

First Ladies

Ornamental Bow Brooches and the Negotiation of Elite Female Status and Roles in Iron Age Norway (c. 400–900 AD)

Ingunn M. Røstad 

From the fifth century to the Viking Age in present-day Norway, certain women belonging to the upper strata of society were buried with high-quality ornamental bow brooches. Although adjusting to changing styles of decoration, the practical function and basic form of the brooches – a rectangular headplate, a bow and a rhomboidal footplate – remained more or less the same throughout the centuries they were in use. By exploring burials which include these ornamental accessories, I argue that the brooches functioned as an important factor in reproducing and continuously negotiating identity shared by certain women within the Scandinavian Iron Age elite.

Keywords: relief brooch, disc-on-bow brooch, burial, identity, gender, heirloom

Introduction

Richly decorated relief brooches and disc-on-bow brooches are characteristic finds from the Norwegian Migration Period (c. AD 400–550) and Merovingian Period (c. AD 550–790/800) respectively, although the latter also appear in Viking-Age burials as cherished heirlooms (figures 1 and 2). The brooches are gilded and adorned with animal-style ornamentation and/or inlays of glass or garnets, and represent prestige objects in themselves (Kristoffersen 2000; Glørstad & Røstad 2015). They are usually found in richly furnished women's graves, many of which represented primary burials in grave mounds, indicating that the women who were buried with these brooches held an elevated position in society (Kristoffersen 2000; Glørstad & Røstad 2015, 2021). The use and function of the brooches, as well as the social position of the women who owned them, point to continuity between the two periods.

The transition from the Migration period to the Merovingian period in Norway is characterized by a fundamental shift in material culture, implying major changes on a wide scale in society. This is not only reflected in changes in jewellery (Røstad 2021:268, 289–290), tools and weapons (Ystgaard 2014:262–264), but also in the abrupt end of the pottery tradition (Fredriksen et al 2014:1–2). There are, moreover, changes in land-use and technology, such as the termination of large-scale trapping systems in outfield areas (Stene 2014:67), and significant alterations in iron production (Stenvik 2015:90). Hillforts and large boathouses went out of use (Ystgaard 2014:261–264), and there were major changes in settlement patterns (Iversen 2013). Furthermore, marked declines are visible in the number of graves, burial in mounds, and in the inclusion of gold and silver items as well as imported goods in burials (Solberg 2000:186–188).

Against this background, the relief brooches and disc-on-bow brooches stand out among contemporary artefact forms for having endured for so long. Few studies have, however, pursued continuity in material culture from the Migration Period into the following Merovingian Period. One reason for this is perhaps that the significant material shift has become well established in scholarship, and until recently has also been reflected in institutional arrangements, entailing that the two periods have frequently been studied separately and handled by different scholars. This has meant that elements of continuity, which can also be observed, have been neglected. Yet the separation into different archaeological periods is only a methodological aid and does not reflect prehistoric reality. The social changes that took place during the transition between the two periods may have been gradual, and were not necessarily perceptible to people living at the time,

and some aspects of society will have survived, even in times of profound societal alterations.

In this article, I will approach one such potential area by studying the construction and content of burials with relief brooches and disc-on-bow brooches. The use of these types of ornamental brooches constituted a tradition that was maintained over several centuries (Røstad 2018). Yet, a main characteristic of tradition is ‘changing while staying the same’ (Jones 2007:87), and, as material symbols are contextually constituted (Lillios 1999:240), the *longue durée* of the brooches does not entail that their social significance remained unchanged throughout their period of use. The preservation of the conservative form of brooch may nevertheless suggest a conscious wish to connect with the past (Arwill-Nordbladh 2008:179). In the following, I pursue this theme by examining graves including these types of brooches in a contextual and temporal framework. Through this approach, I will explore the changes that occurred in the construction of the grave monuments and in the furnishing of the burials, and the implications for the roles and positions of the women buried with the brooches. It has been argued that specific types of objects, often perceived as ‘inalienable’, may play a vital role in reproducing social relationships over long periods of time (Weiner 1985). Such objects are identified with, and inseparable from, their owners. They are often kept within the family, ascribed special value and meaning, and cannot be lost or given away as they bestow social identity and rank, and enforce ‘ancestral identity as a social or political force in the present’ (Weiner 1985:212). To lose an inalienable object is thus synonymous with a diminishing or loss of identity and power (Weiner 1985:223). I argue that the brooches, with their connotations and links to the past, represented such objects, and that they functioned as an important factor in reproducing and negotiating identity shared by certain women belonging to the Iron Age elite (see Arwill-Nordbladh 2008:169; Lund & Arwill-Nordbladh 2016:417).

Relief brooches and disc-on-bow brooches: continuation of form and practical function

Relief brooches and disc-on-bow brooches have traditionally been classified as two different brooch types belonging, as noted, to two succeeding periods. This does not imply that they were conceived as two distinct entities in the past, or that these were meaningful categories in the Scandinavian Iron Age. Moreover, the designation of an archaeological ‘type’ will always, to a certain extent, be both subjective and reductive since it of necessity reduces complex variation into discrete categories through a pro-

cess in which some characteristics are emphasized while others are ignored (Adams & Adams 1991; Dannel 1986; Martin 2015:16, 2020). The typological method has also been criticized for being reductive in that it tends to ‘drive research down particular interpretive pathways’ (Martin 2020; see also Van Oyen 2015:64). The fact that relief and disc-on-bow brooches have traditionally been classified as two distinct brooch types may, in other words, have contributed to their separate trajectories of study. By clarifying the respective type-definitions and what the two types have in common, I argue here that relief and disc-on-bow brooches could be regarded as one consistent category of brooch.

Relief brooches are defined as a class of bow brooch with surface decoration cast in relief. The brooches are made of silver or copper alloy, usually gilt, and are of outstanding quality. They are decorated with spiral motifs and/or zoomorphic ornamentation in the Nydam Style or Salin’s (1904) Style I, and some specimens have additional inlays of garnets or glass (Kristoffersen 2000; Meyer 1935; Røstad 2021:117–175; Sjøvold 1993). Each brooch is individually manufactured. They are of ‘composite design’, divided into three main parts: headplate, bow and footplate. These parts are sub-divided into various ‘fields’, and there is a broad repertoire for the choice of decoration and attributes for each part and field (see e.g. Kristoffersen 2000:246 for schematic drawing). The brooches typically have a rectangular headplate and a rhomboidal footplate, with profiled animal heads protruding on either side of the footplate below the bow. This form can be traced back to the silversheet fibulas of the late fourth and early fifth centuries (figure 1a), a type of brooch usually regarded as a forerunner of the relief brooches (Meyer 1935). There are 73 specimens in the Norwegian corpus which share this basic ‘standard’ form or outline. There are also, albeit more exceptionally, brooches with differently shaped head- and footplates. Twenty-one exemplars comprise a distinct sub-type of smaller brooches with rectangular headplate and spatulate footplate, while 13 brooches are of various different forms. The latter are mostly paralleled in other parts of Scandinavia, for example brooches with semi-circular headplates, but these also include three specimens of unique design (Røstad 2021:117–175).

The basic ‘standard’ form with a rectangular headplate and rhomboidal footplate persists throughout the Migration period, but the exact composition of each relief brooch varies in terms of its details and proportions. They also evolve persistently during their period of use (figure 1b–d). The earliest examples are decorated in Nydam Style, while Style I takes over during the last half of the fifth century. The latter style is frequently combined with garnet or glass inlays, especially in the last phase of the Migration Period. The outline of the brooches also varies to some extent. In the

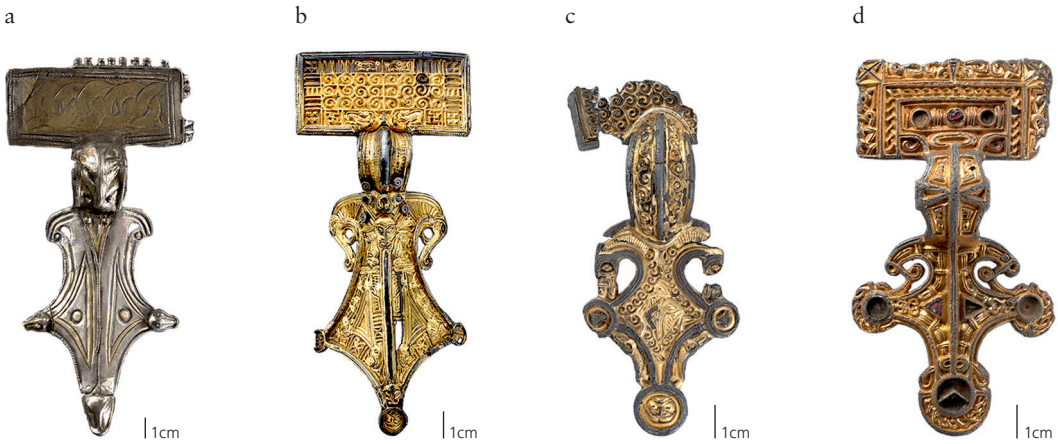


Figure 1. a) Silversheet fibula from Foss, Vest-Agder, c. AD 400. Relief brooches from b) Nordheim, Vestfold in Nydam Style, c. AD 400–450, c) Tveitane, Vestfold in early Style I, ca AD 450–500, d) Offersøy, Nordland in late Style I, c. AD 500–550. Photographs: Kirsten Helgeland. © Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo.

early phases, the footplate's widest point may fall above or below the middle, or it can be cross-shaped. The latter becomes the dominant shape in the last phase of the Migration Period. The shape of the profiled heads and the lateral and terminal lobes vary, and on some exemplars a longitudinal bar divides the footplate. The bow may be ribbon-shaped, have lateral expansions or a disc on the top. In length, the brooches vary from 5 to 24cm, and their size tends to increase throughout the Migration Period (Kristoffersen 2000; Meyer 1935; Røstad 2021:117–175; Sjøvold 1993).

The Norwegian disc-on-bow brooches, a corpus now totalling 69 specimens, share the same basic form/outline with the 'standard-type' of relief brooch, with a rectangular headplate, bow and a more or less rhomboidal footplate (Glørstad & Røstad 2021). As the name implies, a characteristic feature is a disc on the bow. This is also a trait that is frequently found on relief brooches, particularly on late specimens. Like the relief brooches, the disc-on-bow brooches are generally of high quality; they are made of copper alloy, are usually gilt and are decorated with garnet inlays, cloisonné, punch decoration and/or animal ornamentation in Salin's (1904) Style II or III. The use of garnets, zoomorphic decoration and the gilt surface are all characteristics shared with the relief brooches. As with the relief brooches, no exemplars are identical, as each brooch is individually manufactured. Furthermore, they evolve throughout their period of use (figure 2). The earliest specimens have profiled bird heads on either side of the footplate. This feature is perceived as developed from the profiled heads of the relief

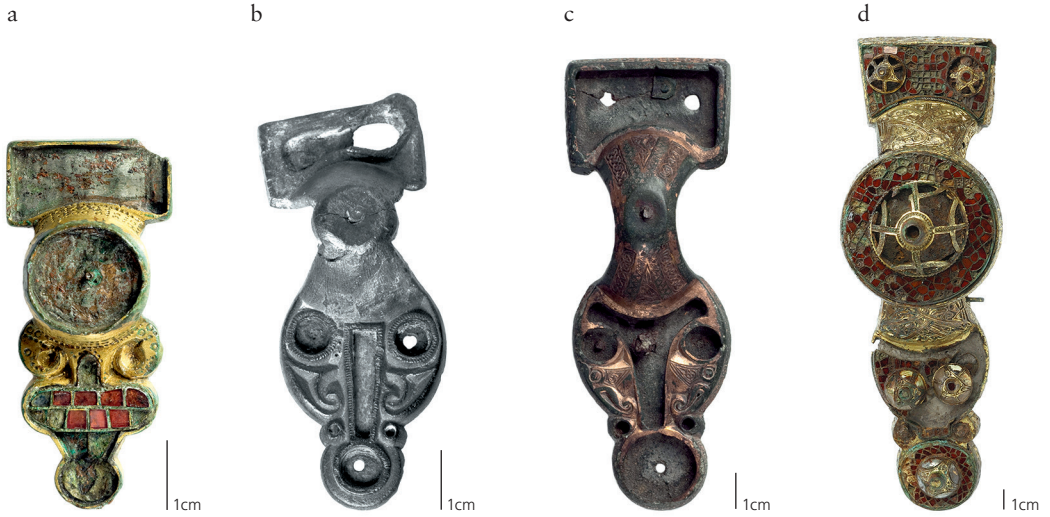


Figure 2. Disc-on-bow brooches from a) Gjukastein, Hordaland, c. AD 550. Photograph: Svein Skare. © University Museum, Bergen (CC BY-SA 4.0). b) Hov, Buskerud, c. AD 550–600/650. Photograph: Eirik I. Johnsen. © Museum of Cultural History. c) Ylmheim, Sogn og Fjordane, c. AD 600/650–700/725. Photograph: © University Museum, Bergen (CC BY-SA 4.0). d) Melhus, Trøndelag, c. AD 700/725–800. Photograph: Ole Bjørn Pedersen. © NTNU, Vitenskapsmuseet.

brooches, which on some exemplars are also formed as bird heads (e.g. Callmer 2008:195). On late disc-on-bow brooches the heads disappear. The earliest specimens are decorated with punch marks in addition to the garnet inlays and simple cloisonné. During the seventh century, the punch marks are supplanted by animal-style decoration in Style II, and subsequently in the eighth century in Style III. The zoomorphic ornaments mostly occur on the bow and the sides/edges of the brooch and the disc, while the cloisonné decoration gradually becomes more elaborate and covers the entire surface of the plates and disc. Like the relief brooches, their lengths vary, from 5.0 to about 30.0cm. The size of the brooches increases throughout the Merovingian Period (Glørstad & Røstad 2021:90–92).

Both types of brooches undoubtedly represented valuable objects, as testified by the high standard and technical skill required to make them, as well as the raw materials invested in them. As demonstrated, each brooch type consisted of individually produced specimens that share the same basic form or outline, but vary to a considerable degree in detail. Also, the respective types both change persistently during their period of use. Within the standard outline or form, there was a broad repertoire for selecting or inventing the decoration and attributes for each brooch-part. This meant that the brooches were reinvented continuously. New elements were con-

stantly introduced, and while some were quickly abandoned, others were cited and stabilised over a period before becoming obsolete and eventually replaced (see also Martin 2020). Furthermore, the transition between the two types may be perceived as fluid, as some features occurred on both late relief brooches and early disc-on-bow brooches; the disc on the bow, the use of garnet inlays and the profiled bird heads. These common factors make it possible to regard the relief brooches and disc-on-bow brooches as one consistent category of deluxe ornamental bow brooches that was continually developing.

This assumption is strengthened by the fact that when found in undisturbed inhumation burials they are both positioned in the same manner, horizontally in the upper region of the chest or across the neck. This indicates that they also shared the same practical function, possibly fastening a cape or shawl (Glørstad & Røstad 2015:195–197; Kristoffersen 2000:107–112). However, there are exceptions, as some relief brooches, usually smaller specimens such as the sub-type with spatulate footplate, functioned as pairs of brooches at the shoulders or as fasteners at the side of the chest or on the sleeve. These often occur in combination with a larger, standard-type relief brooch (Kristoffersen 2000:108–112; Røstad 2021:117), and can be regarded as deluxe versions of the more commonly cruciform and/or small bow brooches that often are found in combination with relief brooches (see below and table 1).

In the following examination of the grave contexts, I will focus on the standard-type of relief brooch, as these share the same basic form or outline, quality and function as the disc-on-bow brooches. However, eight of the standard-type relief brooches differ from the main group in that they are unglilded, of base quality and/or were cast in the same mould (Meyer 1935; Røstad 2021:156–158). This separates them from the other individually formed, high-quality gilt brooches, as they cannot be perceived as prestigious objects in themselves. The grave contexts of both these and the high-quality relief brooches of non-standard form/outline will be explored separately to reveal potential differences or similarities compared to the standard-type brooch burials.

A total of 47 relief brooches of the standard form derive from 44 grave contexts, including three small specimens occurring in combination with a large standard-type brooch. The remainder are stray finds and/or from hoards or caches. A grave from Trygslund in southern Norway included three standard-type relief brooches. These are regarded as representing three individuals. There are 40 disc-on-bow brooches from burials, while the remainder are stray finds (Glørstad & Røstad 2021:93). Of the burials containing disc-on-bow brooches, 14 date to the Viking Age (11 of these date to around AD 800 or the ninth century).

Table 1. Catalogue of Norwegian graves from the Migration period (c. AD 400–550) including ‘standard’

Inv.no.	Location	Mound	Stone cist/chamber	Primary burial
Dalske Skole 1314	Vik, Grimstad, Aust-Agder	X		
B564	Indre Arna, Bergen, Hordaland	X	X	No
B6090	Døsen, Os, Hordaland	X		X
Å1683	Staurnes, Giske Møre og Romsdal	?		
T2805–25	Hole, Rauma, Møre og Romsdal	X	X	X
C8361	Offersøy, Lødingen, Nordland	X	X	X?
Ts478	Berg, Steigen, Nordland	X		
T9822	Hol, Inderøy, Nord-Trøndelag	X	X	X
T3505	Bangsund, Namsos, Nord-Trøndelag	X		No?
C4816	Dalem, Steinkjer, Nord-Trøndelag	X	X	No
S2276	Hovland, Eigersund, Rogaland	X		
S2547	Rivjaland, Hjelmeland, Rogaland	X	X	X?
S4752	Husvegg, Hå, Rogaland	X	No, but stones in circle	X
B5362	Kvassheim, Hå, Rogaland	X	X	
S1969	Fristad, Klepp, Rogaland	X		

d-type' relief brooches with rectangular headplate and a rhomboidal footplate.

Finds and further information

Square-headed relief brooch.

Square-headed relief brooch, equal-armed brooch, fragment of clasp, bucket-shaped pot, sherd/ear' from small pot, keyring with 4 keys.

Square-headed relief brooch, 2 small bow brooches, equal-armed brooch, bronze dress pin, two pair of clasps, bronze keyring with 2 keys, knife, small awl, spindle-whorl, remains of wooden shaft with traces of iron, bucket-shaped pot, bits of resin from wooden box, chunk of resin, remains of wooden board/staff, fragments of textiles and birchbark.

Square-headed relief brooch, bronze dress-pin, fragmentary bronze pin, bucket-shaped pot, scissors. Mixed assemblages, but listed items probably belonging to the same burial.

Square-headed relief brooch, 4 cruciform brooches, small bow brooch, silver-gilt punch-marked disc-shaped pendant, 2 glass beads (monochrome), fragments of silver bowl (?), sherd from glass vessel, 3 ceramic pots, resin from wooden box, weaving-batten/sword of iron, spindle-whorl of burnt clay, bronze keyring (?), fragments of iron key (?) with attached ring, wooden knife shaft with bronze ferrule and iron mount, counter (?) of burnt clay, 2 bits of burnt clay (?), small flat circular stone. (2 further iron rivets and iron fragments may have belonged to another context.)

Square-headed relief brooch, small bronze bow brooch, bronze dress-pin, 12–14 glass beads (of which some are polychrome), tubular bead of spiral bronze wire, iron bowl, bronze keyring, knife.

Square-headed relief brooch, glass bead, whetstone.

Square-headed relief brooch, 3 small equal-armed relief brooches, cruciform brooch, 2 s-shaped brooches of silver, silver-gilt scutiform pendant, vase/vessel-shaped pendant of silver, spiral clasps, 2 gold-in-glass beads, bronze key(?)ring, 3 (?) bronze keys, silver-sheet mount, weaving-batten/sword of iron with wooden shaft with interlace decoration and bronze ferrule, spindle-whorl of burnt clay, fragmentary knife with shaft with silver ferrule, sickle, casket handle of iron, awl (?) of iron, 2 ceramic pots, remains of bronze-sheet mounts, possibly to round box or vessel of wood or leather, bronze fragment.

Square-headed relief brooch, many beads of glass (some segmented, of which poss. gold-foiled) and amber (over 60 cm long necklace), poss. weaving-sword and small iron rivets in a row c. 188 x 94 cm.

Square-headed relief brooch, 3 gold-bracteates (t. C), gold spiral ring, 3 small square-headed relief brooches, 2 pair of silver clasps, silver-gilt gusset-plate, bronze keys, weaving-sword, bone fragments of cow and goat.

Square-headed relief brooch, cruciform brooch, gold spiral finger ring, fragment of bronze keyring (?), 2 ceramic pots. Some uncertainty whether objects belong to same assemblage.

Square-headed relief brooch, 3 small bow brooches, 2 silver dress-pins, gold-bracteate (t. D), clasps, 2 blue glass beads, bronze key(?)ring with attached iron ring and fragmentary key (?), 2 spindle-whorls of soapstone, 3 knives, bucket-shaped pot, resin from oval vessel of birchbark, fragments from textiles and fur, fragment of ox horn. 2 arrows of iron possibly belong to the assemblage.

Square-headed relief brooch, mosaic glass bead, bronze keyring with one key, spindle-whorl of stone, knife.

Square-headed relief brooch, 3 small equal-armed brooches, clasp, knife, bucket-shaped pot, iron fragments.

Square-headed relief brooch, possibly associated with belt mount and ceramic vessel, but uncertain context.

Inv.no.	Location	Mound	Stone cist/chamber	Primary burial
B4000	Hauge, Klepp, Rogaland	X	X	X
B2271	Hauge, Klepp, Rogaland	X	X	X
S2451	Nord-Braut, Klepp, Rogaland	X	X	X
C21407	Tu, Klepp, Rogaland	X	X	X
S8080	Vaula, Rennesøy, Rogaland	X	X	X
S9181	Eikeland, Time, Rogaland	X	X	X
S2695	Østbø, Vindafjord, Rogaland	X	X	X
B6656	Sanddal, Jølster, Sogn og Fjordane	X	X	X?
B6516	Kvåle, Sogndal, Sogn og Fjordane	X	X	X
B13954	Kvåle, Sogndal, Sogn og Fjordane	X	X	X
B9688	Nornes, Sogndal, Sogn og Fjordane	X	X	X
B8045	Hauglum, Vik, Sogn og Fjordane	No mound at time of exc.	X	X

Finds and further information

Square-headed relief brooch, small bow brooch, 2 gold-bracteates (t. B and C), 10 glass beads (monochrome, simple mosaic and 1 segmented gold-in-foil), bronze keyring, iron weaving-sword, 3 spindle-whorls, 3 ceramic vessels, 2 arrows of iron, iron fragments, bones of large bird and sheep, goat or dog, 3 flint stones, 2 egg-shaped stones, 8 small red stones. 2 bronze lumps and part of a crucible possibly part of the assemblage. Earlier disturbed grave context.

Square-headed relief brooch, fragments of small relief brooch, cruciform brooch of silver, scutiform pendant of gold, 3 (?) pair of clasps, red glass bead, 2 silver figures/masks, bronze hanging-bowl, glass vessel, 3 ceramic vessels, wooden bucket with bronze mounts and handle, 2 hinges/hasps poss. from casket, 2 fragmentary iron weaving-sword, spindle-whorl of burnt clay, 2 hide-scrappers of iron, silver ingot (?), 3 disc-shaped pieces of clay, bear claws and remains of fur, remains of oak boards and textiles.

Square-headed relief brooch, small bow brooch, 2 small equal-armed brooches, clasps, 2 bronze dress-pins, 7 glass beads (monochrome), 1 amber bead, bronze keyring with 3 attached loops/rings, iron key, ceramic vessel, knife, iron mount. Disturbed grave context.

Square-headed relief brooch, cruciform brooch, spiral finger ring of gold, clasps, green glass bead, iron weaving-sword, spindle-whorl of soapstone, 2 ceramic vessels, knife, iron fragments, horse (?) tooth, birchbark, charcoal.

Square-headed relief brooch, ceramic vessel, iron mounts from wooden vessel with handle, resin, knife, arrow of iron, iron rod. Disturbed grave context.

Square-headed relief brooch, 2 small equal-armed brooches, 2 silver-gilt 'plate-rings', 2 bronze dress-pins, 9 glass beads (monochrome), clasps, bronze key(?)ring, spindle-whorl of soapstone, 4 (?) ceramic vessels, resin and iron fragments from wooden vessel, textile fragments from cuff.

Square-headed relief brooch, 2 small bow brooches, bronze keyring, bucket-shaped pot, knife, fragmentary wool textiles.

Square-headed relief brooch, 2 silver 'plate-rings', iron weaving-sword, 2 (?) bucket-shaped pots, scissors. Double, female and male, burial. Poss. mixed assemblages.

Square-headed relief brooch, 2 small relief brooches with spatulate foot (t. B1), 2 small equal-armed brooches of bronze, 2 pair of clasps, 6 glass beads (monochrome), keyring and 2 keys of bronze, weaving-sword of iron, spindle-whorl of iron, 9 spindles/staffs, remains of casket of wood with 2 handles, mounts and rivets of iron, bucket-shaped pot, knife, awl, undef. tool of iron.

Square-headed relief brooch, 2 cruciform brooches, annular brooch with animal heads, drop-shaped bronze pendant (?), 9 glass beads of which several mosaic beads, amber bead, clasps (?), 2 glass vessels, 4 ceramic vessels, keys of iron, iron weaving-sword with wooden handle with interlace decoration, 2 spindle-whorls of stone and burnt clay, bronze hooks, prob. from spindles, 2 iron hide-scrappers/knives, knife with bronze pommel and ferrule, 2 iron handles from casket, iron handle from bucket, resin from poss. 5 vessels, 2 small buttons of glass/poss. counters/gaming pieces, 3 small silver masks, stone axe, 2 balls of clay, textile fragments. Burial with 2 individuals, adult female and girl appr. 10 yrs.

Square-headed relief brooch, cruciform brooch, 2 small bow brooches, clasps, bronze keyring with animal style dec., key of iron, bucket-shaped pot, iron weaving-sword with bronze mount, spindle-whorl of stone or burnt clay, iron rivet, iron rod/tang, awl-like tool, knife with mounted scabbard,

Square-headed relief brooch, 2 silver-gilt 'plate-rings' with animal style dec., clasps, keyring and 3 keys of bronze, iron key/tool, belt mount of bronze with remains of leather, weaving-sword of iron, 2 spindle-whorls of soapstone, iron hide-scraper/knife, small knife, iron mounts, rivets and handle from casket, 2 bucket-shaped pots, resin from 2 wooden vessels, textile fragments, fragments of iron from undef. tool, birchbark, burnt bones.

Inv.no.	Location	Mound	Stone cist/chamber	Primary burial
C21856	Falkum, Skien, Telemark	No mound at time of exc.		
C9441	Sjøtvedt, Skien, Telemark	X	X? small chambers encircling the burial	X
Ts2587	Laneset, Tranøy, Troms	No	X	
B3410	Ågedal, Audnedal, Vest-Agder	X	X	X
B5037	Høiland, Farsund, Vest-Agder	No?	Under big stone slab	
C55731	Sande, Farsund, Vest-Agder	X	X?	X
C7455	Gyland, Flekkefjord, Vest-Agder	X	X	No?
C13697	Hægebostad, Lindesnes, Vest-Agder	X		
Dcccxxxiii–iv	Trygsland, Marnadal, Vest-Agder	XXX	XXX	X?(XX?)
C19227	Berg, Larvik, Vestfold	X		No
C19858	Nordheim, Larvik, Vestfold	X		
C11237	Tveitane, Larvik, Vestfold	X	X	X
C11221	Tveitane, Larvik, Vestfold	X	X	X
C18714	Veierland, Nøtterøy, Vestfold	X		
C5950	Langlo, Stokke, Vestfold	X	X	X

Finds and further information

Square-headed relief brooch, 2 cruciform brooches, small bow brooch, gold-bracteate (t. A), mosaic/millefiori glass bead, glass vessel, 3 ceramic pots. Disturbed grave context.

Square-headed relief brooch, 2 gold-bracteates (t. C), button from clasp, 10–12 glass beads (8 poly- and 4 monochrome), amber bead, 3 bronze keys, glass vessel, bronze vessel, 2 ceramic vessels, silver-gilt ring from handle.

Square-headed relief brooch, disc-shaped 'plate-ring'/mount of silver, 2 glass beads (monochrome), bucket-shaped pot.

Square-headed relief brooch, 3 relief brooches with spatulate foot, 2 small bow brooches, 2 gold-bracteates (t. C), clasps, 2 glass beads (monochrome), keyring and key of bronze, fragment from glass vessel, 5 (?) ceramic vessels, weaving-sword of iron, 2 spindle whorls of stone, fragments of textiles. The glass beads, the fragment of the glass vessel and sherd from a ceramic vessel possibly belong to another burial, but this is uncertain.

Square-headed relief brooch, fragments of relief brooch, small bow brooch of silver, cruciform brooch of silver, 1 glass bead (monochrome), 6–7 ceramic vessels, 2 swords of which 1 possibly is a weaving-sword (Kristoffersen 2000:285), mount from casket/chest, flint tool. Possibly 2 individuals.

Square-headed relief brooch, 2 small bow brooches with relief decoration, clasps, silver 'plate-rings', 1 ring of silver (for suspension?), 2 glass beads (1 mono- and 1 polychrome), 1 amber bead, keyring and key of bronze, weaving-sword of iron, 2 spindle whorls of stone, fragments from glass vessel, lock from casket, ceramic vessel, knife, unknown object of bronze and wood, 9 small discs of silver (?), 2 iron rivets, fragments of textiles, lump/ball of rock crystal, fragments of white quartz, flint core and fragments, fragments of burnt bones.

Square-headed relief brooch, fragment of relief brooch, cruciform brooch, clasps, 3 gold-bracteates (t. C), disc-shaped pendant of silver with Style I-decoration (or poss. clasp), weaving-sword of iron, 3 spindle-whorls, bronze vessel, 2 ceramic vessels. Disturbed grave, poss. 2 individuals.

Square-headed relief brooch.

3 square-headed relief brooches, 2 cruciform brooches, 2 dress pins of bronze, clasps, gold spiral/payment ring, keyring with 4 keys of bronze, poss. weaving-sword of iron, 2 spindle-whorls of stone, 3 ceramic vessels, unknown object of wood, unknown object. 2 skeletons observed. Mixed assemblages. NB: counted as 3 individual burials.

Square-headed relief brooch, brooch (?) of unknown type, spindle-whorl, iron fragments, ceramic vessel and resin from vessel of wood, but context uncertain.

Square-headed relief brooch.

Square-headed relief brooch, 24 beads of glass (of which 1 segmented gold-in-foil, 1 large mosaic/millefiori and several polychrome), weaving-sword of iron, 3 ceramic vessels. Disturbed grave.

Square-headed relief brooch, 3 cruciform brooches, 2–3 small bow brooches or cruciform brooches, gold-bracteate (t. C), clasps, 2 dress pins of bronze, 1 blue glass bead, 1 amber bead, belt/key ring of bronze, weaving-sword of iron, 2 spindle-whorls, 5 ceramic vessels, resin from one or more vessels of wood, small iron objects/pieces fastened to wood, a.o. 2 rivets. Poss. 2 individuals.

Square-headed relief brooch, 2+ ceramic vessels, spindle-whorl of soap stone, knife, sickle (?), iron fragments. Uncertain context, poss. mixed assemblages.

Square-headed relief brooch, 3 cruciform brooches, 3 vase-shaped pendants of silver, 2 cylinder-shaped pendants of silver, 2 silver spiral beads, spiral ring of gold, 2 finger rings of silver, 13 glass beads (monochrome), glass vessel, 4 ceramic vessels, 2 vessels of wood with iron handles and mounts, fragments of poss. weaving-sword of iron, spindle-whorl of burnt clay.

The grave monuments

Many of the burials containing ornamental bow brooches were excavated during the nineteenth and early twentieth century, and consequently they often lack detailed information about the context (see below). In addition, with certain exceptions, mostly from northern Norway, human remains from the periods treated here are generally scarce. Designation of burial ritual, cremation or inhumation, is accordingly often based on the grave goods being burnt/unburnt, or on the presence or absence of cremation ashes, or on the positioning of the grave goods indicating the presence of a decayed skeleton. Feminine gender is usually attributed through association with brooches and/or several items of jewellery, or textile implements. Correlation between biological sex and these items is collaborated by studies of burials from northern Norway and other parts of Scandinavia (Glørstad & Røstad 2021:93; Røstad 2021:34 with references). It is likely that all the graves containing relief brooches represented inhumations (tables 1 and 3), while 13 of the burials with disc-on-bow brooches were cremations, and 10 represented inhumations (tables 2 and 3). The remaining graves were insufficiently documented for the ritual to be decided (see also Glørstad & Røstad 2021:93).

In total, 39 of the burials containing relief brooches were covered by mounds/barrows, of which 25 probably represented primary burials and five secondary burials. If the possible three individuals in the Trygslund grave were interred at the same time, 27 burials were primary. Three graves had no trace of mound at the time of the excavation, but it is uncertain whether this was the case originally. Two graves lacked sufficient documentation for this to be decided. At least 29 of the graves containing a disc-on-bow brooch were barrow-burials. Five burials most likely represent unmarked/flat graves, while the presence of a mound is uncertain for the remainder. Of the barrow-burials, nine can with some certainty be regarded as primary interments and three as secondary; the remainder are undecided. There are few exact measurements of the sizes of the mounds, but the diameters vary from 5–30m and the heights from about 0.7–5.6m. However, most mounds are wider than 10m.

In 30 of the graves that include relief brooches, the deceased was buried in a great cist or chamber built of stone slabs (tables 1 and 3). Stone cists/chambers generally went out of use during the transition to the Merovingian Period (Solberg 2000:186), but were present in four mounds containing disc-on-bow brooches (tables 2 and 3). Two of the graves contained early specimens dating to the transition between the two periods. In one of these, a burial at Gjukastein in Hordaland in western Norway, the brooch was found outside of the cist, probably due to later disturbances (accession register of the University Museum of Bergen: B653–B659). The last two graves

included brooches dating to the last phase of the Merovingian Period or around AD 800. Six of the burials with disc-on-bow brooches represented boat graves. All six belonged to the two concluding phases of the Merovingian Period or the early Viking Age.

Summing up, there are some persistent features associated with the grave monuments with brooches of these types, such as burial in mounds and adherence to the inhumation ritual, but the transition between the periods also sees changes through the cessation of stone cists and the introduction of cremations and boat graves. There was also a decline in the percentage of mounds in the Merovingian- to Viking-period evidence compared with the Migration-period burials. It should, however, be noted that there are in general markedly fewer burials in mounds from the Merovingian Period than in the Migration Period (see above).

The grave goods

To obtain a more thorough understanding of the position and roles of the women buried with the brooches, I will now explore the grave assemblages which included the brooches. When assessing the grave goods included in the individual burials, it should, however, be noted that only nine of the graves containing disc-on-bow brooches and 13 of the graves with relief brooches have been subject to professional excavations. The archaeological excavations were mainly carried out in the nineteenth or early twentieth century. Furthermore, four burials with relief and seven with disc-on-bow brooches represented possibly mixed assemblages, and six graves with relief brooches and two with disc-on-bow brooches are reported to represent previously disturbed burials. Four burials each with relief and disc-on-bow brooches have no information beyond the fact that the brooch was found in a grave mound.

Both types of brooch were associated with rich jewellery assemblages. In total, 36 graves with relief brooches and 28 with disc-on-bow brooches contained beads and/or other types of brooches and jewellery (tables 1 and 2). Clasps (19 burials) and cruciform brooches (13) or various sorts of small bow brooches (17) were repeatedly associated with relief brooches, while oval/tortoise brooches were most common in the contexts containing disc-on-bow brooches (17 finds). Beads appeared in 22 of the graves with relief brooches and 20 with disc-on-bow brooches, but the number of beads in the individual bead assemblage was usually lower in the former graves than in the latter. Also, the bead arrangements associated with disc-on-bow brooches frequently featured larger and more impressive beads, such as large millefiori and rock crystal examples (figure 3). Gold and/or silver

Table 2. Catalogue of Norwegian graves from the Merovingian period (c. AD 550–790/800) and the Vi

Inv.no.	Location	Stone cist/ chamber	Primary burial	Inhumation/ Cremation	Mound
C10244	Onsrud vestre, Ullensaker, Akershus				X
C10492	Hov, Ål, Buskerud			C	X
C22120 b	Jahren øvre, Hurum, Buskerud		X	C	X
C8156	Fonnås, Rendalen, Hedmark			C	X
C16019c	Åker, Hamar, Hedmark		X	C	X
C25880 b	Svergvollen, Tynset, Hedmark			C	
C26403 b	Veaa, Løten, Hedmark	X		C	X
B664	Gjukastein, Voss, Hordaland	X (brooch found outside cist)	No	I?	X
B7509	Varberg, Ulvik, Hordaland		No		X
B6721	Nes, Fauske, Nordland				
Ts3267	Leivset nedre, Fauske, Nordland				X
Ts5281	Hagbartsholmen, Steigen, Nordland		X	I	No
Ts6362 a	Haukenes, Hadsel, Nordland		X	I	X
Ts6378 a	Ytre Kvarøy, Lurøy, Nordland		X	I	No
Ts12308/2 og 5, Ts13785/250	Bitterstad, Hadsel, Nordland		X	I	No (?)
T1120	Tømmerås, Grong, Nord-Trøndelag				

king Age (790/800–1050) including disc-on-bow brooches.

Finds and further information

Disc-on-bow brooch.

Disc-on-bow brooch.

Disc-on-bow brooch, 2 oval brooches (Berdal-type), 10-12 beads of glass, rock-crystal and cornelian, weaving-sword of iron, spindle-whorl of burnt clay, loom weight, smoothing stone (?), iron fragments prob. from casket/chest, iron key, small chisel (?), whetstone. Disturbed grave. DATE: Viking Age.

Disc-on-bow brooch, 2 oval brooches (t. R.655). DATE: Viking Age.

Disc-on-bow brooch, large spherical bronze bead/(pendant?) with garnet inlays and interlace decoration, 20+ beads of glass (of which several millefiori and/or mosaic beads), rock crystal and cornelian, Style II-decorated mount, glass vessel, iron cauldron, comb of antler with animal heads, part of lock (?) from casket/chest, iron rivets, burnt bones/tooth of animal(s) (cow?/horse?).

Disc-on-bow brooch, oval brooch (t. R.647), 2 arm rings of bronze, iron key, iron weaving-sword, scissors, hide-scraper/weaving implement R.413, knife, iron hinge from casket (?). DATE: Viking Age.

Disc-on-bow brooch, undef. bronze fragment, spindle-whorl, comb.

Disc-on-bow brooch, 1 small bow brooch [2 cruciform brooches, 2 swords, 2 shield bosses, spear, axe, piece/lump of rock crystal – NB: these items not counted as prob. represent other burials]. Mixed assemblages.

Disc-on-bow brooch [cruciform brooch – not counted], arrow of iron. Mixed assemblages?

Disc-on-bow brooch, spear, axe. Mixed burials?

Disc-on-bow brooch, oval brooch (t. R.648). DATE: Viking Age.

Disc-on-bow brooch, 2 oval brooches (t. R.655), annular brooch, 1200 beads of glass, bronze and rock-crystal (several segmented silver- and gold-foiled), 2 bronze rings, balance, weight of lead, soapstone vessel, weaving-sword of iron, 2 spindle-whorls, wool-comb/heckle, sickle, whetstone, 2 knives, iron chain, bell, comb, 6 iron rivets, iron fragments, remains of wood and birchbark, flint flake. Boat grave (?). DATE: Viking Age.

Disc-on-bow brooch, rectangular brooch with animal decoration, 22 beads of glass, bronze, bone and rock-crystal (several large millefiori and mosaic beads), beartooth-pendant, key, 2 spindle-whorls, wool-comb (?), scissors, 2 knives, iron spit, comb of antler/bone, 4 iron mounts (prob. from casket), fragments of textile (linnen).

Disc-on-bow brooch, 2 oval brooches/creeping beast brooches, conical brooch, 69 beads of glass, stone, bone, amber and bronze (several large mosaic beads), flat pierced bronze fragment, bronze fragments, 2 wool-combs/heckles, sickle/scythe, spear, iron fragments, rivets. Boat grave.

1-2 oval brooches (t. R.643), brooch fragment with animal style dec. and garnet inlays, 2 mask-shaped pendants of silver with garnet inlays, 92+ beads of glass (several millefiori beads and segmented gold? and silver-foiled), bronze fragment, sickle, knife/scissors, whetstone, iron mount from casket (?), burnt animal bones. Boat grave.

Disc-on-bow brooch, 2 oval brooches (t. R.648), iron cauldron. DATE: Viking Age.

Inv.no.	Location	Stone cist/ chamber	Primary burial	Inhumation/ Cremation	Mound
T1300	Stangerholt, Levanger, Nord-Trøndelag				X
T2060	Tanem, Steinkjer, Nord- Trøndelag				X
T3808	Laberget, Frosta, Nord- Trøndelag				X
T6055	Dyva nordre, Stjørdal, Nord-Trøndelag				X
T6574	Melhus, Overhalla, Nord-Trøndelag		X	I	X
T7714	Skogmo store, Overhalla, Nord- Trøndelag		X	I	X
C716	Holen, Øyer, Oppland	X		I?	X
C15041	Alfstad, Øystre, Oppland				X
C23947 y	Hjemstølen, Vestre, Oppland			C	
S4843b	Espeland, Bjerkereim, Rogaland		X	C	X
B488	Storhaugen, Stavanger, Rogaland		?		X
B2559	Orre, Klepp, Rogaland			I?	X
S4924	Byberg, Sola, Rogaland				X
B4969b	Fure, Fjaler, Sogn og Fjordane	X		C	No
B12215	Ylmheim, Sogndal, Sogn og Fjordane			C	No
T18280	Sør-Trøndelag, Osen, Strand				
T1010	Strand, Åfjord, Sør- Trøndelag			I	X
T3198	Risegjerdet, Oppdal, Sør-Trøndelag				

Finds and further information

Disc-on-bow brooch, 21 glass beads (of which several large mosaic and millefiori beads), rectangular mount with animal style dec., spindle-whorl, sickle.

Disc-on-bow brooch, dice (?), belt mount, whetstone, undef. weapon. Prob. mixed assemblages.

Disc-on-bow brooch, fragment of jewellery (poss. arm ring?)

Disc-on-bow brooch, glass mosaic bead, mount, fragment of jewellery (?). More objects were originally included in the grave.

Disc-on-bow brooch, 2 oval brooches (t. R643), insular mount-brooch with enamel, 135 beads of glass (of which several segmented gold-foiled and mosaic/millefiori (?)), 1 bead of silver wire, weaving-sword of whalebone, whalebone plaque, spindle-whorl, Insular reliquary found inside a wooden casket, ring of iron (poss. from harness), scissors, handle (?) of iron, iron fragments, rod-shaped iron tool, iron rivets, burnt animal bones. Double burial of male and female. Listed items belong to female. Boat grave. DATE: late Mer. period/early Viking Age/ca AD 800.

Disc-on-bow brooch, 2 oval brooches (t. R643), 18 glass beads (mostly all large millefiori beads), 1 amber bead, 2 keys of iron, weaving-sword of whalebone, whalebone plaque, spindle-whorl, smoothing stone, sickle, knife, jaw of ox/cow, iron rivets, iron mounts (for boat?). Boat grave.

Disc-on-bow brooch, 18 beads (of which several mosaic beads).

Disc-on-bow brooch, iron rod/undef. tool. Earlier finds from same area in mound: sword, jingle of iron, iron key. Mixed assemblages?

Disc-on-bow brooch, oval brooch (t. R.652/654), weaving-sword of iron, 2 spindle-whorls, 3 loom weights, iron hinge, lock, mounts and handle from a casket, sickle (?), 3 iron cramps, whirl-shaped object of iron (unknown function), Double burial of male and female. Listed items prob. belong to female. DATE: Viking Age.

Disc-on-bow brooch, oval brooch (t. 647), bronze chain, bronze pin, 'button' of bone (from the disc-on-bow brooch?), wool-comb, sickle, comb, knife. DATE: Viking Age.

Disc-on-bow brooch.

Disc-on-bow brooch, insular mount-brooch (?), 2 oval brooches (t. R.647), beads of glass and agate (of which several mosaic/millefiori (?) beads), spindle-whorl. DATE: Viking Age.

Disc-on-bow brooch, fragmentary oval brooch (unclassifiable early type), arm ring of bronze, 30 beads of glass and bronze (of which several mosaic beads and segmented silver- and gold-beads), finger ring or mount of bronze, pin (from brooch?) with remains of textile, spindle-whorl, knife, iron fragments. DATE: late Mer. period/early Viking Age/ca AD 800.

Disc-on-bow brooch, insular mount-brooch, silver arm ring (?), 21 beads of glass (of which some mosaic beads and segmented glass-foil beads) and one large bronze gilt bead, iron cauldron, iron spit, axe. DATE: Viking Age.

Disc-on-bow brooch, 20+ beads of glass (of which 1 glass mosaic bead), stone and bronze, iron key, iron lock, mounts, handle etc. for casket, weaving-sword of iron, 2 spindle-whorls, 4+ loom weights, sickle, celt, scissors, hide-scraper/weaving implement of iron (t. R.413), knife, bridle.

Disc-on-bow brooch, large mosaic bead.

Disc-on-bow brooch, spindle-whorl.

Disc-on-bow brooch, annular brooch, beads, spindle-whorl, knife, arrow. Poss. mixed assemblages.

Inv.no.	Location	Stone cist/ chamber	Primary burial	Inhumation/ Cremation	Mound
Ts83	Hundstad, Kvæfjord, Troms				X
Brit.Mus. MCS1297	Nær Tromsø, Tromsø, Troms				X?
C6054	Langlo, Stokke, Vestfold			C	X
C6247	Lundre nordre, Larvik, Vestfold			C	X
C11898	Melø, Larvik, Vestfold		No?	C	X
C4040	Gjulem, Rakkestad, Østfold				X

pendants occurred in 12 graves with relief brooches; of these gold bracteates were most frequent (eight graves). Two or possibly three graves containing disc-on-bow brooches also included pendants, but these did not represent standardized types.

The jewellery assemblages most likely contributed to the overall impact of the brooches that would ‘have had a striking effect, communicated through their size and shiny surface’ (Kristoffersen & Pedersen 2020:47). They did, however, vary as the types of jewellery changed, not only between the main periods of use, as noted above, but also throughout different phases within each period. Relief brooches were frequently associated with cruciform brooches in the first part of the Migration Period, while small bow brooches dominated in the assemblages from the last phase of that period, as did jewellery types like gold bracteates and so-called ‘plate rings’. The brooch types associated with disc-on-bow brooches likewise altered from small creeping-beast brooches and oval brooches (of type Rygh 1885 fig. 643) in the middle and late Merovingian Period, to larger oval brooches of various types (for example Rygh 1885 fig. 647–648) in the Viking Period. Moreover, associated bead assemblages differed, as for example gold and silver foiled glass beads occurred in combination with disc-on-bow brooches only in contexts dating from the late Merovingian Period onwards, while pendants were included only in the Merovingian Period and arm-rings (with one possible exception) only in the Viking-period assemblages (table 2).

Imported glass or bronze vessels were part of the burial goods in nine of the graves containing relief brooches, but only one grave with a disc-on-bow brooch contained a glass beaker. Vessels of iron, however, occurred in one context with a relief brooch and in three with disc-on-bow brooches.

Finds and further information

Disc-on-bow brooch.

Disc-on-bow brooch, 2 oval/creeping beast brooches, 32 beads of glass (of which several millefiori-beads) and rock crystal.

Disc-on-bow brooch, 2 oval brooches (t. R.647), arm ring of bronze, spiral bronze bead, spindle-whorl, comb of antler, bridle, 3 iron crampons (for horse), 1 iron hook with spiral. Boat grave. DATE: Viking Age.

Disc-on-bow brooch, bronze key, spearhead, 2 bridles, iron hook. Disturbed grave. Mixed assemblages.

Disc-on-bow brooch, 2 oval brooches (t. R.647), dress pin, 5 glass beads (of which 1 large mosaic, 1 silver- and 1 segmented gold-foil bead), 1 bronze bead, sickle, ploughshare, large iron fragments. Bone of dog (?) observed when excavated. DATE: Viking Age.

Disc-on-bow brooch, counter and dice of bone.

A soapstone vessel was associated with a disc-on-bow brooch in a Viking-period burial, while containers of ceramics, wood or other organic material were included in 34 graves including relief brooches.

Both types of brooch were frequently associated with tools (table 4). Two types of implements used in textile production, spindle-whorls and weaving-swords/battens, were recurrent (see also Kristoffersen 2000:105, 130–137 and Glørstad & Røstad 2015:195). Of the burials with relief brooches, 21 contained spindle-whorls and 20 weaving-swords. Fourteen of the graves containing disc-on-bow brooches also included spindle-whorls while seven burials contained weaving-swords. Several of the burials with disc-on-bow brooches contained additional types of textile implements such as loom weights, wool-combs, whalebone plaques and smoothing stones. The function of the plaques is disputed, but according to the traditional interpretation, they were used as boards for smoothing linen. Some, however, argue that wear and cut marks indicate that they were food plates or used for preparing hides (cf. Petersen 1905:376–378; Storli 2006:170; Heen-Pettersen & Murray 2018:74). The latter is interesting since objects that have been interpreted as hide-scrapers (implements of type Rygh 1885 fig. 413) occurred in association with both relief and disc-on-bow brooches. (However, an alternative interpretation is that these functioned as weaving-tools/thread-pickers, see for example Kristoffersen 2000 and Petersen 1951). Likewise, arrows occurred in association with both types of brooch, as did sickles, but the latter were markedly more common in graves containing disc-on-bow brooches (nine burials) than relief brooches (two). Four graves with relief brooches also included awl-like objects of iron and possibly two scissors, while three and five burials with disc-on-bow brooches



Figure 3. Disc-on-bow brooch and beads from Stor Skomo, Trøndelag. Photograph: © NTNU, Vitenskapsmuseet.

contained axes and scissors respectively, in addition to personal implements like combs (six) (table 4).

Keys and/or caskets or chests also recurred among the grave goods associated with both brooch types (see also Kristoffersen 2000:105, 130–137 and Glørstad & Røstad 2015:195), with 24 occurrences associated with relief brooches and 10 with disc-on-bow brooches. Since the caskets were made of wood, they may have disintegrated completely, leaving no trace if they lacked metal fittings or the lock was made of base metal that easily decayed. The keys, which often were made of copper alloy and/or fastened to a key-ring of copper alloy, may indicate the potential presence of a casket or chest. In a burial including a relief brooch at Sande in Farsund in southwestern Norway, part of an iron lock from a casket remained, and a bronze key hooked to a ring and attached to the girdle of the deceased fitted the lock (Vedeler et al. 2018:4). In a grave containing a relief brooch at Kvåle in Sogndal in western Norway, a key was found in the immediate vicinity of a casket/chest, and may have been placed in the lock at the time of the burial (Kristoffersen 2000:115). However, it is also likely that some of the graves may have contained only keys and no casket or chest, perhaps as a *pars pro toto* representation, as this is documented in several Iron Age burials (Berg 2021:414, 416).

Table 3. Numbers of various burial rituals and grave forms associated with graves from the Migration period including relief brooches and from the Merovingian period and Viking Age including disc-on-bow brooches.

Burial ritual	Migration Period (c. AD 400–550)	Merovingian Period/Viking Age (c. AD 550–1050)
Inhumation	44	10
Cremation	-	13
Mound/Barrow	39	29
Unmarked/Flat grave	3?	5
Primary burial in mound	25 (27?)	9
Secondary burial in mound	5?	3?
Stone cist/chamber	30	4
Boat burial	-	6

Seven contexts with relief brooches and five with disc-on-bow brooches contained (parts of) animals and/or burnt animal bones, such as of cow, goat, bird and horse. Some of these probably represented remains from meals (e.g. Petersen 1905:369; Kristoffersen 2000:316). However, due to poor preservation conditions for bone in general in Norway, it is likely that the animal bones (like the human remains) are under-represented in these graves.

Summing up, the examination of the contents of the graves reveals that there were some obvious differences in relation to the funerary goods associated with the two types of brooches. The divergence concerns the variation in jewellery assemblages and in the types and numbers of containers and tools. The analysis also demonstrates varieties within the assemblages associated with each type: the jewellery types differed in different phases and the individual assemblages included some, but not all, of the same object types. In this regard, the assemblages were not consistent either between or within each of the respective periods of use of the brooches. There were, on the other hand, recurrent features to some of these graves in that spindle-whorls, weaving-battens, keys and/or caskets, as well as sickles, scissors, hide-scrapers (alternatively thread-pickers), arrows and animal bones appeared in both periods.

Seen together, the examination of the grave monuments and the burial assemblages demonstrates a fluidity between graves containing standard-type relief brooches and disc-on-bow brooches. On the other hand, some constant factors appeared, not only in the construction of the grave monuments, but also in the continuous inclusion of certain object types among the grave goods associated with both types. The nine burials including high-quality relief brooches of *non-standard* form support this overall pattern. One grave context is undocumented, but the remaining eight included beads

Table 4. Number of graves from the Migration period including relief brooches and from the Merovingian period and Viking Age including disc-on-bow brooches in association with different types of tools.

Tools	Migration Period (c. AD 400–550)	Merovingian Period/ Viking Age (c. AD 550–1050)
Weaving-sword	20	7
Spindle-whorl	21	14
Loom weight	-	3
Wool-comb/heckle	-	4
Whalebone plaque	-	2
Smoothing stone	-	2
Hide-scraper/thread picker	3	2
Arrow	3	2 (?)
Sickle	2	9
Awl-like implement	4	-
Celt/axe	-	3
Scissors	2 (?)	5
Comb	-	6

and/or other types of jewellery. Spindle-whorls occurred in four finds and weaving-swords in three, while keys/caskets were included in five burials and ceramic vessels in six of the burials. Two graves included items of gold, and two imported glass vessels. At least seven of the graves were covered by mounds, and eight contained a stone cist or chamber. There is thus a complexity to these ‘brooch burials’, reflecting both stability and change, and variability.

Burials and expressions of identity

What does this complexity imply concerning the social significance and roles of the women buried in these graves? It has been argued that the bereaved and the community expressed how society should be seen in ideal terms through the burial rites. Consequently, the deceased was furnished with the identity or identities that were conceived as essential in order to maintain social order – or alternatively, the burial context could be used to challenge that social order (Parker Pearson 1993:226–227; Williams 1998:96; Kristoffersen 2000:19–21; Lucy 2000:178; Díaz-Andreu 2005:39; Røstad 2021:33). It is not likely that there was no connection between the deceased and the monuments constructed or the objects deposited as part of the funerary rite, but on this premise one cannot assume that the burial

monument and assemblage directly reflected the social identity and status of the dead while living (e.g. Lillios 1999:241). Mortuary evidence may nevertheless serve as a starting point for explorations of expressions of identities.

A person's identity may be conceived as dynamic, contextual and multidimensional in that it is made up of different layers or aspects, formed through the intersecting lines of experience. Different aspects of identity, such as age, gender, social status and ethnic affiliation are activated, emphasized or played out in relation to specific social situations and contexts. The forming, maintenance, negotiation and transformation of identities may thus be regarded as a continuously ongoing process (Jones 1997; Lund & Moen 2019). From this perspective, diverse material expressions of identity are to be expected, as different aspects will be emphasized or activated according to the specific context (Lund & Moen 2019:152). The complexity in the funerary expressions may thus reflect a fluidity in composite, multidimensional identities negotiated through the context of burials.

In accordance with this understanding of how identities are composed and may be expressed through the burial components, the objects included in a burial would take on meaning depending on the immediate context and individual lines of experiences, but would also be influenced by the wider historical situation. In light of the importance of trade in furs and other hunting products during most of the Scandinavian Iron Age (e.g. Ashby et al. 2015; Sindbæk 2017; Baug et al. 2019), the presence of arrows in some of these brooch-graves could imply that the individual woman buried with these particular items had a link of some sort with hunting. She could, for instance have hunted and/or played a role in relation to trade with hunting products (Lund & Moen 2019). Likewise, the inclusion of what may represent hide-scrapers and possibly whalebone plaques may potentially have referred to the deceased's role in preparing skins/furs, for either trade or domestic use. This could then reflect one or more aspects out of several social roles of the deceased that were thought important to accentuate in the burial ritual in particular situations. The fluidity within the larger group of burials containing these ornamental bow brooches may thus testify to the recognition of the different intersecting lines of experience of the individual women buried with this type of brooch.

The more regular occurrence of features such as a large/composite jewellery set, and objects such as spindle-whorls, weaving-swords and caskets/keys, imply that these represented factors that were given importance in many of the burial situations. Perhaps such items referenced the significance of the deceased women in public displays of splendour and authority, their association with textile production and/or ritual divination (Kristoffersen 2000:142; Fernstål 2007:270), and access to and ownership of valuable possessions that needed to be kept under lock and key (Berg 2021:412, 421–

422). The meanings would most likely vary, though, depending not only on individual experiences, but also over time. The appearance of weaving-swords in certain Migration-period graves could have connotations regarding the production of high-quality textiles that figured in aristocratic gift-exchange (Kristoffersen 2000:142). Weaving-swords and the additional inclusion of textile implements in the Merovingian and Viking Periods could still have similar associations in specific contexts. Yet, in other situations, it could potentially be connected with the surge in North Sea activities from the early eighth century (Baug et al. 2019), if the production of textiles had to do with the making of wool sails or tradable cloth (Sindbæk 2017). The regular and occasional inclusion of objects and other elements thus allowed for the interplay between separate layers of identities and how these aspects were played out both in specific burial situations as well as in a broader historical context.

Negotiating positions and keeping up with the times

Certain objects may arguably create an effect of constancy, even in situations where the actual circumstances are changed (Hoskins 2005:79). As elements composing the visual aspects that would impact the observers (Kristoffersen & Pedersen 2020:47), the maintenance of the antiquated basic brooch form may have preserved an impression of stability. The changes, noted above and outlined in figures 1 and 2, which took place within the frame of this basic form in the choice of decoration and attributes, allowed for the demonstration of long-distance connections and socio-political relationships that were of consequence in the present. As such, the supply of new elements would add to the exotic effect and significance of the brooches, intrinsically linking the past with the present. This may be exemplified through the increase in use of garnets and the introduction of the cloisonné technique during the transition to the Merovingian period (figure 2). In this period, garnet-inlaid metalwork functioned as an emblem of elite networks in the North Sea region (Arrhenius 1985; Hamerow 2017). In the early Migration Period (figure 1) decoration in the Nydam style was influenced by, and conveyed a connection to, Roman culture. The subsequent use of Style I ornamentation functioned as a manifestation of Germanic in opposition to Roman identity, and of political alliances within the Germanic elite (Kristoffersen 2000:130–145, 209). By adapting decorative elements and styles that had social and political significance in the present, the brooches acquired an updated relevance (see also Lund & Arwill-Nordbladh 2016:416).



Figure 4. Migration-period find from Falkum, Telemark. Photograph: Ove Holst. © Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo.

The continued use of a conservative form may be connected to the fact that several of the relief brooches and disc-on-bow brooches were old, worn and sometimes even repaired when buried. Such old brooches most likely represented heirlooms, and this practice can be traced back to the silver-sheet fibulas of the late Roman Period (Røstad 2018:83–84). Heirlooms are characteristically conservative in design and restricted in type and material

(Lillios 1999:242, 252). Many of the brooches found in the burials were not old, but their antiquated form may have alluded to the heirloom-brooches in remaining, in Katina Lillios's (1999:242) words, 'heirloom-able over many generations'. The reality of the heirloom-brooches may thus have driven the continued production of the standard-type brooch. This conservatism, both in form and practical function, combined with political relevance, may have served to make the brooches suitable as a means to establish or negotiate contested social positions.

There may also have existed other ways of negotiating or manipulating social roles expressed by the brooch-burials. A group of relief brooches shared, as noted, the same basic form/outline as those in the main corpus, but were of lower quality. These 'simple bronze brooches' have been ascribed to women belonging to a lower social stratum (Meyer 1935:102). It seems relevant to ask if these women, by wearing an imitation of a high-status brooch, aspired to social mobility? Ethnographic analogies suggest another possible interpretation, showing that symbolic representations of heirlooms in less exotic raw materials might be included in burials while the original remains in use (Lillios 1999:252). Seven of the 'simple bronze brooches' have been found in grave contexts, of which two have no further information on the construction. Of the remaining five, four were from mound burials and four contained stone chambers. None of the graves included items of gold or imported vessels, but at least four and possibly six of the burials contained additional items of jewellery. Only one of the graves has been subject to archaeological excavation, and this was a primary burial in a stone cist covered by a mound. It included five or six ceramic vessels, two spindle-whorls, a belt/key-ring of bronze, a hide-scraper of iron and a knife (Accession register, Museum of Archaeology, University of Stavanger: S8607). This grave does not stand out on the basis of the grave contents or the construction of the monument when compared to the main corpus of high-quality brooches. This may lend some support to an interpretation of the simple bronze brooches having served as symbolic substitutes, but due to the scarcity of well-documented contexts, it is difficult to reach a firm conclusion regarding the function of these brooches.

Buried with a brooch: creating continuity of elite female status and roles

The examination of the burial contexts revealed that when it comes to how the monuments were constructed, there was a consistency that was more marked in the Migration Period than in the following periods. In the former period, inhumations in barrows were almost ubiquitous, and the deceased

was normally placed in a stone cist. If, as has been claimed, the rank of an individual may be expressed through the amount of energy expended on their burial monument (Lillios 1999:251), the great investment in building these monuments, and the fact that many of the graves represented primary burials, indicate that the women buried in them were conceived as socially important by the contemporary society. There was, as demonstrated, more variability in the funerary *assemblages* within this period, but a certain consistency was perceivable nevertheless in the appearance of a rich jewellery assemblage and in the relatively frequent inclusion of vessels of ceramic or other materials, keys and/or caskets, spindle-whorls and weaving-battens. Variability was represented through additional elements such as gold items and imported vessels, as well as awl-like implements, hide-scrapers, arrows and sickles.

Burials in barrows were maintained in the following periods, although some flat/unmarked graves occurred. Some reservations must be noted due to the scarcity of well-documented contexts from this period, but there seems to have been a possible decline in primary burials in barrows. If this was the case, it may reflect a tendency to a diminished investment in the ‘brooch burials’, although the continued use of a mound still indicates that the women buried with these brooches maintained social significance. Alternatively, the reuse of existing burial mounds may have represented a conscious strategy for establishing or legitimizing a contested social position by creating a tangible link with the past (Bradley 1987; Williams 1998). A secondary interment containing an early disc-on-bow brooch at Gjukastein in West-Norway could thus potentially represent an attempt to create continuity, and as such might be connected with the phenomenon of ‘invention of tradition’ (Hobsbawm 1983), attested through more radical changes in the manufacturing of the brooches at this stage (Røstad 2018:97–98). The practice of secondary interment in mounds can also be seen in light of increased social mobility causing inherited positions to be challenged and resulting in conflicting economic and societal interests during the eighth and ninth centuries (Baug et al. 2019; Glørstad & Røstad 2021:101).

When it comes to the grave goods, the burial components were more varied in the Merovingian and Viking Periods than in the previous period, and repetitive patterns among the burial assemblages were fewer. Nevertheless, rich jewellery sets, particularly bead arrangements, were noticeable, as were also the continued appearance of spindle-whorls, keys and/or caskets and to a certain extent weaving-swords, and the now more common inclusion of sickles. The variables in the grave goods in this period were mainly made up of additional textile implements or other types of tools.

The repetitive elements that are demonstrated in some of these graves, through the use of barrows and/or the inclusion of specific objects, may

as noted indicate that certain aspects connected with the social roles these women held, were more emphasized than others. That these aspects were more commonly materialized may imply that they represented characteristics of an ideal role that was presented as essential for contemporary society. Since the objects occurred in graves belonging to both the Migration and Merovingian/Viking Periods, it may further be argued that regardless of potential ‘new’ references that the objects acquired depending on individual experiences and shifting historical situations, the preservation of these traits eventually lent the burials an antiquated appearance. As such, the graves functioned as an extenuation of the brooches themselves in acquiring contemporary actualization while ostensibly remaining the same (see also Jones 2007; Lund & Arwill-Nordbladh 2016:417, 424). At the same time, the reproduction of this role was continually subject to changes as reflected through the variation in the individual burial components as they evolved through time, for example the transfer of emphasis upon particular objects, the inclusion of new object types and adherence to new rites such as boat burial and cremation. Although both the brooches and the burials were transformed over time, the burials created an impression of staying ‘outside of time’ effectuated through the use of an antiquated brooch form and recurring ritual elements. In this way, an ideal social role for elite females was reproduced, negotiated, transformed and sometimes perhaps even manipulated or imitated.

While the exact content of this role and the meanings ascribed to it altered within different contexts, depending on individual experiences and shifting social and historical conditions, these burials nevertheless represented a relatively stable social practice and pattern of behaviour within Iron Age society. As an established custom, they created a norm and acceptance around an elite female role-set. Thus, they were crucial in legitimizing, regulating and upholding a hierarchical social structure. In this way, the maintenance of the brooch burials constituted a social institution that lasted for several centuries. Although as an institution they represented stability and an apparent constant in Iron Age society, there were in fact, as demonstrated, considerable variations and alterations taking place as the phenomenon adapted to a changing society from the Migration Period to the Viking Age.

Acknowledgements

I am most grateful to the two anonymous peer reviewers and Alison Klevnäs for constructive comments and useful feedback.

References

- Adams, W.Y. & Adams, E.W. 1991. *Archaeological Typology and Practical Reality: A Dialectical Approach to Artefact Classification and Sorting*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Arrhenius, B. 1985. *Merovingian Garnet Jewellery: Emergence and Social Implications*. Stockholm: Kungl. Vitterhets historie och antikvitets akademien.
- Arwill-Nordbladh, E. 2008. Aska och Rök: Om minne och materiell kultur i nordisk vikingatid. In: Petersson, B. & Skoglund, P. (eds), *Arkeologi och identitet*, pp. 169–188. Lund: Institutionen för arkeologi och antikens historia, Lund Universitet.
- Asby, S., Coutu, A.N. & Sindbæk, S.M. 2015. Urban Networks and Arctic Outlands: Craft Specialists and Reindeer Antler in Viking Towns. *European Journal of Archaeology*. Vol. 18 pp. 679–704.
- Baug, I., Skre, D., Heldal, T. & Jansen, Ø.J. 2019. The Beginning of the Viking Age in the West. *Journal of Maritime Archaeology*. Vol. 14(1) pp. 43–80.
- Berg, H.L. 2021. *Mechanisms of Security: Locks, Keys, and Ordered Life in Iron Age Norway (c. 0–1050 AD)*. Unpublished phd-thesis, University of Bergen.
- Bradley, R.J. 1987. Time Regained: The Creation of Continuity. *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*. Vol. 140 pp. 1–17.
- Callmer, J. 2008. The Meaning of Women's Ornaments and Ornamentation: Eastern Middle Sweden in the 8th and early 9th Century. *Acta Archaeologica*. Vol. 79 pp. 185–207.
- Díaz-Andreu, M. 2005. Gender Identity. In: Díaz-Andreu, M., Lucy, S., Babic, S. & Edwards, D.N. (eds), *The Archaeology of Identity: Approaches to Gender, Age, Status, Ethnicity and Religion*, pp. 13–42. London: Routledge.
- Dunnell, R.C. 1986. Methodological Issues in Americanist Artifact Classification. *Advances in Archaeological Method and Theory*. Vol. 9 pp. 149–207.
- Fernstål, L. 2007. Spoken Words: Equality and Dynamics within a Group of Women Skalds in the Third Century AD, Skovgårde, Denmark. *World Archaeology*. Vol. 39(2) pp. 263–280.
- Fredriksen, P.D., Kristoffersen, E.S. & Zimmermann, U. 2014. Innovation and Collapse: Bucket-Shaped Pottery and Metalwork in the Terminal Migration Period. *Norwegian Archaeological Review*. Vol. 47 pp. 1–22.
- Glørstad, A.Z.T. & Røstad, I.M. 2015. Mot en ny tid? Merovingertidens ryggknappspenner som uttrykk for endring og erindring. In: Vedeler, M. & Røstad, I.M. (eds), *Smykker: Personlig pynt i kulturhistorisk lys*, pp. 181–210. Trondheim: Museumsforlaget.
- Glørstad, A.Z.T. & Røstad, I.M. 2021. Echoes of the Past: Women, Memories and Disc-on-Bow Brooches in Vendel and Viking Period Scandinavia. *European Journal of Archaeology*. Vol. 24(1) pp. 89–107.
- Hamerow, H. 2017. The Circulation of Garnets in the North Sea Zone, c. 400–700. In: Hilgner, A., Greiff, S. & Quast, D. (eds), *Gemstones in the First Millennium AD: Mines, Trade, Workshops and Symbolism*, pp. 71–74. Mainz: Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum.
- Heen-Pettersen, A. & Murray, G. 2018. An Insular Reliquary from Melhus: The Significance of Insular Ecclesiastical Material in Early Viking-Age Norway. *Medieval Archaeology*. Vol. 62(1) pp. 53–82.
- Hobsbawm, E. 1983. Introduction: Inventing Traditions. In: Hobsbawm, E. & Ranger, T. (eds), *The Invention of Tradition*, pp. 1–14. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Hoskins, J. 2005. Agency, Biography and Objects. In: Tilley, C., Keane, W., Kuchler, S., Rowlands, M. & Spitzer, P. (eds), *Handbook of Material Culture* 1, pp. 74–85. London: Sage Publications.
- Iversen, F. 2013. Big Bang, Lordship or Inheritance? Changes in the Settlement Structure on the Threshold of the Merovingian Period, South-Eastern Norway. In: Klapste, J. (ed.), *Hierarchies in Rural Settlements*, pp. 341–358. *Ruralia* 9. Turnhout: Brepols.
- Jones, A. 2007. *Memory and Material Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jones, S. 1997. *The Archaeology of Ethnicity: Constructing Identities in the Past and Present*. London: Routledge.
- Kristoffersen, S. 2000. *Sverd og spenne: Dyreornamentikk og sosial kontekst*. *Studia Humanitatis Bergensia* 13. Kristiansand: Høyskoleforlaget.
- Kristoffersen, S. & Pedersen, U. 2020. Changing Perspectives in Southwest Norwegian Style. In: Martin, T. & Morrison, W. (eds); *Barbaric Splendour: The Use of Image Before and After Rome*, pp. 47–60. Oxford: Archaeopress.
- Lillios, K.T. 1999. Objects of Memory: The Ethnography and Archaeology of Heirlooms. *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory*. Vol. 6 pp. 235–262.
- Lucy, S. 2000. *The Anglo-Saxon Way of Death: Burial Rites in Early England*. Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing.
- Lund, J. & Arwill-Nordbladh, E. 2016. Divergent Ways of Relating to the Past in the Viking Age. *European Journal of Archaeology*. Vol. 19(3) pp. 415–438.
- Lund, J. & Moen, M. 2019. Hunting Identities: Intersectional Perspectives on Viking Age Mortuary Expressions. *Fennoscandia Archaeologica*. Vol. XXXVI pp. 142–155.
- Martin, T. 2015. *The Cruciform Brooch and Anglo-Saxon England*. Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer.
- Martin, T. 2020. Casting the Net Wider: Network Approaches to Artefact Variation in Post-Roman Europe. *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory*. Vol. 27 pp. 861–886.
- Meyer, E.N. 1935. *Relieffspenner i Norden*. Bergens Museum Årbok 1934. Historisk–antikvarisk rekke. Vol. 4. Bergen: University of Bergen.
- Parker Pearson, M. 1993. The Powerful Dead: Archaeological Relationships between the Living and the Dead. *Cambridge Archaeological Journal*. Vol. 3(2) pp. 203–229.
- Petersen, J. 1951. *Vikingetidens redskaper*. Det Norske Videnskaps-akademi Skrifter, 2. Historisk-filosofisk Klasse 1951(4). Oslo: Dybwad.
- Petersen, T. 1905. Fortsatte udgravninger i Namdalen. *Aarsberetning fra Foreningen til norske Fortidsmindesmærkers Bevaring*. Kristiania.
- Røstad, I.M. 2018. The Immortal Brooch: The Tradition of Great Ornamental Bow Brooches in Migration and Merovingian Period Norway. In: Vedeler, M., Røstad, I.M., Kristoffersen, S. & Glørstad, Z. (eds), *Charismatic Objects from Roman Times to the Middle Ages*, pp. 73–101. Oslo: Cappelen Damm Akademisk.
- Røstad, I.M. 2021. *The Language of Jewellery: Dress-Accessories and Negotiations of Identity in Scandinavia, c. AD 400–650/700*. *Norske Oldfunn XXXII*. Oslo: Cappelen Damm Akademisk.
- Rygh, O. 1885. *Norske Oldsager*. Christiania: Cammermeyer.
- Salin, B. 1904. *Die altgermanische Tierornamentik: Typologische Studie über germanische Metallgegenstände aus dem IV. bis IX. Jahrhundert, nebst einer Studie über irische Ornamentik*. Stockholm: Beckmanns.

- Sindbæk, S. 2017. Urbanism and Exchange in the North Atlantic/Baltic, 600–1000 CE. In: Hoder, T. (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Archaeology and Globalization*, pp. 553–565. New York: Routledge.
- Sjøvold, T. 1993. *The Scandinavian Relief Brooches of the Migration Period: An Attempt at a New Classification*. Norske Oldfunn XV. Oslo: Institutt for arkeologi, kunsthistorie og numismatikk. Oldsaksamlingen.
- Solberg, B. 2000. *Jernalderen i Norge: 500 før Kristus til 1030 etter Kristus*. Oslo: Cap-pelen Akademisk Forlag.
- Stene, K. 2014. *Gråfjellprosjektet bind 4. I randen av taigaen: Bosetning og ressursutnyttelse i jernalder og middelalder i Østerdalen*. Oslo: Portal.
- Stenvik, L.F. 2015. The Bloomery in Mid-Norway: A Retrospective Glance and Foresight. In: Indrelid, S., Hjelle, K.I. & Stene, K. (eds), *Exploitation of outfield resources: Joint research at the University Museums of Norway*, pp. 85–98. Bergen: University Museum of Bergen.
- Storli, I. 2006. *Hålogaland før rikssamlingen: Politiske prosesser i perioden 200–900 e.Kr.* Instituttet for sammenlignende kulturforskning, Serie B Skrifter. Vol. 123. Oslo: Novus forlag.
- Van Oyen, A. 2015. Actor-Network Theory's take on Archaeological Types: Becoming, Material Agency and Historical Explanation. *Cambridge Archaeological Journal*. Vol. 25(1) pp. 63–78.
- Vedeler, M., Kristoffersen, E.S. & Røstad, I.M. 2018. Dressed for Ritual, Dressed for Life: A Migration-Period Grave from Sande in Norway. *Medieval Archaeology*. Vol. 62(1) pp. 1–27.
- Weiner, A.B. 1985. Inalienable Wealth. *American Ethnologist*. Vol. 12(2) pp. 210–227.
- Williams, H. 1998. Monuments and the Past in Early Anglo-Saxon England. *World Archaeology*. Vol. 30(1) pp. 90–108.
- Ystgaard, I. 2014. *Krigens praksis: Organisert voldsbruk og materiell kultur i Midt-Norge ca. 100–900 e.Kr.* Unpublished PhD thesis, NTNU, Vitenskapsmuseet.