

Depending on Sex?  
Tongue, Sieve, and Ladle Shaped Pendants  
from Late Iron Age Gotland  
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The Lady and Her Mead Cup

**D**RINKING RITUALS and the “great halls” in which such rituals would have taken place are probably some of the most emblematic elements of Viking culture in terms of both the amount of scholarship dedicated to the topic and how the lives of late-ancient and medieval Scandinavians are conceived of in the popular imagination.<sup>1</sup> Central to these conceptions is the figure of the “lady of the hall” acting in the role of “lady with the mead cup” (as she is named in Michael J. Enright’s eponymous work on this topic), who is by now a very familiar archetype within Viking studies.<sup>2</sup> The prominent role women played in ceremonial imbibing, and thus in the sociopolitical and religious processes to which these ceremonies were so integral, in Iron Age and early medieval Scandinavia is supported by a variety of literary, documentary, and archaeological sources.<sup>3</sup> Goddesses and heroines are depicted in the role of sacralized hostess and peacemaker in the Eddas and the Old Icelandic sagas,<sup>4</sup> and

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1. This essay was first presented under the same title in a session on “Power and Hierarchy in Early Historical Perspective: Sources to Women’s Histories” during the XIth Nordic Women’s and Gender History conference at Stockholm University, August 19–21, 2015.

2. Michael J. Enright, *Lady with a Mead Cup: Ritual, Prophecy, and Lordship in the European Warband from La Tène to the Viking Age* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1996).

3. Especially the wife and/or other female relatives of the chieftain owning the hall in question or, as has been pointed out in a much needed corrective in recent research, who could just as well have owned the hall herself.

4. For example, in the *Lokasenna*, the goddess Sif (Thor’s wife) gives counsel and calms an argument between the other gods while serving them mead; the Valkyrie

the oldest extant Scandinavian law code, the *Grágás* laws of Iceland, even cites the ritualized drinking of ale served by the new bride as an essential requirement for a marriage to be considered valid.<sup>5</sup>

This strong association between women and the ritual service of alcohol is particularly manifest in the archaeological record of the Baltic island of Gotland, located southeast of the Swedish mainland. Here the motif of a female figure bearing a drinking horn and presenting it to a male warrior riding on a horse or sitting in a high seat is frequently repeated on the island's famed Viking Age picture stones (fig. 1),<sup>6</sup> and costly Roman-style drinking utensils have been found in both male and female graves from the Roman Iron Age onwards (fig. 2).<sup>7</sup>

These types of artifacts are often cited as evidence for the importance of drinking rituals and for the activities of high-status women in Viking society more generally. But there is another group of objects which acted in the same conceptual world that have received far less attention, discussed specifically in only a handful of Swedish-language journal articles and excavation reports from the 1960s and, more recently, briefly touched upon in archaeologists Lena Thunmark-Nylén's overview of churchyard finds from Gotland and Martin Rundkvist's publications on the large gravefield at Barshalder.<sup>8</sup> These are three pendant types

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Sigdrífa blesses and presents ale to the warriors in *Sigurdrífumál*; and Odin names Valkyries as the cupbearers in Valhalla in *Grimnismál*. Examples from the sagas include Bergthora and Thorhilda in *Njal's Saga*; Queen Gunnhilda, Gydat the housemistress, and an unnamed "ale-maid" in *Egil's Saga*; and Borghild, Brynhildm, and Gudrun in *Volsunga Saga*, to name but a few.

5. Roberta Frank, "Marriage in Twelfth and Thirteenth-Century Iceland," *Viator* 4 (1973): 473-84, 476-77, doi:10.1484/J.VIATOR.2.301661. "Here the new wife would first assume the foremost of her official duties as a housewife, the ceremonial serving of drink."

6. Olof Sundqvist, "Religious and Ideological Aspects of Hall Interiors in the Late Iron Age," in Michael Olausson, ed., *Runsa Borg: Representative Life on a Migration Period Hilltop Site—a Scandinavian Perspective*, Papers from the Project Runsa Borg Uppland; no. 2 (Östersund: Jengel förlag, 2014), 111-45, 119.

7. Several examples of which can be found in the collections of Stockholm's Swedish History Museum.

8. See Birgit Arrhenius, "En vendeltida smyckeuppsättning," *Fornvännen: Journal of Swedish Antiquarian Research* (1960): 65-91, [http://samla.raa.se/xmlui/bitstream/handle/raa/1864/1960\\_065.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](http://samla.raa.se/xmlui/bitstream/handle/raa/1864/1960_065.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y); Birger Nerman, "En



Figure 1: Detail of Tjängvide picture stone depicting a female figure bearing a drinking horn. Photo: Christer Åhlin, SHM (Swedish History Museum).



Figure 2a: Imported glass beaker from Barshalder grave field and 2b: Full-size bronze wine sieve and ladle from grave 11 at Källunge. Photos: Sara Kusmin, SHM.



unique to late Iron Age and early medieval women's dress on Gotland: the so-called tongue, sieve, and ladle pendants (fig. 3). Found exclusively in the graves of wealthy Gotlandic women, these pendants (or amulets) represented—and worked to construct—the idealized elite female identity exemplified in the image of the lady and her mead cup.

### Churchyards, Cemeteries, and Curious Configurations

The tongue, sieve, and ladle (sometimes known as spoon) pendants are all found in their most developed forms in graves dating from the latest part of the Iron Age, that is, from the tail end of the Vendel Period (650–750 CE), throughout the Viking Age (750–1100 CE), and into the beginning of what is generally designated as the early medieval period in Sweden (from roughly 1100 to ca. 1300 CE). The greatest concentrations of finds, however, date specifically to the tenth through the twelfth centuries CE.<sup>9</sup> The pendants are found at sites all across Gotland (see fig. 4 and table 1), both as churchyard finds and in contemporary graves from the last phase of use of traditional pre-Christian gravefields. The approximately two hundred years during which these three pendant types were most in vogue marked a significant period of cultural transition in Gotlandic history. Christianity was beginning to make great headway on the island (i.e., in the erection of the earliest churches on Gotland), but the customs and beliefs of Norse paganism were still very much alive as evidenced by the fact that, while Christian churchyards were founded and utilized more and more at this time, old “pagan” cemeteries were still being used as well.<sup>10</sup>

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gotländsk grupp av hängsmycken från Vendeltid och vikingatid—dess uppkomst och utveckling” (1964); Marten Stenberger, “Das Gräberfeld bei Ihre im Kirchspiel Hellvi auf Gotland,” *Acta Archaeologica* 32 (1961): 1–13; Lena Thunmark-Nylén, “Churchyard Finds from Gotland (11th–12th Centuries),” in Ingmar Jansson, ed., *Archaeology East and West of the Baltic. Papers from the Second Estonian–Swedish Archaeological Symposium, Sigtuna, May 1991* (Stockholm: Department of Archaeology, Stockholm University, 1995); and Martin Rundkvist, *Barsbalder 2: Studies of Late Iron Age Gotland* (Stockholm: University of Stockholm, 2003).

9. The dates given here are those most typically used to demarcate these periods in current Swedish archaeology.

10. Thunmark-Nylén, “Churchyard Finds,” 162. As determined by many objects



Figure 3: Jewelry set with tongue, sieve, and ladle pendant, Barshalder grave 1962:13. Photo: Christer Åhlin, SHM.



The three pendant types always occur in women's graves; that is to say, in all the graves containing the pendants and individuals whose remains could be osteologically sexed, the individuals were determined to be female,<sup>11</sup> alongside other items of dress and types of grave goods that indicate a degree of wealth.<sup>12</sup> Burial customs do differ between the churchyards and gravefields. The practice of "dress burial," where the deceased was inhumed wearing ordinary (albeit fancy) dress but without any other grave goods such as tools or food dominates in the former, whereas in the latter, the dead were buried with clothes, ornaments, and various other types of equipment as well.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, whether in churchyard or gravefield, in the contexts where their original placement can be determined, tongue, sieve, and ladle pendants always appear as components of strings of beads and pendants strung between paired brooches or pins and worn over the breasts (see fig. 3).<sup>14</sup>

As shown in table 1, the three pendant types are also remarkable in comparison to most ornaments worn in these large assemblages of beads and pendants on the chest for their occurrence in apparently fixed sets.<sup>15</sup> As noted by Lena Thunmark-Nylén (and also evident in the data from the Barshalder and Hellvi gravefields),<sup>16</sup> unlike other pendant types char-

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interred in both the churchyards and older cemeteries that both date to this same period.

11. Rundkvist, "Barshalder 2," 60.

12. I.e., imported items, those with precious stones and metals and/or elaborate and high quality of craftsmanship.

13. Thunmark-Nylén, "Churchyard Finds," 162; Rundkvist, "Barshalder 2," 60. Another difference is that the last stage of use of the gravefields includes cremation graves, though the pendants under discussion here are overwhelmingly more common in inhumations.

14. These assemblages are sometimes known as "treasure necklaces" and were highly characteristic of Viking Age female dress on Gotland and in other areas of presentday Sweden.

15. Bo Jensen, *Viking Age Amulets in Scandinavia and Western Europe*, BAR International Series; 2169 (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2010), 146. As Jensen discusses, fixed sets of pendants/amulets where certain designs always occur together in the same number and order are very rare in Viking Age Scandinavian contexts. Interestingly enough, one of the only examples of the phenomenon he acknowledges is a combination of horse, shield, and spear shaped amulets, which are also found on Gotland.

16. Thunmark-Nylén, "Churchyard Finds." See Martin Rundkvist, "Barshalder

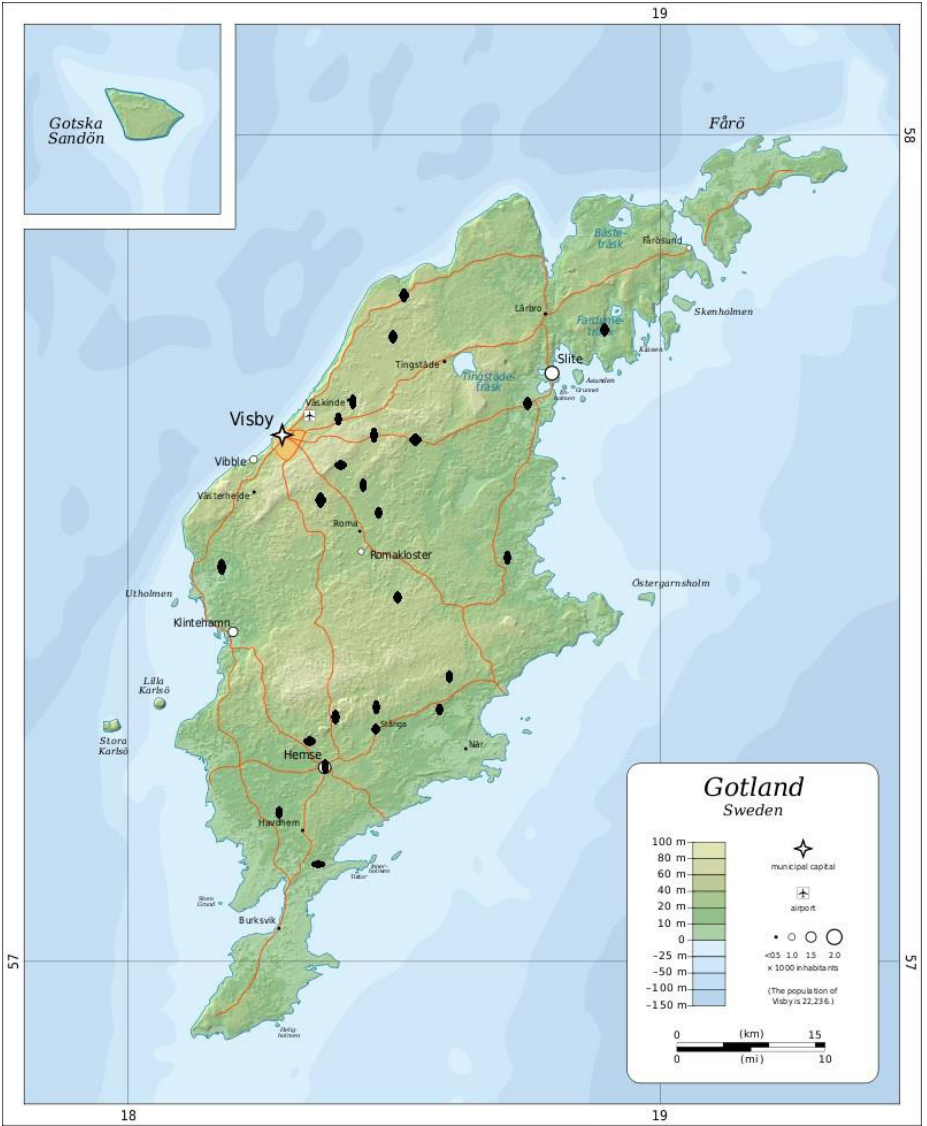


Figure 4: Distribution of finds of tongue, sieve, and ladle shaped pendants.  
 Map: Oona Räisänen, wikicommons, with additional markings by the author.

acteristic of late Iron Age Gotland, such as semiprecious stone, fishhead shaped, or coin pendants, tongues, sieves, and ladles are *never* multiplied within reliable find contexts. When all three types occur together, only a single example of each type is ever present, which often (though not always) appear to have been manufactured together, judging from commonalities in artistic technique and style of ornamentation. The makeup of incomplete sets also seems to follow a specific a pattern: when one pendant is found alone, it is always a tongue pendant; and when two, there is always a tongue pendant and a sieve pendant.

Table 1. Tongue, sieve, and ladle shaped pendants listed by find site\*

Site	Grave #	Grave Type	Pendant Type	Dating*
Allekvia	Allekvia 1893	Inhumation	Tongue (older type)	900-1000 CE
Barshalder gravefield	Bhr 1927:II	Inhumation	Tongue (younger type)	1000-1100 CE
Barshalder gravefield	Bhr 1927:II	Inhumation	Sieve	1000-1100 CE
Barshalder gravefield	Bhr 1935: 04	Inhumation	Sieve	1000-1000 CE
Barshalder gravefield	Bhr 1960:02a	Cremation	Tongue	1000-1100 CE
Barshalder gravefield	Bhr 1961: 01d2	Inhumation	Tongue (older type)	900-1000 CE
Barshalder gravefield	Bhr 1961: 01d2	Inhumation	Ladle	900-1000 CE
Barshalder gravefield	Bhr 1961: 02	Inhumation	Tongue (younger type)	1000-1100 CE
Barshalder gravefield	Bhr 1961: 02	Inhumation	Tongue (fragment)	1000-1100 CE
Barshalder gravefield	Bhr 1961: 02	Inhumation	Sieve	1000-1100 CE
Barshalder gravefield	Bhr 1961: 02	Inhumation	Ladle	1000-1100 CE
Barshalder gravefield	Bhr 1961: 09	Inhumation	Ladle (damaged)	1000-1100 CE
Barshalder gravefield	Bhr 1962: 13	Inhumation	Tongue (younger type)	1000-1100 CE
Barshalder gravefield	Bhr 1962: 13	Inhumation	Sieve	1000-1100 CE
Barshalder gravefield	Bhr 1962: 13	Inhumation	Ladle	1000-1100 CE
Barshalder gravefield	Bhr 1966: 01a	Cremation	Sieve	1000-1100 CE
Barshalder gravefield	Bhr 1966: 19	Inhumation	Tongue(older)	1000-1100 CE
Barshalder gravefield	Bhr 1966: 19	Inhumation	Sieve	1000-1100 CE
Barshalder gravefield	Bhr 1966: 19	Inhumation	Ladle	1000-1100 CE
Barshalder gravefield	Bhr 1966: 27c	Inhumation	Tongue (younger type)	1000-1100 CE
Barshalder gravefield	Bhr 1966: 27c	Inhumation	Sieve	1000-1100 CE

1: "A Cemetery in Grötlingbo and Fide Parishes, Gotland, Sweden, c. AD 1-1100.:Excavations and Finds 1826-1971" (PhD diss., University of Stockholm, 2003); and Mårten Stenberger, "Das Gräberfeld bei Ihre im Kirchspiel Hellvi auf Gotland," *Acta Archaeologica* 32 (1961).



Barshalder gravefield	Bhr 1966: 27c	Inhumation	Ladle	1000-1100 CE
Barshalder gravefield	Bhr 1968: 01	Inhumation	Tongue (older type)	1000-1100 CE
Buttle	N/A	Stray find	Tongue (younger type)	1000-1100 CE
Fardhems kyrkogård	Fardhems 28:1	Inhumation	Sieve	1000-1100 CE
Fardhems kyrkogård	Fardhems 28: 2	Inhumation	Tongue (younger type)	1000-1100 CE
Fardhems kyrkogård	Fardhems 28: 2	Inhumation	Sieve	1000-1100 CE
Fardhems kyrkogård	Fardhems 28: 3	Inhumation	Tongue (younger type)	1000-1100 CE
Fardhems kyrkogård	Fardhems 28: 3	Inhumation	Sieve	1000-1100 CE
Garda kyrkogård	Garde 126:1 1904	Inhumation	Tongue (younger type)	1000-1100 CE
Garda kyrkogård	Garde 126:1 1904	Inhumation	Sieve	1000-1100 CE
Halla Broa gravefield	Halla 48: 4	Cremation	Tongue (older type)	900-1000 CE
Halla Broa gravefield	Halla 48: 4	Cremation	Sieve	900-1000 CE
Halla Broa gravefield	Halla 48: 4	Cremation	Ladle	900-1000 CE
Halla Broa gravefield	Halla 48:6F	Inhumation	Sieve	900-1000 CE
Halla Broa gravefield	Halla 48: 6F	Inhumation	Ladle	900-1000 CE
Halla Broa gravefield	Halla 48: 7a	Inhumation	Sieve	900-1000 CE
Halla Broa gravefield	Halla 48: 7a	Inhumation	Ladle	900-1000 CE
Havdhems kyrkogård	Hafdhem 1895	Not recorded	Tongue (younger type)	1000-1100 CE
Havdhems kyrkogård	Hafdhem 1896	Inhumation	Tongue (younger type)	1000-1100 CE
Havdhems kyrkogård	Hafdhem 1906	Not recorded	Tongue (older type)	1000-1100 CE
Havdhems kyrkogård	Havdhem 1925	Inhumation	Ladle	1000-1100 CE
Havdhems kyrkogård	N/A	Stray find	Tongue (younger type)	1000-1100 CE
Hemse Annexshem	Hemse 1892	Inhumation	Tongue (younger type)	1000-1100 CE
Hemse Annexshem	Hemse 1892	Inhumation	Sieve	1000-1100 CE
Hemse Annexshem	Hemse 1892	Inhumation	Ladle	1000-1100 CE
Hemse Annexshem	Hemse 1892	Inhumation	Ladle	1000-1100 CE
Källunge kyrkogård	Källunge 1954	Not recorded	Tongue(very corroded)	1000-1100 CE
Källunge kyrkogård	Källunge 1954	Not recorded	Sieve	1000-1100 CE
Källunge kyrkogård	Källunge 1954	Not recorded	Ladle	1000-1100 CE
Kvie	Kvie 1859	Inhumation	Tongue (older type)	900-1000 CE
Kvie	Kvie 1859	Inhumation	Ladle	900-1000 CE
Kvie	Kvie 1859	Inhumation	Ladle	900-1000 CE
Lexarve	Lexarve 1893	Not recorded	Tongue (younger type)	1000-1100 CE
Lexarve	Lexarve 1893	Not recorded	Sieve	1000-1100 CE
Lilla Myrungs	Lilla Myrungs 1892	Inhumation	Sieve	900-1000 CE
Lilla Rone	N/A	Hoard	Tongue (younger type)	1000-1100 CE
Lilla Rone	N/A	Hoard	Sieve	1000-1100 CE
Lilla Rone	N/A	Hoard	Ladle	1000-1100 CE

Mangsarve gravefield	Ekeby 25:6	Cremation	Tongue (older type)	800-900 CE
Mangsarve gravefield	Ekeby 25: 6	Cremation	Ladle	800-900 CE
Martebo	Martebo 1893	Not recorded	Sieve	1000-1100 CE
Mos Stenkyrka	N/A	Stray find	Ladle	1000-1100 CE
Smiss	Smiss 1927	Not recorded	Ladle	900-1000 CE
Stånga kyrkogård	Stånga 140:3	Inhumation	Tongue (younger type)	1000-1100 CE
Stånga kyrkogård	Stånga 140:3	Inhumation	Tongue (younger type)	1000-1100 CE
Stånga kyrkogård	Stånga 140:3	Inhumation	Sieve	1000-1100 CE
Stånga kyrkogård	Stånga 140:3	Inhumation	Sieve	1000-1100 CE
Stånga kyrkogård	Stånga 140:3	Inhumation	Ladle	1000-1100 CE
Stånga kyrkogård	Stånga 140:3	Inhumation	Ladle	1000-1100 CE
Stånga kyrkogård	Stånga 140:3	Inhumation	Ladle	1000-1100 CE
Stånga prästgård	not recorded	Inhumation	Tongue (younger type)	1000-1100 CE
Stora Åby	Bro 1877	Not recorded	Tongue (younger type)	1000-1100 CE
Stora Sojdeby	N/A	Hoard	Ladle	800-900 CE
St. Ihre gravefield	St. Ihre 218:1	Inhumation	Tongue (older type)	900-1000 CE
St. Ihre gravefield	St. Ihre 218:2	Inhumation	Tongue (older type)	900-1000 CE
St. Ihre gravefield	St. Ihre 218:2	Inhumation	Tongue (older type)	900-1000 CE
St. Ihre gravefield	St. Ihre 218:2	Inhumation	Tongue (fragment)	900-1000 CE
St. Ihre gravefield	St. Ihre 218:2	Inhumation	Sieve	900-1000 CE
St. Ihre gravefield	St. Ihre 220	Inhumation	Tongue (younger type)	1000-1100 CE
St. Ihre gravefield	St. Ihre 220	Inhumation	Sieve	1000-1100 CE
St. Ihre gravefield	St. Ihre 220	Inhumation	Ladle	1000-1100 CE
Trullhalsar	Trullhalsar 1916:23	Inhumation	Tongue (older type)	900-1000 CE
Valva	Valva 1893	Not recorded	Tongue (older type)	800-900 CE
Valva	Valva 1893	Not recorded	Sieve	800-900 CE
Valva	Valva 1893	Not recorded	Ladle	800-900 CE

\*Listed pendants currently located in the Swedish History Museum or Gotland's Fornsalen Museum, choice here restricted to those with secure provenance and which the author was able to examine in person or detailed photographs.

This singularity and systemization in the arrangement of the pendants is in itself suggestive of a purpose and meaning beyond mere decorative function as it indicates a deliberate, repeated pattern of practice involving conscious choices being made as to which pendants were selected to include in treasure necklaces deposited in graves.<sup>17</sup> In other words, it

17. Thunmark-Nylén, "Churchyard finds," 178.

is highly suggestive of the existence of a ritualized dimension to the use of tongue, sieve, and ladle pendants. Ritualization, a systematic, formalized, and meaning-creating type of practice, assists in the creation of:

embodied knowledge and experience [that can be] highly structured and structuring, and, through this process, meaningful dimensions of people's lives are created. Through the process of ritualization, the actor is drawn into the ritual and becomes, with or against his or her own will, part of the structure that is created through the practice.<sup>18</sup>

In this case, the ritual elements informing the way in which these three pendant types were curated was most likely tied into the overarching ceremonial aspects of the great hall milieu and the reproduction of gender relations and ideals within that setting.

### A Grave Issue—Sex vs. Gender

In recent decades more and more attention has been paid to the problematics inherent in attempting to reconstruct how gender was negotiated in prehistoric societies. In particular, the dichotomy present when working with osteological evidence for sex, which may be gleaned from human remains, on the one hand, and cultural ideas about gender, presumed to be expressed in the artifacts preserved as grave goods, on the other, has begun to be addressed in earnest. It is now generally acknowledged in among archaeologists that though all bodies have a sex (though what that sex may be is often in itself difficult to determine based solely on bones),<sup>19</sup> not all graves have a discernible gender and that the exact connection between grave goods, which may have had

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18. Åsa Berggren and Liv Nilsson Stutz, "From Spectator to Critic and Participant: A New Role for Archaeology in Ritual Studies," *Journal of Social Archaeology* 10, no. 2 (2010): 171-97, 176.

19. Fredrik Fahlander, "Facing Gender: Corporeality, Materiality, Intersectionality and Resurrection," in Ing-Marie Back Danielsson and Susanne Thedéen, eds., *To Tender Gender: The Pasts and Futures of Gender Research in Archaeology*, Stockholm Studies in Archaeology 58 (Stockholm: Stockholm University, 2012), 138.

gendered associations, and the biological sex of bodies is always up for interpretation.<sup>20</sup> This problem has understandably cast severe doubt on the longstanding archaeological practice of gendering graves on the basis of sorting types of grave goods as exclusively “feminine” or “masculine.”<sup>21</sup> Nonetheless, when certain practices, like the deposition of specific articles of dress, *do* appear to correlate with divisions in sex, it can be reasonable to assume that biological sex did indeed play a role in the construction of social gender. With this in mind, it follows that one can start by noting an association with sex in the archaeological data and go on to use it as a jumping-off point for building an understanding of how *gender* was being constructed in a particular context, as is the case with the three Gotlandic pendant types being discussed here.

While questions about how biological sex should be disentangled from socially constructed gender are especially thorny ones for investigators of burials, archaeological incarnations of these issues are only one part of a much larger debate currently ongoing within gender studies questioning whether sex and gender can ever truly be wholly separated. To quote archaeologist Marie Louise Stig Sørensen:

During the last decade this polarized distinction [between gender and sex] has been increasingly questioned, with arguments focusing on the mutual interactions and influences between them, with some even arguing that sex and gender are not or cannot be separated. . . . it is possible to interpret the existing basically social constructivist model of gender in a way that does not negate the significance of biology or of sexuality.<sup>22</sup>

It has, in sum, become increasingly clear to scholars across the humanistic disciplines that both the extreme positions of biological determinism (where all social identities are seen as determined by natural biological traits) and cultural essentialism (in which identity and gender

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20. Jensen, *Viking Age Amulets*, 180.

21. Tove Hjørungdal, “Poles Apart: Have There Been Any Male and Female Graves?” *Current Swedish Archaeology* 2 (1994): 141–50, 141, open-access journal at <http://www.arkeologiskasamfundet.se/csa/archive.html>.

22. Marie Louise Stig Sørensen, “Gender, Material Culture, and Identity in the Viking Diaspora,” *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 5 (2009): 253–69, 254.

roles are attributed entirely to the ways a particular culture prescribes them) are insufficient.<sup>23</sup> That this paper is entitled “Depending on Sex” might even be said to be a little misleading, or rather, incomplete, as the biological and the cultural are always inextricably linked in reciprocally constituting individual and group identities.

To irrevocably divide physical sex from discursive gender is hardly tenable given that, as the philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler has famously stated, gender is not only performed in some figurative sense but literally as well. For example, cultures often assign specific bodily practices to the province of different gendered groups, and the repeated performance of these practices leave physical traces and make their practitioners “*gendered down to the bone*.”<sup>24</sup> In fact, all “identities, including gendered ones, are constituted by ideology (discourse, norms, culture) in intersection with the body (genetics, hormones, statue, appearance) and the material (technology, material culture, nature).”<sup>25</sup> Therefore, gaining a fuller picture of the lived realities of embodied human subjects in the past must entail examining the complex interplay between physical bodies, with their different sexual characteristics, and the various cultural conditions that have influenced the myriad ways in which those sexed bodies were used, displayed, and decorated.

Clothing and jewelry as material culture in intimate physical contact with the body and which can function as an extension of the body and work to help facilitate or to restrict different bodily practices, are quintessential examples of this intersection. As anthropologists like Mary Douglas assert, one may even speak of the continual coexistence of two bodies in the world of encultured human experience: a physical body and what is termed a “social body,” which always modifies the physical body and how it acts, moves, and is presented in society.<sup>26</sup> The body is, in other words, itself a social tool alongside and as much as the clothing

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23. Christina Fredengren, “Posthumanism, the Transcorporeal and Biomolecular Archaeology,” *Current Swedish Archaeology* 21 (2013): 53-71, 54.

24. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1990), 30 (my emphasis).

25. Fahlander, “Facing Gender,” 141.

26. Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2004), 71.

and other material objects used to modify it and in everyday life is almost impossible to separate from those materials.<sup>27</sup> For example, whereas the brooches that fastened women's necklaces are among the objects most commonly taken in grave re-openings, the beads and pendants making up women's necklaces in Iron Age Europe were almost never removed (and in some cases were even carefully replaced in their original position while other objects were taken from the grave). Archaeologist Alison Klevnäs suggests that these assemblages were so intimately connected with the body through being worn on it for so long that to separate them from it, even after death, was unthinkable.<sup>28</sup>

In most cultures across time and throughout space, dress and adornment have also been (and, of course, continue to be) one of the (if not *the*) foremost means by which gendered identities are curated in/on the social body. This was evidently true in the Scandinavio-Baltic area during the late Iron Age, as extensive burial analysis of archaeological sites across the region shows numerous distinctively regional and/or gender-specific trends in the distributions of dress objects. Jewelry likely often acted in these traditional societies as a kind of "anti-fashion," visual symbols repeatedly applied to the body to communicate and reinforce the community's idealized and *ritualized* views concerning belief, class, age, gender, and so forth.<sup>29</sup> Tongue, sieve, and ladle pendants from Gotland may thus be characterized as objects operating on the intersection between female sexed bodies and a specific kind of material culture used to adorn and accentuate them, precious objects already inscribed with ideological meanings signified in their designs, which served to help constitute a very specific configuration of the social body: the idealized image of the stately and affluent lady of the hall, an identity organized

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27. Joanne Entwistle *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress, and Modern Social Theory*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Wiley, 2015), 9.

28. Alison Klevnäs, "Give and Take: Grave Goods and Grave Robbery in the Early Middle Ages," in Alison Klevnäs and Charlotte Hedenstierna-Jonson, eds., *Own and Be Owned: Archaeological Approaches to the Concept of Possession*, Stockholm Studies in Archaeology 62 (Stockholm: Department of Archaeology and Classical Studies, Stockholm University, 2015), 135-66, 142.

29. Michèle Hayeur Smith, *Draupnir's Sweat and Mardöll's Tears: An Archaeology of Jewellery, Gender and Identity in Viking Age Iceland*, BAR International Series; 1276 (Oxford: John and Erica Hedges, 2004), 10.



along axes of wealth and gender roles as these were mapped onto the physical capacities of women's bodies.

### Reproducing Religions or Status?

The tongue pendant type (fig. 5) consists of small diamond and oval shaped slabs of bronze measuring a few millimeters thick and approximately 4 centimeters long, with the upper end presenting a slightly thicker triangular profile containing a hole for threading and the lower end curving inwards. There are two distinct subtypes: an older more angular design (see fig. 5a) popular ca. 900-1000 CE, decorated with open and/or relief work (usually silver plated in the best-preserved examples) reminiscent of the Borre-area style, with diagonal "wings" or "arms" sprouting from the rim, and topped by a knobby section, and a younger, more curvilinear type (see fig. 5b), prevalent ca. 1000-1100 CE, with Ringerike-area style bands of silver-plated incised interlace and curls crossing each other to create compartments filled with gilded ornamentation in low relief.

When the tongue pendants have (infrequently) been discussed from a symbolic point of view, interpretation has typically focused on whether the type should be viewed as an expression of pagan and/or Christian religious iconography. The older subtype, interpreted as hieratic helmed figures (an interpretation the present author tends to agree with) does, after all, suggest an affinity with mask amulets of the type found throughout late Iron Age Scandinavia, which, in addition to sharing a mustached face design, also have vaguely rhomboid or oval shapes and are mostly found in women's graves.<sup>30</sup> A number of the known examples of mask amulets were likely manufactured on Gotland beginning in the late tenth century.<sup>31</sup> Many scholars have sought to connect the masks with the cult of Odin, based on well-known etymological and Eddic evidence associating this god of warfare, rulership, and hidden knowledge

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30. Jensen, *Viking Age Amulets*, 30. It must also be stated that nearly *all* types of amulets are more frequently found in female graves.

31. Andres Tvaari, *The Migration Period, Pre-Viking Age, and Viking Age in Estonia* (Tartu: University of Tartu Press, 2012), 152. The mask pendants are found abroad as well in hoards ranging from Estonia to Russia.



Figure 5a: Tongue pendant, Halla Broa grave Bz.  
Photo: Sarah Kusmin, SHM.



Figure 5b: Tongue pendant, Stora Åby.  
Photo: Gabriel Hildebrand, SHM.

with masking, or the cult of the fertility god Freyr, based on similarities between the face-type of the masks and a handful of metal figurines thought to represent that deity.<sup>32</sup> It may follow that the older tongue pendants could have had similar associations.<sup>33</sup>

In contrast to this very pagan reading of the older pendants, the prominence of a central design resembling an equal-armed cross in the later subtype (and the possibility of reading the overall form as “fish-shaped”) has led others to propose a Christian interpretation of this last

32. For example the eleventh-century figurine found at Rällinge in Lunda parish, Södermanland.

33. Though Nerman himself goes the opposite direction and proposes that the older tongue pendants are actually “stylized barbaric copies of an image of Christ,” “Ein gotländsk grupp,” 53.

phase of tongue pendants. They do indeed seem to have supplanted the earlier subtype in popularity just as Christianization began to intensify on Gotland.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, the fact that examples of the later subtype have been found not only in churchyards but also in gravefields in graves with “pagan” burial customs somewhat weakens the notion that their symbolism was conceived in exclusively Christian terms.<sup>35</sup> It should be kept in mind as well that tongue pendants were popular on Gotland during an era of prevailing religious syncretism, and it is thus very likely that of the women buried wearing them, some must have been adherents to the old religion, some to Christianity, and some, perhaps even most, believers in and practitioners of a mix of both traditions.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, the meaning of symbols is always contextual and may shift over time and space and in juxtaposition to other symbols.<sup>37</sup> Older pagan connotations of the tongue pendants could have given way to Christian or simply “less pagan” ones later on; or some wearers may have seen them as religious amulets, while for others they were always “simply” a secular ornament.

All in all, it is much more probable that the tongue pendant type (along with the sieves and ladles) did not typically have any overt connection with confessional identity, or at least that this was not its principal function. Instead its symbolic value was probably founded primarily on its continuing association with women of wealth and status. Whatever else the tongue pendants of late Iron Age Gotland were, they were undoubtedly prestige objects. Expensive adornments almost without exception carry (among other polyvalent messages) connotations of high rank, being made of materials already associated with preciousness. In late Iron Age Scandinavia, and indeed in most of early medieval Europe, jewelry was a crucial means of displaying personal and familial

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34. Thunmark-Nylén, “Churchyard Finds,” 178. Thunmark-Nylén mentions these possibilities, but is not impressed; she sees the pendants as religiously neutral.

35. It is of course not at all unproblematic to see burial customs solely as a direct reflection of the deceased’s actual beliefs. They may reflect the faith of the dead, or of their families, or be linked to regional traditions more than a particular confessional identity, or some mix of all three as well as other economic or social factors.

36. Thunmark-Nylén, “Churchyard Finds,” 162.

37. Jensen, *Viking Age Amulets*, 14. Jensen addresses this specifically in regards to the shift in meaning of different amulets depending on what other amulets were being used at the same time.

prosperity. For upper class women, jewelry often constituted a significant part of the personal property that they brought to, and retained control of, after their marriages.<sup>38</sup> Many of them likely also displayed their economic clout through commissioning new pieces, as well as employing their jewels as part of the intricate networks of gift exchanges and reciprocal obligations that drove Iron Age diplomacy.<sup>39</sup>

Impressive neck and chest adornments in particular often signified special power, both temporal and spiritual, in pre- and protohistoric Scandinavia.<sup>40</sup> Neck rings and certain types of brooches are sometimes found in men's graves dating to the Scandinavian Bronze and Iron Ages (such as the huge gold collars found in Vendel-period "warrior" graves in middle Sweden). However, most archaeological, art historical, and literary evidence, such as the numerous kennings (roundabout metaphorical descriptions of a person, place, or thing) in Viking Age skaldic poetry referring to women as "necklace bearers" and "wealth bearers,"<sup>41</sup> indicates that by the Viking Age, elaborate neck and/or chest jewelry was seen as a quintessentially feminine attribute linked to ideals of the female body as a nexus of fertility.

The typical Viking Age woman's outfit of ankle-length dress and decorative apron (known from finds of textiles, contemporary iconography, and descriptions in the Eddas and sagas) would not perhaps be considered revealing by most modern standards, but this does not mean it was devoid of sexual implications. The placement of jewelry applied to this costume, as evidenced on Gotland and elsewhere in the archaeological recovery of dressed burials with adornments still in situ on the body, tended to adhere to different customary regional arrangements and seems to have been used to draw attention to specific erogenous zones

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38. Nancy L. Wicker, "Nimble-fingered Maidens in Scandinavia: Women as Artists and Patrons," in Therese Martin, ed., *Reassessing the Roles of Women as 'Makers' of Medieval Art and Architecture*, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 2:865-902, 900.

39. Wicker, "Nimble-Fingered Maidens," 901; Klevnäs, "Give and Take," 147.

40. See, for example, Marianne Görman, "The Necklace as a Divine Symbol and as a Sign of Dignity in the Old Norse Conception," *Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis* 16 (2014): 111-50, throughout.

41. Judith Jesch, *Women in the Viking Age* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1991), 161.



Figure 6: Reconstruction of a double brooch and beads set a.k.a treasure necklace  
Photo: Anette Bähren, wikicommons.

of the female anatomy. In particular the intricate arrangement of double brooches and strings of beads and pendants worn across the upper chest of which the tongue, sieve, and ladle pendants formed a part, which was so typical of female dress of the period, would serve to greatly emphasize the breasts (fig. 6). By thus accentuating an external sex specific characteristic, neck/chest jewelry could act as “direct reflections of female sexuality, or better still [it] may have served the purpose of expressing notions of femininity, fertility, lactation and/or associations with female divinities by the hyper-emphasis on stylized female sexual traits.”<sup>42</sup> The large, eye-catching tongue pendants could certainly have helped to create such an emphatic focus.

The link between jewelry and feminine sexuality, fertility, and divinity

42. Hayeur Smith, *Draupnir's Sweat and Mardöll's Tears*, 73. Hayeur Smith cites in particular the popular oval or “turtle” brooches with multiple bosses as possibly designed to echo a pair of stylized breasts with nipples.



in late Iron Age Scandinavian culture(s) is quite explicitly expressed in the mythology surrounding the goddess Freyja. Freyja, meaning literally “The Lady,” was a Norse goddess of fertility, beauty, cats, war, death, *seið* magic (shamanistic trance-work and divination in Old Norse religious practice typically practiced by women), love, and sex. In the myths, she is the owner of the great hall *Sessrúmnir*, where she receives half of all those slain in battle. Passages in the Poetic and Younger Eddas often depict her acting as a cupbearer (i.e., in the *Skaldskapurmál*, where Freyja is the only one who dares pour for the bellicose giant Hrungnir).<sup>43</sup> One of Freya’s most prized possessions is the magical *Brisingamen* (meaning “flaming,” “gleaming,” or “bright”), interpreted variously by scholars as a golden collar or torc, or a large button-on-bow (or other very large and precious) type brooch with an attached bead set incorporating garnets and/or amber.<sup>44</sup> Not only is the jewel a characteristic attribute of the Norse deity of female sexuality, but also, in the fourteenth-century Icelandic *Sörla þáttur* (like most of recorded Norse myths probably based on earlier oral retellings), the goddess is said to have acquired the treasure by means of her matchless bodily charms, allowing each of the four dwarven smiths who created it to spend a single night with her as their payment.<sup>45</sup>

According to Snorre Sturlason’s *Heimskringla*, the title *húsfreyja* (literally “lady of the house”), which derived directly from the name of the love goddess, was an honorific given to a woman who owned her own estate. Freyja clearly embodied a number of what were considered to be highly desirable feminine characteristics of elite women in Old Norse culture(s). Since the idea of copying a magical object as a means to gain sympathetic access to its powers was not unheard of in ancient and medieval sources, such women may have sought to emulate or actually attract Freyja’s qualities by wearing elaborate, expensive, and showy “treasure

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43. Snorre Sturlason *Skaldskapurmál*, trans. Karl G. Johansson and Mats Malm (Stockholm: Stockholm University, 1997), 161.

44. The most detailed description of the jewel is found in *Þrymskviða*, where the god Thor is obliged to borrow the piece from Freyja in order to take her place in a sham marriage to a giant king.

45. Snorre Sturlason, *Sörla þáttur*, trans. Rasmus B. Anderson (Chicago, IL: Scott, Foresman & Co., 1901), stanza 1.





Figure 7: 'Freyja' pendant, Aska in Hagebyhöga.  
Photo: Christer Åhlin, SHM.



Figure 8: Gold foil from Helgö, Sweden  
showing bejeweled woman embracing a man.  
Drawing: B. Arrhenius.

necklaces” in imitation of the goddess’s Brisingamen.<sup>46</sup> As archaeologist and ancient jewelry expert Birgit Arrhenius argues, the remarkably fine treasure necklaces found at various late Iron Age sites throughout Scandinavia amply attest to this practice. These finds include the set from Barshalder, pictured here as Figure 3, and the ornate necklace found in a rich woman’s grave near the Aska mound in Östergötland, Sweden that includes the famous silver pendant depicting a (possibly pregnant) finely dressed woman wearing a bead collar and button-on-bow brooch often interpreted as representing Freyja herself (fig. 7).<sup>47</sup> The latter is part of a whole “series of pictures of prosperous women, all wearing a special jewelry set and engaged in activities related to fertility” found on late Iron Age jewelry (fig. 11), picture stones (fig. 1), and the small gold foils or *guldgubbar* deposited (usually in postholes) in Norse cult and/or hall places (fig. 8).<sup>48</sup>

46. Birgit Arrhenius, “Brisingamen and the Menet Necklace,” in Uta von Freeden, Herwig Friesinger and Egon Wamers, eds., *Glaube, Kult und Herrschaft: Phänomene des Religiösen im 1. Jahrtausend n. Chr. in Mittel- und Nordeuropa: Akten des 59. Internationalen Sachsensymposiums und der Grundprobleme der frühgeschichtlichen Entwicklung im Mitteldonauraum* (Bonn: Habelt, 2009), 219–30, 228.

47. Arrhenius, for example, among others also discusses the necklaces from Hoen, Norway and Eketorp, Sweden as other possible replica Brisingamens.

48. Arrhenius, “Brisingamen and the Menet Necklace,” 225.

This kind of invocation of the forces of fertility and reproductivity that were counted as one of Freyja's domains could be especially desirable as these capacities were also some of the primary means by which women exercised agency within the wider late Iron Age sociopolitical sphere. Though an elite Viking lady seemingly held almost unlimited authority within her own home, outside of it her (formal) powers were more circumscribed, and her opportunities to act in legal matters often depended on the influence she had on her male kin, husband(s), father, brothers, and most *especially* her children.<sup>49</sup> Producing heirs to ensure the continuity and strength of the family line and its concomitant economic and other interests, such as the rights to ancestral *oðal* lands,<sup>50</sup> was one of an elite adult woman's principal duties, and whether it was fulfilled or not was likely to have a significant impact on her prestige. Furthermore, if one grants that the later medieval sagas, at least in part, preserve the attitudes of preceding centuries, wealthy mothers tended to play a very significant part in determining their children's and the wider clan's fortunes by providing, or withholding, the not inconsiderable economic and diplomatic support they wielded.<sup>51</sup>

The components of the treasure necklace in its role as a replica *Brisingamen* could have referenced not only female sexuality generally, but also these ideals of (re)productive elite motherhood specifically. This would, for one, perhaps explain why tongue, sieve, and ladle pendants are only found with *adult* women. In her work on the white cowrie beads found with young girls on Gotland, archaeologist Susanne Thedéen has argued persuasively that aspects of gendered age identities centering on fertility and status (i.e., burials with white beads signified unmarried upper-class "maidens" whose fertility was potential rather than active) were at times expressed through the particular ornaments selected for inclusion on treasure-necklaces.<sup>52</sup> Much as white beads might signal a

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49. Jóhanna Friðriksdóttir, *Women in Old Norse Literature: Bodies, Words, and Power* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 10.

50. Torun Zachrisson, *Gård, gräns, och gravfält: Sammanhang kring ädelmetalldepåer och runstenar från vikingatid och tidig medeltid i Uppland och Gästrikland*, *Stockholm Studies in Archaeology* 15 (Stockholm: Stockholm University, 1998), 24.

51. Friðriksdóttir, *Women in Old Norse Literature*, 85.

52. Susanne Thedéen, "Immortal Maidens: The Visual Significance of the

“maiden” identity, tongue, sieve, and ladle pendants might be deployed to display a (presumably, at least of *age* for marrying and bearing children) fertile, adult female status.<sup>53</sup>

The reproduction signaled by the necklaces and brooches worn by women could operate on a more metaphorical level as well. As archaeologist and art historian Nancy Wicker has observed, high status women were also “instrumental in *reproducing society*” through their pronounced involvement in commemorative practices such as commissioning (and in at least one documented case, carving) runic memorials, weaving narrative tapestries, and curating heirlooms.<sup>54</sup> Heirloom jewelry, which so often formed a vital part of a woman’s personal wealth that she was entitled to dispose of as she pleased and pass on to descendants of her choice, would certainly have figured prominently in these practices. That the expensive and intricately decorated Gotlandic tongue pendants figured among those objects of adornment passed down through female lineages is evidenced both in the occurrence of a number of mismatched sets, where an older subtype tongue pendant occurs alongside a “younger” sieve and/or ladle pendant(s),<sup>55</sup> and in the appearance of older subtype tongue pendants in graves with otherwise much “younger” artifacts. Reproductive power of both these related types was then an essential part of the identity of the lady of the hall in her role as a *maker* of dynasties and diplomatic ties in both a literal and more figurative sense, which her jewelry helped advertise through patronage or possibly

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Colour White in Girls’ Graves on Viking-Age Gotland,” in Fredrik Fahlander and Anna Kjellström, eds., *Making Sense of Things: Archaeologies of Sensory Perception*, Stockholm Studies in Archaeology; 53 (Stockholm: Dept. of Archaeology and Classical History, Stockholm University, 2010), 103–20, throughout. Many of the examples Thedéen cites are from the same period as the pendants discussed here. Some even come from the same cemeteries and churchyards that tongue, sieve, and ladle pendants have been found in.

53. See Stig Sørensen, “Gender, Material Culture, and Identity.” This is very much in line with Stig Sørensen’s and others’ calls for more attention to be given to the many different ascriptions of sexual characteristics and ideas of sexuality that one individual may be given at different stages of life, particularly for women in regards to reproductive capacity, etc.

54. Wicker, “Nimble-Fingered Maidens in Scandinavia,” 902. Italics mine.

55. Thunmark-Nylén, “Churchyard Finds,” 177.

even participation in crafting it.<sup>56</sup> It was an identity expressed in material culture worn on and integrated with the female body, especially in those objects of adornment, like expensive tongue pendants, meant to conjure thoughts not just of material wealth, but also of other desirable associations such as fecundity; in short, of abundance in all its possible forms: economic, bodily, and spiritual.

### Sieves and Ladles in Symbol and Practice

Sieve pendants from Gotland (fig. 9) are made of bronze and always about half or a third of the size of a typical tongue pendant. The form consists of a small, circular concave lower portion with a raised rim (the bowl), with three round holes drilled into it in a triangular pattern, and a rectangular upper portion (the handle, thickened in profile with holes for suspension), which is often decorated with an incised triknót design. The rim and handle are usually silver plated, while the inside of the bowl is gilt. The ladle/spoon pendants (fig. 10) are equal in size to the sieves and also made of bronze, with a convex bottom half (which I have taken to referring to as the scoop) of roughly semicircular shape that slopes upwards into a small central ridge attaching to a “handle” shaped like a rounded triangle. The handle is typically ornamented with a triknót, while the scoop is generally left smooth. The handle and scoop are usually silver plated, while the triangular facets along the ridge-join show traces of gilding in the best preserved examples. The underside of the ladle pendants always has a small triangular depression that would not have been seen with the ornamented convex side worn facing outward, which suggests that it was important in some way that the pendants actually be formed like exacting miniatures of real scooping utensils.<sup>57</sup>

Much like the tongue pendants, sieve and ladle pendants also have an antecedent in an earlier pendant type, the small bowl-shaped pendants dating to the late 800s CE found in Norway, Mälardalen, Denmark, and Gotland. These are also typically decorated with or made of precious metals, and in at least one case, the Hoen hoard, have been found

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56. Wicker, “Nimble-Fingered Maidens in Scandinavia,” 901.

57. Possibly because they then would not be “true” reproductions and would not have the same amuletic value otherwise, as is discussed later in this paper.



Figure 9a: Sieve pendant, Martebo grave 24.  
Photo: Sarah Kusmin, SHM.



Figure 9b: Sieve pendant, Lexarve  
Photo: Christer Åhlin, SHM.



Figure 10a: Ladle pendant, Hemse  
Photos: Elisabet Pettersson, SHM.



Fig. 10b: Ladle pendant, Havgdhem  
Photos: Elisabet Pettersson, SHM.

alongside examples of another form of sieve-like pendant.<sup>58</sup> However, unlike the three Gotlandic pendant types, multiple examples of bowl pendants *are* often found within a single context.

Both the sieve and ladle pendant types can be linked both formally and conceptually with the elaborate wine services, typically including bronze scoops and strainers, as seen in figure 2, that northern Germanic-speaking elites in the Roman and later Iron Age imported as symbols of status.<sup>59</sup> Most obviously, a link is plainly evident through the fact that they are formed as detailed miniature versions, up to and including apparently otherwise entirely superfluous indentations on the ladle pendants, of the implements actually used in drinking rituals. The pendants could thus have acted as a very explicit visual reference to those practices, and, in turn, functioned as a symbol of their wearer's association with and participation in both these ceremonies specifically and a wealthy, elite milieu more generally. They were an emblem of the wearer's status as the lady with the mead cup and *busfræya*, signifying the role in much the same way as the necklace-wearing and cup-bearing silver "valkyrie" pendants (fig. 11) found in a number of late Iron Age female burials on the Swedish mainland and Öland did in an even more direct fashion.

Not only would sieve, ladle (and valkyrie) pendants probably have been immediately recognized by contemporary observers as material allusions to a particular brand of elite femininity connected with drinking rituals, they probably were also displayed during those ceremonies. Along with the large tongue pendants, the miniature sieves and ladles were elements in symbolically loaded treasure necklace assemblages.<sup>60</sup> As one of the paramount expressions of a lady of the hall's position, a treasure necklace would doubtless have formed part of the costume she wore when actually serving drink, one of the most highly visible aspects

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58. Jensen, *Viking Age Amulets*, 63.

59. Fredrik Ekenren, "Performing Death: The Function and Meaning of Roman Drinking Vessels in Scandinavian Mortuary Practices," in *Old Norse Religion in Long-Term Perspectives: Origins, Changes, and Interactions: An International Conference in Lund, Sweden, June 3-7, 2004*, ed. André Anders, *Vägar till Midgård*; 8 (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2006), 110.

60. Though sieves and ladles were smaller, they were no less finely made, or any less expensive or indicative of wealth.





Figure 11: Examples of “valkyrie” pendants from graves in Tuna, Uppland; Birka, Uppland; Grödinge, Södermanland and Köping, Öland. Photo: Gabriel Hildebrand, SHM.

of an elite woman’s duties as ceremonial hostess.<sup>61</sup> As art historian and archaeologist Ann-Sofie Gräslund has asserted in her work on the influence of women in Norse society, though the performance of this role took place in what would now be classified as the private sphere, this did not make it demeaned or lacking in authority.<sup>62</sup> This is hardly surprising if one considers that places and actions we might now call private had, in fact, great public import during the Iron Age. The hall served as one of the primary arenas for the negotiation and reinforcement of interpersonal alliances, not least by way of the communal drinking that took place there.<sup>63</sup> The moments when she was acting as the lady with the mead cup would, therefore, be ones during which the display of an

61. Fröriksdóttir, *Women in Old Norse Literature*, 10.

62. Anne-Sofie Gräslund, “Is there Evidence of Powerful Women in Late Iron Age Svealand?” in *Völker an Nord-und Ostsee und die Franken: Akten des 48. Sachsensymposiums in Mannheim vom 7. bis 11. September 1997*, ed. Uta von Freeden, Ursula Kock, and Alfried Wieczorek, *Mannheimer Geschichtsblätter; 2/Kolloquien zur Vor- und Frühgeschichte*; 3 (Bonn: Habelt, 1999), 91-98, 91.

63. Sundqvist, “Religious and Ideological Aspects of Hall Interiors,” 128.

elite woman's position and economic power was crucial in terms of both her personal reputation and familial honor and affiliations.

In the Old Norse worldview, the great hall was not only a focus for social negotiation, but might also serve to reproduce ideas about the cosmological order of things. Historian of Norse religions Olof Sundqvist suggests that the layout of a great hall probably included

a micro-macrocosmic symbolism. . . . The high seats [in the hall] were organized according to an assumed mythical mode [and] regarded as interfaces or thresholds to the other world, i.e. meeting places for humans and divine beings. The owner and user of such place had an enormous power since he/she appeared in a sacred place that was related to the gods.<sup>64</sup>

The lord of the hall in his high seat, in the place of greatest honor within the hall, could be viewed as an earthly representation of the king of the gods, Odin, on the high seat *Hliðskjálf* in Valhalla, with the lady of the hall seen as ruling over the household in the guise of Frigg. Frigg (also known as *Frigga*), the wife of Odin, is depicted in the Eddic lore as queen of the Norse gods and goddess of wisdom, foreknowledge, divination, good counsel, marriage, domestic arts (especially spinning and textile work, arts linked to women's prophetic powers in the Norse worldview), childbirth, and protector of homes and families.<sup>65</sup> She appears, in sum, as the ideal lady of the hall, and, as so many of her auspices also involved feminine aspects of magical practices, reproduction, and social roles, appears to have overlapped with Freyja in a number of her functions and characteristics.<sup>66</sup> The rituals of the drinking hall could thus in many ways

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64. *Ibid.*, 111.

65. "Gylfaginning," in Anthony Faulkes, trans., *Edda* (London: Charles Tuttle, 1995). 29-30. In the *Gylfaginning*, for example, she is named "highest among goddesses," and in addition to acting as hostess in Valhalla alongside her husband Odin (where she also sits on *Hliðskjálf*), is the owner of her own hall *Fensalir*.

66. Stephan Grundy, "Freyja and Frigg," in Sandra Billington and Miranda Green, eds., *The Concept of the Goddess* (London: Routledge, 1998), 57. As Grundy discusses, many scholars have hypothesized Frigg and Freyja may have originally been aspects of one deity, but "the problem of whether Frigg or Freyja may have been a single goddess originally is a difficult one, made more so by the scantiness of pre-Viking Age references to Germanic goddesses and the diverse quality of the sources."

be read in direct connection to pagan religious beliefs. However, they did not have to be; “such practices had their origin in the pre-Christian period, but continued into the Middle Ages.”<sup>67</sup> Ceremonial drinking as a display of wealth and hospitality and a means of creating group cohesion did not go out of fashion with Christianization, and women of both faiths evidently continued to lead and participate in it.<sup>68</sup>

The person of the lady herself, in her own embodied performance of actions such as greeting guests, walking throughout the hall, and pouring alcohol would have been an integral part of this sociomythical pageantry. Her body, shaped and ornamented by dress and jewelry, including her treasure necklace, with all the messages encoded in its different pendants-signifiers meant to suggest, emphasize, and enhance her richness of desirable feminine attributes, would be on display. In her richly accoutered presence, she would be one of the central foci for the statements about power and prestige, and individual and group identities, being made during the gathering she presided over.<sup>69</sup> The glittering (*brisen*) of the precious metals of her jewelry in the torchlight, and the clinking and chiming of its beads and pendants as she moved further accentuated her form and movement.<sup>70</sup> The ritual service of drink may also have had a reflexive association with the bodies of the women who served it via the link apparently drawn in Old Norse culture(s) between alcohol and female sexuality. The *Eddas* and sagas frequently refer to women’s ability to “intoxicate” men with their beauty; alcohol is used as a metaphor for female genitalia, its consumption compared to the pleasure of sex; and elite women are often depicted as a freely offering their sexual favors along with their ale.<sup>71</sup> In sum, status, drinking, sex, and thus, again, reproduction, women’s roles in the social dramas of the mead hall and their private/public display of special types of precious and polyvalent jewelry like sieve and ladle pendants on their female

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67. Sundqvist, “Religious and Ideological Aspects of Hall Interiors,” 130.

68. Frank, “Marriage in Twelfth and Thirteenth-Century Iceland,” 176.

69. Enright, *Lady with a Mead Cup*, 69.

70. Arrhenius, “Brisingamen and the Menet Necklace,” 226.

71. Jesús Fernando Guerrero Rodriguez, “Old Norse Drinking Culture” (PhD diss., University of York, 2007), 187. Usually as a means of advancing their political agendas.

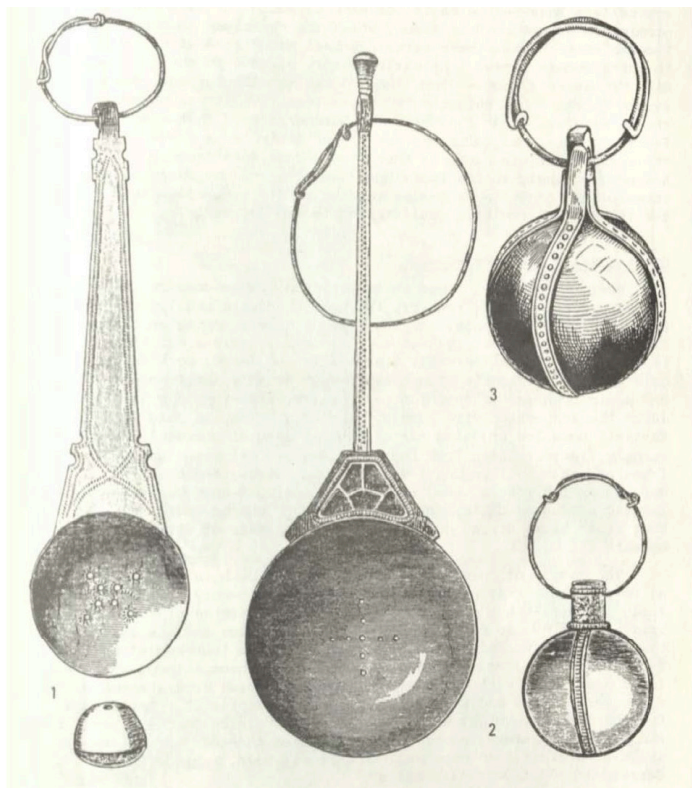


Figure 12: Sieve-spoons and crystal ball pendants from (1) Bifrons Kent, grave 6, (2) Bifrons, grave 42, and (3). Chessell Down IoW. Drawing from Meaney's Anglo-Saxon Amulets.

bodies—could all have been very intimately connected on late Iron Age Gotland.

The use of pendants shaped like miniature drinking implements as a means for elite women to signal their status also has a precedent in other Germanic-speaking regions during the late Iron Age and early Middle Ages. Archaeologist Bo Jensen suggests that bowl, sieve, and ladle/spoon pendants likely all belonged to the same symbolic world as so-called *sieve-spoons*, which occur in particularly rich female graves in slightly older Germanic contexts both in England and on the continent

(fig. 12).<sup>72</sup> The spoons are delicate objects, usually made of silver and sometimes gilt, with slender, variously ornamented handles and bowls perforated with holes arranged in a cross pattern. The most numerous and best studied examples come from the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Kent dating from the sixth and seventh centuries CE. They are objects, for the most part, almost three centuries older than the sieve and ladle pendants from Gotland but would nonetheless have been utilized in a sociocultural milieu similar in many of its essential features to that of the Viking Age Baltic islands.

To begin with, both Anglo-Saxon and Norse societies shared in a common linguistic, material, and religious heritage originating from the (probable) “ancestral homeland” of the Germanic-speaking groups in the area of what is now Denmark and northern Germany.<sup>73</sup> At the time of the Viking conquest of England, for example, the language of the two groups was still close enough that Saxons and Norsemen could understand each other without difficulty. They worshipped similar gods prior to conversion to Christianity, with literary sources referring to the likes of *Woden* (Odin), *Thunor* (Thor), and the goddess *Frige* (Freyja and/or Frigg). Strong stylistic similarities exist between many Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian artifact types (as well as examples of distinctly Anglo-Saxon artifacts found in Scandinavian graves and vice-versa), indicating longstanding trade and other contact between the groups.<sup>74</sup> Additionally, at the time when sieve spoons were being interred with rich women in Kent, Anglo-Saxon mortuary practices were very similar to those evidenced on late Iron Age Gotland with both cremations and “dress burial” inhumations practiced simultaneously, the latter gradually becoming more common with the spread of Christianity in the area.<sup>75</sup>

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72. Jensen, *Viking Age Amulets*, 63.

73. The ethnogenesis, migrations of, and relationships among the loose ethnolinguistic entities commonly referred to as “Germanic” peoples is, to say the least, still unclear in many respects. There are nevertheless enough similarities evident between these groups to make it safe to say that there were many points of interaction and/or shared cultural affiliations between them.

74. Alex Woolf, “Sutton Hoo and Sweden Revisited,” in Alessandro Gnasso, Emanuele E. Intagliata, and Thomas J. MacMaster, eds., *The Long Seventh Century: Continuity and Discontinuity in an Age of Transition* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2015), 5-17, 6.

75. Howard Williams, *Death and Memory in Early Medieval Britain* (Cambridge:

One of the most significant parallels, however, is simply that mead hall culture was also an integral part of Anglo-Saxon society. Much like their northern neighbors, early medieval Anglo-Saxons engaged in gift-exchange, communal drinking, and other displays of wealth and hospitality as methods of simultaneous alliance-building and competition between individuals, families, and kingdoms.<sup>76</sup> Examples of Anglo-Saxon halls like the large fifth-century feasting place recently excavated at Lyminge in Kent are known from archaeology and literature. Perhaps most famously, the epic poem *Beowulf* includes several female characters cast in the archetypal role of the lady with the mead cup.<sup>77</sup> The Danish queen Wealhþeow, for example, acts as hostess and diplomat between her husband and the titular hero and repays the latter for slaying the monster Grendel with the gift of three horses and a necklace referred to as *Brosinga mene*.<sup>78</sup> Wealhþeow is described as wearing elaborate dress and jewelry as a symbol of her status, a detail corresponding with the art historical and archaeological evidence of elite Anglo-Saxon female costumes consisting of gowns, cloaks, and headdresses ornamented with purses, girdles, brooches, and strings of beads and pendants highly reminiscent of Viking treasure-necklaces. As archaeologist Toby Martin theorizes, these ensembles could have, just like their Scandinavian counterparts, “guided movement, posture, gesture . . . [and] emphasised different anatomical aspects of female bodies differentiated by age and perhaps even ethnic identity.”<sup>79</sup>

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Cambridge University Press, 2006), 25.

76. Christopher Scull, “Social Transactions, Gift Exchange and Power in the Archaeology of the Fifth to Seventh Centuries,” in David A. Hinton, Sally Crawford, and Helena Hamerow, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 848–65, 854.

77. Dorothy Carr Porter, “The Social Centrality of Women in *Beowulf*: A New Context,” in “Anthropological and Cultural Approaches to *Beowulf*,” special issue, *The Heroic Age: A Journal of Early Medieval Northwestern Europe* 5 (Summer–Autumn 2001), free ejournal, <http://www.heroicage.org/issues/5/porter1.html>.

78. Richard North, “The King’s Soul: Danish Mythology in *Beowulf*,” in *Origins of Beowulf: From Vergil to Wiglaf* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 194–224, 194. The reference almost certainly relates to the tradition of Freyja and her Brisingamen.

79. Toby Martin, “(Ad)Dressing the Anglo-Saxon Body: Corporeal Meanings



Sieve-spoons should be counted among those objects which would have helped shape the sensory experience of elite Anglo-Saxon femininity. Most examples are equipped with suspension loops and show wear on the bottom of the bowls as if from a long time spent rubbing against cloth, indicating they were probably worn in life hanging from the girdle or chatelaine, which was an essential part of the costume of a well-dressed Anglo-Saxon woman. Their sheer delicacy of construction, their apparent use as essentially items of jewelry, and the fact they are nearly always found in conjunction with other items of a distinctly amuletic nature, specifically, in another suggestive connection with the material from Gotland, crystal ball pendants found nested in the bowls of sieve-spoons resting between buried women's knees, all lends credence to the assumption that sieve-spoons were more symbolic than practical in their function.<sup>80</sup> Much like archaeologist Audrey Lilian Meaney suggests in her classic *Anglo-Saxon Amulets and Curing Stones*, the sieve-spoons worn by high status Anglo-Saxon women and drinking rituals were most likely also directly related:

Perhaps only the lady of an important household, rich enough to afford the imported luxury drink, would wear a sieve-spoon. In Rome it was more probably a slave's task to strain the wine – but the picture we have of early Germanic society, for example in *Beowulf*, clearly shows that serving the drink, whether it were beer, mead, or wine, was not only the duty, but the honoured privilege of the lady of the house. What more natural, then, than that such a lady would wish to advertise that she well knew what was required of one who served wine? Hence the extreme delicacy, beauty and expensiveness of the sieve-spoons, which were intended mainly as status symbols and used, if at all, only on ceremonial occasions.<sup>81</sup>

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and Artefacts in Early England,” in Paul Blinkhorn and C. G. Cumberbatch, eds., *The Chiming of Crack'd Bells: Recent Approaches to the Study of Artefacts in Archaeology*, BAR International Series; 2677 (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2014).

80. Audrey Lilian Meaney, *Anglo-Saxon Amulets and Curing Stones*, BAR British Series; 96 (Oxford: B. A. R., 1981), 84.

81. *Ibid.*, 88.

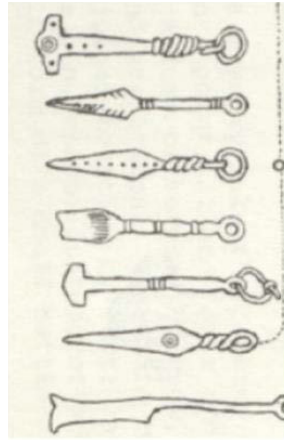


Figure 13a (above, left): Miniatures from Köping, Öland; Photo by Gabriel Hildebrand, SHM.

Figure 13b (above, right): Gilton, Kent; drawing from Meaney, *Amulets*.

Figure 13c (left): Şimleu Silvaniei, Romania; photo by James Steakley, wikicommons.

It is not hard to imagine that what applied to the sieve-spoons might just as well apply to their Scandinavian counterparts, making it all the more probable that the later Gotlandic sieve and ladle pedants would have symbolized much of the same ritualized type of femininity as their Anglo-Saxon predecessors.

Sieve-spoons and sieve and ladle pendants were likely also thought to perpetuate the values they connoted in a very literal as well as symbolic way. All three types can clearly be related to the extensive tradition of miniaturized weapons and tools employed as amulets in Viking Scandinavia, Anglo-Saxon England, and other Germanic speaking areas of Europe throughout the Iron Age and early Middle Ages (fig. 13).<sup>82</sup>

82. This tradition of miniature weapons and tools is discussed by many of the authors already cited in this paper, such as Birgit Arrhenius (in “Vikingatida miniatyrer,” *Tor* 7 [1961]: 139-64); Jensen (in *Viking Age Amulets*); and Meaney (in

These are miniatures that were also evidently strongly associated with femininity being found in women's graves all across their wide area of spatial and temporal distribution, and many taking forms which also seem to refer to women's idealized roles within the household.<sup>83</sup>

Miniature objects are often viewed as having amuletic qualities, that is, to be portable objects capable of accruing positive and/or deflect negative numinous influences—because they are often considered to have a kind of sympathetic connection with their full-size prototypes and thus echo whatever associations are already attributed to the larger artifact within the culture.<sup>84</sup> As archaeologist Ing-Marie Back Danielsson discusses in her work on *guldgubbar* (fig. 8), the miniaturization of objects (and human or animal figures) can act as a potent aspect of magical practice because it can assist “people to think and create meaning, [make] manipulations possible and necessary . . . evoke emotions within the handler or viewer, such as wonder, awe, and/or empowerment . . . [and] contribute to the intelligibility of the world.”<sup>85</sup>

Manipulating the miniature may, in other words, be perceived as having the power to affect change within the real world. Sieve and ladle pendants, among other miniaturized tools, might therefore have been worn by Iron Age women to actively promote wealth, abundance, fertility, and good fortune as much as simply to advertise these boons.

*Anglo-Saxon Amulets*).

83. They are often also used as jewelry, attached to necklaces, chatelaines, and even elaborate (as in the famous example pictured in fig. 13c) body chains, though not exclusively, as other examples are found in graves threaded onto so-called “amulet rings,” such as the example pictured in Figure 13a. See also Erika Rosengren, “Miniatyren-ingen småsak: En presentation av en alternativ tolkning till vapen-och redskapsminiatyrer i Uppåkra,” *Acta archaeologica Lundensia*, ser. 8, 61 (2010): 201-12, 207. Birgit Arrhenius has, for example, connected miniature scythes to the cult of Freyr, god of fertility and brother of Freyja, and Erika Rosengren theorized weapons and horses as symbolic of bridal gifts given by husbands to their new wives as a sign of their high status.

84. Rosengren, “Miniatyren-ingen småsak,” 201.

85. Ing-Marie Back Danielsson, “Go Figure!: Creating Intertwined Worlds in the Scandinavian Late Iron Age (AD 550-1050),” in Dragos Gheorghiu and Ann Cyphers, eds., *Anthropomorphic and Zoomorphic Miniature Figures in Eurasia, Africa and Meso-America: Morphology, Materiality, Technology, Function, and Context*, BAR International Series; 2138 (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2010), 79-90, 81.

Wearing the amulet on a necklace or hanging from a girdle and thereby actually having it in close contact with the desiring body might also be thought to give more direct access to its positive effects as might repeatedly touching it. Sieve and ladle pendants often exhibit more wear than tongue pendants belonging to the same sets, which could be evidence of the former having been more habitually touched, rubbed, or otherwise manipulated.<sup>86</sup> The pendant-amulets' placement within a replica Brisin-gamen/treasure necklace could even have been seen as further enhancing their magical efficacy, as objects whose material qualities alluded to a specific named mythical prototype might be seen as able to draw on the desirable capacities of the original in the same way as a miniature was thought to be linked to its full-scale equivalent.<sup>87</sup>

### Conclusion—Depending on Embodied Identities

The tongue, sieve, and ladle pendant types of late Iron-Age Gotland all operated then “on the line between status symbols and amulets.”<sup>88</sup> They acted as material agents in the creation and maintenance of a certain type of elite female identity through their visual associations to both signs of earthly wealth and sources of fertility and abundance within Old Norse cosmology. Sieve and ladle pendants especially, as miniature replicas of expensive imported objects actually used to serve wine during the period, made clear reference to the drinking rituals which formed such an integral part of alliance building and competitive display within elite Viking society. Elite Viking women presided over such displays as a sign of their status and in so doing acted as representatives of mythological prototypes of idealized Norse womanhood such as Freyja and Frigg.

86. This was observed, for example, in all three “completed” sets handled by me at the Swedish History Museum.

87. Nanouschka Myrberg Burström, “Things of Quality: Possessions and Animated Objects in the Scandinavian Viking Age,” in Klevnäs and Hedenstierna-Jonson, *Own and Be Owned*, 23-48, 27. “Such objects appear to have not just qualities but *capacities*, which are not only useful and awe-inspiring but utterly desirable: to have them on one’s side could make all the difference in a society where skill and luck in battle, sea-faring and socio-economic transactions were fundamental to a good reputation and to survival.”

88. Meaney, *Anglo-Saxon Amulets*, 148.

Not only might this align them with these (and other) archetypal female beings in a show of their own personal and familial power, but they might also hope to literally take on more of the goddesses' gifts through the sympathetic magical force of their imitative performance. Elaborate neck and chest jewelry such as the treasure necklaces tongue, sieve, and ladle pendants were set in also functioned in itself as a sign of feminine dignity and reproductive power in late Iron Age Scandinavia. Flashy pieces like the tongue pendants, in particular, could have acted as especially potent material allusions to the likes of Freyja's Brisingamen set as well as serving to display the wearer's and/or their family's wealth by virtue of their precious materials and exquisite craftsmanship and to emphatically emphasize her bodily charms by their placement at the breast. Pendants displayed in this fashion would be inextricably linked to the sexual characteristics of the women they ornamented and thus to the ideologies mapped onto (presumed to be) fertile, adult female bodies in Old Norse culture(s).

The use of more or less formalized sets of dress objects is, of course, typically directed towards replicating a culturally prescribed ideal rather than individual realities and specific self-perceptions.<sup>89</sup> And it is usually social ideals as much, or often rather more than, personal actualities that are displayed in the accoutrements used in burials, which are chosen not by the deceased but by their family and community. It can even be argued that the image of a person constructed in death relates more to their social identity as a newly minted ancestor than to their former life, though in the case of objects worn in life *and* used in burial, like the tongue, sieve, and ladle pendants, it must be supposed that these artifacts were relevant to the curation of identities in both ontological states.<sup>90</sup> The use of the three Gotlandic pendant types, both in the hall and in the grave, was an invocation of what could be termed a "hegemonic" Norse femininity with the model of the "lady of the hall" or "lady with

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89. Hayeur Smith, *Draupnir's Sweat and Mardöll's Tears*, 21.

90. Ekengren, "Performing Death," 113. "However, this view does not fully conflict with the idea that these practices also defined the personhood of the survivors. By creating images of the dead and the afterlife, the survivors shaped their understanding of themselves and their place in society."

the mead cup” held up as the most desired, highly valued, and dominant expression of femaleness at the time.<sup>91</sup>

Expressing a distinction of sex/gender was, in other words, only a fraction of what was at issue when this jewelry was worn. Equal to or even more important than presenting as a woman was presenting as a certain kind of woman with a certain social position, and certain physical and behavioral characteristics. Quoting archaeologist Bo Jensen once again:

Scandinavian elite used material culture as part of the performance of identities . . . [adornment like brooches or pendants] made it easier for these Scandinavian elite women to *identify* each other, and so *identify with* each other and identify themselves up against other identities. . . . Elite women needed to appear as both respectable women (not men) and at the same time as respectable members of the elite (not poor) and [these adornments] allowed exactly such a double defined identity.<sup>92</sup>

It was even a *triple*-defined identity that these pendants expressed as the different ascriptions of sexual characteristics and ideas of sexuality that one individual may be given at different stages of life, especially as regards women’s reproductive capacity, was also in play. In the end, though presumably not every woman who wore tongue, sieve, or ladle pendants was literally mistress of a great hall, it must be assumed that they all wished to draw on the power of the symbolic associations of that ideal, and that, furthermore, their families wished to continue to promote this image of them even after their deaths. Although it was an idealized feminine archetype being invoked, a late Iron Age woman’s

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91. Mimi Schippers, “Recovering the Feminine Other: Masculinity, Femininity, and Gender hegemony,” *Theory and Society* 36, no. 1 (2007): 85-102, 85, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4501776>. The notion of “hegemonic femininity” is a more recent idea advanced by Schippers and other sociologists as an extension of R. W. Connell’s ground-breaking theory of hegemonic masculinities. Just as multiple masculinities may exist within a culture with one, dominant form of masculinity (the hegemonic masculinity) positioned as the ideal to the detriment of other expressions, multiple femininities may exist and be dominated by a hegemonic expression of femininity.

92. Jensen, *Viking Age Amulets*, 182.



embodied experience of wearing these pendants as part of her best costume, of having them shape her physical, sensory, and ritualized reality in practice, and construct an integral part of her social body as she would be perceived by others and work to perceive and identify herself, would nonetheless have been very real, and had real socioeconomic consequences.

In sum, the tongue, sieve, and ladle pendants of late Iron Age Gotland were probably worn both to signify that their wearer was a woman of substance with a prestigious role in her household and to propagate that position on a number of levels. They were grouped together physically in women's dress because they all participated in the same enduring symbolic complex linking wealth, power, abundance, adornments, drinking rituals, and the embodied presences of the women who led them. They were crafted as expressions of a specifically feminine form of power and prestige and figured in the performance of a specific type of elite female identity. This identity was that of an individual fully endowed with all the authority and responsibility of mature womanhood as culturally ascribed to her stage of life, social position, and sex. Such responsibilities would, or at least could, include presiding at ceremonial drinking rites while wearing her personal version of a sacred jewelry set. The pendants functioned as material manifestations of the cultural capital invested in the "hegemonic femininity" of the honored lady of the hall, intended to project and perpetuate her idealized image both in life and in death for all eternity.

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