

# Situne Dei

Årsskrift för Sigtunaforskning och historisk arkeologi

2018

Redaktion:

Anders Söderberg  
Charlotte Hedenstierna-Jonson  
Anna Kjellström  
Magnus Källström  
Cecilia Ljung  
Johan Runer

Utgiven av Sigtuna Museum



## Unfinished and unused. A new look at two iconic antler finds from Sigtuna, the ‘Mammen’ sword-guard and the ‘Sigtuna Viking’

Uaininn O'Meadhra

Two of Sigtuna's most iconic finds are the ‘Mammen’-style sword-guard and the ‘Sigtuna Viking’ finial mount, both carved in antler, the ivory of the North. Both finds were widely published on discovery in the late 1930s, and have featured prominently ever since in most studies on Viking art, and also in major international travelling exhibitions of Viking society and material culture. What has not been previously noted, in print at least, is that both exhibit signs of being unfinished and unused and are best understood as discarded workshop failures, flawed during the final stages of manufacture.

Not only does this indicate that both were made in Sigtuna, it also means that, considering the carving time invested in their near-perfect creation, the fact that neither object was recycled, is further indication of an over-abundance of the raw material of elk antler (already in evidence from the vast amount of antler waste found throughout the town), but perhaps more astonishingly to an abundance of skilled artisan time and effort.

This article presents a detailed description of the surface condition of these two iconic objects, their manufacture and evidence of their being unfinished and unused. It also explains the high quality of the workmanship, showing them to be masterpieces of antler carving. Some examination of style, date, associations and intended function as well as social context is presented, but a closer examination of these aspects as also relationship to other evidence of craftworking in Sigtuna, has to be left to a later study.

### ***Part 1. The sword-guard***

*Sigtuna Museum reg. no. SF 1965. Chance find by a passer-by in 1939 in dumped soil from building excavations in Handelsmannen or Trädgårdsmästaren (Tesch 2015: n.2). Lit: Floderus 1938; 1941:73f; 1946:27–45, fig. 1; Arbman 1944:8f figs 1–2; Wilson 1966: 127, 132, pl. 47c–d; Fuglesang 1980:66, 193, no. 97, pl. 58A–B; Graham-Campbell 1980: 71f, no. 254; Graham-Campbell & Kidd 1980:168, ill. 98; Muhl 1990:279; Jansson 1991: 280–81, fig. 13; O'Meadhra 2010:92f; Androshchuk 2014:166, 243, 259, no. Up163; Tesch 2007:268, fig 14b; 2015.*



Figure 1a and b. The 'Sigtuna Viking' (left), SHM 22044, length of head with helmet 3 cm, and the 'Mammen' sword-guard, SF 1965, width 10,1 cm. Photo Gabriel Hildebrand.

### Description

Lower guard to a sword hilt, Petersen's Type Z, late 10th – 11th century (Fuglesang 1980:141ff; Androschuk 2014:172). The guard, W: 101 mm, has a gently rounded profile and a polished surface, and the patterns are carefully laid out in balanced compositions within a narrow plain border. One side (A) is tightly packed with a sinuous creature surrounded by foliage and takes full advantage of the fluctuating surface dynamics of carved antler. The other side (B) has a flat surface with an incised pattern, depicting a human face-mask with trailing moustache and hair, dramatically set-off against an empty plain background, reminiscent of incised metalwork. (fig. 1b)

The head of the creature on side A (fig 2a) lies just off-centre – easily identified by its large round eye with opposed cross-bands, and looped upper lip ending in a simple curl above the straight lower lip (figs. 2b & c, next page). The body, which is double contoured and filled with pelleting, forms an inverted S-shape narrowing

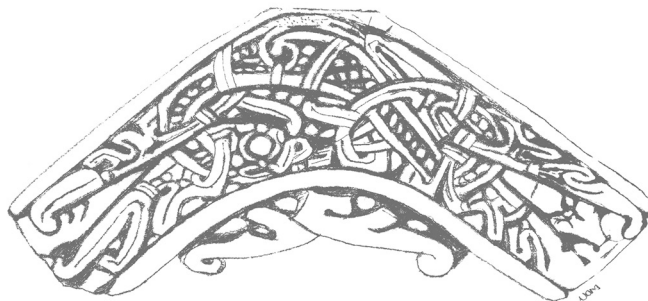


Figure 2a. Reading of side A. Drawing author.

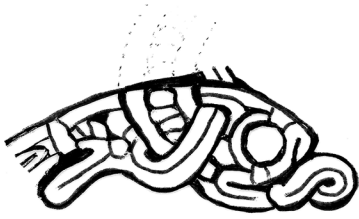


Figure 2b (above). Detail of head-crest entwining the neck. Drawing author.



Figure 2c (above right). Detail of head, curving neck and fore-hip spiral. Note carving technique and damage at tang socket. Photo author.

down into a short hind-leg enclosed in the loop of a ribbon-shaped tail. The fore-hip spiral-joint, containing cross-bands, lies at top centre and from it, a narrow fore-leg extends parallel to the body, ending in an oversized two-toed foot. The visual effect is of a trifurcated, feathered wing, on account of the large area allotted to this feature. The stubby triangular hind-hip, its full extent visible on either side of the overlying strand of the creature's body which partly conceals it, ends in a tiny two-toed foot, abutting both upper and lower lip. The tail continues the line of the body as a medial incised ribbon and loops around the hind-leg to end in a soft curl against a similarly softly curled ending of the head-crest.

This crest fills the left side of the guard and takes the form of elaborate, interlooping foliage with bulbous lobes tied with cross-bands and enclosing a freestanding angular foliate motif (*fig. 3d*). The crest extends into medial-incised ribbon offshoots that end in a soft curl above the head. Matching bulbous foliage fills the right side of the guard as an independent element flanking a separate triangular palmette motif

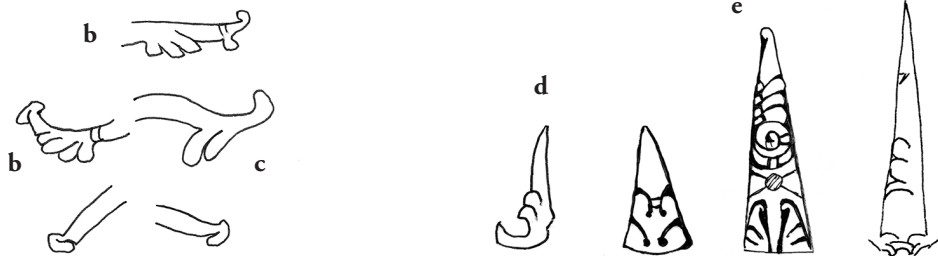


Figure 3. Comparative foliage. Left: tendrils as a sharply bent curl as found in south Scandinavian artwork (a) Sigtuna sword mount (b) DR 284 Hunnestad monument, (c) Bamberg casket. Right: the triangular fields of foliage on (d) the sword-guard compared to (e) antler pins now dated 12th century from Trädgårdsmästaren 9–10. Cf. *fig. 13*. Drawing author.





*Figure 4. Detail of junction between foreleg, tail and foliage (arrowed). Photo author.*

(fig. 3d). The body-pelleting follows a distinctive pattern whereby it changes form after each interlace intersection from a single row of beading at the neck, to three sections of triple rows at the fore-hip, to diagonal hatching, to two sections each of single rows towards the tail and down the hind-hip.

The design adapts well to the unusual shape of the guard in many clever ways, such as the over-proportioned fore-leg which seems caused by the desire to fill the extra large area available at this point. Arbman (1944) and Graham-Campbell (1980) offer the alternative reading that it continued into the foliage feature beside it. But if one compares the medial incisions and the fact that there is a matching looping element on the left of the guard, then it is clear that a returning loop is also intended here (fig 4). Thus confirming the importance of symmetry in the design.

All pattern strands lie tightly against one another. The few empty background spaces are modelled into pellets of similar size to the body pellets. This can lead to difficulty in motif reading for example above the lip curl and hind-foot and around the tail. But this dense carving was clearly meant to be read: the double contours on the body as well as the medial incisions down the ribbon-shaped tendrils intentionally guide the eye through intersections in the interlace, following along the major and minor figures of the design and separating them from the solid background pellets which otherwise claim equal attention. Medial incisions greatly assist motif reading in tightly-knit interlace, and at crossing points, the medial incision runs right up to the crossing and picks up right after it, while abutting tendril endings are marked as solid.

The composition has a balanced symmetry that is based on asymmetrically placed units, created by the complementary deeply cut curves of the main elements of the design, matched by the diagonally opposed interlocking lappet-endings at centre field, and cunningly similar foliage on either side of the guard. Two matching cusp-shaped background pellets frame the base of design, and it is one of these that has been mistakenly removed on side B.

The pattern on side B is easier to read as a human face mask with horns, outstretched hair, whiskers, moustache and beard that interloop with one another and the border in long tendrils. The moustache is shaped as wider notched tendrils with cross-bands and end in a specifically sharply bent curl. The beard extends through the border to the semi-independent pair of tendrils carved in relief over the blade socket.

*Figure 5 (left).  
Scraped corrections  
on the surface of the  
tendrils on side A.  
Photo author.*



*Figure 6 (above right). Corner showing decoration from side A spilling over onto side B.  
A mistake or planned? This feature is not repeated on the other corner. Photo author.*

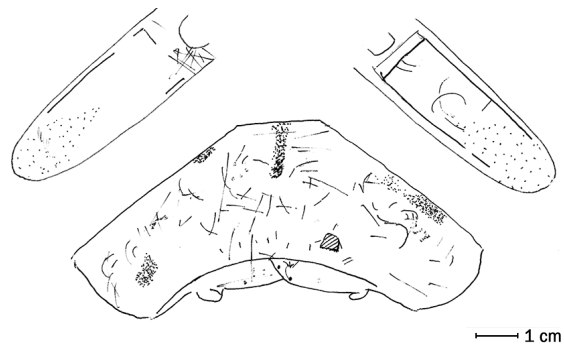
The paired stubby single-lobed tendrils hanging in relief over the centre of the blade socket, differ slightly on each side of the guard – forming a free-standing self-looping unit on side A, and an extension of the beard of the human mask on side B. Both are correctly interlaced at their crossing point and distinction in carving style is made between the larger flatter bands of the tendrils and the smaller rounded background pellets. The sharply bent curl found on the moustache endings is repeated on the tips of the tendril pair on side A. (figs. 3a, 8a)

#### *Unfinished features and mistakes*

Side A seems to be without any major corrections other than the occasional scraping of the surface especially clear on the blade-socket tendrils (fig 5). One strikingly irregular feature in the designing of side A is that the pattern spills over into side B only on one corner (fig. 6).

On side B, changes in the design are more obvious. Here, oblique lighting in the ‘blank’ areas shows very faint erased curvilinear lines, corrections that are not visible under normal lighting conditions (fig. 7) (fig. 8 & 9, next page). These correspond in width to the finished tendrils and seem to be early sketches of tendrils in a more curvilinear style. The design is totally symmetrical but some tendrils are longer than others, partly to accommodate the uneven shape of the guard caused by the antler medium, but also due to irregular cutting, e.g. at the forehead tendrils. When compared to the quality and finish of the carving on side A, side B seems to be unfinished work. Not because it is incised rather than carved (a juxtaposition commonly found in Viking-age artwork) but because of the erratic execution.

Furthermore, there is one serious mistake on side B. The cusp-shaped background space at the



*Figure 7. Analytical drawing of sketch-lines, erasing and tool-slips on side B and upper sloping sides.  
Cf. figs. 8–10. Drawing author.*



*Figure 8a. Faint traces of lightly incised curvilinear tendrils on the blank surface between the mask tendrils and border.*

*Cf. fig. 7. Photo author.*

*Figure 8b. The mistakenly removed cusp-shaped background pellet.*

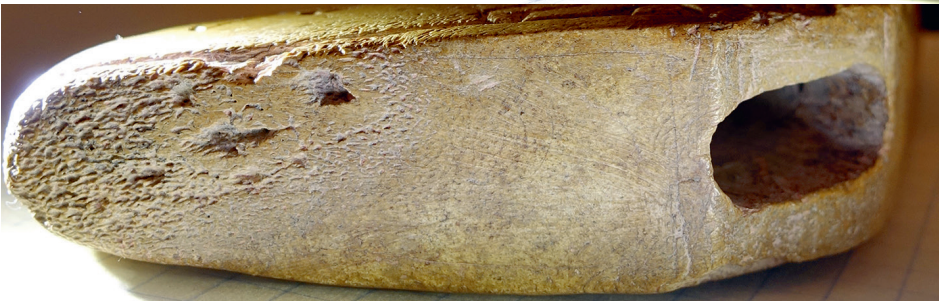
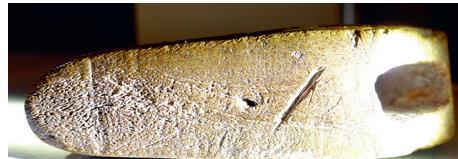
*Photo author.*

cross-band on the lobed feature on the right moustache has been removed and this must be a carving fault, rather than damage, as it lies in a protected area and could only be removed by carving with a tool (*fig. 8b*). It is as if, having lowered the area within the mouth, the carver continued without thinking to do the same job on the similar shape on the tendril, forgetting that it was to remain raised. What we do know is that the corresponding space on the left moustache was not removed to match.

The most striking unfinished aspect in the decoration of the sword-guard occurs on the upper sloping faces. Striking because there is so much of the spongy, cancellous, structure of the antler exposed on what is presumed to be a prestigious object, and also because of traces of an unfinished pattern left on view within the lightly incised beginnings of a fine border (*fig. 7 & 10b*). The pattern is so finely cut that it is marred by the brushstrokes of lacquer applied when a cast of the guard was made in 1939. These sloped surfaces have been previously described as undecorated (Graham-Campbell 1980:72). Another unfinished feature might be the uneven shape of the tang socket, where the drill hole has not been smoothed down. A number of tool slips and cuts also cover these sloping surfaces, though some may be later damage (*fig. 10a & b*).



*Figure 9 (left). As fig. 8 left side. Photo author.*



*Figure 10a & b (above). Lightly incised incomplete border enclosing unfinished sketched pattern lines, left visible on the upper sloping sides of the sword-guard. Cf. fig. 7. Photo author.*





Figure 11. Absence of staining and wear in the socket. Photo author.

### *Unused?*

An object that seems unfinished to the modern eye might have been acceptably finished to its contemporary user. However, the strongest evidence that the guard was never used is the fact that the socket is completely clean on the inside. There are no traces of rust nor other staining, or scrape marks from the inserting of a sword blade (fig. 11). This lack of staining

means that the guard had either become separated from its blade and grip before being discarded, or that it was never mounted in the first place. However, the use of a packing material around the tang might have protected the socket from coming into contact with metal: in later historical times sword-blade tangs were often bound in cloth or leather to ensure a snug fit inside the hilt (pers. com. Lisen Tamm, conservator, Sigtuna Museum). For this reason, a comparative study of surviving antler guards and pommels of the Viking period is being undertaken. The Swedish Historical Museum conservation department made a cast of the guard soon after it was discovered and for this, a protective separating layer of lacquer was applied, which still remains, on the porous cancellous surface of the sloping faces of the guard, but the socket was left untouched. Even if any cleaning was carried out in connection with this casting, it would not have removed iron staining. My conclusion is therefore that because of its fresh appearance, and lack of iron staining, this lower guard was probably never mounted on a sword blade. But what caused the split, visible on finding in 1939, at one corner of the blade socket – is this a constructional fault?

### *Discussion*

The guard was widely published on discovery on account of its exceptional workmanship (e.g. Floderus 1938; 1941:73f with lit.), but was first discussed in detail by Arbman (1944), in his seminal presentation of the bone and antlerwork of Sigtuna. He considered it to be of higher standard than anything produced in Sigtuna and thus not made there. He placed it alongside classic examples of Mammen-style artwork of the late Viking period, suggesting that it was probably made in a royal Danish workshop for a person of high rank in Sigtuna. The next major reference occurred in Wilson's important survey of Viking art where it was discussed in terms of the widespread distribution of quality items in the Mammen style (1966:127, 132). None of these authors mention the condition of the find.

A first hint that the sword guard looked unused was offered in 1974, in an unpublished dissertation on the Ringerike style to which it was then ascribed, where it was stated that the tang hole 'showed no signs of rust' (Fuglesang 1980:193, no. 96); this was not however followed by any further comments. I could confirm this observation when I first examined the guard in 1975, for my own dissertation studies on Viking-period bonework, including that from Sigtuna. In a lecture to the Viking

Congress held in Sigtuna in 1993, I suggested that the sword-guard might have been made in a court workshop in Sigtuna because of apparently related foliage decoration of Ringerike style on antler pins from the recently concluded excavations at the Trädgårdmästaren 9-10 site, e.g. F8350 (*figs. 3:e & 13*), and also because it was made from local elk antler, the material of choice in Birka and Sigtuna, but not the type of antler used in southern Scandinavia nor the British Isles, where red and roe deer predominated (unpublished, but see O'Meadhra 2010:92).

In an important lecture in 2012 (published in revised form in *Situne Dei* 2015), Tesch extensively discussed previous theories on this sword-guard's stylistic context and iconography. He considered the use of elk rather than deer antler to show that the guard must be a product of a Sigtuna court workshop, but working under Danish influence in the court style of that region, the Mammen style. He even contemplates that one of the most prestigious objects in that style, the Cammin casket, if correctly identified as made of elk antler, might have been produced in Sigtuna (see my comments below). Tesch argues that the guard must have belonged to a display sword of an important personage, probably the king. He also expands on recent theories (e.g. Roesdahl 2010) that the major works in the Mammen style – he includes the Sigtuna sword guard – were diplomatic gifts from the Danish court, for the purpose of cementing political goodwill.

Details in the decoration of the sword-guard (*fig. 12*) suggest certain connection with the major works in Mammen style, especially the Bamberg casket of late-10th century, and the more complex Cammin casket of c. 1000 (Muhl 1990:323; Fuglesang 1991: nos 14,15; Roesdahl & Wilson eds 1992: nos 266, 267). The Sigtuna guard differs in style of cutting from these two and can hardly be the work of the same workshop, rather that it shares similar style adherences with these. The Sigtuna guard shows more features of Jellinge (nose curl, body, toe – cf. Wislon 2001:152f), Mammen (pelleting, technique and choice of motif- cf. Jansson 1991) and Ringerike (symmetrical layout and foliage – cf. Fuglesang 1980, Muhl 1990). This places it at the transition from Mammen to Ringerike, c. 1000–1025, and corresponds well with the typological and association dating for the most similar of the sword-hilts of the same class (type Z), which also have a south Scandinavian context (for detailed discussion see Fuglesang 1980:141ff, 193; Muhl 1990:27; Androschuk 2014:172f). This also places it contemporary with the unique metal bird-headed knives possibly made in Sigtuna, which also have a related, not identical, south-Scandinavian tradition underlying their decoration (O'Meadhra & Söderberg 2017:25, 33f).



*Figure 12. The static Ringerike foliage on the Sigtuna sword-guard compared to the fluid tendrils on the Cammin casket.*

*Photo author, Goldschmidt.*



Figure 13. Bone and antler pins with Ringerike foliage found in 12th century contexts at Professorn 1 (F8460), Urmakaren 1 (F4890) and Trädgårdsmästaren 9–10 (F8350). Cf. fig. 3. Photo author.

It has been argued that a Danish-inspired goldsmith's workshop was active in Sigtuna during the town's formative years (Jansson 1991:280f; Duczko 1995:650f; Tesch 2007; 2015:23). This Danish aspect is based mainly on four items of which the sword-guard is one (only if one disregards its Ringerike traits); the other items being a copper-alloy patrix for intricate gold filigree brooches the manufacture of which required a Danish court goldsmith, bronze Köttlach brooches and a magnificent gold filigree pendant in Hiddensee style. The filigree pendant is in mint condition, was it also made in Sigtuna? A number of contemporary goldsmiths' workshops have been identified in the town's early phases on the Tryckaren, Humlegården and Urmakaren sites, the latter including antler-working (Tesch 2015:23; Söderberg 2011:17; 2013:65f), but further study is needed to assess the interrelationships of these and the work of the decorative antler carver.

The evidence presented here that the sword-guard is unfinished and unused, suggests that the few but serious manufacturing mistakes caused the artisan to discard an almost completed work. Alternatively it was accepted with its flaws, mounted with a protective material that kept its socket in prime condition, but was later removed from its blade and separated from the rest of the hilt before it found its way into the ground, perhaps revered for its royal associations or craftsmanship.

Either way, the unfinished nature of the guard confirms that it was made in Sigtuna and signifies that Sigtuna aspired to be of equal status to the southern towns, able to maintain its own high quality workshop and a skilled Danish?-trained artisan. But if this artisan worked in the town on a regular basis, why are there no other finds from the town in the same style as the sword-guard?

## Part 2. The 'Sigtuna Viking'

SHM 22044. Found in 1937 without recorded stratification but together with antlerworking waste during building work in Trädgårdsmästaren 4 (Lit: Floderus 1938:fig. 59; 1941:29, 103; Cinthio 1948:108f; Holmqvist 1955:78 pl lxi, 135; Graham-Campbell 1980:no. 482; Graham-Campbell & Kidd 1980:fig. 64; Jansson 1992:no.80; O'Meadhra 2010:92; Tesch 2007; 2015:25, fig. 13).





Figures 14 a & b. Two views of the ridge mount SHM 22044, showing the natural shape of the antler tine. L: 22.5cm. Photo author.

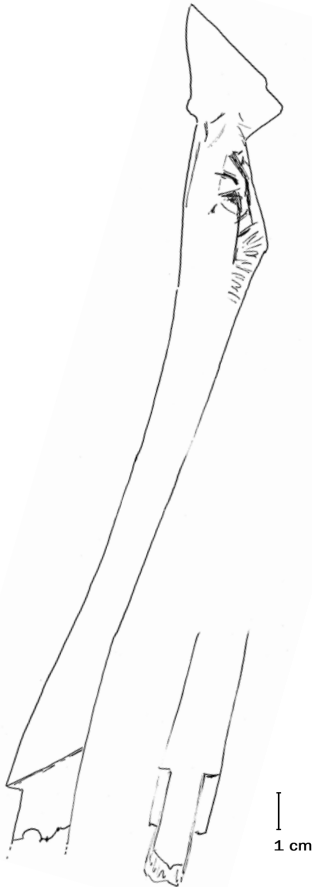


Figure 15. The position of the 'axe' on the mount. Drawing author.

The 'Sigtuna Viking' forms the upper end of an almost complete, long, narrow finial or ridge mount with a full length of 22.5 cm, cut in one piece from the edge of a large dark antler tine of uniform compact texture (*fig. 14*). The antler material is of a different colour and quality from that of the sword guard.

The lower end is neatly shaped into a square-sectioned tenon, now broken through a central perforation. The upper end terminates in the 3-cm long sculptured head of a man wearing a pointed helmet with flared nose-guard. A well-groomed look is achieved by the uplifted posture, carefully modelled oval eyes, high cheek bones, slightly squared chin, upswept plaited moustache and hair combed tightly into a narrow roll above the nape of the neck. The helmet and ridge of the mount are highly polished.

The helmet and the narrow faceted ridge of the mount are decorated with neat rows of ring-and-dot, widely spaced on the helmet, tightly packed on the encircling edging strip. Four vertical rows of incised ring-and-dot divide the helmet radially into four equal parts. These mark four axial divisions, one of which extends down the nose-guard (*figs. 1 & 14*). This is a clear representation of a pointed composite helmet made from four riveted sub-triangular plates encased by a beaded brow band, with nose-guard. On the narrow ridge there are three rows of ring-and-dots, one for each of its three facets, with the outer two rows starting slightly lower down, with the addition of two extra rings at the base as an enclosing border. This gives the impression of a stylized coat of chainmail.



*Figure 16a (above). Broken end showing perforation and file marks from shaping the tenon. Figure 16b (below), unfinished inner face showing whittled edges. Photo author.*

### *Breakage*

The break through the perforation on the tenon is clean, but slightly chipped, possibly from lying around the workshop when discarded (*fig. 16b*). The earliest photos taken on discovery show the break exactly as it is now. It is not surprising that the mount snapped here, as such a delicate tenon, especially when perforated, would hardly have held for the whole mount. If this happened during manufacture it would explain why the mount was left unfinished.

### *Unfinished details*

The irregular inner face of the mount is unfinished and shows interesting technical features (*fig 16a*). The mount has been sawn to its initial shape and the edges on the lower section show signs of being partly trimmed by whittling with a knife. This trimming seems incomplete. A cluster of parallel marks along the edge of the widest section suggests attempts to loosen-up the hard antler material with a serrated file prior to further shaping (*fig 17*). On the left shoulder and neck, the carving has been left unsmoothed, in contrast to the facial and ridge areas (*fig. 18*).

An unfinished detail on the right shoulder is of special interest (*fig. 1 & fig. 19*). To the best of my knowledge, these markings have only been referred to twice in the research literature, as ‘some suggestion of what might be clothing’ (Jansson 1992:247, no. 80), or as marks from an overlying feature: ‘Note that the left side of the antler, viewed from the front, is less worked below the head and slightly concavely lowered suggesting that this side lay against a transverse object of some sort’ (C.R. af Ugglas, SHM inventory, July 1938; my translation). To me these cuts have always suggested something else – the roughing out of a splayed axe as if held at shoulder height).

I will return to this interpretation at the end of the paper. First, a discussion of the mount itself to appreciate the high quality of carving, remembering its minute size.



*Figure 17. Serrated file marks from unfinished shaping of the mount. Photo author.*



Figure 18 (left). Schematic illustration of cut-marks and unfinished shaping. Drawing author.  
Figure 19 (right). The unfinished carving in differently angled lighting, showing the preliminary blocking out of a possible 'axe'. Photo author.

#### *Workmanship and manufacture*

While the carver seems to have lacked the foresight to see that a tiny perforated tang might not hold for the hinged construction, even in such a strong material as antler (MacGregor 1985:25-29); there is no question as to his superior artistic skill in his work, as is shown in his avoidance of the spongy cancellous structure in favour of the compact outer material needed for carving fine detail.

The craftsmanship is very skilled. Facial features are sensitively rendered and acute attention is paid to minute details of hair strands and moustache braiding, using finely drawn incisions (fig. 20). A similar delicate hand can possibly be seen in the workmanship on other finds from Sigtuna (fig. 22, next page), and future research in separating the material both chronologically and stylistically might establish workshop hands. The overall composition is well balanced, with an almost equal subdivision of design elements into head, upper torso and subsections of the ridge-decoration. The flared shape of the nose-guard, accentuated by an incised contour line, is echoed in a similar flaring of the lower end of the ridge, accentuated by its lower horizontal row of ring-and-dots and incised border (fig 21).



Figure 20. Shaping of facial features showing fine undercutting tool-grooves. Photo author.

The naturally pointed tip of the antler would seem to have leant itself to being subtly transformed into this helmeted figure. The head and torso have naturalistic proportions and the tiny semi-circular ears mimic the ring-and dot decoration, while the realistically lentoidal eyes have a double contour only on the lower lid





Figure 21. Matching flaring on the nose-guard and ridge-back ending; detail of the ring-and-dot tooling on nose-guard. Photo author.

to allow for the protruding helmet. The narrow, slightly squared, chin with neatly groomed close-cut beard and upturned moustache with its neat plaiting, create an effect of elegance.

Deeper tool-grooves surround the contours of the raised features such as the nose-guard (fig. 20, page 17), indicating the use of a fine knife blade at various angles. Flatter areas perhaps indicate a specialized draw-knife. A pronged scribing point or centre-bit seems to have been used for incising the ring-and-dots. These are of roughly uniform size and shape; apparent variations being the result of changes in tool angle. Some rings have a ridge as if the tool has been lifted up before turning a full circle (fig. 21). The ring-and-dots on the upper part of the helmet have been cut into sunken fields, giving the impression of being stamped. Possible “chattermarks” are in evidence along the line of decoration on the helmet and down the noseguard (fig. 21). These are produced when the surface is scraped by a knife blade – common in cases of erasing and shaping. (On technique and tool identity see MacGregor 1985:55ff).

The helmet and the full length of the ridge are highly polished as a finishing-off feature. Yet other parts are barely begun. This suggests that the work stopped while working on the



Figure 22 a,b,c; Comparable skilled antler-working from Sigtuna: (a.) openwork snake-head comb endplate SF 1652r7, Draken, unstratified; (b) delicate blade-cut Urnes-style interlace on pinhead SF 1345:1, St Gertrud, unstratified; (c) openwork relief tendrils on harp tuning key F10153, Trädgårdmästaren 9–10, c.1050–70. Photo author.

tenon, at a stage between finishing the ridge and commencing the torso. An alternative explanation is that the polished areas belonged to an existing mount that was undergoing refurbishment when the work was abandoned.

### *Intended function*

It is difficult to see how this mount functioned. It would have edged some form of composite object, with the warrior's head extending as a rigid upright beyond that object's contour. The perforation in the tenon on the broken end suggests some form of hinge-like arrangement, and above this the polished ridge of the mount is neatly finished off at an oblique angle. The file marks are still fresh (*fig. 16 b, page 16*). The perforation in the tenon runs sideways, which would have allowed for a forward/backward movement. Alternatively this could have been a rigid fixture using the standard hinged mechanism merely as a means of joining two parts together.

Owing to the tiny size of the sculpture, what immediately comes to mind is a finial fitting for a chest or casket, as suggested by Cinthio (1948:108). Gable decoration of projecting heads was commonplace throughout the Viking period on household items and furniture, continuing in church art on reliquary shrines, and in traditional folk art on furniture and domestic items (Wilson 1966:pl.37; Roesdahl & Wilson eds 1992; Shetelig ed. 1931). Usually these take the form of stylized bird or animal heads, nothing as realistic as the Sigtuna carving. Also, the mount needs to stand upright to achieve the full effect of the portrait, which would mean that the head would protrude inwards over the object it edges, which is unusual. It was customary in Viking and early medieval material for finial decoration to protrude outwards.

### *Site context, manufacturing waste*

The Sigtuna Viking was found in 1937 when sieving soil that had been saved from a watching-brief on the site of Trädgårdsmästaren 4. No details of stratification could be recorded, and the finds retrieved along with the mount suggest a broad 11–12th century date range. The context seems to be antlerworking waste. The finds consisted of antler offcuts, finished and unfinished single and double combs, undecorated bone pins and pottery of 11th–12th centuries as well as later (finds nos SF1661a–ö; 1662a–u; undergoing assessment).

Initial examination of museum finds and archival records indicates that in the 1930s this section of the Trädgårdsmästaren block produced much antler waste of different types of antler, for gaming pieces, combs, knife handles, spindle whorls, and other small objects. The offcuts include pieces of similar colour and cross-section to the mount, which might provide a context for its manufacture. In the 12th to 13th century an industrial production of antler including the use of reindeer and bone developed in workshops along the main street, documented in the major excavations on the site of Trädgårdsmästaren 9–10 (Karlsson 2016a & b). A horn patrix for gold foils used in decorating filigree brooches was found in a 12th century layer of antlerworking waste on the Professorn 4 site across the street from where the mount had been discarded. This was used to form the gold foils for elaborate Danish-style disc brooches, and one such foil was found in Trädgårdsmästaren, from a late 11th century context (Jansson 2010; O'Meadhra 2010). It is important to note that these

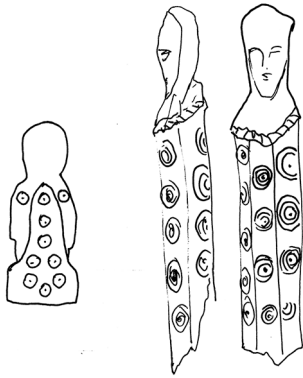


Figure 23. Ring-and-dot ridge decoration in rows down the back of walrus-ivory gaming piece from Lund, H: 4.6 cm, and broken wooden knife-handle from Skara, H: 9.5 cm. Both 11th century. Sketch author, after Wahlöö 1992, Widéen 1943.

objects indicate an association between the goldsmith and the antlerworker, as that the high quality of carving on the ridge mount might have required the competence of a goldsmith.

While the mount is an outstanding piece of work, the standard of carving on other more domestic bone and antler objects at Sigtuna is also high as can be seen from elaborate combs which often use a similar ring-and-dot motif, spoons with moulded palmette decoration, elaborately decorated pins, etc. (e.g. Arbman 1944; Tesch ed. 1990; Wikström 2008:figs 58,60, 65; O'Meadhra 2010) (figs. 13 page 14, 21 a–c page 17). The ring-and-dot motif is extremely common in bone and antlerwork as well as metalwork throughout the Migration, Viking and early medieval periods (cf. inter alia Wilson 1966; Graham-Campbell 1980; Roesdahl & Wilson eds 1992). Two examples where the motif runs in rows down the back of the object in a manner similar to the Sigtuna mount's ridge decoration, are a 4.6cm high walrus ivory gaming-piece from Lund where the chair back is decorated with ring-and-dots (Wahlöö 1992:no. 602) and a 9.5 cm long end-fragment of wooden knife handle from Skara (Widéen 1943:fig.4), both unstratified finds, presumed 11th century (fig. 23).

#### *Folk art or royal portrait?*

The Sigtuna Viking created quite a stir when found, being unusually early for a realistic sculptural portrait, even though handles terminating in tiny human heads were known (e.g. Cinthio 1948: figs 2-3, 6-8). The proud attitude evoked suggestions that it might be a portrait of a 'determined warrior leader' (Cinthio 1948:108, my paraphrase) or even one of Sigtuna's kings (Tesch 2007; 2015:24f). The regal effect however loses some of its impact when the sculpture is viewed frontally (fig. 24 a & b), gaining a squashed appearance owing to the narrow dimensions of the antler tine at this point. This reinforces the impression one gets when viewing a collection of workshop waste of unused tines, that the natural outer concave curvature and pointed tip of the unworked antler tine may have lent itself to the idea for sculpting the head in the first place.

Perhaps this is a personal work, a piece of folk art, albeit by a master craftsman. Had it been a commissioned work of a ruler, a larger piece of antler would perhaps have been chosen to allow for a truly realistic rendering. Already in the early 12th century fully naturalistic three-dimensional sculptures of kings were being produced in Scandinavia, such as the marble head of the Norwegian king Eystein Haraldsson, 1103-22 (Roesdahl & Wilson eds 1992:40, fig. 9, no. 533). The Sigtuna Viking should be understood against this background of portraiture.

A related category of popular, or folk, art concerns the graffiti of human figures sketched in the margins of manuscripts or on waste material in settlement sites.



24 a & b. The 'Sigtuna Viking' viewed from the front.  
Photo author.

One example with as much realism as the Sigtuna Viking is the roughly contemporary sketch of two men's heads (likenesses?) on a slate from the 10/11th century Pictish/Norse settlement at Jarlshof, Shetland (O'Meadhra 1993: fig 27:a-b; Graham-Campbell 1980:no. 483). Realistic portraits on coins first appeared with Henry II as king of the German empire 1002-1014, and first appears in the Anglo-Scandinavian world with the late 11th century bearded images on Edward the Confessor's pointed helmet series discussed below (Archibald 1992:184). These were copied by Olav Kyrre, 1080-90, whose coins depicting his father Olav Haraldsson as *rex iustus* seem to attempt a personalized rendering, if highly stylized (Sjöberg 1989:fig.4) (fig. 27:f next page). The late 11th century Bayeux Tapestry shows a clear attempt at characterization of the human figures for identification purposes, which is to be expected since it is a narrative: Edward the Confessor is shown bearded, Harald Godwinsson has a dark pointed moustache and Guy du Ponthieu and Duke William are clean-shaven with cropped hair (cf. Wilson 1985; Musset 2005:11, 41).

The Sigtuna Viking lacks the stylization of facial features using art-style traits, found in most human figures of the mid-late Viking period. The hair has not been forced into foliate trails, nor moustaches represented as lobed tendrils, nor bulbous eyes as for example on the copper-alloy mount from a late 11th century metalworking context on the Götes Mack site in Sigtuna (Hed Jacobsson & Runer 2016:81, fig. 2) (fig. 25). We do find however on the Sigtuna mount an echo of the characteristic profile of the proud Viking male with upturned head, outstretched pointed chin and pointed nose (compare discussion and examples in Nylén and Lamm 1978, O'Meadhra 1991:40-44, figs 1-3 with lit. and Roesdahl & Wilson eds 1992). At the same time, the realism achieved by the braided moustache, short beard and backswept hair characterizes the Romanesque period as observed by Cinthio (1948:110). Possible similarities elsewhere in Sigtuna have been noted on the base column from a stone altar-table found in 1887 in Lehman's Garden and moved to the ruins of St Peter's



Figure 25. Cast mount F3602:28, late 11th century, Götes Mack; note bulbous eyes and entangled threadlike Urnes tendrils of hair and moustache. L: 2 cm. Photo author.



Figure 26 above. Stone altar base SHM 8872. Late 11th century, carved in Sigtuna. After Holmqvist 1948.

Church (SHM 8872; Holmqvist 1948:10f, n5) (*fig. 26*). Aside from differences in material and size (3 cm antler v. 58 cm stone), we find a similar backswept hair, pointed moustache and a regal look. These stone carvings have been identified as the work of a Sigtuna carver schooled in England or Denmark, and responsible for a group of sculptured heads in the Mälär Valley area (Holmqvist 1948: 99, 103, *fig. 21, 22, 24, 36*). The altar table is dated stylistically to the late 11th century by the transitional Urnes / early Romanesque details in the animal figures with splayed limbs and lobed tendrils that join the two male heads. Church art of such high calibre in Sigtuna can hardly date later than the mid-12th century, when the bishop's seat moved to Uppsala and the royal town began declining in importance (Holmqvist 1948, 52; cf. Tesch 2017:37, n124). Furthermore, the tendrils on the altar base belong to the same artistic context as mid-late 11th century finds from the town in other media, such as the relief trails on the harp tuning-key from Trädgårdsmästaren 9–10 (Söderberg 2016:129; 2017:68, 71) (*fig. 21c, page 17*), and mount from Götes Mack (*fig. 25, page 21*).

#### *A composite pointed helmet with nose-guard*

The helmet worn by the Sigtuna warrior is characterised by its splayed nose-guard, pointed conical shape with axial divisions and encircling band, clearly indicating its composite character of vertically riveted triangular plates fastened by vertical strips and an enclosing brow-band; there are no chainmail fittings, eye-, nape- or chin-guards.

Three types of Scandinavian helmet have been identified for the Viking period (Tweddle 1992; Holmqvist L & Petrovski, S. 2007; Frisk 2012): first, the crested helmet of the Early Viking Period (based on the Vendel type); second, the spectacled, rounded helmet of the Middle Viking Period (includes the Norwegian Gjermundbu find and isolated eyepieces); third, the pointed/conical helmet of the Late Viking and Norman periods which is our concern here. No physical examples of the pointed conical helmet survive in Scandinavia. Its origin is often sought in Kievan areas where physical finds have been made. These however do not provide a good parallel for the Sigtuna helmet, being more rounded, often with separate eye-pieces and separate nose-guards (Tweddle 1992:fig 566).

It is generally accepted that by the 11th century, if not earlier, the pointed helmet had become the norm in Scandinavia, based on the evidence of figurines, picture stones and rune stones (Nylén & Lamm 1978; Graham-Campbell 1980:nos 479–80, 449, 513, 515, 537–8; Tweddle 1992:296; Frisk 2012). Of all of these examples, I consider only the Ledberg stone Ög 181 (*fig. 27 o–r*) alone among the Swedish material, to possibly show a nose-guard, and here the image is highly stylized and suggests a total covering of the whole head. There is a lot of confusion about the correct interpretation of the pointed headgear in Viking-Age pictorial art. Most are perhaps better interpreted as pointed caps of leather or textile (Graham-Campbell 1980: 271; Tweddle 1992:292; Musset 2005:59).

It has been suggested that the Sigtuna Viking might be in the image of Sigtuna king, Anund Jakob, 1022–1050, with reference to his coins copying Cnut's pointed helmet series (Tesch 2015:25). Cnut the Great was the first to place an image of a

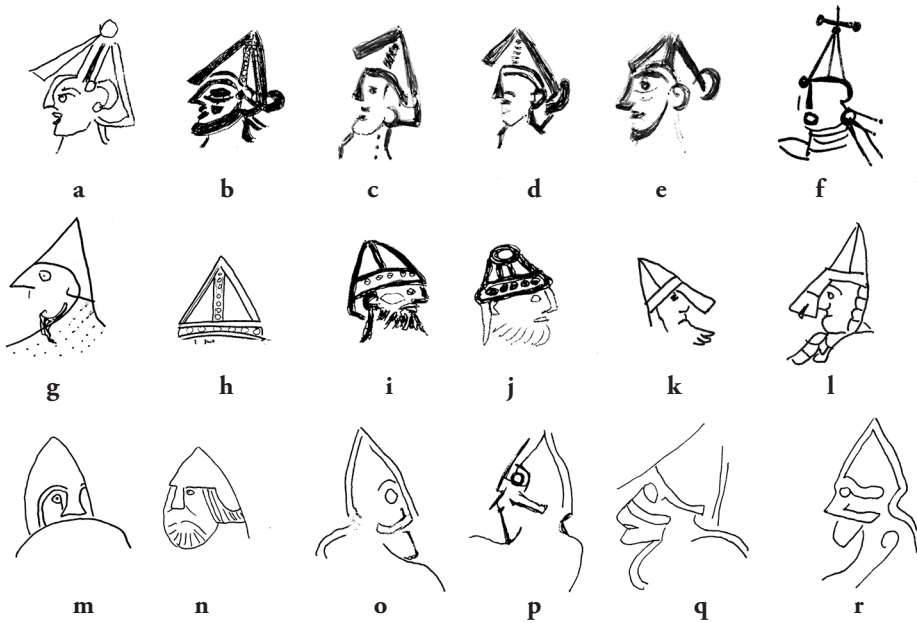


Figure 27. Pointed helmets in art: (a) coin of Cnut c.1024–30; (b–e) coins of Anund Jakob, Sigtuna, c.1030; (f) coin of Olav Kyrre, 1080–90 depicting Olaf Haraldsson in cross-topped sharply pointed composite helmet; (g) Goliath, Harley Psalter, BL Harley MS 603, f.73v, c.1020–30; (h) Goliath's helmet BL MS Cotton Tiberius C. VI, f.9r, late 11th century; (i–j) coins of Edward the Confessor, c.1053–6; (k–l) Bayeux Tapestry 1070s; (m) Salerno chess-piece 1080–5; (n): Lewis chess-piece 12th century; (o–r) Ledberg runestone, Ög 181, 11th century. See discussion in text. Drawing author.

contemporary helmet on a coin, in his pointed helmet series (BMC type XIV) of c. 1024–30 (Archibald 1984:214) (fig. 27a). The type was quickly copied by Scandinavian rulers and adopted c.1030 on Sigtuna coins by Anund Jakob (Malmer 1969; Jonsson 2007; Jonsson 1992:no. 552) (fig. 27 b–e). But the helmets of this series are rather low and cover the nape of the neck as did their coin predecessors, unlike the Sigtuna helmet. Also, as on Cnut's helmet-coin images, there is no nose-guard; the helmet line stops at the eyebrow. With one possible exception: a projection of the helmet line occurs on one of Anund's coin images, signature Thormoth (Malmer 1989:fig. 1:III; Jonsson 2007:fig.3) (fig. 27b), which might indicate a nose-guard or more likely is merely a blundered extension of the helmet edge on Cnut's coins. The legends on Anund's coins are slavish copies of dies and often blundered (Jonsson 2007:273; 2010). The helmeted images seem to be less slavishly copied; even individually altered, but still based on Cnut's original, which re-enforces the interpretation that this is not a nose-guard (fig. 27a). Coins are intended to contain symbolic political information. They may be updated to be current and recognisable as the latest issue, but their reliability as representations of contemporary dress or portraiture cannot be taken for granted. For example, early 11th century skaldic verse contains contemporary information, if transmitted through the written literature of the 13th century. There the helmets (*hjalmr*) of Cnut's men are described as having a nose-guard (*nefþjörg*) (Jesch 2013:353). Jesch has here attempted to match the

references in skaldic verse with the archaeological finds, examining the work of the major poet Sigvatr who composed mainly for Olaf Haraldsson of Norway but also for his son Magnus the Good and his rival Cnut. His accounts are considered fairly reliable. Perhaps this means that the pointed helmet coins are in fact showing a helmet as a crown, whereas a nose-guard would block the face. A number of 11th century Anglo-Saxon manuscripts show such a crown identical to the composite pointed helmet with beaded brow-band and no nose-guard (Tweddle 1992:fig 536) (*comparable to fig. 27h*).

The helmet is described as a symbol of high status in the laws and literature, often exchanged in gift-giving or to be returned on death, but was also an insignia of the warrior king. However, the idea that the late Viking kings distinguished themselves from their men by their gilded helmets, is dismissed as a misreading of the literature which merely refers to the king wearing a helmet in his role as a warrior (Hoffman 1981; 1990; Vestergaard 1990; Tweddle 1992:337; Frisk 2012). In the Bayeux Tapestry no differentiation is made between the helmets worn by foot soldiers and leaders (Musset 2005:46). The pointed helmet, without nose-guard, appears in a small number of 11th cent Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, usually in psalter images of Goliath fighting David, where the giant is depicted as a threatening Anglo Scandinavian warrior (Tweddle 1992:fig. 536e-f; Schichler 2008) (*fig 27 g-h*).

Cnut's pointed helmet series was revived by Edward the Confessor in 1053-69, showing an up-dated more sharply pointed helmet and an attempt at portraiture by showing the king bearded (Archibald 1984:184, nos. 229-30) (*fig 27 i-j*). This was adopted in the extremely pointed helmet on the coin of the Norwegian king Olav Kyre, 1080-90, believed to show his father Olaf Haraldsson (Sjöberg 1989:fig. 4) (*fig 27f*) This is the best match in a coin image for the Sigtuna helmet's basic shape in being so sharply pointed, but it is a highly stylized rendering. Both series lack nose-guards.

The best parallel in helmet type is to be found in the Bayeux Tapestry, with its cone-shape and flared nose-guard, and vertical band defining the composite construction (*fig. 27 k-l*). This is very clear where the helmets are being carried by their nose-guards (Wilson 1985:192, scene 37; Musset 2005:46). The date and commissioner of this work is hotly debated, but it is generally accepted as English in its design and manufacture and lately provenanced to Canterbury in the 1070s (Pastan & White et al. 2014). This would give a secure Anglo Saxon context for the Sigtuna helmet type, which became the archetypical Norman helmet throughout the 12th century ([http: www.ManuscriptMiniatures.com](http://www.ManuscriptMiniatures.com)).

I do not find good parallels to the Sigtuna helmet in the other often-cited parallels belonging to the immediate post-Viking period. These include the figures from a Norman ivory chess-set (*fig 27m*), made in Salerno, S Italy and dated on historical evidence to 1080-85, placing this late type of helmet oddly contemporary with the Bayeux Tapestry (Pastoureau 1990:33-4; fig 1), some mid French chess-pieces in elephant ivory dated c.1140-50 (Pastoureau 1990: fig 31) and the late 12th early 13th century chess-pieces from the Isle of Lewis, Hebrides (*fig 27n*) (Robinson 2004). These have a lower helmet and occasional nose-guards but only in combination with nape-guards. Of similar poor comparative value is the oft-cited Norwegian stave

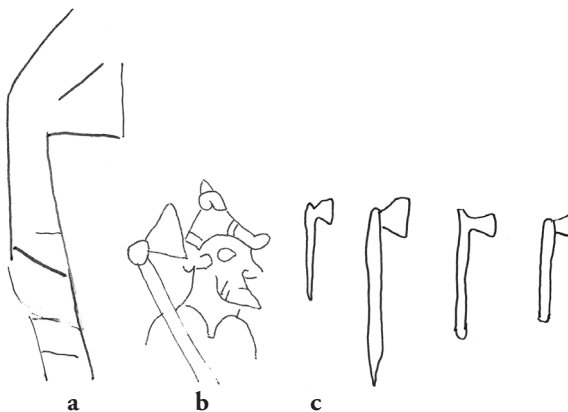
church carving at Hylestad, c.1200, depicting the Sigurd myth (Roesdahl & Wilson eds 1992:no.442), which shows a different type of lower helmet with cusp-shaped markings more similar to eastern examples and has a specific curl to the end of the nose- and nape-guards.

### *An axe?*

Is it too imaginative to interpret the markings at the shoulder as the first blocking out of a simple flared axe blade and upper part of the handle, as if held at shoulder height? (*figs 18 & 19 page 17 & 28a*)

The transverse cuts at the base of the handle could then mark out a hand, shortening the image so that it might fit within the limited space available. The carving at the shoulder was never completed. However, one serious problem with reading an axe into this carving is the absence of a sharply angled outline representing the junction of the blade and handle. It should be understood as the initial blocking out of the motif, and not the finished product. If this is an axe, then it raises interesting questions as to what sort of person the carving might represent.

In an inspired study on the Viking-Age axe, Näsman (1991:179f, fig. 1- 4; cf. now also Pedersen 2014) has shown how the axe was a male status symbol in the late Viking and Norman periods. The axe was the sole weapon in male graves of the 10th-century period of Christianisation in Denmark and Scania, as well as Gotland (Trotzig 1985). Näsman emphasises that the major but few decorated examples that have survived signified members of the king's retinue, while the more commonly found plain axes signified the regular warrior. He notes (1991:180) that in the Bayeux Tapestry the long-handled axe figures as a symbol of power, marking out the men who are close to the king but not (yet) kings themselves – Harald holds such an axe before his coronation – relinquishing its role now that he is no longer a jarl (but an alternative reading is that he is accepting it with the crown as a symbol of his new role as warrior king), and Guy de Ponthieu holds one when addressing his superior Duke William (cf. Wilson 1985 pl.37; Rud 1994:58; Musset 2005:n.69). One of the few contemporary Nordic illustrations of a warrior with an axe, shows the long-handled axe carried over the right shoulder (Hunnestad DR 282; the long dress and curled helmet type suggests this is a Varangian warrior – Rosborn 2004:142)



*Figure 28. The Sigtuna 'axe' reversed (a), compared to images on (b) DR 282 Hunnestad monument, and (c) Magnus the Good's Hedeby coins of 1043, photos in Gullbekk 2016. Drawing author.*



(*fig 28b*). Also, in the Gotlantic axe-graves the axehead is mainly placed on the right shoulder (Trotzig 1985:86, figs 1, 5–6). These match the position (as also shape and size) of the 'axe' on the Sigtuna mount, as if held to the shoulder. The demands of the antler medium required that it fit within the contours of the piece. An over-the-shoulder position would have required an extensive projection, unsuitable for the shape of the antler tine being used, and to add-on a loose axe would be anachronistic for late Viking art. The Lewis chessmen show a parallel solution (Robinson 2004).

The Scandinavian members of Cnut's 'housecarls' in England and of the Varangian Guard in Constantinople were both known as 'axe-bearers' (Rosborn 2004:142). A possible link between the axe and the returning members of either of these units is interesting as their presence in the Mälars area is recorded on runestones and in saga references (Duczko 1995; 2004; Tesch 2015:19f; but see Bolton 2009:247f). The importance of seeing an axe in the unfinished carvings on the shoulder gains further in significance when one remembers that the pointed helmet appears in Scandinavia as a combination of influences from Kievan and Anglo-Scandinavian areas.

Tesch (2015:24f) has proposed that the regal bearing of the antler figure might indicate one of Sigtuna's rulers and while the helmet images on Anund Jakob's coins are not so close, they do not rule this out. However, the presence of an axe might. The king's emblem during this period was the sword, not the axe, as can be gleaned from contemporary skaldic verse, manuscript art, and 13th century saga literature (Jesch 2013; Jørgensen 2016). The Lewis chessmen of 12th/13th century (Robinson 2004) confirm this. It is also interesting to note that axes are rarely mentioned with regard to prestigious events in contemporary writings (Jesch 2013:343n11).

There is, however, one king traditionally associated with an axe: Olaf Haraldsson of Norway, later St Olaf. But how old is this tradition? Not as old as the sagas would have us believe. The first mention of an axe causing Olaf's death is by Snorri Sturluson in his 13th century *Heimskringla*, and it is also there that we first hear of Olaf having during his lifetime an axe named 'Hel'. It is also Snorri who first mentions that Olaf's son Magnus the Good used Olaf's axe to gain victory at Lyrskog in 1043, and that Magnus then deposited the axe as a relic in Olaf's shrine in Trondheim. This part of Snorri's account seems to be corroborated by the archaeological finds. Magnus depicts an axe together with a sceptre on his Hedeby coins of 1043, commemorating his victory at Lyrskog, presumably as propaganda to promote his ancestral right to the Norwegian throne (Lidén 1999:50f; Gullbekk 2016:116, figs. 2-7). Neither Lidén (1999:50) nor Ekroll (2016: n14) accept this identification as an axe, and consider it could be Magnus and not Olaf who is depicted in the Byzantine-style bust figure holding it. To my mind the image on each of these coins is without doubt an axe (*fig. 28, page 25*).

Lidén (1997; 1999:33, 216f) has in a seminal work examined the evidence for St Olaf's iconography and attributes. When examining the first association of an axe with the saint, she considers that coins, church sculptures and seals, divulge only their iconographic legacy, not contemporary dress, accoutrements, or portrait likeness. Lidén therefore dismisses the candidates presented in previous research where claimed on the presence of popularized attributes such as beard, red hair or axe, concluding that the earliest non-controversial image of St Olaf with the axe as



*Figure 29. Cast figure of St Olaf? in early Romanesque style, from St Manchan's reliquary shrine, Ireland. 1120s. H: c.15 cm. Drawing Eva Wilson, after Wilson 1969.*



his attribute, dates to the mid-13th century, in church sculpture, and that the oldest representation of the saint in art occurs on a pillar in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem dated to c.1150-60, where he is shown in regal dress, crowned, and holding a sceptre and kite-shaped shield; but no axe (Lidén 1999:18-21, 50-53, pl 1, fig 4; Ekroll 2016:11, fig 3). The axe is equally absent from his earliest images on seals, of similar date (Ekroll 2016:182). The lack of early images of Olaf as a saint is explained in that before the 12th cent, sainthood involved relics more than images (Stang 2016:28, n.4).

There is however one possible early 12th century representation of St Olaf holding an axe (rather than St Mathew who shared the same attribute). This belongs to a set of copper-alloy figurines of saints and apostles attached to the shrine of St Manchan, a product of a prestigious Scandinavian-influenced Irish monastic workshop (Wilson 1966:121, pl.78a; 1969; Graham-Campbell 1980:no.507; Murray 2015) (*fig 29*). Wearing a scull cap not a helmet, the figure holds a diminutive long-handled axe in his right hand with the blade shielded by the palm of his left. This is exactly as described for the Varangian Guards on ceremonial duty (cited in Kotowicz 2013:50), a clear reference to Olaf as warrior, while the Romanesque *rex iustus* formula followed in his clothing and expression are a reference to Olaf as king defending the Christian cause.

It thus seems from this coin evidence, that an association between St Olaf and an axe did exist by the 1040s, promoted as a political tool by those aspiring to royal and ecclesiastic power in Norway. But there is no evidence for it being associated with an image of Olaf in contemporary art. When Olav Kyrre in 1080-90 places an image of Olaf, the warrior king, on his coins as *rex iustus* (Sjöberg 1989:fig.4) there is no axe. So if Olaf was intended to be represented on the Sigtuna carving, we are faced with a new and unparalleled imagery. That it could appear in Sigtuna is not a problem. Within years of Olaf's death, his cult as saint and martyr had spread throughout the Scandinavian diaspora with various political motivation from aspiring kings and churchmen (Lidén 1999; Sjöberg 1989; Sundqvist 2017). Olaf had connections with Sigtuna in his lifetime through marriage and political ambitions. The 13th century sagas felt it correct to tell us that it was from this region that he mustered a following of men to assist his effort to reclaim Norwegian rule. The cult of St Olaf would have been as popular at as early a date in Sigtuna and the Mälär Valley area as elsewhere (for Sigtuna see Holmqvist 1948:88, 103, n.83 and Renström 2013 with literature; for early dates in Ireland and England see Wilson 1969:n.7; for early dates on Gotland and in Novgorod see Melnikova 2009).

An often claimed association between the cult of St Olaf and the miniature axes such as found in Sigtuna and mainly in eastern Europe (fully discussed in Kucypera & Wadyl 2012; Edberg & Söderberg this volume), is not relevant to our argument, being possibly a later construct and concerning a different shape of axe.

*So who was the 'Sigtuna Viking'?*

The close similarities of helmet type with the figures in the Bayeux Tapestry and lack of Viking art-stylization would seem to confirm the judgement made on discovery that it is most likely from late in the 11th century (Floderus 1938:fig. 59; 1941:29, 103; Cinthio 1948:n3 with refs; Holmqvist 1955:78; Jansson 1992:no.80; O'Meadhra 2010:92), rather than earlier (Graham-Campbell 1980:no. 482; Tesch 2007; 2015:25). The helmets on Anund Jakob's coins even allowing for stylization, provides a poor parallel, suggesting that on the basis of helmet type, an association with that king seems unlikely.

Perhaps it is more likely that the Sigtuna Viking should be seen as a representation of a proud 11th century warrior who had served in the Viking campaigns in England or from service as a member of the Anglo-Scandinavian guard, having assisted in Cnut's attempts at a unified Scandinavian power in England and Northern Europe, or perhaps one of those who only left England after the Conquest (for discussion see Duczko 1995; Bolton 2009:153ff; 2017:158f, 185).

The Manchan figurine of the 1120s is of rather similar size to the Sigtuna carving, and the striking contrast between the two emphasizes how the latter if it could represent St Olaf, does not belong among church art, but would be a secular rendering in a personal late-Viking manner of the saint as Olaf Haraldsson the warrior king. As such, it would be unique. It would also be the earliest image of the saint known so far. Given the stringent control around the cult of St Olaf suggested by the historical sources, such an image would surely also be strictly controlled by the king in Sigtuna. In any event, it must be kept in mind that my reading of an axe is very tentative, and if it fails scrutiny, then there is no reason to link the carving with the Norwegian king as warrior or saint.

*Some final thoughts*

These two iconic finds from Sigtuna, were found in different locations along the main street in the town, made of different types of antler material and in different styles and are the results of events in Sigtuna at either end of the 11th century. Both share a connection with the elitist warrior stratum in society, come from different locations within the town, both abutting onto the main street. They seem to come from different periods in the history of Sigtuna: one at the beginning and one at end of the 11th century and both are masterpieces of the antler-worker's craft.

The fact that both are unfinished confirms that both were made in Sigtuna. The fact that neither was reworked into another object confirms the evidence well-known from the vast amounts of antler waste found throughout the town that there was an abundance of the raw material of elk antler (Pettersson 2007; Karlsson 2016a,b). But perhaps more astonishingly, suggests an abundance of skilled artisan time and effort. This means Sigtuna had the means to adequately maintain artisans of the highest calibre.

There is much work yet to be done in understanding the role of the antler-worker in Sigtuna.

We need to know if there was a division into specialist carvers on the one hand and comb-makers on the other (cf Arbman 1945; Ros 1990:85; Pettersson 2007,

Wikstrand 2008). Also within metalworking, between the bronze-worker and goldsmith (Söderberg 2011; O'Meadhra & Söderberg 2017). But what about the goldsmith and the decorative antler carver, which written medieval sources such as Theophilus' handbook tell us could be the same person. The Sigtuna goldsmiths certainly used antler in tools for their work as shown by antler finds of trial-pieces, patrices, mini anvils, etc., but further study is needed here. We also need to examine the possibility of the existence of petty workshops serving the needs beyond those of the court. And of course we need to compare the situation in Sigtuna with that in its hinterland and other early towns, especially Lund and Trondheim.

#### *Acknowledgements*

*I wish to thank Anders Söderberg and Sten Tesch for help and discussions concerning the finds in Sigtuna Museum, and the former for invaluable assistance in seeing this through to print, as also my reader for comments on an earlier draft. I am most grateful to the Berit Wallenberg Foundation for support.*

---

#### *References*

- Andersson, A. 1966. *Medieval Wooden Sculpture in Sweden*. Stockholm.
- Androshchuk, F. 2014. *Viking Swords: swords and social aspects of weaponry in Viking Age societies*. Stockholm.
- Arbman, H. 1944. Hornsnidare som konstnärer. *Situne Dei*. p 7–20.
- Archibald M. 1984. Anglo-Saxon coinage, Alfred to the Conquest. In Backhouse et al. (eds.) 1984. p 170–191.
- Backhouse, J. Turner, D.H. & Webster, L. (eds.) 1984. *The Golden Age of Anglo-Saxon Art, 966–1066*. British Museum Exhibition catalogue. London.
- Bayeux Tapestry: see Wilson 1985; Rud 1994; Musset 2005; Pastan & White 2014.
- Bolton. T. 2009. *The Empire of Cnut the Great*. The Northern World 40. Leiden.
- Cinthio, E. 1948. Två medeltida människotyper. *Situne Dei*. p 108–117.
- Duczko, W. 1995. Kungar, thengnar, tegnebyar, juveler och silverskatter. Om danskt inflytande under sen vikingatid. *Tor* 27. Uppsala. p 625–662.
- Duczko, W. 2004. *Viking Rus: studies on the presence of Scandinavians in Eastern Europe*. The Northern World 12. Leiden.

- Edberg, R. 2016. No kingdom without a town. Anund Olofsson's policy for national independence and its materiality. *New Aspects on Viking-Age Urbanism c. AD 750–1100*. Holmqvist, L. & Hedenstierna-Jonson, C. (eds.). p 151–158.
- Edberg, R. 2011. Exit Knut. Ett apropå till de nya rönen om Sigtunamyntningen. *Situne Dei*. p 107–111.
- Ekroll, Ø. 2016. St. Olav og olavssymbolikk i mellomalderske segl og heraldikk. In Ekroll, Ø. (ed.) 2016. p 143–189.
- Ekroll, Ø. (ed.) 2016. *Helgenkongen St. Olav i kunsten*. Trondheim.
- Floderus, E. 1938. Från hedendom till kristendom. *Svenska folket genom tiderna*. Vol. 2. Malmö.
- Floderus, E. 1941. *Sigtuna. Sveriges äldsta medeltidsstad*. Stockholm.
- Floderus, E. 1946. Demonmasken från Sigtuna. *Situne Dei*. p 26–45.
- Fransson, U. Svedin, M. Bergerbrant, S. & Androschchuk, A (eds.). 2007. *Cultural interaction between east and west*. Stockholm Studies in Archaeology 44. Stockholm.
- Frisk, M. 2012. Hjälmén under yngre järnåldern. Härkomst, förekomst och bruk. Undergraduate degree thesis in archaeology. University College Gotland. Visby.
- Fuglesang, S. H. 1980. *Some aspects of the Ringerike style*. Medieval Scandinavia suppl. 1. Odense.
- Fuglesang, S. H. 1991. The axehead from Mammen and the Mammen style. In Iversen, M. (ed.) 1991. p 83–108.
- Fuglesang, S. H. 2001. Animal ornament: the late Viking period. In Müller-Wille & Larsson (eds.). p 157–194.
- Graham-Campbell, J. 1980. *Viking Artefacts: a Select Catalogue*. London: British Museum.
- Graham-Campbell, J. 2014. From New York to Moscow: some Viking-Age brooches from Sweden. In Fransson et al. (eds.) 2014. p 307–309.
- Graham-Campbell, J. & Kidd, D. 1980. *The Vikings*. London.
- Gullbekk, S.H. 2016. Olavsikonografi på mynt. De eldste fremstillingene av Olav Haraldsson, Hellig-Olav og helgenkongen. In Ekroll (ed.) 2016. p 109–141.
- Hed Jacobsson, A. & Runer, J. 2016. I Sigtunas utkant. Gravar och bebyggelse vid Götes mack. *Situne Dei*. p 80–81.
- Hoffman, E. 1981. König Olav Haraldsson als Heiliger des norwegischen Königshauses. *St. Olav, seine Zeit und sein Kult*. Acta Visbyensia VI. p 35–43.
- Hoffman, E. 1990. Coronations and coronation ordinances in mediaval Scandinavia. *Coronations: Medieval and Early Modern Monarchic Ritual*. Bak, J. M. (ed.). Oxford. p 125–151.
- Holmqvist, L. & Petrovski, S. 2007. Curious birds – two helmet? mounts with a Christian motif from Birka's garrison. In Fransson et al. (eds.) 2007. p 231–238.
- Holmqvist, W. 1948. Sigtunamästaren och hans krets: del 1. Den äldre Mälardalsskolan. *Situne Dei*. p 7–107.
- Holmqvist, W. 1955. *Germanic art*. Stockholm.
- Iversen, M. (ed.) 1991. *Mammen: grav, kunst og samfund i vikingatid*. Höjbjerg.
- Jansson, I. 1991. År 970/971 och vikingatidens kronologi. Iversen (ed.) 1991. p 267–284.
- Jansson, I. 1992. Catalogue entries in Roesdahl & Wilson (eds.) 1992.
- Jansson, I. 2010. Danskt guldsmede i Sigtuna under tidig medeltid? *Situne Dei*. p 19–35.
- Jesch, J. 2013. Some Viking Weapons in Sigvatr's Verse. *Early Medieval Art and Archaeology in the Northern World. Studies in honour of James Graham-Campbell*. Reynolds, A. & Webster, L. (eds). Leiden. p 341–358.
- Jonsson, K. 1992. Catalogue entries in Roesdahl & Wilson (eds.) 1992.
- Jonsson, K. 2007. Does the 'CNVT REX SW' coin legend show that Cnut the Great ruled at Sigtuna? In Franzén U. et al (eds.) 2014. p 272–275.
- Jørgensen, J. G. 2016. Óláfr Haraldsson, king, warrior and saint: presentations of King Óláfr Haraldsson the Saint in medieval poetry and prose. *Kings and Warriors in Early North-West Europe*. Rekdal, J.E. & Doherty, C. (eds.). Dublin. p 345–398.

- Karlsson, J. 2016a. Ben- och hornhantverk i Birka och Sigtuna – närverk manifesterade i råvaruansvändning. *Situne Dei*. p 52–59.
- Karlsson, J. 2016b. *Spill. Om djur, hantverk och nätverk i Mälaramrådet under vikingatid och medeltid*. Theses and Papers in Osteoarchaeology 8. Stockholm.
- Kotowicz, P.N. 2013. The sign of the cross on the early medieval Axes – a symbol of power, magic or religion? *Weapons Bring Peace? Warfare in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*. *Wratislava Antiqua* 18. Wrocław. p 41–55.
- Kucypera, P. & Wadyl, D. 2012. Early medieval miniature axes of Makarov's type 2 in the Baltic Sea Region. *Archaeologia Lituanica* 2011–12. p 122–130.
- Lidén, A. 1997. Bilden av sankt Olav. Helgonet i Nidaros. *Olavskult och kristnande i Norden*. Rumar, I.L. (ed.) Skrifter från Riksarkivet 3. Stockholm. p 26–49.
- Lidén, A. 1999. *Olav den helige i medeltida bildkonst. Legendmotiv och attribut*. Stockholm.
- Malmer, B. 1989. A note on the coinage of Sigtuna. *LOL. Festskrift till Lars O. Lagerqvist*. Svenska numismatiska meddelanden 37. Stockholm. p 259–262.
- http: ManuscriptMiniatures.com
- Melnikova, E. 2009. Gutagård i Novgorod: dess förhistoria. *Spaden och Pennan*. Svensson, T. Hedenstierna-Jonson, C. Lindkvist, E., Vasilyeva, S. Gerhards, M. (eds.). Stockholm. p 483–498.
- Muhl, A. 1990. Der Bamberger und der Camminer Schrein. Zwei im Mammenstil verzierte Prunkkästchen der Wikingerzeit. *Offa* 47.
- Müller-Wille, M. & Larsson, L.O. (eds.). 2001. *Tiere – Menschen – Götter: Wikingerzeitliche Kunststile und ihre Neuzeitliche Rezeption*. Göttingen.
- Murray, G. 2014. Irish Church Metalwork of the Romanesque period from the Day collection. *Journal Cork Historical and Archaeological Society* 119. p 111–122.
- Musset, L. 2005. *The Bayeux Tapestry*. Boydell Press.
- Näsman, U. 1991a. Grav og økse. Mammen og den danske vikingetids våbengrave. (Grave and axe. Mammen and the weapon graves of the Danish Viking Age). In Iversen (ed.) 1991, 163–180.
- Näsman, U. 1991b. Mammen 1871. Ett vikingatida depåfynd. (Mammen 1871. A Viking-Age hoard). In Iversen (ed.) 1991. p 217–260.
- Nylén, E. & Lamm, J.P. 1978. *Gotlands Bildstenar*. Stockholm.
- O'Meadhra, U. 1991. A medieval Dubliner's talismanic portrait? An incised profile cut-out head from Christ Church Place, Dublin. *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 21. p 39–54.
- O'Meadhra, U. 1993. Viking-age sketches and motif-pieces from the Northern Earldoms. *The Viking Age in Caithness, Orkney and the North Atlantic*. Batey, C. Jesch, J. & Morris, C.M. (eds.). p 423–440.
- O'Meadhra, U. 2010. Skisser i urnes-/runstensstil på horn och ben från Sigtuna. *Situne Dei*. p 85–96.
- O'Meadhra, U. & Söderberg, A. 2017. En säregen knivtyp i gränslandet mellan Jelling-, Mammen- och Ringerikestil. *Situne Dei*. p 14–37.
- Pastan, E.C. & White, S. (with K. Gilbert). 2014. *The Bayeux Tapestry and its Contexts: A Reassessment*.
- Pastoureau, M. 1990. *L'Echiquier de Charlemagne: un jeu pour ne pas jouer*. Paris.
- Pedersen A. 2014. *Dead Warriors in Living Memory. A study of weapons and wquestrian burials in Viking-age Denmark, AD 800–1000*. Copenhagen.
- Pettersson, B. 2007. Kammakeriavfallets spridning på en tidigmedeltida stadsgård i Sigtuna. *Situne Dei*. p 7–15.
- Renström, S. 2013. Olav den helige och hans kult. Undergraduate degree thesis in Historical Archaeology, Lund University.
- Robinson, J. 2004. *The Lewis Chessmen*. British Museum Objects in Focus, London.
- Roesdahl, E. 2010. Viking art in European churches (Cammin – Bamberg – Prague – León). *Viking Trade and Settlement in Continental Western Europe*. Skibsted Klæsøe, I. (ed). Copenhagen. p 149–164.

- Roesdahl E. & Wilson D.M. eds 1992. *From Viking to Crusader. Scandinavia and Europe 800–1200*. 22nd Council of Europe Exhibition catalogue. Uddevalla.
- Roesdahl E. Graham-Campbell, J. Connor, P. & Pearson, L. (eds). 1981. *The Vikings in England and in their Danish homeland*. Exhibition catalogue. London.
- Ros, J. 1990. *Ben- och hornhantverk*. In Tesch (ed.) 1990. p 80–86.
- Rosborn S. 2004. *Den skånska historien. Vikingar*. Fotvikens Museum, Lund.
- Rud, M. 1994. *Bayeux-tapeten och slaget vid Hastings 1066*. Stockholm
- Schichler, R. 2008. Ending on a Giant Theme: The Utrecht and Harley Psalters, and the Pointe-Helmet Coinage of Cnut. *Intertexts: studies in Anglo-Saxon culture presented to Paul E. Szarmach*. Blanton, V. & Scheck, H. (eds). ASMAR 24. Arizona.
- Shetelig, H. (ed.) 1931. *Konst*. Nordisk Kultur 27. Stockholm.
- SHM catalogue – [www.historiska.se](http://www.historiska.se)
- Sjöberg, R. 1989. Erik den helige – Sveriges rex iustus. *LOL. Festskrift till Lars O. Lagerqvist*. Svenska numismatiska meddelanden 37. Stockholm. p 369–379.
- Söderberg, A. 2011. Eyvind Skáldaspillir's silver, *Situne Dei*. p 5–34.
- Söderberg, A. 2013. Om stratigrafi, tomtmönster och hantverk i kv. Urmakaren, Sigtuna. *Situne Dei*. p 47–70.
- Söderberg, A. 2016. Medieval string instrument finds from Sigtuna, including the earliest known key for a possible nyckelharpa. *Fornvännen* 2016. p 129–132.
- Söderberg, A. 2017. Några 'nyfynd' ur museets magasin. *Situne Dei*. p 67–71.
- Stang, M.C. 2016. Helgenkongen och alterbilder. In Ekroll (ed.) 2106. p 27–54.
- Sundqvist, O. 2017. Täten av Olav Geirstad. Skiftet. In Tesch, S. (ed.) 2017. p 225–244.
- Tesch, S. 2007. Kungen, Kristus och Sigtuna – platsen där människor och guld möttes. Kult, guld och makt. Ett tvärvetenskapligt symposium i Götene. In Lindgren, I. (ed.) Skara. p 233–257.
- Tesch, S. 2015. Att parera eller paradera. Ett tusenårigt svärdshjalt från Sigtuna och dess europeiska sammanhang. *Situne Dei*. p 14–27.
- Tesch, S. (ed.). 1990. *Makt och människor i kungens Sigtuna. Sigtunagrävningen 1988–90*. Sigtuna.
- Tesch, S. (ed.) 2017. *Skiftet. Vikingatida sed och kristen tro*. Skellefteå.
- Trotzig, G. 1985. An axe as sign of rank in a Viking community. *Archaeology and Environment* 4. p 83–87.
- Tweddle, D. 1992. The Anglian Helmet from 16-22 Coppergate. *The Archaeology of York. The Small Finds*. Vol. 17:8. London: CBA.
- Vestergaard, E. 1990. A note on Viking-Age inaugurations'. *Coronations: Medieval and Early Modern Monarchic Ritual*. Bak, J. M. (ed.). Oxford. p 119–124.
- Wahlöö, C. 1992 Catalogue entries in Roesdahl & Wilson (eds.) 1992.
- Widéén, H. 1943. Från Skaras Sigtunatid. *Situne Dei*. p 105–115.
- Wikström, A. 2008. Kammar. *På väg mot Paradiset – arkeologiska undersökningar i kv. Humlegården 3 i Sigtuna 2006*. Meddelanden och Rapporter från Sigtuna Museum 33.
- Wilson D.M. 1966. Chapter 4ff in Wilson D.M. & Klindt-Jensen, O. 1966.
- Wilson D.M. 1969. An early representation of St Olaf. *Medieval Literature and Civilization. Studies in memory of G.N. Garmonsway*. Pearsall, D.A. & Waldron, R.A. (eds). London. p 141–145.
- Wilson D.M. 1985. *The Bayeux Tapestry*. London.
- Wilson D.M. 1995 *Vikingatidens konst*. Signums svenska konsthistoria 2. Lund.
- Wilson D.M. 2001 The earliest animal styles of the Viking Age. In Müller-Wille & Larsson (eds.) 2001. p 131–156.
- Wilson D.M. & Klindt-Jensen, O. 1966. *Viking Art*. London (Danish edition: *Vikingetidens kunst*. Århus, 1964).



### *Sammanfattning*

Två av Sigtunas mest diskuterade och avbildade arkeologiska fynd är det skickligt snidade svärdshjaltet i Mammenstil och den hjälmförsedda "sigtunavikingen", som både hittades under sent 1930-tal utan klar stratigrafisk kontext. Ej tidigare observerat är att det i båda fallen rör sig om arbeten som inte färdigställts på grund av små men avgörande tillverkningsfel. Detta bekräftar att bägge föremål måste ha tillverkats i Sigtuna, vilket redan tidigare diskuterades utifrån valet av älghorn (O'Meadhra 2010; Tesch 2015).

Tillverkningsfelen var antagligen anledning till att bägge föremålen kasserades. Då felen på svärdshjaltet är små kan hjaltet ha används trots allt, men det var i alla fall i obrukat skick när det hamnat i jorden, då det saknar all spår av järnrost från ett svärdsblad. Hjaltet är noggrant planerat men ojämnt arbetat på den ristade ansiktssidan, där även en bakgrundsdetalj vid ena mustaschen har huggits bort av misstag. Dessutom tycks hjaltet sluttande ovansidor vara ofullbordade, där hornmaterialets spongiösa struktur bryter igenom och en kantbård med tillhörande skissade mönsterlinjer lämnats fullt synliga. Svärdshjaltet kan dateras till ca 1000-1025 av hjaltformen (typ Z) och ornamentiken i en övergångsstil av Mammen-Ringerikestil som kvalitetsmässigt tillhör sydsandinavisk tradition. Närmare stildiskussion och hjaltet relation till verkstäder i Sigtuna lämnas dock därhän till en senare studie. Andra fynd i Sigtuna av samma hand saknas. Det material som tidigare bedömts vara bevis på en gemensam hornverkstad (O'Meadhra 2010), har nu visat sig vara stratigrafiskt daterat ett sekel senare än tidigare antaget.

Sigtunavikingen sitter på ena änden av ett halvfärdigt kantbeslag, kanske ämnat till ett skrin. Beslaget är avbrutet vid fästansordningen vilket tycks vara anledningen till att arbetet aldrig fullbordades. Huggspår vid figurens högra axel diskuteras här som en skiss till en yxa buren vid den högra skuldran, såsom källorna beskriver för väringarna. Yxan var också symbolen för medlemmarna i Knut den Stores hird. Samtida avbildningar av sigtunavikingens hjälmtyp, den sammansatta spetsiga koniska hjälmen med nässkydd, har visat sig svårt att hitta med undantag för den Anglo-Saxiska Bayeux-tapeten från 1070-talet, med sina krigare av Anglo-Skandinaviskt och Normandiskt påbrå. En tidigare tolkning av sigtunavikingen som ett kungaporträtt (Tesch 2015) blir mindre attraktivt om figuren avbildas med en yxa istället för ett svärd. Det fanns dock en kung med viss anknytning till Sigtuna som redan under 1040-talet kopplades ihop med en yxa – den norske helgonkungen S:t Olof. Kan sigtunavikingen vara vår tidigaste avbildning inom Olofkulten? En bild av en stark krigare, snarare än en helgonkung, utförd i protoromansk stil med senvikingatida manér av en hornsmed från Sigtuna?