was run to see if there was any significant patterning of the burial assemblages, but a closer look revealed a high degree of variation. In terms of this small sample, there are no grounds to suggest a common role based on the grave goods though this relates to a small sample pertaining to one specific time period only. It does however, also correlate to a wider study carried out by Hege Damlien on material from Østfold and Vestfold which found that the common distinguishing trait for these burials was in fact concentrated in the outer shape (Damlien 2002:68). Damlien does note that assemblages in long mounds tend to be less weighted in gendered artefacts than those in round mounds, noting that this could be because the gender was communicated in the external shape (Damlien 2002:68). An explanation considered likely is that long mounds communicate a social role, quite possibly one associated with specific gender, but not limited to this only. This is left as an open suggestion for further research however, as a comprehensive analysis of the material from long mounds would present a fascinating proposition, and one that might contribute significant new knowledge regarding social organisation in the Iron Age.

That one restricted group of the population was consistently given a particular form of memorial in the shape of easily distinguishable mounds does warrant the theory that this group was set apart by some common trait. However, the grave goods do not offer much help in determining what this might be. Until a more comprehensive survey has been carried out, the most that can be said is that these individuals were most likely of a high social standing, and of sufficient significance to warrant burial in a manner that made them stand out from counterparts in the more abundant round mounds.

Flat graves vs mounds: symbols of different status?

The choice to place some burials in mounds and others without such external markers must be considered significant. What it means however, is more diffuse. If we return to the discussion of mounds as property markers or indicators of status and power in Chapter Four, it may be tempting to see flat graves as the mark of less social prominence than those given barrows. However, a brief look into the burial assemblages found at for example Bikjholberget, and indeed at Birka, makes it abundantly clear that material wealth was not missing from these expressions.

Wealth and status as they are generally perceived in mortuary contexts in other words, are not always dependent on an outward monumental marker. Subsequently, whilst mounds are interpreted as being a symbol of status, status in burials is not limited to mounds. What remains however, is the property aspect. The suggestion here is that burial mounds may have communicated a status that was anchored in land, and in ownership of and disposal thereof. This may not necessarily mean direct ownership of land, as the large barrow cemetery at Nordre Kaupang might call this into question by its sheer size. What it may mean however, is a status based in a land owning family. Flat graves on the other hand, can be envisaged as graves for those whose prominence and status was not tied to land. Tradespeople, craftspeople, perhaps religious specialists: these are suggested roles which may have occasioned conspicuous displays of wealth without the erection of a mound.

It should be noted here that this is merely a suggested interpretation, and that it is also likely that there are no overarching rules that can be applied here: it is equally likely that the outward expressions of burials was dependent on a wealth of factors including local practice, cultural referencing, religious beliefs and ritual enactment.

The land as asset

A point that was touched upon in Chapter Nine was the tendency for burials to be placed on arable land. This is a recurring trait in most of the sites discussed here, and it can be conjectured that this was a conscious choice. In a landscape dominated by hills, the use of flat, arable land for burials must be considered significant. This corresponds with trends in Norway in general, in a survey of reuse of older sites, Eva Thäte found that in 38% of sites in South-West Norway were on high ground, as compared with 81% in Sweden and 50% in Denmark (Thäte 2009:108). This should be seen in conjunction with the topographical layout of the respective countries, as flat land is considerably harder to come by in Norway than it is in for example Denmark. The use of flat land, rather than high ground, may be termed a trend in Norway.

The land itself can be seen as an attribute of the burials, a statement of the importance accorded to the dead (Gansum 2004:233), as was referenced in Chapter Nine.

An interesting comparison point is that Liv Helga Dommasnes has also pointed out that female burials from old settlements in Sogn in Norway are often placed in the best agricultural land (Dommasnes 1991:57). If the land is seen as an asset, and as adding to the status and honour shown to the deceased, this must be seen as potentially significant.

The conscious choices which determined where burials were placed are suggested as indicative of what they were meant to communicate. Exactly what they communicated is another matter, but it is very clear that as far as the material discussed in this thesis, it does not appear to be determined simply by gender.

The material conclusion

Rather than understanding gender as locked and binary, the material in this thesis lends support for an alternative understanding of gender as fluid. This brings us back to the question posed throughout this thesis of where these traditional interpretations have sprung from, and how they are substantiated and justified. As we have seen, this is not necessarily the archaeological material. The options left open are therefore written sources, or modern preconceptions and biases imposed on to the material in question.

The notion of androcentric biases may perhaps feel unfashionable to many, who rest easy in the belief that second wave feminism dealt with all of that back in the 1980s and 1990s and that we can now feel confident that it is no longer a concern. This is, sadly, not the

case, as has been highlighted through this thesis. A case in point is discussed in Hans Bolin's examination of gendered burials in the Mälaren valley, where he points to an analysis published in 1998 which concludes that the dominance of female burials in the Early Iron Age must be indicative of these women as "pawns in a game" and that they cannot be considered "wealthy or aware" of their own accord (Kent Andersson 1998:89 as cited in Bolin 2004:182). Considering there is nothing in the burial evidence that singles these women out as pawns, we must ask where this interpretation springs from, if not from an inherent belief that women have always been suppressed as part of the natural order of things. Chapters Four and Five detailed a number of other instances of biased interpretations, that help demonstrate that the male gaze and bias is alive and well in many depictions of the past.

I do not term interpretations which find suppression of women a likely scenario androcentric by default. Rather, it is those interpretations which *considers no other option*, or which bends evidence to fit their perceptions and understandings, which dismisses contradictory evidence as inadmissible without justifying why, that are correctly identified as carrying implicit biases and promoting a harmful view of gender as static and inevitable. I further recognise, as has been pointed out previously, that much of this can be attributed to long-standing overarching research traditions which has naturalised these biases. However, it must be reiterated that such biases ought to have been rooted out by now in light of the previous decades' gender-focused research.

The meeting of written sources and material

As will be clear from the text above, both the archaeological and the written sources present rather a conflicting picture as regards social organisation at the highest tiers. Support for a unilaterally subordinate role for women is hard to sustain, once the subject is approached without a reliance on previous interpretations.

Jenny Jochen's division of women in saga material into sorceresses, warriors, avengers or whetters (referenced in Friðriksdóttir 2013:5) has remained hugely influential in how women are read and perceived in this material, as demonstrated by its wide range of citations (standing at over 200 at the time of writing for the book which introduced this division¹³). It is however, not universally supported by the written material, nor indeed by archaeological remains. Instead, the mortuary record shows individuals honoured in death,

¹³ Jenny Jochens, 1995, *Women in Old Norse Society*, citations counted in *Google Scholar*

equipped with grave goods designed to show wealth and status, perhaps to aid them in the afterlife, and very likely also designed to represent their social role and standing.

These individuals do not fall into neat categories of strictly segregated male/female identities, but instead show a multitude of different expressions, though with trends and groups running through the material. This can also be supported by written sources, and thus the material can be considered mutually supportive of such a theory.

Likewise, if we hark back to Chapter Four and its description of male roles and standards, the material evidence here is not so neat that it shows us the farmer, the warrior and the trader. It shows instead combinations of these, overlaps and composite identities.

The following, and final, chapter will draw together the potential meanings of this, in light of the discussion in this chapter.

Chapter Eleven: Concluding remarks

This chapter aims to summarise the overall challenges and conclusions, bridging from the introduction through the theoretical framework, the material, and to the final discussion.

As will be clear from the preceding chapters, the elite material examined here certainly speaks to a reality where both men and women left their marks in the form of lasting mortuary monuments. When this is put into context with the growing corpus of research on gender as contextual and fluid in the Viking Age as can be deduced both from written sources and from archaeological contexts (Clover 1993; Bolin 2004; Danielsson 2007; Hedeager 2011; Mundal 2014), the argument for looking beyond binary gender constellations is strengthened.

Thus, the interpretation offered here is that gender in the Viking Age was more complex than a time when men were men and women were their pawns. The idea of a social reality governed by such strict ideals as the *innanstokks/utanstokks* principle is called into question as lacking in nuance, and instead the suggestion that a focus on a wider array of social considerations is furthered. It has not been the intention of this thesis to argue in detail for any one social role as held by both men and women. Rather, the aim has been to direct attention to the blurred lines evident in many settings and contexts which are often argued as exclusively the domain of one or the other gender. As the thesis developed through engagement with the material, an aim of highlighting how gender is but one factor in determining social identity and role also become a main concern, as was evident in the foregoing chapter.

It ought at this stage to be mentioned that this thesis, setting out as it did to examine *gender* has ended up placing much of its emphasis on *women*. That this is an overall concern in much gender-focused archaeology was outlined in Chapter Two, and yet this thesis has proven no exception. The reason for this corresponds with what was likewise outlined in Chapter Two, and can explained in both that women and women's roles in the Viking Age have tended to garner less academic interest (outside of specialised enquiries), as was laid out in Chapters Four and Five, as well as in the concern that women's roles have not been fully explored. Nevertheless, this focus on the need to revise women's roles

in the Viking Age also means we need to revise the role of men. If women could participate in public life, this has a resultant impact on how public life can be envisaged.

The final few pages of this thesis will seek to connect the material analysis and discussion back with the research questions, in order to highlight the ensuing proffered interpretations.

The research aims, reappraised

Chapter One outlined the research aims for this thesis, and these now need to be evaluated in light of the material and the discussion thereof.

Firstly, on whether or not the material evidence, in the form of mortuary contexts, upholds gender as an absolute divide between male and female social roles, the material examined here can be interpreted as speaking *against* this. Though there are differences in the material expressions of female and male gendered graves, there is also significant overlap. There is also the concern, as discussed in Chapter Ten, of the large number of indeterminate burials which can be argued to be significant: whether it is seen as a lack of concern with communicating gendered status, or whether it is taken more as a shortcoming in our methods on in the material available, the end result is that we draw inferences on gender based on only a partial material, which calls the strict adherence to male and female as opposites into question.

Secondly, on whether the mortuary evidence supports a social model where men are more clearly marked as belonging to the elite, the material examined here indicates this is not the case. As was evident in Chapter Eight, the internal expressions of wealth and status are of a comparable level, and the outward expressions are likewise in general not indicative of a different social standing. The ratios of male to female expressions does show a preponderance for male expressions, though the ratios are much more equal than is often conjectured in Norway (out of all gendered expressions, 44% are termed female and 56% are male). The challenges inherent in gender-determination through grave goods has been discussed both in Chapter Six as well as in the wider discussion in Chapter Ten, with the result that the interpretation here is that we can envisage the sex ratio as fairly equal at the sites discussed here. It is recognised that the material examined here is limited geographically, and certainly therefore we might expect regional variations if a similar study was conducted on a wider base of material. This does not invalidate the findings here, but it does urge caution in drawing inferences across to other material

without careful examination, and it is to be hoped that similar studies will be carried out on other sets of material in the future.

Thirdly, on whether there is anything in general that sets male and female burials apart in a way which would support conjectures about different governing social ideals, the interpretation taken from the material analysed here is more composite. There are certainly indicators of female expressions and of male expressions, as was highlighted in Chapter Eight. Textile working tools and oval brooches are reliably found in female gendered expressions, whilst weapons are strongly associated with male expressions. Several categories of ornamentation are also strongly associated with female expressions, notably oval brooches and strings of beads. The point made earlier in this thesis regarding oval brooches, namely that they are strongly associated with female expressions, but that female expressions are also often found with them, is worth bringing up again here. Outside of these categories however, the lines become less defined. Thus, whilst the material indicates certain *roles* as common for women and certain for men, the amount of common ground found in the remaining internal and external expressions also indicates a shared social platform, with other roles and responsibilities as shared.

Thus, though the material shows some distinctions, it is lacking in many others. Internally, the burials do not support suppositions of a higher status for men than for women. Correspondingly and crucially, if the landscape was used to show ownership, status or power, and if these were all male domains, then no one told those who erected similarly elaborate and prominent memorials over male and female expressions both at Gulli, Kaupang and in the Hedrum area. *If* the mortuary landscape therefore does transmit these messages, it must be conceded that gender was not an overruling factor in who were commemorated in such ways.

Finally, the question of whether the material examined in this thesis gives cause to consider an alternative understanding of gender, the preceding discussion in Chapter Ten made the case that it does. A reminder is due that we can only work with what we have, meaning that there is an overwhelming likelihood that we are working from incomplete material in the shape of organic material, skeletal remains, and even in this case potentially overlooked burials. This is in the nature of archaeology however, and the proposition is made here that by assuring theories are tested through various methods, interpretations can be offered which are considered viable in light of the information at

hand. At this stage, it is also necessary to point out that the material in this thesis has been approached through two different methods: the correspondence analysis and the landscape analysis. The two analysis use different traits of the complete burial assemblages, examining both internal and external aspects, but yield results which can be read as largely comparable, and even mutually supportive.

Fluidity and intersecting social identities

The final point that I want to make in this thesis therefore, is that we need to consider the mortuary material in its entirety if we are to interpret it. The common ground shared between burials helps underline how people in the past embodied complex identities, made up of intersecting strands of gender, age, ethnicity, class, perhaps physical attributes, skills, vocations and social function. That all of these aspects can be found reflected in any one mortuary context is not to be expected, but that we need to consider identities as made up of more than gender markers is equally clear. This remains significant regardless of how we interpret grave goods: if they are seen as reflections of the social identity of the deceased, as gifts or ideal expressions, or a combination thereof, the sense remains that they reflect an underlying social core which is made apparent in the rituals of death and mourning.

Thus, the more mundane grave goods such as knives, sickles and vessels also need to be considered as part of the composition of a person's social identity. This does not mean that swords and brooches are considered unimportant, but rather that they are not the only factors that should be considered.

Furthermore, the mortuary landscape indicates similar considerations in where burials were placed and the choices made in their external expression regardless of the gender of the interred.

These factors can be taken as indicators that the modern, rigidly divided two-sex model is conceivably not the best tool with which to understand gender in the Viking Age. Returning to the points made in Chapter Ten, an alternative understanding can be based on that separate social functions in some senses need not necessitate a deep, ideological divide. Instead, we can envisage a model where men and women were made of the same stuff, and shared the same characteristics, potential and personality traits.

This does not contradict a culture in which certain roles and occupations were more strongly associated with one or the other gender, but it rather argues against *inevitability* and fixity in these. This can further be used to explain why gender often *is* communicated in death, in showing that it was indeed part of what a particular social role viable, but it can also explain why it is often *not*, in that it can show how gender was not necessarily a divider. It can also help understand those burials which to us appear so strongly transgressive, such as female weapon burials: the presence of one set of desired characteristics would necessarily open for the possibility for both genders to fulfil the most exalted social positions in some cases.

Thus, whilst the material in this thesis has shown that in many instances, gender affiliation is communicated in death, it has likewise shown that in many instances it is not. It has also found cases of cross-gender artefacts in burials, such as the axes in female graves at Kaupang. Furthermore, the overall result of the analysis is to highlight the similarities between elite burials, regardless of gender. This result need not be considered particularly ground-breaking, if we can envisage a society where identities were formed of multiple strands, and where gender did not determine *who* you were at a fundamental level, but rather was a contributing factor towards your likely social function and role.

The final word here therefore, is to urge openness in the gender constellations we envisage when examining the past, and that we refrain from assigning strict and rigid systems before considering that this is not the only viable option.

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