

A group of Viking Age sword chapes reflecting the political geography of the time

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During the 1998 excavations on the Garrison site at Birka, Uppland, Sweden, a spectacular deposit was found in a post pit belonging to the Warrior's House, one of the finds in which was a bronze sword chape of a type not previously found in Birka. The scarcity of this type of chape and its distribution pattern aroused a series of questions concerning its function, iconographic symbols and whether or not the pattern of distribution of a material culture through diplomatic and political contacts can reflect a political landscape? An iconographic study, partly based on a surface structure analysis, is made of the newly found chape.

A sword chape from the 'Garrison' in Birka

During the 1998 excavations at Björkö/Birka in Uppland, Sweden, examination of part of the 'Garrison' revealed a deposit of artefacts of a clear military character, including a sword chape of bronze (Hedenstierna-Jonson et al. 1998) (fig. 1). The ornamentation is of a type not previously found at Birka. Decorated in the Borre Style, the chape shows an anthropomorphic figure with a triangular body and ribbon-like arms and legs, standing with its legs wide apart and its arms extended, tied to the surrounding framework with triquetra-shaped knots and surrounded by entwined scrolls. Despite the human-like body, the figure's face is more animal-like, with a muzzle and large, staring eyes. Its head is crowned with an arch-like ribbon, which bears some resemblance to a helmet, and there is a concentric circle with it by each ear. The top of the chape is adorned with an animal head, from which a ribbon leads down to the head in the centre.

In his extensive work *Schwertortbänder der Wikingerzeit*, P. Paulsen (1953) divided the Viking Age chapes into a number of motif groups. Of the nine chapes found at Birka (table 1), six are decorated with a falcon (Ambrosiani et al. 1973, Arbman 1943, Holmquist Olausson 1993) and one other has a different bird-motif that lack direct parallels in Paulsen's survey (Ambrosiani 2001, Edberg 2001). A mould for making bronze chapes with a falcon, found in the Black Earth, should also be mentioned in connection with the actual chapes. This shows that the falcon-model was actually cast at Birka (Strömberg 1951). Two chapes differ from the others, one is adorned with a four-legged animal in the Jelling Style (Ambrosiani et al.

1973) and one is the newly found chape from the Garrison (Hedenstierna-Jonson et al. 1998).

The sword chape type and its pattern of distribution

The tied anthropomorphic figure is a motif that occurs on a number of chapes found in different parts of Northern and Eastern Europe. A preliminary survey of the area of distribution gives the following result (table 2, fig. 2).

As the survey reveals, the locations of the finds are spread over quite an extensive geographical area, being typically places of some local, regional or even inter-regional importance: proto-towns (Hedeby and Birka), court sites (Stiegen) and the like. Several of the chapes were found in settlements (Araisi, Steigen, Birka, Hedeby, Nimschütz) rather than graves, and without their swords. In some cases, as in the Warrior's House, the chape with the anthropomorphic figure had been removed from the scabbard before deposition. In the majority of cases, however, the circumstances in which the chapes were found are not certain. Many of the finds are old (especially the Swedish ones), and some are only mentioned as being on display in various museums. The locations nevertheless differ somewhat in character from those where the other types of sword chapes from the same period were found (for a study of the falcon-motif chapes, see Hedenstierna-Jonson 2002). Even the fact that several of the chapes with an anthropomorphic figure were found without their sword causes them to differ from the falcon chapes which have to a larger extent been found in graves, together with their swords and other weapons.

Motif	Type	Graves	Black Earth	Town Rampart	Garrison
Falcon	I:2	3 (643, 750, 944)	2	1	
Bird motif	I?		1		
Four-legged beast	II:1	1(496)			
Anthropo-morphic	II:3				1

Table 1. Sword chapes found at Birka. Types according to Paulsen (1953).

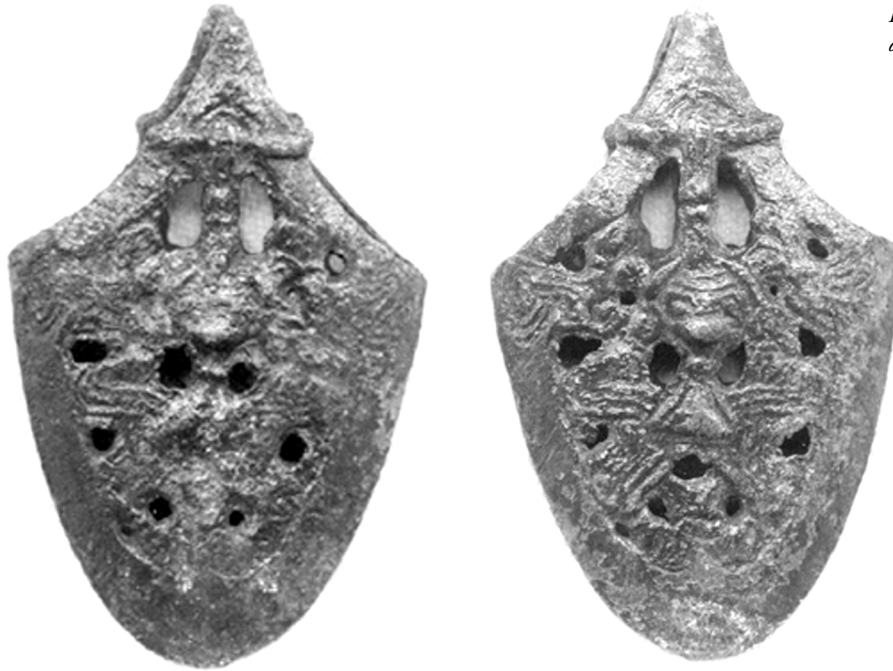


Figure 1. Sword chape found at Birka, decorated in the Borre Style.

Although the chapes with an anthropomorphic figure can differ in style, the above-mentioned compositional elements always occur. Four main sub-groups can be discerned, the most important detail in which the iconography differs being the presentation of the head. In some cases the figure is clearly human, but in others it possesses animal-like features, and in one case the head is clearly that of an animal. **Sub-group A** (fig. 3) consists of chapes with animal-like features on which the body of the anthropomorph is clearly distinguishable and the motif as a whole is most clearly presented. The chape from the Garrison at Birka belongs to this group. **Sub-group B** (fig. 4) contains chapes with a human head. On that from Cherson the head is crowned with an actual crown rather than the ribbon-like helmet, while in the other two cases the helmet has taken on more of a trefoil shape. In this group the anthropomorph's body has almost disintegrated into the entwined scrolls, but there is still a small triangular formation below the head from which ribbon-like arms and legs extend. The sword chapes from the Slavonic areas all belong to this group. Special notice should be taken of the silhouettes of the chapes in this group, all but one of which have an extension at the bottom, a feature that seems to be characteristic of chapes found in Slavonic areas (cf. Paulsen 1953).

Sub-group C (fig. 5) contains only one chape up to now, from Gotland, Sweden. The animal head bears a likeness to the animal masks seen in other Borre ornamentations, and the overall impression suggests a connection with the oval brooches of type P48 (Petersen 1928), as commented on by Paulsen (1953:48). **Sub-group D** (fig. 5) consists of chapes where the motif seems to be distorted or misinterpreted, as there is no head and it is not possible to make out the arms clearly, which leaves the motif without any comprehensible meaning. The two Lithuanian chapes in the group have been assumed to be of local origin (Vaitkunskiene 1983:10; Kazakevicius 1992:97). A couple of chapes do not fit into the sub-groups. That from Ljarskogen on Iceland is strikingly divergent from the rest, being naive in style, although this is not really a misinterpretation, as the vital parts of the composition are present (fig. 5). Shetelig (1937:213) describes the chape as of Icelandic origin and an attempted copy. It has not been possible to classify the chape from Timerëvo in Russia because of its severely corroded state.

As the chapes are not identical in design but have a remarkably homogeneous form of composition, it is most probable that there existed some kind of original or model, which could have been in the form of a picture, or even a mythological belief, but

Table 2. *Sword chapes of Paulsen's type II:3, known locations of finds.*

Country	Location	Sub-group	Context	Reference
DENMARK	Roskilde, Seeland	A	stray find	Roskildes bys historie
GERMANY	Haithabu	A	in house	Schwantes 1932
	Nimschütz	B	Slavonic settlement	Coblenz 1978 (1975)
FINLAND	Huittinen			Kivikoski 1951; Paulsen 1953
ICELAND	Lundur, Halshr.	A	stray find, furnace?	Eldjárn 2000
	Ljarskogen, Laxardalshr.	?	stray find, mound?	Eldjárn 2000
LATVIA	Araisi	A	fortified settlement?	Apala & Apals 1992
	Kristapinu	A?, fragm.		Kulakow 1990; Kuniga
LITHUANIA	Zasinas, Silale	D	grave 62, burial ground	Kazakevicius 1992
	Zasinas, Silale	D	grave 94, burial ground	Kazakevicius 1992
NORWAY	Steigen	A	Court-site	Johansen 1980
POLAND	Irsekapinis/ Klincovka	D	grave 117, burial ground	Kulakow 1990; Kazakevicius 1992
RUSSIA	Timerëvo	?, fragm.	kurgan 274, burial ground	Nedosivina 1963
SWEDEN	Anga, Gotland	C	unknown	Paulsen 1953; FV28
	Birka, Uppland	A	deposit in house	Hedenstierna-Jonson et al. 1998
	Gävle?, Gästrikland			Paulsen 1953
	Skåne	A	unknown	Bruzelius
	Dämstasjön, Styrnäs, Ångermanland Amsberg-Sör, St. Tuna, Dalarna	A?	stray find, furnace? grave field?	Johansson 1993 Serning 1966
UKRAINE	Cherson, Crimea	B	grave field	Arne 1914; Enjosova 1994
	Koroston/ Zitomirskaja	B		Fechner 1982; Kulakow 1990
	Sestovica, Kiev	B?	kurgan 42, burial ground	Arne 1931; Androschuk 2001

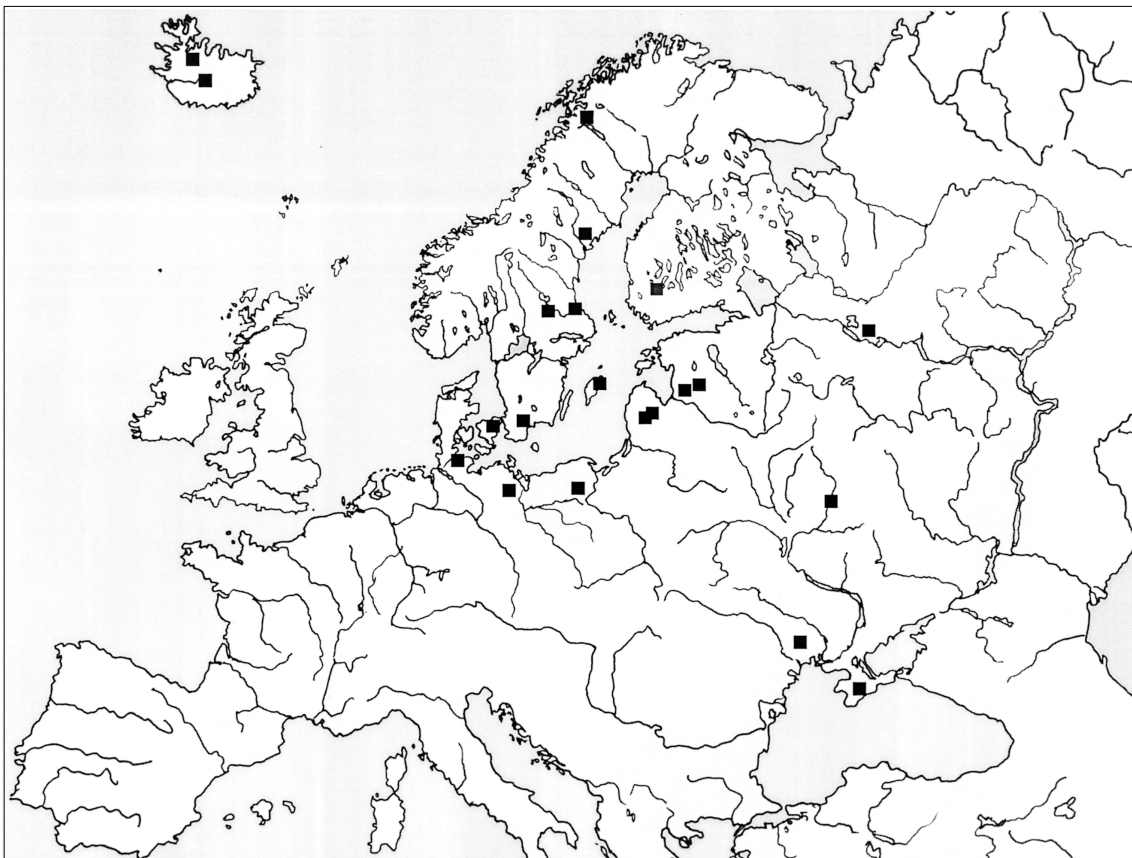


Figure 2. *Pattern of distribution of the Borre Style sword chape.*

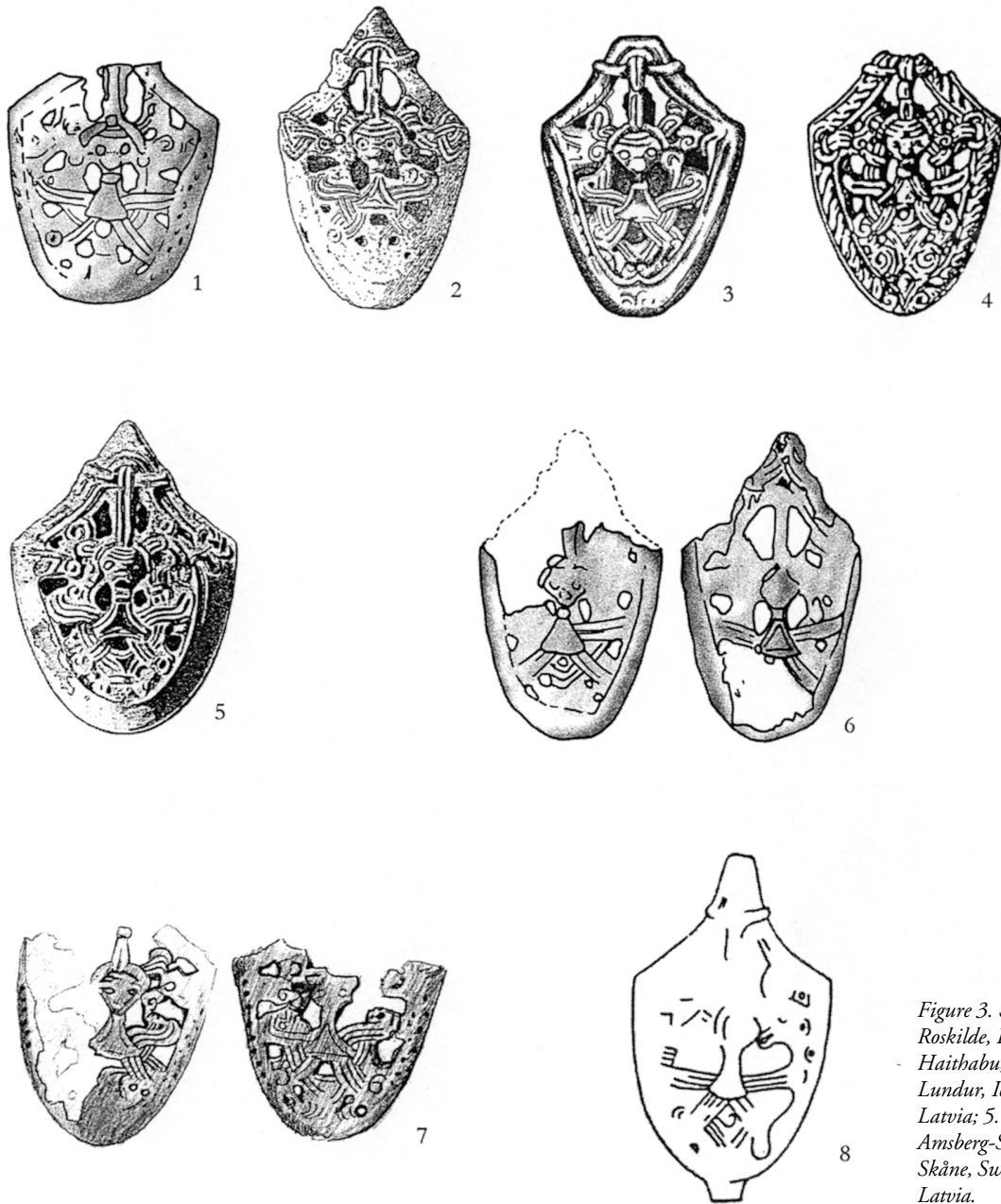


Figure 3. *Sub-group A*: 1. Roskilde, Denmark; 2. Haithabu, Germany; 3. Lundur, Iceland; 4. Arais, Latvia; 5. Steigen, Norway; 6. Amsberg-Sör, Sweden; 7. Skåne, Sweden; 8. Kristapinu, Latvia.

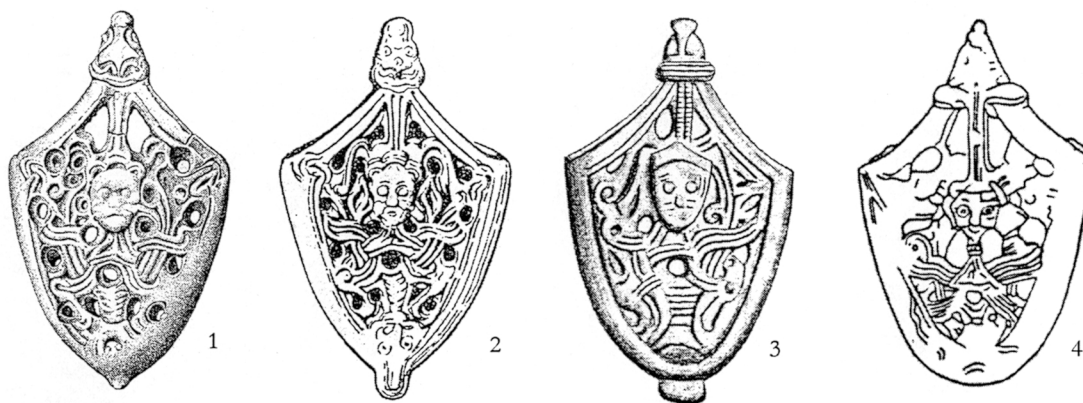


Figure 4. *Sub-group B*: 1. Nimschütz, Germany; 2. Koroston, Ukraine; 3. Cherson, Ukraine; 4. Šestovica, Ukraine.

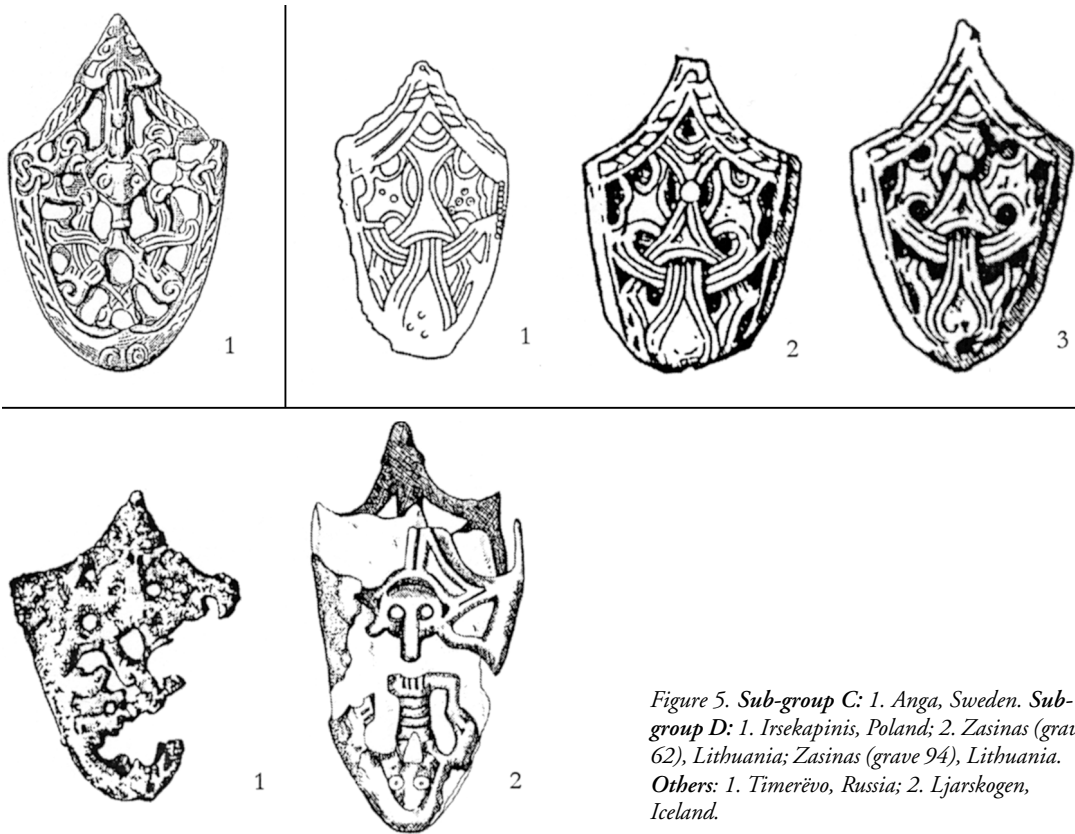


Figure 5. *Sub-group C*: 1. Anga, Sweden. *Sub-group D*: 1. Irsekapinis, Poland; 2. Zasinis (grave 62), Lithuania; Zasinis (grave 94), Lithuania. *Others*: 1. Timerëvo, Russia; 2. Ljarskogen, Iceland.

it could also have included very specific requirements concerning composition. The style and form varied, but the motif, which was evidently essential, has remained the same.

Conservation and surface structure analysis of the newly found chape

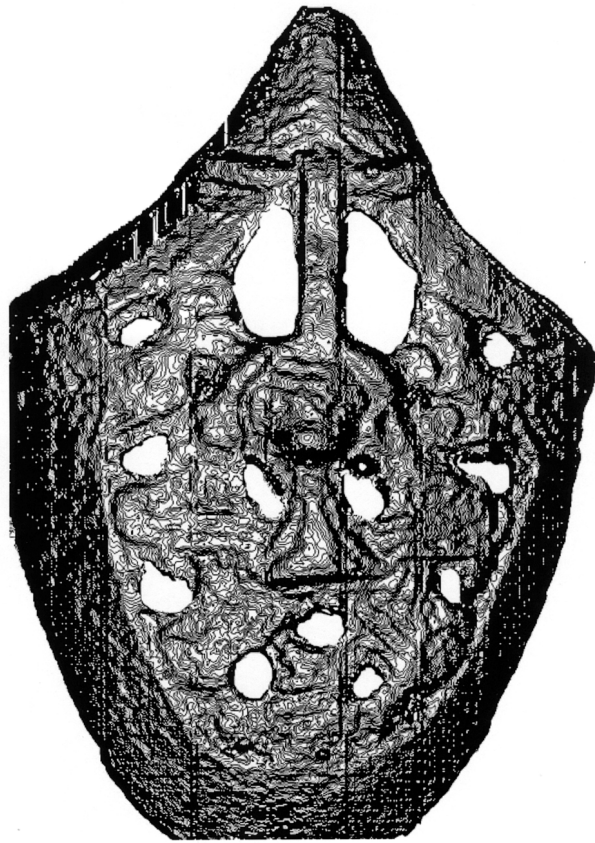
The preservation conditions in the soil of the 'Garrison' area are not ideal for bronze, and many bronze objects have deteriorated to an extent where it has been difficult to study their shape and design, or even to preserve them at all. This should be contrasted with the situation regarding the iron material, which is in pristine condition. The bronze chape in the deposit was in better condition than the bronze finds in general, even though the ornamentation on one side had suffered from rather severe corrosion. It was conserved by the EDTA method (Klockhoff 1989, 1993; Brunskog 1992), which has proved suitable for delicate bronze objects, permitting even the most brittle surface of the ornamentation to be exposed. The EDTA chemical is the bisodium salt of ethylene diamine tetra-acetate ($C_{10}H_{14}N_2Na_2O_8 \cdot 2H_2O$), a complex former, which means that it will affect the corrosion and not the metal itself. The method requires the solution to be of the correct pH, concentration and temperature, and the process can be interrupted at any time by soaking the object in distilled water (Klockhoff 1993). As the object can be studied under a microscope at all stages in the conservation process, it is an ideal method when working with ornamented material.

As a complement to the standard reading of iconography and style, using a microscope or the naked eye and recording the results by means of hand drawings, a surface structure analysis

was carried out in this case, based on a laser scanner technique previously used on similar material with good results (Arrhenius & Freij 1992; Hedenstierna-Jonson 1997; 1998; Ericsson 1999). Both sides of the chape were scanned to an accuracy better than ± 0.002 mm received and the resulting measurements were processed so that visual representations could be produced with standard graphic programs, in this case SURFER 32 (figs. 6 & 7). The surface can then be presented as a topographical map, in 3D-profile or as a grey-scale or colour image (Hedenstierna-Jonson 1998). The reverse side of the chape is hard to interpret in its present state due to corrosion, but the surface structure images show that it was designed in the same way as the front and also emphasise that the figure is surrounded by an oval, a feature that may be of importance for the iconographic discussion and interpretation.

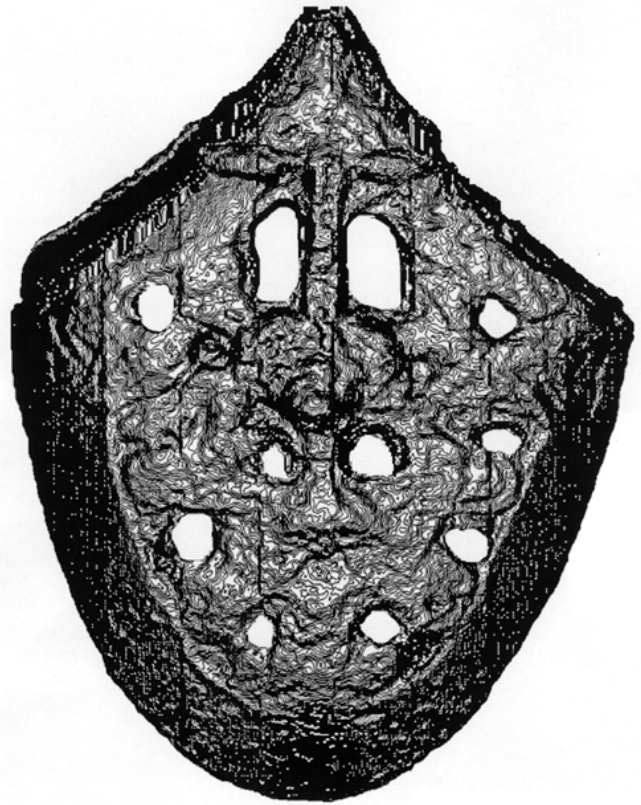
A parallel in motif and composition

Parallels to the motif and iconography of this chape, can be found over an extensive geographical area and on a number of different artefacts dating from the Iron Age. In the Christian art of Northern Europe, the figure of Christ was often depicted as being tied to the cross with a rope around the wrists instead of being nailed to it (Fuglesang 1977). Of special interest in this case is the representation of Christ on the Jellinge stone in Denmark, dated by B. Sawyer to period 2, i.e. 960–1050 (Sawyer 2000:200), in which he is tied to the cross with triquetra-shaped knots, like the anthropomorphic figure on the chape, and surrounded by a framework of similar knots (fig. 8). The triangular shape of the body is reflected in Christ's tunic-like ar-



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Figure 6. Topographical map of the sword chape from the Garrison at Birka, front.



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Figure 7. Topographical map of the sword chape from the Garrison at Birka, reverse side.

ticle of clothing. Another important detail on the chape is the helmet-like ribbon crowning the head of the anthropomorphic figure, while the figure of Christ on the Jellinge stone has a rayed halo surrounding the head in a similar fashion. The markings that create a cross in the halo have counterparts in the concentric circles beside the ears of the anthropomorphic figure. The braided ribbon that encloses the Jellinge Christ appears on several of the other chapes, but not on this one from Birka. The oval shape that surrounds the figure on most of the sword chapes, though not on the Jellinge stone, could be interpreted as a mandorla, which would further argue for a Christian interpretation of the scene, since Christ surrounded by a mandorla is a common motif in medieval art (Dahlby 1963, entry 102).

The Jellinge crucifixion scene is depicted in accordance with an iconography that became common in Carolingian art, belonging to “a theologically important group in pre-Romanesque, European iconography” (Fuglesang 1977:88–89). The striking parallels between the motif on the chapes and the depiction of Christ on the Jellinge stone raise questions of whether or not the chapes have a Christian symbolism and who the bearers of these possibly Christian chapes might have been. I will return to these questions later in this article. Of special interest in this case is the myth of Odin’s self-sacrifice by hanging himself in the

World Tree. Fuglesang (1977:84) discards the idea that the bound Christ might have anything to do with Adam of Bremen’s mention that pagan rites included the sacrifice of men to Odin by hanging, and I fully agree with her line of argument. Nonetheless, the ropes and knots as familiar symbols of sacrifice could have provided an increased understanding of the messages of the new religion and made the representation of the bound Christ a preferred version of the Crucifixion scene. Two parallel actions of self-sacrifice could thus form the content of one image, and in this way legitimise the new religious message by referring to an old-established one.

Sword chapes – occurrence and function

Sword chapes form an interesting group of artefacts in many respects. They constitute a decorative element highly comparable to a mount, and are by no means a compulsory feature of the scabbard. Many swords are found without a chape, and some chapes are found in contexts where they seem to have been removed from their sword before deposition. They served no actual technical purpose, as the hilt rested on the mouth of the scabbard to bear the weight of the sword. At best it might have protected the scabbard from blows from the outside. The total number of known sword chapes dating from the Viking Age is

extremely limited, and their distribution differs from the distribution of swords. They are scarce in number in Norway, for example, although swords are relatively numerous (Strömberg 1951). In fact they are generally uncommon, and even though they mainly are connected with a high status weapon, the sword, this is not always the case. They also appear on their own and seem to have had a meaning and value apart from being the decorative end of a scabbard.

Another interesting aspect is that the existing types of sword chapes are relatively uniform in design and shape, so that the variations in style and motif are highly restricted. This is especially significant when we remember that the known chapes were found over an extensive geographical area. Even though certain places have primarily one type of chape, e.g. the model with the falcon at Birka, it is difficult to see any evident geographical limits or areas (see Paulsen 1953). Swords were weapons reserved for warriors of a certain category, and among these only a small group had chapes. These probably high status warriors were active over an extensive geographical area, however.

In spite of being very rare even compared with other types of chapes (Paulsen 1953), the model with the anthropomorphic figure has a particularly wide distribution pattern, which inevitably leads to questions about its function. The chapes concerned are well spread along the eastern trade routes travelled by Scandinavian merchants and warriors during the Viking Age, with emphasis on Sweden and its eastern contacts. It should also be noted that only one example has been found in each place except for the two chapes found in Zasiņas, Lithuania. This should be seen in comparison with the distribution patterns of the other types of chape, e.g. that adorned with the falcon motif, six of which have been discovered at Birka alone. The picture is the same at Šestovica in the Ukraine, where three falcon chapes have been found but only one with the anthropomorphic figure (Hedenstierna-Jonson 2002).

Some brief comments on the locations of the finds

As stated above, the majority of the chapes with the anthropomorphic figure have been found in places which had some kind of central function relative to their hinterland and where contacts reached beyond the local or even regional level. Birka was founded in the mid-8th century as a trading post with long-distance contacts, and its fortifications and warriors provided an important guarantee for the safety and welfare of the merchants and other inhabitants of the proto-town. The 'Garrison' was a late addition to the fortification system. Two Islamic coins found in the closed deposit in the Warrior's House which contained the sword chape have been dated to 866–869 and 922–932 (Rispling 1998), which would place the construction of the house to the mid-10th century (Hedenstierna-Jonson et al 1998; Stjerna 1998; Stjerna 2002). Hedeby, like Birka, was a fortified trading-post or proto-town with long-distance trade contacts, and the house in which the chape was found had cut into an earlier Viking Age female grave (Schwantes 1932:246). Likewise, Roskilde, where a chape was found underneath a 13th century grave beside the cathedral, was a trading post and settlement closely linked to the Danish king Harald Bluetooth, with



Figure 8. The Jellinge stone, Denmark.

archaeological finds from the 9th century and onwards (Roskilde bys historie 1992:62ff, 79). As for the other Scandinavian finds, it should be noted that both the chape from Lundur on Iceland and that from Amsberg-Sör in Dalarna, Sweden, seem to have been found in connection with a furnace, located close to a grave field (Serning 1966:108f, 199ff; Eldjárn 2000:333).

Šestovica, in the present-day Ukraine was established at the beginning of the 10th century. The site comprises a settlement with burial-grounds and two hill-forts. The numerous Scandinavian finds in the graves indicate that this was a camp for Scandinavian warriors and traders (Androschuk 2001; Androschuk 2000; Hedenstierna-Jonson 2002). The neighbouring Cernigov, also with numerous Scandinavian finds in its earlier graves, probably functioned as a religious centre and princely residence, or pogost (Androschuk 2000). The chape from Šestovica was found in a grave, together with a sword and other high-status finds (Arne 1931).

Dating

Ambrosiani writes in his recently published article *The Birka Falcon* that the group of sword chapes bearing a central mask (i.e. an anthropomorphic figure) represent "the earliest of the various Viking Age chape types" (Ambrosiani 2001:24). Paulsen dated the sword chapes to the mid-10th century (1953:48ff), and Enjosova (1994) comes to the same conclusion. Like Paulsen, she compares the chapes with the oval brooches of Petersen type 48A (Enjosova 1994:106). Considering the arguments put forward by Paulsen and Enjosova and the circumstances of the find in the Warrior's House on Birka, the chapes probably date to

the middle or latter part of the 10th century. The latter alternative is supported by the fact that some of the locations where the chapes of this type have been found were formed as late as the end of the 9th or beginning of the 10th century, e.g. Šestovica.

A symbol of rank or office

The rise of the state led to the emergence of bureaucracy and religious and military organisations. The king or chieftain could not himself visit or control all the places that he claimed power over or was interested in, but instead he sent deputies to look after his and the state's interests (Brink 1996:240). These deputies or representatives acted on the orders of their leader and it can be presumed that they carried a symbol of their rank and office with them. The use of symbols of loyalty and alliances thus became even more important than before. A person's position in the local society became dependent on a foreign symbolic system provided by the state (Earle 1990:75). Thus T. Earle (1990:73) associates complex chiefdoms with the emergence of 'great styles', in which the ruling elite was identified by special materials, objects and symbols. According to the *Russian Primary Chronicle* for the year 945 (cf. Lindberger 2001:70; Edberg 2001:6f), emissaries carried seals of gold, while merchants carried seals of silver. The content of the pictures on these seals, and their style in general, could be used to claim a connection with the divine, and thus these members of the local elite stood out above the ordinary society (Hedeager 1996; 1997). At the same time, the giving of gifts that clearly signalled the identity of the giver, meant that these gifts served as a form of propaganda, with a new style symbolising a new ruler. This applied first to the weapons used to achieve power, and later spread to other objects in the material culture. The uniformity of the style indicates that production was controlled to a certain extent (cf. Earle 1990). The connection between a certain style and a strong ruler or a central source of power can be studied in the case of the association between the Frankish kingdom and the 'polychrome style', for instance, i.e. gold with advanced cloisonné garnet inlays. The king handed out gifts fashioned in this polychrome style as a token of alliances and loyalty, so that ring-swords decorated in this style may be said to denote members of his retinue (Arrhenius 1997; Steuer 1989). Another symbol of a ruler and his kin can be seen in the case of the Riurikid dynasty in Kiev. It is mentioned in the recent thorough survey of ancient Russian princely emblems by E. Lindberger (2001) that these are to be seen in their most significant form on coins, the earliest confirmed Russian coins having been struck in the name of Prince Vladimir (978–1015) as an essential part of his programme for gaining prestige, power and renown (Lindberger 2001:72ff). The coins were decorated with the emblem of the Rurik family – a falcon. Edberg discusses the Rurikids' use of this emblem as an ideological and symbolic instrument in their claim for continuity and the consolidation of their power (Edberg 2001:14f).

Symbols of rank and office differ from prestigious goods in that they are not primarily inaccessible goods or luxury products of high status because of their economic value but rather they represent a function, duty or office which in itself can be, and probably was, high in status (cf. Hägg 1991). Symbols of rank and office are products of an organised society capable of formu-

lating and guaranteeing a uniform system and spreading it throughout the region over which that society's power and/or interests may be deemed to extend. This system requires some kind of social control, so that only persons occupying a certain office or rank wore or used a given symbol. Another aspect of this presumed societal organization was the uniform naming of places that occurred during the Late Iron Age, i.e. places with specific state functions were named after a common system (Brink 1996; Brink 1997; cf. Duczko 1995). This nomenclature, together with symbols of rank and office, indicates a strong central power, which could not only form an administrative and military organisation but also maintain and increase that organization over a constantly expanding geographical area.

Prestigious goods and political geography

As noted in the opening arguments of this paper, the distribution of artefacts representing material culture can reflect the political and economic contacts maintained by a society. A. Andrén writes about political geography in connection with the distribution and context of gold bracteates from the Migration Period (Andrén 1991). By identifying identical bracteates it is possible to trace allied or associated groups of people. Artefacts that are identical or closely resemble each other provide a basis for the discussions concerning workshop attribution and the question of whether it is possible to distinguish individual craftsmen or specific workshops. Attempts have been made using a variety of technical equipment to determine if the artefacts bear traces of tools, and whether it is possible to recognise recurrent tools. On the principal objects of such investigations have been punch-decorated ornaments, the aim being to distinguish individual punches (Andersson 1991; Benner Larsen 1985; Wårhem 1997), but regardless of whether the studies have been of a stylistic or technical nature, the conclusions have been limited to interpreting similarities as expressions of a common workshop, common production and distribution, or possibly a passive expression of an exchange of ideas within a social elite. Andrén goes somewhat further in his interpretation and considers the similarities to show a pattern of diplomatic relations in which deliberately distributed artefacts are intended to mirror alliances (Andrén 1991; cf. Arrhenius 1997). The difference lies in the deliberate nature of the action. Instead of being a passive expression of contacts, the artefacts were specifically created as active bearers of identity.

The limited number of motifs to be found on chapes indicates that they were designed to symbolise something very particular. One possibility is that they functioned as symbols of rank or office. Paulsen (1953:143ff) suggests that the various motifs could represent different troops in a military organisation, but the distribution of the chapes argues against this theory. If the chapes are to be interpreted as symbols of rank or of troops, the same military system must have been in operation over a very large area. The ornamentation in itself is too discrete to function as a symbol of particular troops in a battle situation, so that it must have functioned as such primarily in times of peace. It is probable that the function of the chape was partly to display affiliation to a group and/or to a leader. It is important, however, to make a distinction between the various types of chape, as is

further stressed by the differences in distribution pattern and context. It is significant that the design with the anthropomorphic figure is unique in each location where it has been found, and that it is principally found in contexts other than graves. These circumstances could indicate that the anthropomorphic chape not was a personal possession but the symbol of an office.

In connection with the above discussion of art as propaganda and particular artefacts with specific forms of ornamentation as symbols of office, I would like to point out once more the connection between the anthropomorphic chape motif and the Jelling stone in Denmark. The resemblance in composition is striking, and to my mind too obvious to be coincidental. The connection between the stone and the Danish king Harald Bluetooth arouses the question of whether the motif could represent a king, chieftain or retinue connected with Denmark and the highest social strata that existed there. The chape could indicate that the office was a military one, but it does not necessarily have to be so. On the other hand, the chape found in the Garrison area at Birka was clearly in a military context, deposited by a post in the 'Warriors House', together with other artefacts of a military kind (spearheads, comb cases, arrowheads etc.) (Hedenstierna-Jonson et al. 1998). The fact that the motif on the chape can be interpreted as Christian points to a connection with the Danish court, which is assumed to have been Christian at that time.

Conclusions

The occurrence and context of the chape with the anthropomorphic figure at Birka is representative of the way in which the majority of the chapes of this type have been found. They represent a unique phenomenon in each location and are stray finds in settlements rather than grave finds connected with a sword and scabbard. Although the material is quite homogeneous in composition, three sub-groups can be distinguished, of which sub-group A, in which the design is in its purest form, is spread over an area extending from Iceland in the north-west to Latvia in the south-east, sub-group B is found only in Slavonic areas and shows both a slight difference in composition and a difference in shape, and sub-group C contains only one specimen at present.

The chapes bears a close resemblance in composition to the Crucifixionscene on the Jelling stone in Denmark. The question is whether they also correspond in iconography, so that the chapes can also be regarded as Christian. As the date, motif and location make a connection with the Danish king Harald Bluetooth plausible, it is possible that the iconography of the chape is indeed Christian. The context and distribution pattern are of great importance when discussing the function of the chape. It is significant that it does not seem to be a personal possession, as it is generally not found in graves. This fact together with its occurrence in locations of regional or inter-regional importance with widespread contacts has aroused the idea that the chape may have functioned as some kind of symbol of office, the bearer possibly being in the service of the Danish court. The distribution of the chape type with an anthropomorphic figure could consequently be seen as a reflection of the diplomatic contacts and political relations maintained by the early Danish court.

Acknowledgements

The excavations of the 'Garrison' at Birka are part of the project *Borgar och befästningsverk i Mellansverige 400–1100 e. Kr.*, led by Dr. Lena Holmquist Olausson and Dr. Michael Olausson of the Archaeological Research Laboratory, University of Stockholm, and funded by the *Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation*.

English language revision by Malcolm Hicks

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