

A Treasured Persona

Re-Interpreting the Eketorp Precious Metal Deposition

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The theory and practice of the object-biographical approach is the backdrop for this re-interpretation of the celebrated precious metal deposition from Eketorp in central Sweden. This example serves to demonstrate the potential of the approach for assemblages as well as single objects. The Eketorp hoard is one of a category of thematically composed Viking-Age precious metal depositions and contains an exceptional number of miniatures and pendants, jewellery, and some unusual coins. This paper presents new findings from excavations in 2017 and 2019, contextualises the hoard, reinterprets a number of the artefacts and points towards possibilities for further interpretation.

Keywords: deposition, themed hoard, coin, miniature, pendant, metal-detecting, network

The life of a treasure

In recent decades, the theory and practice of creating ‘object biographies’ have become current within archaeology. Object-biographical scholarship builds on the idea of objects (things) having ‘lives’, or life trajectories, as well as ‘social lives’, agency and relations with humans and other objects (Burström, N.M. 2014 and references therein). This theoretical and methodological approach will here sustain the discussion of the precious metal deposition (‘hoard’, ‘treasure’) from Eketorp in Middle Sweden, which in turn serves as an example of how the biographical approach may deepen our understanding of this type of assemblage.

Depositions of precious metal objects, principally of silver, are one of the most frequently discussed sources from the Viking Age. They are characteristic for Scandinavia but also appear in several other contexts, including Britain, Poland and Russia. The island of Gotland in the Baltic Sea has yielded a particularly high number of hoards, which are often understood as a kind of norm or template for understanding the hoarding phenomenon. When Gotlandic hoards – and accordingly Scandinavian hoards in general – are discussed, they are by tradition chiefly considered to be remnants from trade and warfare due to their inclusion of a variety of ‘means of payment’: objects such as coins, silver bars and whole or cut-up arm-rings (for example Bolin 1945; Östergren 1989; Jonsson 1993; Graham-Campbell & Williams 2007; Graham-Campbell et al. 2011). Linked to this view, in traditional scholarship the deposition of precious metal hoards is generally regarded as prompted by a need to store away the valuables to avoid theft, or robbery in times of war.

More recently, in order to investigate other aspects of the hoards and to gain a fuller understanding of what they represent, ‘biographical approaches’ have been applied to precious metal depositions, both hoards mainly made up of means of payment and those which also include other types of objects (Myrberg 2009a, b; Burström, N.M. 2014; Näversköld 2016; Fern et al. 2019; Ingvardson 2020). It has been recognised that the composition of a deposition reflects both societal structures and large-scale events that allowed certain objects to be collected in the first place (such as trade networks, *danegeld* or war booty) and individual choices about what to actually include and at what point in time. Precious metal depositions from the Viking Age therefore bear witness to how individual strategies and wishes were played out within the frames set by broader historical and societal patterns (Burström, N.M. 2014:78). These later approaches have clarified and underlined the diversity in composition between hoards and opened up for new interpretations (see also Burström, M. 1993; Hårdh 1996; Zachrisson 1998; Kilger 2008a).

A biographical approach may be applied to the Eketorp hoard from several angles: it was assembled over a protracted period of time; the included objects had long and varied ‘lives’; and, as will be discussed below, the hoard has a long find history. These aspects would correspond to its life history, including its ‘afterlives’. In very few cases will it be possible to tie a precious metal deposition to a named individual; this cannot generally be a reasonable aim. Nor will it be straightforward to connect it with certainty to one single event (for a nuanced and reflective discussion of this, see Fern et al. 2019:356–360). The writing of a biography proper, focusing on the ‘persona’ of the deposition, will always be restricted by our etic perspective, but may also benefit from it, as our outsider view and historical perspective provide other analytical tools.

Indeed, through a broader knowledge and understanding of hoards, and of their cultural context/s, we may come close to the ‘persona’ expressed in the assemblage’s composition and in the performative aspects of its deposition. To this end, the use of metaphor is an important interpretative tool, to reach out for what may be understood beyond the physical components at hand. When the objects were selected and combined, the resulting assemblage acquired new meanings beyond those of the individual object. This was once referred to as the ‘metaphorical qualities’ of an assemblage (Arwill-Nordbladh 1993:32; see also Arwill-Nordbladh 1998:242–249), implying that the original meaning of individual artefacts is important but also may be transcended by a meaningful whole which we can analyse. Objects are multifaceted and polysemous, and work as citations, creating links to other objects and phenomena. In so doing, they perform, and are of consequence for human memory and identity (Williams 2016:500). An iconic or old object may thus be used to ‘charge’ an assemblage and give it deeper, parallel meanings such as gender (Arwill-Nordbladh 2001:34), allusions to specific myths, or other reference points.

A MEANINGFUL COMPOSITION

While part of the broader Scandinavian hoarding tradition, the Eketorp precious metal deposition exemplifies a smaller group of ‘thematic’ depositions to which increased attention has been paid in recent years and which are particularly interesting from an object-biographical perspective. These depositions include repeated repertoires of objects, often, but not always, including coins (Myrberg 2009a, b). Particularly compelling are hoards whose composition is similar to the grave inventory of a female, often with pendants and other jewellery (Thunmark-Nylén 1998:456–458; Kilger 2008a), and Eketorp seems to fit into this group. The connection with females comes through, in particular, in the inclusion of the iconic middle brooches, which were the centrepiece of a full set of Viking-Age female

clasps. These items of female dress were connected not only with the individual but also represented her social standing and public persona, perhaps to such an extent that they became social agents in their own right (Thedéen 2012; Burström, N.M. 2015). A related analysis was undertaken by Tsigaridas Glørstad (2010) in her thesis about penannular brooches, where objects, finds, texts and a general understanding of Viking society were all activated to better understand the social and ritual practices tied to those brooches, so intimately connected with a male, elite persona (see also Gustin 2004).

Although all precious metal depositions are unique in their detail, understanding them as assemblages and as variations on themes may help us to interpret this enigmatic category of finds from an angle that is different from object function, trading networks or economic value. Even if we still do not fully understand their purpose, it cannot be a coincidence that there are numerous ‘hoards’ that include similar objects from the same repertoire while certain other types of objects are never included. It therefore seems straightforward to suggest that a metaphorical quality was aimed for in many cases, in particular when miniatures are involved (Johansen 1996), and suggest that the hoards *also* represent (or are) graves, or women, or Christian identity, or something else that we can read from the composition.

‘A MOST REMARKABLE TREASURE’

The precious metal deposition from Eketorp was found in 1955 by a farmer ploughing a field in the province of Närke in central Sweden (Figure 1). A few items had been found earlier on, but in that year the main part of the find was discovered and the site investigated by archaeologists. In total, the hoard now contains more than 470 objects and weighs circa 1.5kg, making it by far the largest hoard found in the province.¹ It is kept in the Örebro County Museum (ÖLM) and is a source of great regional pride.

When the Eketorp hoard was first made public it was labelled ‘one of this country’s most remarkable silver treasures from the Viking Age’ in Fornvännen (Anonymous 1955:278). Over the years, it became quite famous in Scandinavian Viking Age studies for its rich contents, which are not only numerous but also include miniatures and some unusual coins, rare in both hoards and other contexts. Accordingly, when in 2017 a number of additional artefacts from the deposition were discovered by participants in *Metallsökarprojektet*² (ÖLM 2017; ÖLM diary no (dnr) 2017.210.156;

1 If referring to weight. The hoard from Sandtorp in Viby parish, Närke (SHM/KMK inv. no 14 935) contains more coins but weighs circa 1050g.

2 *The Metal detecting project*: Martin Edlund, archaeologist at the ÖLM, in collaboration with the Örebro County Administrative Board, the National Heritage Board, and amateur detectorists from *Sveriges metallsökarförening* (The Swedish association for metal detecting).



Figure 1. The province Närke in Sweden (black area) and the approximate location of the Eketorp deposition (white dot). Map by Florent Audy with additions by the author. Graphic: Anders Gutehall, Visuell Arkeologi.

ÖLM inventory no (inv. no) 39132; Edlund forthcoming) it sparked great excitement. The present author examined the new finds and wrote a report on the hoard for the museum (Burström, N.M. 2017).

Revisiting the Eketorp hoard to evaluate the new findings also prompted re-evaluation, contextualisation and theorizing of several previously found objects from the hoard. All the objects comprising this important find undoubtedly deserve a fresh look and a thorough examination in the light of scholarly advances of the last half century, but for such a large and complex assemblage this will take time. This paper will therefore not present a full-blown object biography of the Eketorp hoard, but provides updated information about this internationally significant assemblage and contributes some new interpretations and suggestions based on the deposition, underpinned by the newly found material, as well as some of the most distinctive and informative earlier finds.

The contextual analysis also brings new thoughts on the nature and purpose of the Eketorp deposition. Relating this treasure to other depositions of similar character allows us to understand something more of its original purpose and meaning. Although separated in time and space, the depositions play on the same concepts: a specific ‘persona’ might be composed through the use of certain objects, a process undertaken with an apparently shared understanding of how such a deposit should be properly assembled. In a sense they are like ‘still lives’, but one may ask who was intended to see it – an audience while it was deposited, divine or supernatural beings, or a future retriever? It is also worth considering where and by whom the understanding of this kind of deposition, and of the appropriate composition of it, was kept and transmitted. Perhaps it was like a recipe or a tale, passed down from one generation to the next, transmitted orally or by use of models and inscriptions. We may also wonder why these treasures were deposited: if they were stored away for safekeeping until retrieved by their owners, if they were sacrifices, or if they commemorate someone passed away, or if they perhaps were buried to pacify loaded and powerful objects.

These questions will not get their definite answers here, but it is necessary to further the debate by posing them and by at least suggesting possible answers, such as those above, and interpretations, such as those forwarded below, underpinned by empirical observations and an understanding of the past as more complex than trade, storage and warfare alone. The initial insight that many precious metal depositions were deliberately composed, and composed in ways that reflect certain themes that we may interpret, is a step forward towards an understanding of the reasons behind them, and of the agency that may be ascribed even a ‘hidden’ treasure.

The find history of the Eketorp hoard: parts one, two and three

The ‘remarkable treasure’ was found in October 1955 by Harry Wikander, a farmer ploughing a field belonging to the farm Eketorp in Edsberg parish, Närke, Sweden (Figure 1). A few items from the treasure had actually already surfaced in the spring of 1950, when two large silver neck-rings were hooked by Wikander’s plough. As is so often the case, the find was reported to the authorities only somewhat later, and a visit to the site by the County Antiquarian to pin down the precise find-spot proved fruitless (Ekelund 1956:143). The field was left as pasture for a few years, but when ploughed afresh in 1955 a great number of new objects came to light, and the site was then carefully investigated by Gunnar Ekelund and Folke Hallberg from the Swedish National Heritage Board.

The Eketorp hoard was deposited, possibly in a wooden box with mounts and handles, in what was a small lake or marsh at the time. When excavated, the deposition was concentrated to about two square metres, at 20–30cm below the surface. The earth layer (circa 50cm thick) must have become more compact when it dried out after ditching and draining in the early nineteenth century, and it is therefore not possible to say anything about the depth at the time of deposition (Ekelund 1956:144, 148–149). Wet contexts are not common in connection with Scandinavian Viking-Age precious metal depositions, although there are other examples, including a few from Närke. Notably, the Sandtorp (Viby parish) hoard (Statens Historiska Museum (SHM)/Kungliga Myntkabinettet (KMK) inv. no 14935, *terminus post quem* (tpq) 1034), another remarkable Viking-Age precious metal deposition, was found not very far from Eketorp in ‘a long-cultivated moss’ (*Fornvännen* 1913:268–269, my translation), that is to say, in former wetlands. Närke also boasts other spectacular archaeological wetland finds such as a Viking-Age cultic site at Götavi (situated about 11km NNE of Eketorp) and a sixth century AD cultic site at Frösvi (situated about 3km SSW of Eketorp) (Lindqvist 1910:119–138; Svensson 2008:197–210).

The contents of the hoard as found in 1950 and 1955 (ÖLM 20350, 22461, 36941, 36943), consisting of several hundred artefacts and fragments, were published in detail by the excavator, Gunnar Ekelund, in 1956, and only a selection will be considered here. Two large plaited neck-rings were, as mentioned above, the first objects to come out of the ground. There are also several brooches, finger-rings and rods, all more or less fragmented.



Figure 2. A miniature box chair pendant from the Eketorp deposition, found in 1955. The chair is cast in silver, gilded and looped. Two pierced holes on the lower front and a ring from soldering on the seat indicate that a figurine once sat on the chair. Object inventory no ÖLM.22461.28. Original size 1.9 (height)×1.6 (width)cm. Photographs: Per Torgén, ÖLM (CC BY-NC 4.0).



Figure 3. A weapon dancer or a warrior saint? The silver figurine holds a sword at the ready and wears a cuirass and skirt. It appears to look at us from deep inside a helmet, and perhaps there were once eyes inset into the sockets. It may derive from a reliquary and has a broken loop (?) on its back. Length 37mm. ÖLM 22461.27. Photograph: Per Torgén, ÖLM (CC BY-NC 4.0).



Figure 4. The cloisonné jewel, probably the oldest object in the hoard. The composite jewel (in total circa 30mm diameter) is made of gold and garnets and may derive from a reliquary or book-case. ÖLM 22 461.1:A–B, found in 1955 (centre and main part of frame) and ÖLM dnr 2017.210.156 find no 40, found in 2017 (piece at twelve o'clock). Photographs: Per Torgén, ÖLM (CC BY-NC 4.0).

Miniatures and pendants in various shapes were also included, for example fire-steels, hammers, a coiled snake, a chair and a small figurine carrying a sword (Figures 2 & 3). There are pendants with filigree and granulation, and no fewer than 24 silver beads and 57 beads of amber and glass (Ekelund 1956:149–152). Several of these pieces of jewellery are gilded and most of them were probably once strung together into one necklace. Other objects of particular interest are a cloisonné jewel (ÖLM 22461.1; Ekelund 1956:155–156, item 3), possibly the oldest object of the hoard (Figure 4), and parts of an exceptionally large penannular brooch of eastern Scandinavian origin (Graham-Campbell 2007).

The coins (see lists in the Royal Coin Cabinet (KMK) and a summary in Golabiewski Lannby 1990: no 12) included an Anglo-Viking coin minted in York (AD 939–941) (ÖLM 36943; Naismith 2017:299: no 2605), two coins from Hedeby (Malmer 1966: Pl. 56), and a German coin struck in Cologne before 962 (Dannenberg 1875, 1894, 1898, 1905a, 1905b; Hävernäck 1935; Figure 5). The remaining coins are Islamic and heavily fragmented. Those are still interesting, since they provide a chronological framework and a use-context for the coins, and to some extent for the whole find. The oldest coin of the hoard is Islamic (Umayyad dynasty), circa 743/744 (ÖLM 36941.1) and the most recent datable coin is Volga-Bulgarian, minted in 958/959 (ÖLM 36941.233; SHM/KMK dnr 5542/55 no 233, handwritten additions by Gert Rispling before 1990; Golabiewski Lannby 1990: no 12).

Finally, a small (24mm) iron ring with a specially manufactured attachment is worth noting. This was interpreted by Ekelund as a handle for a



Figure 5A–E. A) 'Raven' coin from York, Anlaf/Olaf Guthfrithsson AD 939–941. Ag, 1.00g, 20mm diameter. ÖLM 36943. B) Saffarid dynasty, time of 'Ali b. al-Layth, AH 280–288/AD 893–901, mint unknown. Ag, circa 15mm radius. ÖLM 39132.15. C) Volga-Bulgarian coin, Talib ibn Ahmad, Suwar mint, AH 347/AD 958–959, Ag. ÖLM 36 941.233. D) Scandinavian coin, Hedeby, Malmer type CE III:BlA/D III:Bl, combination group 8 (circa 950 AD), Ag, 0.48g, 17.5mm diameter. SHM/KMK 300097. E) The oldest coin of the Eketorp hoard: Umayyad dynasty, Wasit mint, AH 126/AD 743–744. Gilded and pierced for suspension (loop removed). Ag, 2.23g without loop, 23.5mm diameter. ÖLM 36941.1. Photographs A–C, E: Per Torgén, ÖLM (CC BY-NC 4.0). Photograph D: Florent Audy, SHM (used with permission).

wooden box (1956, item no 57). The interpretation is reasonable since it is unusual to find iron objects included in precious metal depositions, but the object is also reminiscent of rings found at cult sites which have been interpreted as amulets or, in some cases, part of constructions demarcating the areas (for example Fuglesang 1989:16–18; Nielsen 1997; Bäck et al. 2008). Such rings are however rarely found alone, and, as far as this author is aware, none has previously been found in a precious metal hoard. For the time being, Ekelund's (1956) suggestion therefore remains the best explanation.



Figure 6. A pin, pointer, stylus or stick? Looped silver object ornamented in Oseberg style, found in 1956. Object 128mm in total, head 17mm diameter, ring 21mm diameter. ÖLM 22 461.4. Photograph: Per Torgén, ÖLM (CC BY-NC 4.0).

In 1956, a follow-up investigation with metal detectors produced a third part of the hoard: a fragmented tongue-shaped brooch and a possibly unique type of pin decorated in Oseberg style (ÖLM 22461.4; Riksantikvarieämbetet (RAÄ)/SHM dnr 6319/1956; personal communication Kershaw; personal communication Jansson) (Figure 6). As they were found only in November 1956, these objects were not included in Ekelund's find publication and therefore have not received much scholarly attention (but see Rönne 2017).

The Eketorp hoard: parts four, five and six

When the first finds were made in 1950, the objects were dragged by the plough before being noticed, and the exact find-spot could not be pinned down. As described above, the location was narrowed down only several years later (in 1955) when the main part of the find (above referred to as part two) was discovered. Considering the large number of very small fragments recovered in the major investigation of the site, it was at that point deemed unlikely that additional material was left in the ground (Ekelund 1956:146). Ekelund carried out two follow-up investigations with metal detectors and sieving in 1956 and 1957, and these produced only two objects from the hoard (RAÄ/SHM dnr 6319/1956, 3463/1957; referred to above as part three).

However, in 1984 a fourth part of the find surfaced: another three Islamic coin fragments, parts of a trefoil brooch and two pieces of silver bars

or rods were found by metal detectorists and handed in to the authorities (ÖLM 22461.47; KMK dnr 145/1985; ÖLM dnr 16/1985). Suddenly it seemed possible that more material could still be buried there.

In October 2017, archaeologists from Örebro County Museum therefore investigated the Eketorp site in collaboration with the Örebro County Board and metal detectorists from Sveriges Metallsökarförening (the Swedish association for metal detecting), supervised by the National Heritage Board. The purpose was to increase knowledge about ancient metal finds in arable land and cultivated fields, as well as to develop the museum's collaborations with amateur archaeologists and non-profit organisations. Two other sites, Mellösa Parsonage and Storsicke, were also investigated as part of the same project. The three sites together produced a large and varied body of material including prehistoric brooches, a sword pommel (AD 400–550), medieval coins, seals for trade goods, settlement finds and other objects. Despite some difficulties with undergrowth, 1583 finds were registered and even more indicated over the four-day campaign. A preliminary report of the investigations of all three sites was submitted by Martin Edlund (ÖLM dnr 2017.210.156, undated memorandum, October 2019), who is also preparing the final report (Edlund forthcoming).

During the 2017 investigation at Eketorp several new finds from the hoard came to light, such as gilded (silver) chain terminals (2017 F41, F43), pieces of a chain (F42?), a fragment (F40) of cloisonné ornament, a strap-end (F2, cf. Thomas 2004:2–4, possibly gilded or with a brass cover, and inlaid with niello, Smits 2019:5), two silver arm-rings (F39, F44), a filigree silver bead (F10), loose rings of silver thread, silver pieces from a neck-ring and clasps (?), and no fewer than 52 fragmented Islamic coins (ÖLM 39132; ÖLM dnr 2017.210.156). A follow-up visit to the site in October 2019 produced 15 coin fragments, a small piece of a filigree brooch and two small pieces of silver rod (ÖLM 39327; ÖLM dnr 2017.210.156; ÖLM 2019). All the new coins from 2017 and 2019 turned out to be Islamic. The coins found in 2019 need to be conserved before further analysis, but the 52 coins (fragments) found in 2017 were fully identified by Viacheslav Kuleshov for the project *Viking-Age hoards and coins from Närke* (Audy forthcoming; Audy & Burström 2020) and this paper.

Re-evaluating the Eketorp hoard: the coins

The Eketorp hoard now contains 328 coins and coin fragments (including the finds of 2017 and 2019). Of these, as noted above, only four are from Western mints. None of those was pierced or looped for suspension. The rare Anglo-Viking coin, of which only 37 specimens are known, was struck

by the moneyer Athelferd for Anlaf (Olof) Guthfrithsson who was ‘king’ of York in AD 939–941 (ÖLM 36943; Blunt et al. 1989:229–230; Naismith 2017:299). Only four specimens have hitherto been found in Scandinavia, of which two were in Sweden: the one from Eketorp and one which probably derives from a hoard found in Valsnäs, Löt parish on Öland in 1828 (Alstertun 1998; Lindberger 1999:94, 100–101). The specimen in the Eketorp hoard is one of the few whole, non-fragmented and unaltered coins in the hoard. The coin is an important reminder of the fact that Vikings actually produced coins long before the practice was brought to Scandinavia in about AD 995. Equally noteworthy is its iconography, depicting a raven and stating the Norse title ‘*cununc*’ for ‘king’ rather than the (on coins) customary Latin REX (Figure 5A). One can only guess at the reasons for including this rarity in the hoard – perhaps it was selected for its beauty, or for its connection with a successful Viking, or because of the symbolism of the raven?

The hoard also includes two Nordic imitations of Charlemagne’s Dorestad coins, struck in Hedeby in the first half of the tenth century (see Malmer type CE III:A-/D III:A1, combination group 7:1, circa 900–950, and type CE III:BlA/D III:Bl, combination group 8, circa 950, cf. Malmer 1966:219, 223–224, Pl. 19:3) (Figure 5D), and one German coin of the type OTTO REX)(Sa COLONIA A, struck in Cologne by Otto I (936–962) before he was crowned emperor in 962 (cf. Dannenberg 1875, 1894, 1898, 1905a, 1905b; Hävernäck 1935). These coins are worn, and the Hedeby coins are of a type (‘half-bracteates’) which were minted on very thin flans and accordingly have their designs blurred by the imprint from the opposite side. Nevertheless, they all show a clear and geometric iconography that may have been perceived as attractive, perhaps a reason to select them for hoarding (see also Audy 2018:152).

All the remaining coins of the hoard, including those found subsequently, are Islamic (Cufic) and most are heavily fragmented, which makes the material difficult to work with. The majority of these coins were identified by Ulla Linder Welin in 1955, and those determinations were updated by Gert Rispling in the late 1980s for the purposes of a publication (Golabiewski Lannby 1990). Rispling was at that point able to revise some of the older dates and attributions, and importantly distinguished the Volga-Bulgarian coin, minted for Talib ibn Ahmad in Suwar in AD 958/959, which now provides a *tpq* date for the hoard (Figure 5C). This date would suggest that, allowing for time of use, wear and transport, the deposition of the assemblage was made in the mid- or late 960s AD.

Most (about 82per cent, not including the 15 coins from 2019) Islamic coins in the Eketorp deposition are Samanid (that is, minted by rulers from the Samanid dynasty) or imitations of such. This is normal for the period and could be compared with a near-contemporary Närke hoard from

Härminge (Gällersta parish, SHM/KMK 8671, *tpq* 949) which consists of 93 per cent Samanid coins or imitations of such. While these and other Islamic coins are commonly found in all Scandinavia, Volga-Bulgarian coins are typical for Swedish finds – although they are not very common there either (circa 10 per cent of the Islamic material in total) (Rispling 1987; Kropotkin 1990; Kilger 2008b). The number of Volga-Bulgarian coins in the Eketorp hoard is less than 3 per cent, but because of their comparative rareness, the particular connection with Sweden, and their specific history, they are an interesting component.

The Volga Bulgars were a Bulgarian group living along the River Volga with their main centre in Bolgar in present-day Russia. They were subordinated to the Khazars, who minted imitations of Islamic coins despite professing themselves to the Jewish faith. From the beginning of the tenth century AD the Volga Bulgars, too, minted imitations of Samanid coins and only from around AD 950 did they produce independent, official coins in the towns of Bolgar and Suwar, both situated along the Volga (Rispling 1990:276). During that period, they converted to Islam and liberated themselves from the Khazars, a process giving rise to the famous travel account of Ibn Fadlan (transl. Montgomery 2017). Their autonomous coinage, to which the final coin from Eketorp belongs, was part of their emancipatory process.

The oldest coin of the Eketorp hoard is an Umayyad example from Wasit in present Iraq, dated to Islamic calendar year 126 or circa AD 743/744 (ÖLM 36941.1; KMK dnr 5542/55 coin list no 1) (Figure 5E). This coin was gilded and pierced for suspension. Apart from three coins minted in the eighth century AD (ÖLM 22461.1, 2; ÖLM 39132.91), nine from the ninth century (ÖLM 22461.3–8, 11, 16–17; ÖLM 39132.15) and six from the middle of the tenth century (ÖLM 39132.17, 45, 62, 66, 67, 78), the coins in the Eketorp hoard were all minted during the first half of the tenth century (this includes the four Western coins, struck around or just before the middle of the tenth century). The degree of fragmentation is very high (97.5 per cent) and all but four oriental coins (ÖLM 22461.1, 9, 16, 51) were found as unusually small fragments. Many seem to have been intentionally cut, possibly already at the mint, for use as smaller denominations. Of the non-fragmented coins, three (ÖLM 22461.1, 9, 51) are pierced for suspension or stitching.

Particularly interesting are two Islamic coins from the Saffarid dynasty, the time of ‘Ali b. al-Layth (AD 893–901) (Figure 5B). Very few such coins have been unearthed in Sweden, and two of those derive from the Eketorp hoard, one in 1955 and one in 2017 (ÖLM 22461.8; ÖLM 39132.15). This is one example of how the distinctive yet similar numismatic composition of the different parts of the find makes it clear that they belong to the same

hoard. According to Viacheslav Kuleshov, the hoard's present composition of Islamic coins is more typical of finds from the Eastern Slav area than from Sweden (personal communication Kuleshov). The high proportion of very small fragments is also characteristic for hoards from the third quarter or end of the tenth century, that is, somewhat later than the Eketorp *tpq* date 958/959 (Welin & Thordeman 1956; the observation still holds true).

The new coins from the Eketorp hoard identified so far have not provided any new sensations in terms of unique coins or new dating, but they sustain and reinforce the picture of this hoard as unusual in its highly fragmented state and in terms of composition for this location. The new coins also support the suggestion that the deposition was perhaps made later in the tenth century, when this kind of fragmentation is more typical, rather than in the 960s. It can also be noted that the coins found in 1984 fit convincingly with those that came to light before and after. In all, the coins demonstrate from a numismatic perspective that the finds made in 1955, 1984, 2017 and 2019 were all clearly part of the same deposition.

If the arguments about similar coin composition and condition are not enough to convince the non-numismatist to accept the different find-phases of the hoard as deriving from one deposition, there is even more evidence to consider. For example, two gilded animal head terminals for a chain (ÖLM 39132.41, 43) found in 2017 have an exact parallel in the 1955 parcel (ÖLM 22461.30; Ekelund 1956: no 31). Similarly, another fragment from the cloisonné jewel found in 1955 (ÖLM 22461.1:A–B; Ekelund 1956: no 3) was also among the 2017 finds (Figure 4). The same is true of a fragmentary tongue-shaped brooch found in 1956 which, like pieces of a puzzle, matched a piece that had come to light already in 1955 (Ekelund 1956: no 10).

Revisiting the Eketorp hoard: some key artefacts

Considering the above, we can feel confident that a single original assemblage is involved, although the Eketorp hoard was reassembled in a piecemeal fashion over 70 years. We shall therefore now revisit the hoard, considering it as a whole, and venture to offer some interpretations of it.

THE CLOISONNÉ JEWEL

The cloisonné jewelled ornament (ÖLM 22461.1; Figure 4) is of particular interest here, since it is the oldest object of the hoard and the only item made of gold and precious stone. Birgit Arrhenius (2006, 2009:222–224) identified the garnets of this object as having similar mineral properties as those of another, comparable, object (Kulturhistorisk Museum, Oslo (KHM) C740) found in a hoard from Hoen, Øvre Eiker, Buskerud, Nor-

way (*tpq* 848/9 but probably deposited in the last part of the ninth century; this find also comes from a wetland context). The garnets originated in South Asia, and in the cases mentioned they were most probably worked into jewellery in the Anglo-Saxon area. The cloisonné work of the Eketorp jewel, including ‘arrow’ cell shapes, was probably crafted in the first half of the seventh century (Hamerow 2017:77; Hilgner et al. 2017; Fern et al. 2019:266–269). It has parallels in the Staffordshire hoard and in the famous Wilton cross pendant (Webster & Backhouse 1991:27; Fern et al. 2019:269). The cloisonné frame is secondary and the centrepiece (where very little of the garnet inlay is preserved) is probably a reworked, cross-ornamented, Anglo-Saxon disc pendant or brooch (see Webster & Backhouse 1991:49–50; Fern et al. 2019:277).

Unlike the Eketorp jewel, the one from Hoen has a secondary suspension loop and rivet. Holes on the back plate, however, reveal that it was probably originally nailed to another object. Based on the jewel’s cross iconography and analogies with similar objects, Arrhenius (2006) suggests that it must have been a religious object, and would have been attached to an object of wood or leather, quite possibly a reliquary or a book cover (Arrhenius 2006). Similar holes, iconography and artisanship are also demonstrated by the Eketorp jewel, which must accordingly be considered as a fitting or boss for a similar object. Peter Pentz (forthcoming) therefore discusses the jewel in an article about the Vikings’ relation to books and writing. If indeed deriving from a book cover, book case or reliquary, the cloisonné jewel could well be a souvenir from Viking movements in the Anglo-Saxon or Carolingian world. Apart from its provenance, it may also have reminded the creator of the Eketorp hoard of the central part of domestic high-end showpiece button-on-bow brooches, which it resembles.

THE FIGURINE

Probably the most widely known object from the hoard is a small figurine carrying a sword (ÖLM 22461.27; Ekelund 1956: no 28) (Figure 3). Virtually unique in a Scandinavian context, it is often used as a symbol by the Örebro County Museum, where it is kept. The figurine is characterised by two large hollow eye-sockets which may once have been inlaid with gemstones or other material representing the eyes. The eye-sockets may also indicate a helmet with nose-guard. Judging from the sword and the overall context, the figure seems to belong to an iconographical and mythological sphere of ‘weapon dancers’, known from Scandinavian helmet mounts, coins and miniatures; possibly representations of a ritual specialist or indeed the god Odin who had similar powers. In several cases, a punched-out eye underlines an association with the one-eyed god. Examples of this figure come mainly from Scandinavia, but also from Britain and Russia, and when

dated they seem to generally belong to the centuries just before the Viking Age proper or to its earliest phase (Ringqvist 1969; Kitzler 2000:18; Price 2002:385–388). However, in these cases the figure of the sword-dancer is depicted with a horned helmet (the horns sometimes with bird's head endings) whereas the Eketorp warrior has a rounded head or helmet, and while the latter holds his sword sheath in one hand and is ready to draw with the other, the sword-dancers normally hold a sword in one hand and a spear or drumstick/s in the other. The interpretation is therefore not entirely evident.

A recent suggestion is that the Eketorp figurine derives instead from a reliquary or book shrine (Pentz forthcoming), with analogies in the figural ornamentation of the Stowe Missal *cumdach* (book shrine) from circa 1030 (Ó Riain 1991:294) and the shrine of St Manchán (Graves 1874) from the early twelfth century. Several observations support this. The miniature was only secondarily provided with a loop (now broken) and was thus not originally meant to be suspended. It was not meant to be free-standing either, judging by the feet. It was probably meant to be seen from the front, since the back is not as detailed in its ornamentation. Although there are no fixing holes in the figure, the broken 'loop' could in reality be a remnant of an arrangement for attachment. Pentz (forthcoming) proposes that the interpretation of the Eketorp warrior as an ornamental detail or fitting from a shrine makes sense also in the light of the relatively great numbers of such fittings found in Scandinavia. One such find, probably of Irish origin, comes from Rise in Oppdal, Trøndelag, Norway (KHM C646; Mullarkey 2007:66) and shows a figure holding a similar sword to that of the Eketorp figurine, ready for use. The Rise mount is usually referred to as an angel, but the 'wings' could also be a cloak or mantle and the pointed endings of the 'wings' seem to be created by the holes for fastening the mount. To the figure's chest is strapped a square object, looking like the Stowe Missal book shrine. Since *cumdachs* are known to have been brought into battle to secure protection and victory, Pentz (forthcoming) interprets the Rise figurine as not only deriving from a shrine but also illustrating the shrine's use when the figure both defends and is defended by it.

When seen in the light of Christian iconography, the figures referred to above, from the shrines of St Manchán and Stowe, and from Rise and Eketorp, belong to a larger iconographical scheme of 'warrior saints' – a concept that grew from Late Antiquity and refers to a warrior or soldier who gave up arms for his faith and suffered for it. The cultural conditions in Early Christian Britain when this heroic figure was introduced resulted in a slightly different tradition than on the continent. With a background in Germanic heroism and divine kingship, Anglo-Saxon warrior saints developed as a sub-genre, the martyred warrior-kings. These king-saints did not renounce swords and wars but fended off adversaries and extended their

realms by force; death in battle was for them a form of martyrdom and a prerequisite for sainthood (Damon 2003:26–32). Warrior saints are iconographically distinguished from other saints and martyrs by armour and military equipment, and the depictions within Byzantine art are particularly elaborate (Grotowski 2010:2–13). The Eketorp sword-bearer, who clearly wears a cuirass (torso armour), and a skirt, perhaps like the *pteryges* which is part of a Byzantine-style warrior saint's dress (Grotowski 2010:162–163), easily fits into such a scenario. The empty eye-sockets may have been filled with something that gave an impression of a 'burning' gaze, to augment the figure's supernatural character according to the representational conventions of the time.

Without more analogies, metal analyses or other evidence to work with, we cannot be sure at present where the Eketorp sword-bearer came from. If he came as loot – or a treasured souvenir – from the Irish or Anglo-Saxon area, this is of course interesting in itself. But it is equally interesting to consider how the figure in that case may have been perceived in Scandinavia. Why would it have been meaningful to use it as a pendant and to include it in a deposition? Perhaps because figures and figurines were 'performing objects' (Back Danielsson 2007:240), and the interpretation then was as it may be now: that the figurine is an (iconographical) sibling of the sword-dancers, of mythical and supernatural warriors, and perhaps even a depiction of Odin himself. Following aesthetic reception theory, the beholder of an image is disposed towards an understanding of the object or image due to her/his own preconditions – culture, gender, history – but the understanding would still be tied to the qualities of the artwork itself (Kemp 1998:180–181). The particular understanding and reception would open up for wider cultural connotations, through which the object or image affected its beholder (Gell 1998; Burström, N.M. 2014:66–67). The empty eye sockets, once perhaps not empty, may also in the new context have resonated with an understanding of eyes and gaze as significant and indicating divinity, and could easily have been connected with existing myths. The figure is therefore ambiguous, which may have been a quality in itself. I agree with Pentz (forthcoming) that the significance of the figure cannot be restricted to its being 'Christian' or indeed 'non-Christian', but depends on its own magical agency, which would have worked in either context.

THE BIRD OF PREY

Here attention must be drawn again to the 'raven' coin of Anlaf. This Anglo-Viking leader was associated with the raven not only on his coins, but possibly also on a banner carried in battle (Lindberger 1999:94, 2001; Naismith 2017:299). The symbol refers to ravens as birds of prey and scavengers, that is, to their appearance on the battlefield to (metaphorically)

hunt down the enemy and to (literally) eat their corpses after (Viking) victory. The raven is also a symbol for the war-god and king-god Odin, who often appears accompanied by two ravens in both texts and iconography. Naismith (2017:299) points out that this bird in late Anglo-Saxon England also came to symbolise St Oswald, one of the paramount Anglo-Saxon warrior-king saints (Damon 2003:42–56). In several ways, the Anlaf coin thus seems to work as a counterpart of the sword-bearing figurine in the hoard, and it suddenly comes forward as a treasured and carefully selected component of the assemblage, perhaps meant to underline a message or to work its magic as another souvenir from the mighty kingdom in the West.

THE CHAIR

The hoard also includes a miniature chair or throne of the ‘box’ type (Figure 2). The earliest-known example of this type in Scandinavia is from the Oseberg ship grave (dated to the 840s) (Lindahl 1972:col. 207–212), although the Eketorp miniature version may be from the tenth century. In total, at least 18 such miniatures have been found to date, of which most are pendants (Drescher & Hauck 1982; Vierck 2002; Christensen 2010; Jensen 2010; Helmbrecht 2011; Nationalmuseet 2016; Norges Metallsøkerforening 2019). Several were decorated with two ravens (alluding to Odin’s companion birds Hugin and Munin), and in a few cases with a seated figure which may be interpreted as a god or goddess (Arrhenius 1961; Drescher & Hauck 1982; Christensen 2010; Jensen 2010; Arwill-Nordbladh 2012; Burström, N.M. 2019). The Eketorp chair is one of the latter, although the figure was lost or removed before the chair was hoarded. The chair should therefore be regarded as a small throne. Chairs, too, may refer to Odin and to royal holiness and knowledge (Burström, N.M. 2019). Perhaps of particular interest in this connection is one small chair, found in Lejre, Denmark, with a seated figure which is, judging by the dress, a female. However, the accompanying birds and animal heads (possibly wolves) are also tied to the iconography of Odin, and the figure may have a moustache as well as a neck-ring, an object that may also be seen on male figures (Christensen 2010:11–17; Baastrup 2012:183). This gender-equivocal figure underlines that ambiguity may be a quality in itself when it comes to some religious and mythological iconography, perhaps opening up for multifaceted and transcendent use. Indeed, both Odin and the female goddess Freya gain particularly strong positions through their paramount masculinity/femininity alongside their knowledge of *sejdr* (sorcery, necromancy), runes and shape-shifting: they combine desirable gender-specific qualities with powerful gender-un-specific intellectual and practical abilities (see also Solli 1999, 2002).

It should be underlined that although pointing at ideas of divine kingship and warfare, miniatures like chairs and ‘weapon dancers’ were worn



Figure 7. Part of a filigree trefoil brooch found by metal detectorists in 1984. ÖLM 22461.47. Photograph: Per Torgén, ÖLM (CC BY-NC 4.0).

and used by women (Drescher & Hauck 1982; Price 2002:388; Helmbrecht 2011:143–146), and were part of an ideological framework shared by the sexes and possibly by the whole society. Their role in hoards and women's graves cannot be fully established, but miniatures serve to encapsulate and materialise important concepts. Reduction in scale skews time and space relations of the everyday and thus has the capacity to link the individual to the divine, to work as media for transcendence, and to be used for divination, incantations or similar rituals (Fuglesang 1989; Stewart 1993:65–69; Back Danielsson 2007:171–175; Alberti 2013:46, 55; Burström, N.M. 2019:155).

THE TREFOIL BROOCH

The middle brooch included in the Eketorp hoard is a 'trefoil' brooch of which a fragment representing about a third of the original was found with a few other objects by a private metal detectorist in 1984 (Figure 7). The brooch is a Scandinavian imitation of a Carolingian type, but made with filigree rather than cast. Duzco (1985:91–94) considers the filigree trefoil

brooches generally to be of Scandinavian manufacture (see also Maixner 2005:176). Trefoil brooches with filigree are however very rare in Sweden (three are recorded, of which two are from hoards and therefore not entirely representative of circulation) and Denmark (two, both from hoards), but are more common in Norway, where at least five have been unearthed (from hoards, graves and stray finds) apart from an adapted gold mount in the Norwegian Hoen hoard.

Birgit Maixner (personal communication) compares the Eketorp trefoil piece to Carolingian filigree work, such as that seen in parts of sword-belts – but considers the filigree to be of lesser quality – and to tongue-shaped filigree brooches in Jelling style. Also in the Eketorp hoard there are filigree tongue-shaped brooches – three were included in Ekelund's (1956) publication and one was found during his follow-up investigation in 1956 – and indeed their ornamentation is very reminiscent of the trefoil brooch. Maixner (personal communication) also points out that some trefoil filigree brooches lack fastening pins, and that it is not always clear if they were actually used as brooches. In the case of the Eketorp brooch, this is not clear from the preserved fragment, and here it is considered to be a brooch until otherwise demonstrated. The inclusion of a middle brooch underlines the similarities in hoard composition between the Eketorp hoard and other 'female' hoards.

THE 'PIN'

One final noteworthy object will be discussed here: the silver 'pin' (Figure 6) which was found in 1956 and therefore not included in Ekelund's publication. Ekelund called it a 'pricker', but the object is very different from preserved comparators (for example from Birka: Arbman 1940: Taf. 171:6a, 6b). The bulb-shaped head is ornamented in the Scandinavian Oseberg Gripping Beast style and was probably made in Scandinavia in the ninth century. The pin is worn on the top, but the original suspension loop is still attached. It is, however, a somewhat mysterious object, since it looks like a luxury dress-pin but has a fairly large knob on the shaft, for which this author has failed to find any analogies. The pin is also slightly larger than usual (128mm long, as opposed to a more typical length of around 90mm) and extremely few dress-pins in precious metal are known. The knob would impede running the pin through textile (if not very loosely knit), and the point is blunt. In the light of these circumstances, other interpretations of the object are worth considering.

One suggestion is that the item belongs to the material culture of reading and writing – a *stylus* writing tool, or a book-pointer (*aestel* or *yad*). The knob on the shaft would then facilitate holding the tool steady. English book-pointers from the time (like the famous 'Alfred jewel', Ashmolean Museum no AN1836.p135.371, or one found in Borg in Norway, Stamsø

Munch et al. 2003:246–247) often (but not always) seem to have a flat side of the head since they were laid down on the book-page, and this author found no example with a knob on the shaft itself. Jewish book-pointers may have knobs on the shaft and were used in an upright position, but I found no example as early as the pin, and it is difficult to argue a connection with the Jewish religion for a domestic Scandinavian ninth-century object. I have neither found parallels for a stylus with a knob, nor for ninth-century use of styli in Scandinavia, but the size of the ‘pin’ and the practical considerations around its use still makes this an interpretation to keep in mind. A very different suggestion is that the pin is a miniature, like the many other symbolic pendants of the hoard, and represents an unknown object, perhaps like a sorceress’ staff (of which several have knobs on the shaft, see for example Price 2002; Gustin 2010) or the ‘drumsticks’ held in one hand by weapon dancers. Staff pendants are discussed by Price (2002:203–204) who argues that they are associated with Odin, and suggests that staffs and miniature chairs may have formed part of a ‘tool-kit’ used by Viking Age sorceresses. The examples shown by Price are however very stylised versions of real staffs and very different from the object from Eketorp. Pin, pointer, stylus or staff – we will have to leave the question open until new evidence presents itself.

Interpreting the Eketorp hoard

THE SETTING

Närke is one of Sweden’s smallest historical provinces, situated in the historical heartland of the country between the large lakes Hjälmaren, Vänern and Vättern. It borders on five other provinces and sits between the larger historical ‘lands’ of Svealand (to which it belongs) and Götaland. This has given Närke a special character as a crossroads, a point of interface for different topographical features, industries, dynasties and politics. In the north-west there is an important mining district, with documented royal privileges since the Middle Ages, and to the south there is rich agricultural and pastoral land spread out, all latticed by larger and smaller lakes. The geographical position and access to the big lakes gave this small province a vital role as a gateway for anyone moving north–south or east–west.

The province’s multi-faceted or even hybrid character is apparent in the influences from different areas that are visible in some cultural and historical features, the erection and styles of rune-ornamented monuments being one example (Ljung 2016a:119–120). Audy (forthcoming) proposes, based on an analysis of five preserved hoards from Närke, that precious metal in the area was in the possession of a few members of the élite, and was used in status-enhancing strategies. This élite was widely connected to other high

status families in Scandinavia and beyond, as shown by the precious metal hoards, the contents of which come from all parts of Scandinavia. A few objects, such as coins, the silver figure, a strap-end (of Carolingian origin or an Anglo-Saxon imitation) and the garnet jewel in the Eketorp hoard clearly originated outside Scandinavia, but most are domestic or regional work.

The wider Scandinavian connections are illustrated by a passage in the Saga of King Olaf Haraldsson, where the king, on one of his many journeys, stays for several months in Närke (in the spring of AD 1029) at the home of one Sigtrygg, mentioned in the saga as rich and powerful, as ruling over Närke, and as father of Ivar who later also became a distinguished person (Sturluson 2018, *Saga of King Ólafr Haraldsson* §181). Audy (forthcoming) points out that Sigtrygg's estate in Närke was not only on the established route going east from Southern Norway, but also offered a safe haven from Olaf's political enemies. Admittedly, political alliances shifted quickly in the Viking Age, but since many deep and long-lasting relations were built on family bonds or sworn brotherhood, the episode probably still reveals something about enduring networks between Norway and Närke. We do not know precisely where Sigtrygg lived, and the province includes several potential sites of interest, but the area where the Eketorp hoard was deposited is certainly one candidate for the estate of (a grandfather of) such a high-standing chieftain. Not least, this takes into consideration its immediate proximity to an early Cistercian nunnery, Riseberga, established through a land donation in the 1170–80s (*Diplomatarium Suecanum* 823; *Svenskt Diplomatariums huvudkartotek för medeltidsbrev* 245) by Earl Birger Brosa, one of Sweden's most powerful men at the time (Conradi Mattsson 1998). Rune-ornamented grave-monuments from circa 1050–1080 (Ljung 2016b:15) indicate that an early Christian church – a typical indication of an élite estate – preceded the nunnery on the site and, while it cannot be demonstrated conclusively, patterns of inheritance in Viking society would suggest that this tract of land was in the hands of a high-status family long before that.

The typical hoard owner in Närke may thus be characterized as a member of the local élite, with special connections in western and southern Scandinavia, who uses precious metal as a way to enhance his/her status through conspicuous consumption and sacrifice. This analysis differs from the traditional interpretation of hoards as being generated by a trader in a more egalitarian society, a view that stems from the Gotlandic hoards but needs to be questioned as a rule and in this case seems definitely ill-suited. The Närke hoards as a group also show strong connections with Norway in particular, exemplified by the Stora Mellösa hoard (SHM 4355, 4414, 13278), which contains objects of Norwegian origin and has a composition that is similar to Norwegian jewellery hoards. Some of the objects may

therefore derive from personal networks and institutional exchanges of gifts within the élite sphere (Audy & Burström 2020; Audy forthcoming).

COMPOSING A PERSONA OF PRECIOUS METAL

The connection between Närke élites and Norway discussed above is important considering that several objects also in the Eketorp hoard show links further west, to Britain, hinting at Norway functioning as a gateway for British objects (see for example Tsigaridas Glørstad 2010). For example, the characteristic middle brooch in the hoard was of a filigree type that is most commonly found in Norway. The previously mentioned find from Hoen (of Buskerud, Norway) is of particular interest in this connection because of several echoes in the Eketorp assemblage. The two finds have several distinctive objects in common: apart from the cloisonné jewels discussed above, there are also almost identical and extremely rare coiled-snake pendants³, two very large neck-rings⁴, and an unusual number of vegetal-ornamented and filigree pendants. Noteworthy differences are that the coins in the Hoen hoard are not fragmented silver coins, but are all of gold, and were all provided with loops. Indeed, almost all the objects in this (from that point of view) uncharacteristic hoard are of gold, and with a total weight of about 2.9kg the Hoen hoard must be regarded as one of the most sumptuous depositions from the Scandinavian Viking Age as a whole. Even its trefoil brooch stands out, as it is an adapted Frankish gold mount, which was transformed into a clasp in Scandinavia. This may be the oldest example of what was to develop into a common practice, giving rise to the Scandinavian-made trefoil brooch.

Referring to the idea that this kind of thematic assemblage may represent (certain) women and their public personas, the Hoen hoard could perhaps (somewhat jokingly) be called the ‘Queen Mother’ of all such Scandinavian hoards. As pointed out above, it is amazing that depositions much separated in time and space play on the same concepts, apparently assembled with an understanding of how such a deposit should be properly composed. Surely a display like this would be the stuff of legend, worth remembering down the generations. Eketorp, deposited almost a century later, still picks up some of the same themes and repertoire of objects, including several key de-

3 Snake pendants are also known from graves Bj 632 and 844 in Birka, Sweden (Arwidsson ed. 1989:61); both also contained a chair pendant (Gräslund 2005:388). Coiled snakes feature on early ‘Nordic’ coins (Malmer 1966: Pl. 1:2, combined with building and mask, Pl. 2:1–24, combined with deer, mask and triquetra) and, later, on coins from Harthacnut (c. 1030) (Jensen ed. 1995:36–37).

4 Scandinavian Viking-Age neck-rings appear as depositions, single or with other objects, but not in graves, and how they were worn, if at all, has not been established (Hårdh 1996:41, 73–74).

tails, although mainly consisting of silver objects. The similarities between the Eketorp and Hoen hoards acquire new meaning from this perspective.

So who in Närke may have collected and/or deposited the Eketorp precious metal deposition, and what was the purpose of doing so? As pointed out above, it would not be reasonable to identify this with certainty, in particular without an extensive analysis of all included objects, but some conclusions can yet be drawn and some interpretations made. A person having access to – gathering, owning and choosing – objects such as those in the Eketorp deposition must have a certain social standing. The time of *production* of the included objects spans over 350 years, but considering the reuse (re-mounting, looping, gilding) of the oldest objects, some adapted in several steps, we may narrow down the time of *collection* to a hundred years or less. There are no indications that the selected objects should not have been deposited simultaneously. The composition may therefore be regarded as partly reflecting the general social context of the depositor (allowing access to the objects) and partly as a conscious act and statement at a particular point of time.

Possibly, considering the character of some of the objects, the collector/depositor also held a special role in society. Apart from the general aesthetic qualities of several objects in the assemblage (such as pendants, brooches and beads), some artefacts (for example the miniature chair, the sword-dancer and the coiled snake) may have been amulets, protective and magic objects that were possibly used for rituals, divination or similar (Gräslund 2005; on Scandinavian Viking-Age amulets in general see also Fuglesang 1989). If so, this also sheds some light on the collector and the intended effect of the assemblage. Women buried with amulets may have had important functions in Viking-Age cult (Gräslund 2005:390), although we do not at present know the specific use or the precise rituals. The inclusion of such objects in the Eketorp hoard is thus a strong allusion on women and hints to a ritual persona and/or purpose. The inclusion of a vital and identity-enhancing accessory like the female middle brooch, as well as several sets of other clasps, further underlines the allusion to the feminine (see also Arrhenius 1995 on ‘women and gold’). There are parts of a super-sized ring-brooch (generally considered as a male object) included in the assemblage as well, but it should be underlined that those are the decorated terminals and needle-holder, not the entire clasp. The scale of the object also points as much to the cultic sphere as to the ordinary male costume.

Applying a biographical approach to the Eketorp hoard rests on several methodological considerations: it includes objects spanning over several hundred years which in themselves had long and varied ‘lives’; the hoard’s long find history; and the thematic composition of the hoard. As noted above, it will rarely be possible to tie a precious metal deposition to

a named individual or to a single event. But we may still go beyond pure description by being sensitive to the material. This means both investigating the evidence and attempting interpretations which, although restricted by our outsider view, may also benefit from it, as our historical perspective and wider archaeological comparisons provide analytical tools. Seeing the deposition as a whole makes it possible to relate this treasure to other depositions of similar character, allowing us to understand something more of its original purpose and meaning and opening up for a ‘fusion of horizons’ between past and present understandings.

Apart from a general background in elite networks and consumption, and the suggestions above regarding gender, social context and special roles, some hoards could in this interpretational spirit be regarded as a kind of graves, created to commemorate a dead person and to cope with individual, societal and cultural stress caused by their death (see also Myrberg 2009a). Perhaps some objects could not be allowed to pass on to the next generation, or were dangerous to keep in circulation, for reasons we do not know (Lund 2010:50–51; Burström, N.M. 2015:37–38, 41). In a similar vein, we could speculate that selected depositions were a way of sacrificing ‘humans’ to the gods without bloodshed. Whatever the reasons for turning to this ritual of conspicuous consumption, the careful composition of the precious metal depositions, and their repetition and emulation of previous iconic depositions, demonstrate clearly that they are not stowed away random collections of valuables. Instead, they fit into an established repertoire of actions which were not only deeply meaningful to the individuals involved, but widely recognised and understood in their time.

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PERSONAL COMMUNICATIONS

- Jansson, Ingmar, Dr, docent, Uppsala. Email 31/1/2020.
- Kershaw, Jane, Dr, researcher, University of Oxford. Email 23/1/2020.
- Kuleshov, Viacheslav, Dr, Numismatic Institute, Stockholm. Meetings 13/6/2018, 17/9/2018.
- Maixner, Birgit, Dr, Associate Professor, NTNU University Museum. Email 14/2/2020.