

Háskóli Íslands

Hugvísindasvið

Viking and Medieval Norse Studies

A Falconer's Ritual

**A study of the cognitive and spiritual dimensions
of pre-Christian Scandinavian falconry**

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Abstract

Working from the premise that falconry was introduced in Scandinavia from an eastern origin sometime in the course of the 6th century AD, this paper suggests that the practice may have harboured cognitive and spiritual dimensions unshared by the rest of the feudal, Christian European kingdoms. Falconry is thus reinterpreted in light of an inherited prehistoric human-animal relationship in Scandinavia, in addition to a reconstructed Viking Age cosmology. The multidisciplinary approach of this paper permits us to suggest that falconry was shaped by the culture already in place around 500 AD and that, in turn, it influenced its subsequent development into the Viking Age. The unique relationship between a falconer and a bird of prey may have been the inspiration to the development of the avian hybridity motif of Scandinavian animal art. It may also be likened to the numerous Norse concepts of animalistic souls and shamanistic shape shifting, such as the myths have preserved in memorable images and situations.

Útdáttur

Rannsóknin gengur út frá því að fálkar hafi þekkt á Norðurlöndum og komið úr austri á 6. öld, og þar er sett fram sú tilgáta að tamning fálka hafi falið í sér andlega þætti sem ekki þekktust í öðrum kristnum evrópskum konungsríkjum á lénstímabilinu. Þannig er fálkatamning endurtúlkuð í ljósi norrænnar arfleiddar um samband manns og dýrs eins og hún kemur fram í endurgerðri heimsmynd víkingaaldar. Þverfagleg nálgun rannsóknarinnar bendir okkur til þess að fálkatamning hafi mótast menningarlega þegar um 500 e. kr. og hafi síðan mótast af menningunni til víkingaaldar. Einstakt samband fálkatemjara og ránfuglsins gæti haft sín áhrif á þróun hamskiptaminnisins þar sem fuglar koma mjög við sögu, bæði í norrænni dýralist og síðar í goðsögunum þar sem bæði má sjá minni um tengsl sálar og dýrs og hamskipti galdramanna.

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I. Introduction

In 2012, UNESCO has inscribed falconry on their Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity², a consideration that is long overdue. Indeed, where the historical bonds between humans and dogs and horses, for example, is well known,³ the cooperation initiated between mankind and birds of prey is comparatively less recognized—at least in our modern western world. Falconry is a practice that has had an historical impact on mankind, one that is of course different, and yet complementary to the impact of horses and dogs.

However, birds of prey are very different from mammal species, and their differences impose limits and possibilities in our interaction with them⁴. They remain wild animals that cannot be tamed nor domesticated, which means that they are acquired from their natural habitat. Before the training period properly begins, they must accustom themselves to humans, something called “manning”⁵. Their training inculcates in them behaviours they wouldn’t normally adopt in the wild, such as hunt bigger preys⁶. Sometimes, as a result of manning, a strong bond with their human owner is formed. They otherwise constitute a high maintenance responsibility that can easily overwhelm those people lacking time, means, space and dedication. And yet, despite all this, birds of prey are primal beasts at their core. Given the chance, they will return to nature, where they

² UNESCO World Heritage, “Falconry, a living human heritage,” accessed February 28 2015, <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/RL/00732>.

³ For a historical background to the domestication of both dogs and horses in the world, see Juliet Clutton-Brock, *A Natural History of Domesticated Mammals*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 238. For a Scandinavian perspective, see Kristina Jennbert, *Animals and Humans. Recurrent symbiosis in archaeology and Old Norse religion*, (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2011), 272.

⁴ Both dogs and horses are social animals which can easily form bonds of friendship together and with other species, humans among them. Their fearlessness of humans is a result of their domestication. Though tamed and domesticated, they are essentially kept in captivity in which they are bred, trained, and regulated in number. They are easy to acquire and their purposes for humans are numerous.

⁵ Robin S. Oggins, *Kings and Their Hawks: Falconry in Medieval England*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 25; Thomas T. Allsen, *The Royal Hunt in Eurasian History*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 62; Phillip Glasier, *Falconry and Hawking*. (London: B. T. Batsford, 1978), 44.

⁶ Wietske Prummel, “Falconry in continental settlements as reflected by animal bones from the 6th to the 12th centuries AD”, in *Hunting in northern Europe until 1500 AD Old traditions and regional developments, continental sources and continental influences*, ed. Oliver Grimm, Ulrich Schmölcke. (Neumünster: Wachholtz, 2013), 357.

reproduce best. This performance imposes restraints in their acquisition and in the management of their number.

This short summary briefly explains why birds of prey are not as famous companions to humans as are dogs and horses. The relationship that emerges between raptors and mankind is essentially a personal one, as opposed to social, and it is also a temporary one. Indeed, unlike dogs and horses, falcons are not kept for life. They are eventually released. Falconry is not so much about a successful hunt as it is about a successful flight, which is a direct result of the training process. Falconry is thus something that is practiced. It is humankind's ability to successfully and temporarily harness the wild, only to let it loose, without altering its innate nature.

This paper proposes to investigate the relationship that exists between humans and birds of prey, which is to say falconry, in the context of pre-Christian Scandinavia, 500 AD-1200 AD. Working from the premise that falconry has been introduced and practiced in Scandinavia synchronically with the rest of mainland Europe, which is to say from ca. 5th-6th centuries, it is possible to imagine that falconry had a degree of impact on the developing Scandinavian society. This impact can be measured in terms of hunting practices, and from there, we can posit that the close relationship between man and bird of prey coloured the idea of avian-human hybridity such as it is often represented in figurative art. If we succeed at establishing falconry as a model for a development of beliefs and ritual practices pertaining to bird transformation, it follows that mythology, despite having been recorded in writing at a later date, has conserved bits and pieces of these conceptual ideas in the semantic characteristics of gods, goddesses, and other mythological beings.

If we are to explore different cognitive aspects of the relationship between humans and raptors, it seems important to first discuss briefly the ways humans and birds interacted in the Scandinavian Stone, Bronze and Iron Ages. We can then move on to postulate as to the time and the identity of those responsible for the arrival of the technique of falconry in the North. In doing so, this paper places itself against the long held idea that falconry is a medieval European importation to the Christianising and centralizing Scandinavian kingdoms of 11th and 12th century. Instead, we think that falconry may have arrived in

Scandinavia from more or less the same peoples that most probably brought the technique to Europe during the Migration Era (4th-8th centuries): the Huns, the Alans, the Sarmatians or the Vandals⁷. In the closing of this historiographical premise, explaining what falconry is and what it entails seems just as necessary.

i. Human-Bird interactions in Scandinavia from the Stone Age to the Iron Age

The aim of this section is to provide a brief and general picture of human-bird relationship in Scandinavia before the advent of falconry. This seems a necessary step because the multiple populations inhabiting Scandinavia from the Stone Age to the Middle Age had quite different understandings of animals in general. We can expect these to have changed as we go from one period to the next. The interpretation of that relationship is problematic, since our own modern relationship with animals is the result of several millennia of interactions with them. Indeed, from what can be surmised as a Palaeolithic equal and respectful recognition that both animals and humans have their place in the world, it transforms into a relationship of cooperation and interdependence, as agriculture becomes a lifestyle norm. Over the past few centuries, especially with the advent of industrial farming, that relationship becomes one of dominance; humans see themselves altogether superior. Our modern interpretation of animals is thus tainted, and because scholars are the product of their time, their discourse on the past is coloured by its preoccupations. Therefore, studying the earlier relationships of humans and animals is tricky. We must be wary of forming analogies between features belonging to different periods, even if they seem to be a continuation. Some concepts may well survive while others don't. It must be born in mind that their meanings and usages have surely been adapted to suit changing social, cultural, religious, hierarchical, and other paradigms⁸

⁷ Claus Dobiak, "Early falconry in central Europe on the basis of grave finds, with a discussion of the origin of falconry," in *Hunting in northern Europe until 1500 AD Old traditions and regional developments, continental sources and continental influences*, ed. Oliver Grimm, Ulrich Schmölcke. (Neumünster: Wachholtz, 2013), 349.

⁸ Ragnhild Bjerre Finnestad, "The Part and the Whole: Reflections on Theory and Methods Applied to the Interpretation of Scandinavian Rock Carvings," in *Words and Objects: Towards a Dialogue Between Archaeology and History of Religion*, ed. Gro Steinsland. (Oslo: Norwegian University Press; The Institute for Comparative Research in Human Culture, 1986), 27.

which, for scholars, usually means the shifting of an era. We must try nonetheless, and stay aware that every interpretation and every conclusion reached are hypothetical.

Stone Age (12,500 BC-1500 BC)

It is largely held that, based on archaeology and on rock carvings, the peoples of the Stone Age were hunters, and as such, had an important relationship with animals in general. We can attempt some interpretation of that relationship if we compare the styles of Norwegian Mesolithic (Fig. 1) and Neolithic (Fig. 2) period rock carvings⁹. The first style seems to be the result of careful observation of wild animals of which the elk dominates in number. They are portrayed in relative isolation over large slabs of rock. The second style depicts crowds of (mostly)

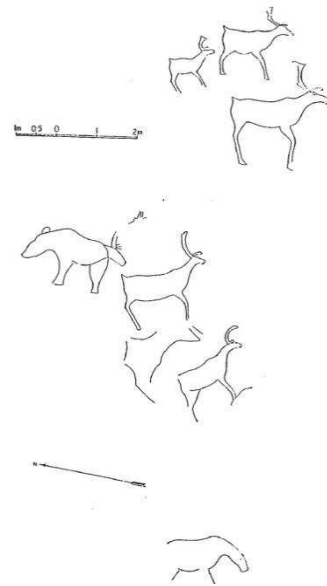


Fig. 1 Mesolithic rock-carving from Fykanvatn, Norway. After Gutorm Gjessing.

elks together, sometimes carved over one another. Their bodies are also carved with inner lines, which seem to indicate anatomical awareness. It is in this second style that humans appear in the carvings.

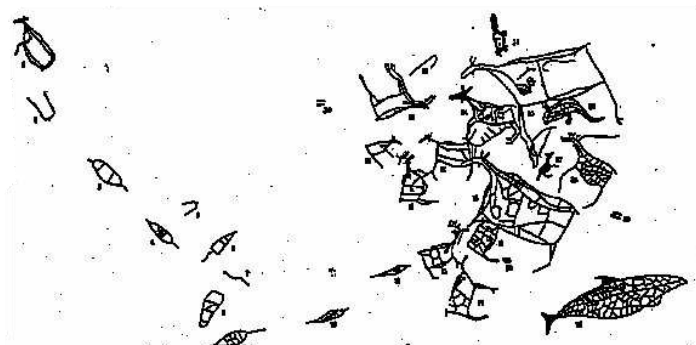


Fig. 2 Stone Age Neolithic carving from Drammen, Norway. After Engelstad.

The meaning and purpose of these carvings have been interpreted differently over several decades of scholarship, from “pure alluring magic¹⁰ to [...] indications of the best hunting places”¹¹, all of which relates essentially to ideas of fertility and easy access to natural resources.

⁹ The Nordic Stone Age is divided into three periods: the Upper Palaeolithic (12,500 BC-6000 BC), the Mesolithic period (6000 BC-3000 BC), and the Neolithic period (3000 BC-1500 BC). Stone carving is attested to have begun in the Mesolithic period and to have continued well during the Neolithic, until the Bronze Age (1500 BC-500 BC).

¹⁰ Haakon Shetelig, Hjalmar Falk, *Scandinavian Archaeology*, translated by E. V. Gordon. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937), 114, 121.

The Stone Age carvings suggest a developing relationship between humans and animals. A cosmological shift seems to occur as one style takes over the other. The appearance of human figures in the Neolithic part of the Stone Age can be taken as an indication that Man now sees itself as being part of the world, perhaps at an equal footing with wild animals. This is further strengthened by the anatomical concern in the drawings of elks' body. Living beings, animals and humans, might now be seen as different parts put together, something that challenges a possible Mesolithic idea of wholeness.

Bird bones (eagle, heron, crane, swan, wood-grouse, grey goose, and various ducks and cormorants) were found from the early Mesolithic Maglemosian (9000 BC- 6000 BC) culture of Sjælland, Denmark¹². They are interpreted as the results of human consumption, which is possible considering that the bones were piled together in refuse pits with the remains of other herbivores, crustaceans, omnivores and carnivores. It is not unheard of that prehistoric—and modern man—ate the meat of carnivores¹³. Yet, such interpretation is established by the state of the bones. If they are deliberately broken, showing the marks of teeth, or showing the signs of culinary processing, it is safe to say that they indicated consumption¹⁴. There is no information regarding the state of the eagle bones. In fact, some of the animals found in the piles may have ended up there for various reasons other than human activity¹⁵. The presence of the eagle doesn't suggest much at all, since it seems to be an unusual find.

¹¹ Egil Mikkelsen, "Religion and Ecology: Motifs and Location of Hunter's Rock Carvings in Eastern Norway," in *Words and Objects (op. cit.,)*. (Oslo: Norwegian University Press, 1986), 127.

¹² Haakon Shetelig, Hjalmar Falk, *op. cit.*, [first page of chap. III]. The archaeological excavation that informs this specific situation is presumed to have been carried out around the turn of the 20th century.

¹³ Patricia Martín, Palmira Saladié, Jordi Nadal, and Josep María Vergès, "Butchered and consumed : Small carnivores from the Holocene levels of El Mirador Cave (Sierra de Atapuerca, Burgos, Spain)," *Quaternary International*, 353 (2014), 153-169.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 153.

¹⁵ The interpretation that the presence of animal remains attributed to human activity is sometimes erroneous, especially when animal agency is not taken into account. Cf. Jon M. Erlandson, and Madonna L. Moss, "Shellfish Feeders, Carrion Eaters, and the Archaeology of Aquatic Adaptations," *American Antiquity*, 66; 3 (2001), 413-432. The article mentions the activity of sea eagles and other birds that are found in circumstances misattributed to humans. Although the eagle from Maglemose is found in a pile of discarded bones in a human setting, its presence may be traced to other circumstances.



Fig. 3 Gåshopen I, Norway. After Simonsen (1958).

Returning to stone carvings, archaeologist Poul Simonsen points out how in southern Norway (Hjemmeluft and Gåshopen I) Stone Age human figures are sometimes represented wearing what he interprets as bird costumes (Fig. 3)¹⁶. This view is questionable, albeit interesting. The whole article suffers from a general lack of reference; but it may constitute the sum of Simonsen’s scholarly life’s work. Whether we accept or not the specific figurative interpretation of the bird costume, it is relatively clear that humans associated themselves with animals, as evidenced by corroborating archaeological artefacts to stone carvings¹⁷. Terry Gunnell takes up this idea and links it specifically as being a “part of ceremonial or shamanistic ritual”¹⁸.

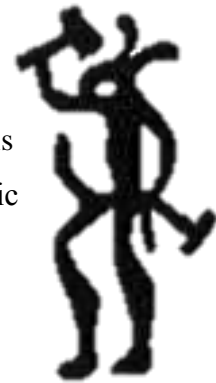


Fig. 4 Horned, masked figure bearing a hammer, from Lövsåsen, Tanum, Bohuslän. After Almgren.

Bronze Age (1500 BC-500 BC)

The Bronze Age is characterized by the advent of agriculture in south Scandinavia, while the northern parts continue more or less unchanged. Despite this fundamental cultural shift from nature, rock carvings remained a pregnant art form, which, in the south at least, took a third dimension, as evidenced by—especially Danish—archaeological finds¹⁹. The carvings from both hunting and agricultural societies are more or less distinguished in the early scholarship. It is recognized though that the stylistic changes defining Bronze Age carvings involves psychological elements, conducive of recognizable features of spirituality and of religious beliefs and rituals. The hunting peoples from the north keep carving animals and hunting scenes. In southern, agrarian Scandinavia, ships, trees, suns, serpents, axes, ploughs,

¹⁶ Poul Simonsen, “The Magic Picture: Used Once or More Times?,” in *Words and Objects (op. cit.)*. (Oslo: Norwegian University Press, 1986), 208.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 208. “At the same locality [Hjemmeluft in Alta] there are, at any rate, four or five scenes, each consisting of two persons face to face holding long poles with a moose-head on top. Such a moose-head, carved in wood, has been found in a bog in North Finland, clearly being part of a procession pole.”

¹⁸ Terry Gunnell, *The Origins of Drama in Scandinavia*, (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1995), 37-41.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

animals, and more appear in the stone²⁰. More recent scholarship has speculated upon a whole cosmology which centers on the rebirth of the sun, but also on the eschatology of the human soul. Animals play therein fundamental roles²¹. Humans also feature more prominently

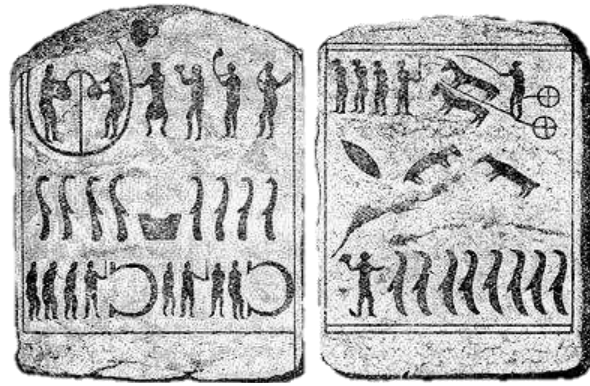


Fig. 5 Kivik grave rock engravings. After Montelius.

than before, and some figures sport animal characteristics, such as horns, as part of their bodies (Fig. 4). It is widely viewed by scholars that these specific figures must have played some religious role of sorts²².

Two Bronze Age examples, the Kivik stones from Skåne (Fig. 5) and the Kallsängen stone from Bohuslän (Fig. 6), depict humans taking on aspects of birds. The Kivik grave is dated to ca. 1200 BC and contains at least two slabs of stone with pictures interpreted as women in swan-like costumes. That interpretation is based on the similarity shared between the pointed head of the bird-like figures from the Stone Age carvings mentioned and shown above (Fig. 3). Gunnell tentatively suggests that these “female” Bronze Age figures may be correlated to Late Iron Age *valkyrjur*²³. The Kallsängen carvings portray male figures raising their winged arms. They also seem to wear masks with the distinctive beaked profile of birds²⁴. The diametric energy

displayed by these two types of figure is interesting. The Kivik swan-like figures are altogether sedate with their shared solemn countenance, which seems appropriate considering that the slabs belong to a grave. The male figures are energetic; their wings are full and their body is slanted, as if they were

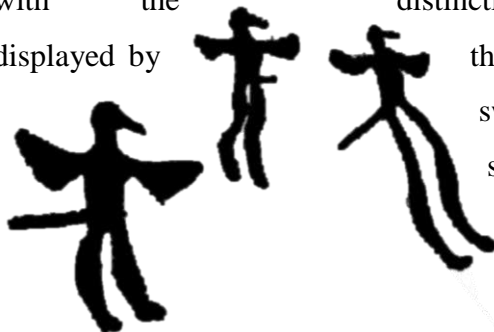


Fig. 6 Kallsängen men in bird costume. Digitally created tracings based on photography.

²⁰ Haakon Shetelig, Hjalmar Falk, *op. cit.*, 134-5, 158, 170-1.

²¹ Joakim Goldhahn, “Rock Art Studies in Northernmost Europe, 2000-2004”, in *Rock art studies. News of the world III*, edited by Bahn, P., Franklin, N. & Strecklin, M. (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2008), 21.

²² Poul Simonsen, *op. cit.*, (1986), 197-211.

²³ This avian interpretation is not unanimously shared, Terry Gunnell, *op. cit.*, (1995), 47 fn. 100, 48.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 47-50. See also John Coles, *Shadows of a Northern Past, Rock Carvings of Bohuslän and Østfold*. (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2005), 46, 49-50, 175.

facing the wind with the intention to take off. Whatever interpretation we have of them, they speak of excitement, of activity; a total contrast to the Kivik carvings.

Iron Age (500 BC-1050AD)

The Iron Age brings its lot of technological and ideological changes, which of course impacts again on the Nordic societies. Different waves of contacts have been studied between Scandinavia and continental Europe, which have been rationalized into a subdivided time period²⁵.

We know more about Iron Age human-animal interactions than we do about the previous two ages because of a richer access to archaeological data, to figurative evidences and to textual sources. As Kristina Jennbert explains, early prehistoric domestication of various animals and the importation of new species in Scandinavia give us an idea of their importance in human's strategies for survival. Within millennia, humans and animals domesticated each other to the point where neither could survive without the other. It is of no surprise then to see how animals permeate every aspect of human life, branching from basic survival needs to ideological associations²⁶.

In Late Iron Age, the iconography abounds with images of wild animals such as serpents, wild boars, wolves, and birds of prey. Jennbert observes that they had great significance in the cosmology and in the cultural contacts that existed between civilizations; animals were political actors²⁷.

Humans have depended on animals for food, clothing and tools from the very start of their existence. With domestication, this relationship changed dramatically. Wild animals became dependant on humans as well. Their tamed behaviour and their modified physiology sometimes made them henceforth largely unable to fend for themselves. Such is

²⁵ The Early Iron Age (500 BC- 400 AD) is divided according to the rise, the height and the decline of the Roman empire: Pre-Roman Iron Age, 500 BC-1 AD; Early Roman Iron Age, 1-200 AD; Late Roman Iron Age 200-400 AD. The Late Iron Age (400-1050 AD) is characterized by the movements of tribes all around Europe: Migration Period, 400-575 AD; Vendel Period, 575-750 AD; Viking Age, 750-1050 AD. Kristina Jennbert, *op. cit.*, 14.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 53-112.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 80-1.

the case of cattle, hens, sheep, ducks, etc. It is assumed that with the development of agriculture and farm life, a cosmological shift occurs, in which different animals played different roles according to their nature. With new contacts with other civilizations, new ideas and concepts challenge the Scandinavian societies to adapt. The cultural result—if it survives archaeologically—serves to gauge what animals meant to humans. Early on they certainly acquired numerous properties, which were tapped into by etching them on rocky surfaces, by enacting them in ceremonial rituals, and by having them accompany the dead in their grave. The meaning of birds evolved along with the societal and cognitive development of Scandinavian populations throughout Prehistory. Although they did seem to play an important spiritual role from at least the Bronze Age, it appears that their historical influence can be dated from the Late Iron Age and forward into the Viking Age. The introduction of falconry seems to be the likeliest explanation for this, and that is what we are going to examine in the following pages.

ii. The introduction of falconry in pre-Christian Scandinavia

The question of when and by whom falconry was introduced on the Continent has been debated for more than a century, but only for half that time for Scandinavia. The most influential western scholars in the debate are historians, art historians and archaeologists²⁸. Hans J. Epstein is, in 1943²⁹, the first scholar to put together and to analyse the written evidence for falconry from various Eurasian civilizations, including the European sources³⁰. Writing in 2006, Thomas T. Allsen says that Epstein's article has an uncertain chronology and must be subjected to revision, but that it remains the best general guide to the early history of falconry³¹. Indeed, the most recent publications³² on this subject refer to Epstein

²⁸ Asian and Middle Eastern treatises on falconry have been compiled and written independently from Western scholarship, but given that my linguistic proficiency is limited to 'western' languages, I may not readily point the reader towards such work.

²⁹ Hans J. Epstein, "The Origin and Earliest History of Falconry," in *Isis* 34 (1943), 497-509.

³⁰ Before him, scholars mainly discussed the subject in national isolation or within the confines of their discipline, horizon shortened. *Ibid.*, 497, fn. 1 and 2.

³¹ Thomas T. Allsen, *op. cit.*, 58, fn. 48, 288.

³² *Ibid.*; Robin S. Oggins, *op. cit.*, 251; Kristina Jennbert, *op. cit.*, 272; Claus Dobiak, *op. cit.*, 343-356.

one way or another. Most importantly, it is his concluding remarks concerning the emergence of the technique of falconry and its subsequent appearance in Europe that are still influencing the scholarship on this subject. To his mind, the technique is not a Germanic or Celtic indigenous discovery or invention. It must rather have been developed somewhere in the Near, Middle or Far East. Moreover, it must have been introduced in Europe in the course of the Migration Era by one or several tribes moving about in Europe at the time³³. The subsequent debate over which population brought falconry in Europe ensues.

Epstein declares it impossible to prove that either Germans [*sic*], from their contacts with migrating eastern peoples, or Romans, through service in their eastern colonies, learned falconry first and brought it to central Europe³⁴. In 1981, Gunilla Åkerström-Hougen, referring to the work of Gisella Hoffman and Kurtz Lindner³⁵, points to the Ostrogoths particularly as likely candidates³⁶ though she is quick to suggest other possibilities³⁷. When she later concludes her article, however, her opinion on the introduction of falconry in Scandinavia takes a western direction rather than an eastern one:

Principally the introduction might have come about in two ways, either from Byzantium and the Caliphate, or via the West. Historical and art historical circumstances seem to indicate quite clearly that it resulted from early trading connections with the Frisians and the Franks, and also with England. These connections started early enough to explain the appearance of falconry in our Vendel period. The travels eastwards started only somewhat later on³⁸.

³³ Hans. J. Epstein, *op. cit.*, 507-9.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 509.

³⁵ I have been unable to consult either scholar's work, and thus have been unable to ascertain Epstein's influence on their ideas. Gisella Hoffmann, "Falkenjagd und Falkenhandel in den nordischen Ländern während des Mittelalters," in *Zeitschr. dtsh. Altert. u. dtsh. Lit.* 88 (1957), 115-149; Kurtz Lindner, "Beizjagd," in *Reallexikon der germanische Altertunmskunde*, 2. Aufl. II (Berlin, New York, 1976), 163-171.

³⁶ Gunilla Åkerström-Hougen, "Falconry as a motif in early Swedish art; Its historical and art historical significance," in *Les Pays du Nord et Byzance (Scandinavie et Byzance). Actes du colloque d'Upsal 20-22 avril 1979*, ed. Rudolf Zeitler. (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1981), 265.

³⁷ Åkerström-Hougen has worked extensively with the mosaics of what is known as the House of the Falconer in Argos in the Peloponnese. These mosaics are dated to ca. 500 AD, and the scholar rightly points out that a long practice and tradition must already have been in place to give lieu to such an artistic display. Therefore, the introduction of falconry in this part of the world may already be a reality by 400 AD, introduced perhaps by the Visigoths. *Ibid.*, 263.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 274-5.

The earliest art historical evidence indicating falconry in Scandinavia is essentially Swedish and Gotlandic in origin (Fig. 7), as the scholar demonstrates in her article. Moreover, it is truly well attested that early contacts existed between Western Europe and Scandinavia at that period³⁹. It is equally so between Scandinavia (Sweden) and the Baltic and Black Seas areas, though it remains a debated subject among scholars⁴⁰. Falconry however does not originate in the Caliphate or in Byzantium, but rather with migrating peoples of the steppes, as has been hypothesized from the start by Epstein and studied further by Allsen⁴¹. This is why Åkerström-Hougen's rejection, on a chronological basis, of an eastern connection in favour of a western one is dubious, especially given her acceptance, after Lindner, of a possible Ostrogothic

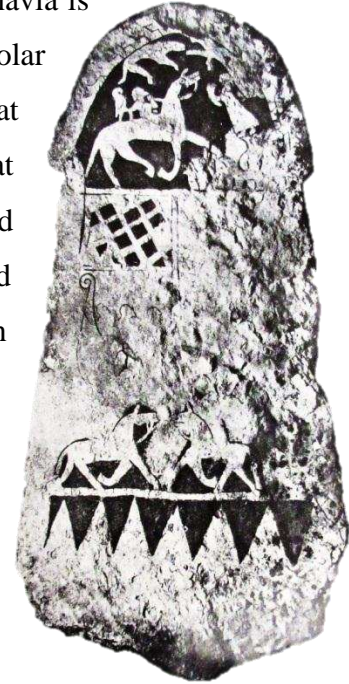


Fig. 7 Picture Stone from Klinte, Gotland. The upper sequence shows a horseman holding a bird. After Lindqvist.

westward introduction of falconry in Europe. Denmark and southern and coastal Norway are the most direct recipients of Frisian, Frankish, and English influences, and yet, falconry emerges there only with the Viking period⁴². It goes without saying of course that Åkerström-Hougen was working with the information available at the time of writing her article.

From her contribution originates the western camp in the debate concerning the origins of falconry in Scandinavia. Allsen, mentioned above, follows in this western track. The scope of his book encompasses extensively all source types from the Eurasian

³⁹ Daniel Melleno, "North Sea Networks: Trade and Communication from the Seventh to the Tenth Century," in *Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 45 (2014), 65-89.

⁴⁰ Mentioning falconry (see note 56): Herwig Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, (translated from the second German edition. Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988 [1979]) 115. Not mentioning falconry: Bjørn Myhre, "The Iron Age," in *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia, Volume I Prehistory to 1520*, edited by Knut Helle. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 60-93.

⁴¹ Hans J. Epstein, *op. cit.*, 507-9; Thomas T. Allsen, *op. cit.*, 58-70. See also Claus Dobiak, *op. cit.*, 345.

⁴² Anne Birgitte Gotfredsen, "Birds in Subsistence and Culture at Viking Age Sites in Denmark," in *International Journal of Osteoarchaeology* 24 (2013), 365-377; Frans-Arne Stylegar, "The Kaupang Cemeteries Revisited," in *Kaupang in Skiringssal: Excavation and Surveys at Kaupang and Huseby, 1998-2003. Background and Results*, edited by Dagfinn Skre, Bjørg Stabell and Rolf Sørensen. (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2007), 93-95.

continent. Yet, his coverage of Scandinavia is barely distinguishable from his treatment of the rest of Europe⁴³. This may explain his western stance on this debate.

In the same decade as Åkerström-Hougen's article, archaeologists Sabine Sten and Maria Vretemark were sharing the results of their *Storgravsprojekt*⁴⁴, a thorough bone analysis of mid-eastern Swedish cremation graves from the Vendel period. The results indicate the presence of numerous animals sacrificed with the deceased, most notably birds of prey. The two scholars suggest that they are indicative of the practice of falconry. They also conclude that the practice is modeled after that of the feudal upper class of Continental Europe. However, further research by Vretemark some years later yields a different conclusion. "Up until now there is only evidence of falconry in grave finds in mid-east Sweden [...]." Falconry may have been practiced elsewhere without leaving any traces. Likewise, the spread of Christianity in southern Scandinavia reduces the likelihood of finding animals in graves. "But still, we cannot ignore the fact that birds of prey in fact are missing in pre-Christian royal mounds and other rich graves in western Sweden. This indicates that the art of falconry in the 6th-9th centuries was indeed an eastern-linked custom not yet adopted by the leading families in the north-western part of Europe"⁴⁵.

The eastern camp on the debate regarding the introduction of falconry in Scandinavia is further strengthened by Claus Dobiak, whose 2013 article⁴⁶ reviews the main archaeological and textual evidence for falconry from its beginnings to its Scandinavian diffusion. He adds a significant clue linking the spread of falconry in northern Germany with a north-eastern origin, which consists of a 500 AD or early 6th century fibulae (Fig. 8). Representing a horseman holding a feathered lure in his hand—a well-recognized tool in falconry—the fibulae is stylistically linked to southern Russian craftsmanship. For Dobiak,

⁴³ Thomas T. Allsen, *op. cit.*, 59. "[...] the first secure mention of hawking in Western Europe dates from the mid-fifth century. Thereafter, literary and pictorial evidence of falconry in Western Europe becomes increasingly abundant. From here falconry spread north, reaching Scandinavia, where it is well attested in archaeology and in literature by the early Viking age."

⁴⁴ Sabine Sten, Maria Vretemark, "Storgravsprojektet—osteologiska analyser av yngre järnålderns benrika brandgravar," in *Fornvännen* (1988), 145-156

⁴⁵ Maria Vretemark, "The Vendel Period royal follower's grave at Swedish Rickeby as starting point for reflections about falconry in Northern Europe," in *Hunting in northern Europe until 1500 AD (op. cit.)*. (Neumünster: Wachholtz, 2013), 384.

⁴⁶ Claus Dobiak, *op. cit.*, 343-356.



Fig. 8 Gilded fibula from Xanten, Germany, St. Viktor, Grave 66. From Dobiat.

this constitutes a compelling evidence (along with northern German pagan graves displaying evidence of falconry) that falconry spread into Europe with the “westward expansions of eastern peoples and mounted tribes”⁴⁷.

I do not think that either camp arguing for an eastern or a western introduction of falconry in Scandinavia disagree fundamentally on its spread into mainland Europe proper. The figurative, archaeological and textual evidence that we have of the practice attest a uniform experience over the whole of the Continent, including Scandinavia⁴⁸, during the 5th and 6th centuries. The disagreement concerns the provenance of the diffusion in the North. A western path of transmission carries the possibility of a Christian, feudal transference of meaning in the practice⁴⁹. An eastern import would assumedly be fairly devoid of such a specific takeover. In fact, this debate is but a fraction of a larger one concerned with the long process of state-formation in Scandinavia which leads to the medieval Christian kingdoms.

Art history, archaeology, settlement archaeology and landscape studies have demonstrated in recent years how, in the course of the Migration Period in Scandinavia, ornamental styles, religious and sacrificial rituals, architecture, and other tangible evidence of human social behaviour have fundamentally changed. For a long time, scholars ascribed these changes to the Christianisation of Scandinavia (between the 10th and 12th centuries), but it is becoming clearer that the centralisation of powers in the North and the formation of

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 349-50.

⁴⁸ We are aware that Scandinavia at that time did not share a uniform culture. The inclusion of the northern peninsula in this statement puts in evidence the fact that most of the scholars who work on falconry and who mention Scandinavia do so in this generalized way. Dobiat, Epstein and Allsen do not make any regional distinction in the emergence of the practice of falconry in Scandinavia; the same goes for Åkerström-Hougen, though the archaeologist focuses primarily on runic and picture stones that belong to the Mälär region. Sten and Vretemark, in their 1988 article, concern themselves only with mid-eastern Sweden, but regional awareness in the appearance of falconry in Scandinavia only emerges, it seems, in Vretemark's 2013 article.

⁴⁹ For a perspective on the different feudal meanings of falconry pertaining specifically to Medieval England, see Robin S. Oggins, *op. cit.*, 251; and John Cummins, *The Hound and the Hawk The Art of Medieval Hunting*. (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1988), 306.

kingdoms was something already independently in motion well before the conversion⁵⁰. Many scholars debate on the depth of these changes, but also the length of the transformations, their sudden catalyst, or their long-term outside influences⁵¹. Eastern and western camps can also be found in this larger debate.

In its various instalments, Lotte Hedeager takes a stand⁵². The conclusion of her book from 2011 proposes two hypotheses which, with a varying degree of success, argue for a direct, short spanned but lasting influence of the Huns in Scandinavia⁵³. It is not the aim of this thesis to enter into this debate, but it is relevant to observe that, if some of Hedeager's contribution on the subject can be accepted, the Huns could be the likely transmitters of falconry in Scandinavia. It must be stressed however, that there is no unequivocal evidence indicating the ethnicity of those who brought the technique to Europe and to Scandinavia. Furthermore, while Hedeager recognizes the cognitive importance of animals for Late Iron Age Scandinavians (something we will discuss below), she never raises the subject of falconry in relation to the Huns. But Claus Dobiati⁵⁴ does, as he lists a short list of possible responsible eastern populations migrating into Europe: the Alans, the Sarmates, the Vandals, and the Huns (Fig. 9)⁵⁵.

⁵⁰ Charlotte Fabech, "Centrality in sites and landscapes," in *Settlement and Landscape. Proceedings of a conference in Århus, Denmark, May 4-7 1998*, eds. Charlotte Fabech, Jytte Ringtved (Moesgård: Jutland Archaeological Society, 1999), 455-473; Bjørn Myhre, *op. cit.*, 60-93.

⁵¹ Among others, Charlotte Fabech, *op. cit.*, 455-473; Bjørn Myhre, *op. cit.*, 60-93; Anders Kaliff, Olof Sundkvist, "Odin and Mithras. Religious acculturation during the Roman Iron Age and the Migration Period;" Andreas Lundin, "The advent of the esteemed horseman-sovereign. A study of rider-motifs on Gotlandic picture-stones;" and others in *Old Norse religion in long-term perspectives. Origins, changes, and interactions*, eds. Anders Andréén, Kristina Jennbert, Catharina Raudvere (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2006), 212-17; 369-74 respectively; Lotte Hedeager, *Iron Age Myth and Materiality. An Archaeology of Scandinavia AD 400-1000*. (London, New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2011), 286.

⁵² Lotte Hedeager, *op. cit.* (2011), 191-223.

⁵³ This stance is much criticized, especially by scholar Ulf Näsman, "Scandinavia and the huns: a source-critical approach to an old question," in *Fornvännen* 103 (2008), 111-118. Anders Andréén assesses Hedeager's thesis in a useful manner, which helps opening the door again to the scholarly consideration of eastern influence in Scandinavia, rather than finding them only in Southern and Western Europe: Anders Andréén, *Tracing Old Norse Cosmology The world tree, middle earth, and the sun in archaeological perspectives*, (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2014), 173-178.

⁵⁴ He does so independently of Lotte Hedeager's overall work.

⁵⁵ Claus Dobiati, *op. cit.*, 349.

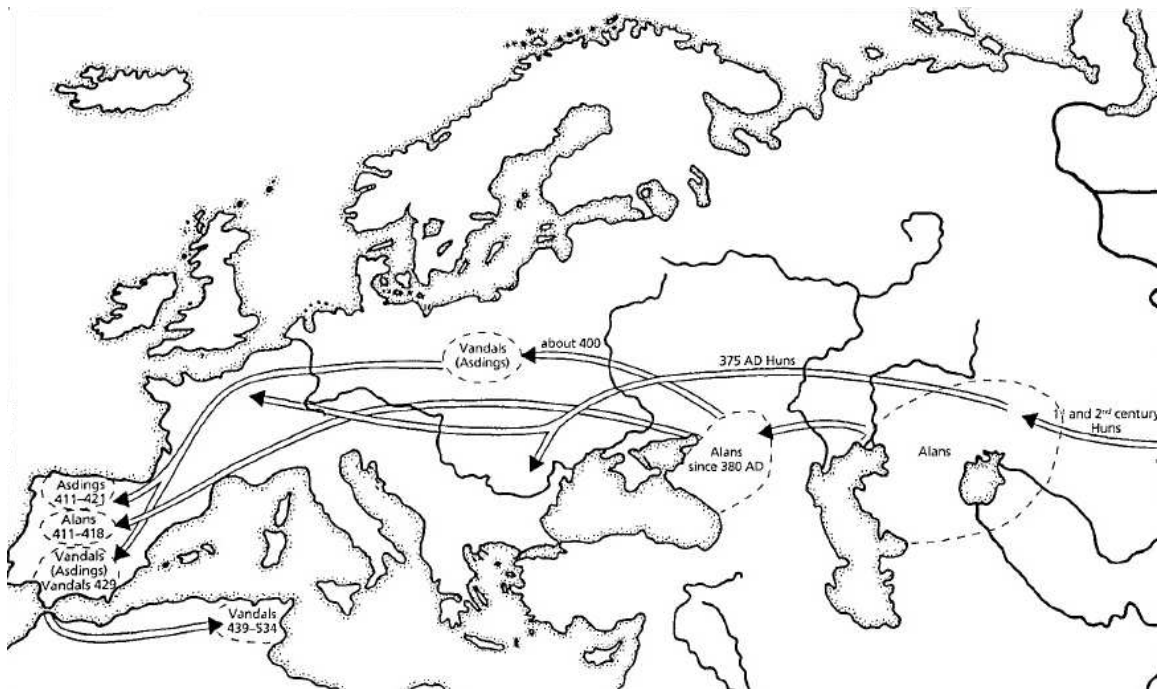


Fig. 9 Tribes reaching central Europe from the east during the Migration Period (since the 4th century AD). After Dobiati.

This part of this paper aimed to present a short historiographical overview of falconry studies in the North. It highlights several things. One is a limited early interest in the study of falconry in Scandinavia that is slowly taking momentum in recent years, particularly with the involvement of archaeology. Another is the importance of broadening our scholarly horizon in researching falconry: it is a practice that developed over millennia and spread over entire continents. It must be studied with the aid of various disciplines and across nations: it should not remain entrenched in a hermetic western scholarly approach. This section also highlights the fact that this discussion on falconry in the North is part of a larger, much divided one concerning the early development of Scandinavian societies. What is at stake is the recognition of a western Christian feudal influence in falconry ideology in early Scandinavia. However, we have argued for an eastern provenance, which is probably devoid of such connotations. Instead, an eastern spread of falconry in the North could mean a more shamanistic⁵⁶ approach to the relationship between humans and birds of

⁵⁶ Based on his critical analysis of Cassiodorus on the subject of the Ostrogoths, Herwig Wolfram points out that these eastern Goths have Scandinavian origins and that they migrated towards and dwelled for some time in the northern region of the Black Sea. There, according to Wolfram, the “the Scythization of the eastern Goths is completed: the armored lancer, who covered incredible distances and fought on horseback;

prey; an approach that is fundamentally compatible with the prehistoric human-animal relationships that we have summarily outlined above.

iii. What is falconry⁵⁷?

Most scholars define falconry nowadays as the art of hunting with trained birds of prey⁵⁸. Its purpose changes depending on the time period and the social hierarchy of its practitioners⁵⁹. Allsen distinguishes three purposes to hunting in general, in which falconry takes place: the pursuit of protein, profit and power⁶⁰. Falconers would argue that a successful hunt is a successful flight⁶¹: it does not matter that the bird catches its prey, so long as it returns to its owner⁶². Frederick II of Hohenstaufen (1194-1250), who wrote the most significant medieval treatise on falconry (*De Arte Venandi cum Avibus*), says that falconers should “aspire to have only fine falcons, better trained than others, that have gained honor and pre-eminence in the chase”⁶³. Obviously, training comes as the most important feature in falconry, from which stems all other satisfaction in the activity.

It has been stated before that falconry is an inherited millennial practice, which improves as experiments are made in concert with the bird. Traditions can thus be said to arise in different parts of the world⁶⁴. As people come together and share their experiences,

the practice of hunting with falcons; shamanism; [...]; in short, the life-style of the Iranian-Turkish peoples of the steppe became part of the Gothic world.” Herwig Wolfram, *op. cit.*, 115. Not primarily discussed by the scholar, it is possible that these Goths retained some contact with Scandinavia, thus perhaps spreading falconry in mid-eastern Sweden; but the chronology is uncertain. The question demands more consideration; this is why I focus mostly on other possibilities.

⁵⁷ This section does not aim to present a technical survey of what falconry is. It rather aims at explaining how different our modern and the medieval techniques of falconry cannot fully apply to pre-Christian Scandinavian falconry practices and meaning.

⁵⁸ Phillip Glasier, *op. cit.*, 9.

⁵⁹ Falconry may not have been a gendered activity, which means that both women and men may have practiced it. This cannot be discussed here, but it is important to refrain from assuming a masculine bias.

⁶⁰ Thomas T. Allsen, *op. cit.*, 1-13.

⁶¹ UNESCO World Heritage, *op. cit.*, video accessed March 18 2015.

⁶² Phillip Glasier, *op. cit.*, 8.

⁶³ Frederick II, *The Art of Falconry, Being the De arte venandi cum avibus of Frederick II of Hohenstaufen*. Trans. and ed. Casey A. Wood and F. Marjorie Fyfe. (Stanford, 1943), 151-2.

⁶⁴ Phillip Glasier speaks of a Japanese tradition of hunting, called the Masayori Method; Phillip Glasier, *op. cit.*, 11. Oggins, based on Hans J. Epstein, *op. cit.*, 507, reports that Frederick II’s treatise may be a bridge between two traditions of falconry, a Middle Eastern one and an older, “more primitive, indigenous Germanic” one. Oggins, *op. cit.*, 4.

the art flourishes; such as has happened in Europe in the course of the 12th century and subsequently. Falconry cannot be thought therefore to have been practiced uniformly across continents and across times. Similarly, it cannot be said to have meant the same thing to every people engaging in it. If we are to investigate the meaning and features of falconry in Scandinavian pre-Christian societies, we cannot do so in light of medieval Christian and Arabic developments. And since there is very little evidence in the North, we may never know in fact what falconry was in a heathen Scandinavian context. It can only be speculated.

It can be said however that Allsen's distinction in the purposes of hunting (protein, profit and power) is quite valid, but he overlooks at least another function, a spiritual⁶⁵ one. Animals in Late Iron Age Scandinavia played important and various social roles. Birds of prey appear in various forms and situations, which indeed pertain to Allsen's characterisation of purposes. However, it would be neglectful to dismiss the cognitive implications of the most relevant activity that engages together birds and humans: falconry.

Moreover, Frederick II's statement, above, surely does not wholly represent the motivation of pre-Christian Scandinavian falconers. "In modern sociological terms medieval falconry was an almost perfect example of conspicuous consumption: it was expensive, time-consuming, and useless⁶⁶." The attitude that the Emperor promotes to the contemporary 13th century medieval aristocracy seems ill-suited to the Late Iron Age pagan Northerners, whose social dynamics and values were somewhat different⁶⁷. Still, there can be little doubt that pride is warranted from falconers of any era and of any culture who successfully fly a well-trained bird of prey.

Epstein states that early Germanic laws make it clear that falconry was a well-established and a well-developed form of hunting already from the 6th century on⁶⁸. The regulations and salient features of these laws do not explain the training process, and although we cannot stamp a medieval training process on the earlier Scandinavian one,

⁶⁵ I refuse to use the word "religious", for it would undoubtedly create some confusion with its usual Christian connotation. "Spiritual" is also more neutral than "shamanistic". My intent with this paper is to show the emotional purpose of falconry, without delving in its political, economic or prestigious dimensions.

⁶⁶ Robin S. Oggins, *op. cit.*, 111.

⁶⁷ Bjørn Myhre, *op. cit.*, 81-3.

⁶⁸ Hans J. Epstein, *op. cit.*, 507.

many features are bound to have remained the same. These features shall be addressed as the need arise in the course of this paper.

From what has been presented so far, it is possible to say that early Scandinavians and birds have a long (pre-)history of meaningful interaction at seemingly every cultural level. It can be thought that, from the beginning of the 6th century AD, that interaction gained a more concrete dimension with the introduction of falconry in Scandinavia. Our sources for pinpointing this art may be scant—the most significant of them will be presented and discussed below—but this is to be expected from such an intangible and elusive practice.

I have argued so far for an eastern, heathen connection to falconry in pre-Christian Scandinavia. This signifies in essence that it must have carried different meanings to the Norse peoples who practiced it. I think that falconry indeed had a spiritual or shamanistic aspect that was neither shared nor influenced by the western Christian and feudal European kingdoms. It is that aspect that this paper aims to reveal.

II. The sacred hunt

The following pages will deal with the direct archaeological evidences for falconry in Scandinavia. It will also attempt to show that this hunting technique may have held some sacred dimension to the people who practiced it.

Introduction: The sacredness of falconry

Natural resources are per definition found in the wild: they occur naturally and independently from human action. They may be tapped into, managed and exploited by humans once they are discovered, but they are uncontrolled in their creation or their breeding. The prehistoric rock carvings mentioned earlier may be part of the earliest rituals designed to ascertain control or to entreat on Nature's fertility. This can be thought to have evolved later on into bodily metaphors, as animals gain ritualistic meanings in their placement in the grave for example. Over longer periods of time, these metaphors may constitute cosmological themes⁶⁹.

Nature as a place is the opposite of human settlements; it is, in the Old Norse mythological tradition—as reflected in 13th century textual sources—the Miðgarðr and Útgarðr paradigm. Previous scholars ascribed to these two concepts a well-defined division; which in turn has been criticised⁷⁰. The meaning of *-garðr* as being a “fence” or an “hedge” in Old Icelandic still retains the same connotation in modern Icelandic. Miðgarðr should therefore be understood as a fenced area⁷¹. Kristinna Jennbert uses this concept as a mentality: the civilized area of the farm is a center where humans and domesticated and tamed animals relate to each other; a center which opposes the area outside of the fence, the wilderness⁷². That binary system is not clear-cut⁷³. “[...] the landscape was changed

⁶⁹ Kristinna Jennbert, *op. cit.*, 137.

⁷⁰ Agneta Ney, “The edges of the Old Norse world-view: A bestiary concept?” and Per Vikstrand, “Ásgarðr, Miðgarðr, and Útgarðr: A linguistic approach to a classical problem,” in *Old Norse religion in long-term perspectives*. (*op. cit.*). (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2006), 63-7; 354-7.

⁷¹ Per Vikstrand, *op. cit.*, 354-5.

⁷² Kristinna Jennbert, *op. cit.*, 70-1: “Production conditions and the values ascribed to animals comprised a conceptual system to do with the way people perceived themselves in relation to the world around them, to nature and animals. The Midgard mentality is important for understanding the living conditions of animals and humans.”

through the building of farms and the system of infields and outlands, lynchets and pastures. This affected the wild fauna so that certain species were favoured while others were driven away.⁷⁴ This means that a wild intermediary area must have existed between the thoroughly settled landscape and the truly foreign wilderness. Encounters with predatory animals such as wolves and bears could occur there. Their threatening presence in Útgarðr and their occasional foray past into the fenced areas must have incurred a reaction urging for protection such as hunting them down⁷⁵ or wearing protective items against them⁷⁶.

Natural resources, such as game and predators, belonged to Útgarðr. Because of the dangers the outlying world represented, hunters who ventured there were probably skilled and knowledgeable in ways of protecting themselves. Lauri Honko contextualizes several Finno-Ugrian poems relating to the hunt. These poems are attached to no particular time period, which makes Honko's assessment timeless. It emphasizes the shamanistic aspect of the hunt in the Arctic and sub-Arctic regions. The scholar explains how the hunter takes account of both flora and fauna according to seasons, landscapes, and so on. Most importantly, the hunter must be well-acquainted with the mythology of the forest, with the spirit forces that rule there, and show proper respect in the form of various and appropriate rituals and sacrifices if he wants his passage and intent to go favourably. He needs "to remain in harmony with the supranormal masters and guardians of the environment"⁷⁷.

During the Viking Age, contacts between Norse and Sámi seem to have been frequent⁷⁸. Earlier scholars even suggest that contacts with Ugric peoples may have been

⁷³ Agneta Ney also suggests a revised interpretation of this binary world-view on the basis of human-animal interactions, in which she distinguishes Miðgarðr and Útgarðr from the clearly different Útangarðr—where truly supernatural beings emerge. These magical and threatening beings display animalistic traits. Agneta Ney, *op. cit.*, 66.

⁷⁴ Kristinna Jennbert, *op. cit.*, 81.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 80-81, 187.

⁷⁶ According to Anne Sofie Gräslund who studied such things in selected burials from Birka, these items consist of small copper alloy bells, but also of wild animal's parts like a tooth or a claw. Anne Sofie Gräslund, "Schellen," in *Birka II:1. Systematische Analysen der Gräberfunde*. Edited by Greta Ardwidsson (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell for the Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien, 1984), 119-124.

⁷⁷ Lauri Honko, Senni Timonen and Michael Branch (eds.), *The Great Bear. A Thematic Anthology of Oral Poetry in the Finno-Ugrian Languages*. (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 1993), 118.

⁷⁸ Inger Zachrisson, "The Sámi and their interaction with the Nordic peoples," in *The Viking World*, edited by Stefan Brink and Neil Price. (New York: Routledge, 2008), 32-9.

initiated as early as the Bronze Age⁷⁹. If by the Viking Age these relations are well established, they must already be in effect, to some degree at least, during the Vendel period. However, ascribing a timeframe to these contacts is difficult, but it can be said that both cultures exchanged much in terms of cosmology, religion, techniques and goods over extended periods of time; at least enough in any case to be identifiable during the Viking Age⁸⁰. For example, it is thought that Old Norse magic and *seiðr* share some links, weak or strong, with Sámi shamanism⁸¹. Although we cannot say for certain that the Sámi's shamanistic approach to hunting transferred in any way to pre-Viking central-eastern Swedish society, it remains a possibility⁸². That possibility in turns becomes relevant in exploring falconry at that time and in that area. We can be fairly certain however that the Sámi did not practice that art. They in fact may have had a more spiritual approach to birds of prey⁸³.

The aim of the discussion above is to lay the land, so to speak, for a cosmological view of how hunters may have approached and experienced wilderness in contrast to the farm—especially where wild animals are concerned. There is moreover an idea of belongingness that needs to be accentuated. Humans are part of the *Miðgarðr* world, of culture and of civilization, which they bring with them (physically in terms of clothing, weapons, etc., and psychologically in terms of behaviour, cosmological perspective, etc.) as they venture into *Útgarðr*. In the same reverse manner, birds of prey are inherently wild, whether they are free in nature or kept in a settlement by a falconer. The training of the bird of prey will impose the visible trappings of civilization: the jesses, which consists of leather cords cuffing both feet and linked to a leash; and the bells, which are used to audibly identify its general condition, behaviour and location in both settlement and nature⁸⁴. Yet, despite this

⁷⁹ Haakon Shetelig, Hjalmar Falk, *op. cit.*, 114.

⁸⁰ Inger Zachrisson, *op. cit.*, 32. See also Neil Price, *The Viking Way. Religion and War in Late Iron Age Scandinavia*. (Uppsala: Dept. of Archaeology and Ancient History, 2002), 235-39.

⁸¹ See Clive Tolley, *Shamanism in Norse Myth and Magic*. (Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 2009), 589; Neil Price, *op. cit.*, (2002), 435.

⁸² Neil Price, *op. cit.*, (2002), 241.

⁸³ See the whole chapter on Sámi shamanism (*Noaidevuohta*): *Ibid.*, 233-275.

⁸⁴ The hood is a Middle Eastern improvement which Frederick II of Hohenstaufen popularized in Europe; it is very doubtful that it was used by Scandinavians before the 13th century. Oggins, *op. cit.*, 5.

disguise of tameness, the bird's nature is not altered. Granted, it becomes a better and more effective hunter, but these characteristics are not the hallmarks of culture. Birds of prey are a beacon of wilderness in the settlement; and they are in their environment during the hunt. The reverse is true of the falconer: he does not belong to Útgarðr; would he be lost there without his bird of prey? Does the bird possess his/her falconer while in that place, in the same way that it is kept in captivity in the settlement? Does the training process civilize the raptor somehow during its stay in among humans while, in the course of the hunt, the falconer shifts into a wilder self? Wouldn't the falconer be deemed magical for harnessing the aid of this fierce animal who returns to him or her after the chase? In the long course of this paper, these questions of belong-ness and identity are to be answered along with that of the sacredness of falconry.

Evidence from the earth

As has been said numerous times already, falconry leaves little to no material traces. Written texts are the best indication that it was actually practiced, but that isn't falconry itself. The same can be said of the archaeological traces of falconry: they are thought to belong to this art only by interpreting them as such. Wietske Prummel identifies four different types of archaeological evidence indicative of falconry in settlement remains. The first one consists of the devices used in falconry. Most of them are made of leather (lure, glove and jesses), and so they rarely survive in the soil. Metal objects, such as small round bronze bells and swivels, have better chances. The second type of evidence is the bones of birds of prey (of the genera *Accipiter* and *Falco*). Third is the sex of the individuals. If these bones show a higher number of female raptors, chances are that they were used in falconry: the females are usually bigger and stronger than the males, who are contrastingly more aggressive and persistent. The fourth archaeological evidence is the presence of bones from the prey animals (hares, squirrels, geese, ducks, partridges, thrushes, corvine birds, herons, cranes, etc)⁸⁵. Moreover, different type of data is expected to appear depending on the type of site that is excavated. In a settlement context, one can expect to find wastes,

⁸⁵ Wietske Prummel, *op. cit.*, 359-363. Anne Birgitte Gotfredsen, quoting Prummel's article, adds a fifth evidence, which consists of the direct association of raptor bones with the remains of humans. Anne Birgitte Gotfredsen, *op. cit.*, 373.

which are intended as such. Unintentional wastes may also happen, such as lost objects. The bones of birds of prey can be thought to belong to that first category of intentionality. In a funerary context, most of the material remains that are found *in situ* of the burial are taken to be deposited intentionally, and this underlines the ritualistic nature of the deposition.

It is not possible at this stage to present the reports of every archaeological excavation of Scandinavian sites dated between 500 AD and 1000 AD. Similarly the limits imposed by this paper do not permit a detailed and thorough analysis of all the signs indicative of falconry. The archaeological sites we will discuss (e.g. rural graves, urban cemeteries, urban centers, diverse settlement areas, etc.) encompass a great variety of context, which may account for their uneven source value. However, these differences may afford us a wider opportunity for comparing the categories of evidence outlined above. For purposes of convenience, we may merge together the three last categories into one which we may name according to their common denominator: the bone evidence. We will treat that category first, and the artefactual evidence after.

The bone evidence of falconry

Sweden

During the 1980's Sabine Sten and Maria Vretemark analysed the bones from 14 Late Iron Age chieftain's grave situated mainly in Uppland and Södermanland⁸⁶. They found many species of animals which were sacrificed one way or another: some are found only in fragments, which probably indicate that they were part of the funerary meal. Others were adults sacrificed whole. Among the latter group, birds of prey are well represented. Four species of raptors are accounted for in twelve of the studied graves; in total they amount to 24 individual birds. They consist of 7 to 9 Eurasian eagle-owls (*Bubo bubo*), 4 peregrine falcons (*Falco peregrinus*), 9 to 12 northern goshawks (*Accipiter gentilis*), and

⁸⁶ The 14 graves are Gunnerstad in Gamleby parish, Småland; Hoxla in Sorunda parish, Landshammar (7th century) in Spelvik parish, Ingjaldshögen in Vansö parish, Karleby in Östertälje parish and Algö (7th century) in Överselö parish, Södermanland; Rådhuset in Örebro quarter., Närke; Skopintull (early 10th century) in Aldelsö, Västhögen (second half of 6th century) in Gamla Upsala parish, Viby in Kalmar parish, Rinkeby in Spånga parish, Arninge (9th century) in Täby parish, Rickeby (early 7th century) in Vallentuna parish, and Ottarshögen in Vendel parish, Uppland. Sabine Sten, Maria Vretemark, *op. cit.*, 145-156.



Fig. 10 Reconstruction of the position of the dead and the sacrificed animals in the Rickeby grave. After Sten and Vretemark. The picture has been rotated 45° counter-clockwise.

one Eurasian sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*). The northern goshawk appears twice in the early 7th century Rickeby grave (Fig. 10).

The prey are less evenly represented in numbers per individual graves, but they are more numerous in species counts⁸⁷.

The distribution of birds of prey and their prey are strongly indicative of falconry, as Sten and Vretemark demonstrate and as

Prummel categorizes. The other osteological indication is the gender of the raptors, something that is not provided by the article. The accompanying grave goods and sacrificed animals point to hunting activities performed by the wealthy mid-eastern Swedish elite. Indeed, horses, dogs and riding equipment are found in a number of the graves⁸⁸. On the basis of bone finds, falconry can be said to have been practiced there from the 6th century to the 10th century. Christianity would afterwards reform the burial rites in ways that prevent us from identifying the art by funerary archaeology⁸⁹.

We assume that the presence of raptors and their prey in burials must have meant something not only to the deceased individuals but to their contemporaries besides. The high social status of these people makes the ceremonies associated with their death a public affair. Every gesture performed during the feast and every object left behind as a testimony of those gestures must have carried a symbolic meaning commonly understood. Otherwise, it is doubtful that falconry—if falconry it is—would have been represented in this funerary

⁸⁷ The greylag goose (*Anser anser*) is the most numerous of the preys, followed by various duck species (*Anatinae sp.*). The goose is notoriously difficult to distinguish from its domesticated counterpart. See Gotfredsen's short description of the distinction problem in Anne Birgitte Gotfredsen, *op. cit.*, 366-7. The other preys are: black grouse (*Lyxurus tetrrix*), hazel grouse (*Tetrastes bonasia*), common crane (*Grus grus*), common starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) and some species of pigeon (*Columba sp.*). Chickens were also found in a significant number, but they are not a prey in falconry. *Ibid.*, 145-156.

⁸⁸ Maria Vretemark, *op. cit.*, 383.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* 384.

context. One cannot help but draw parallels to the funeral feast described by Ahmad ibn Fadlan, the 10th century Abbasid ambassador to the Bulgars of the Volga. His account of the king's lavish death ceremony provides us with the behaviour of all the people involved. The placement of the deceased, the sacrificed animals and peoples, and the deposited objects described in the text are matched by the archaeological excavations of Scandinavian burial sites, such as Oseberg⁹⁰. The ritualistic quality of the proceedings need not be emphasized further. Additionally, although Frederik Ekengren speaks of Roman drinking vessels in mortuary practices, he makes a point concerning humans and material culture—to which we can add animal bodies. “This assumption, where grave goods are perceived as passive and always invested with the same static social connotations, disregards the many recent anthropological and archaeological studies that have shown the dialectic relationship between human agents and material culture.” Indeed, “meaning is produced, not inherent, and the creation of meaning is an interactive process between humans and their social and physical surroundings”⁹¹. Sacrificed birds of prey surely attested to some idea of sacredness inherent of avian characteristic or else to falconry itself. At the same time, it may have become a sacred symbol through the sacrifice itself.

Denmark

In Denmark, the bones of birds of prey are not found in a funerary context⁹². Anne Birgitte Gotfredsen has studied avian remains from 17 different Danish localities, and among these places, the scholar identifies five sites where falconry may have been practiced. These are the urban center of Viborg Søndersø (AD 1016-1045), the trading site of Ribe (active during the 8th century), the stronghold of Trelleborg (10th century) and the

⁹⁰ See Neil Price, “Mythic Acts. Material Narratives of the Dead in Viking Age Scandinavia,” in *More than Mythology: Narratives, Ritual Practices and Regional Distribution in Pre-Christian Scandinavian Religions*, eds. Catharina Raudvere and Jens Peter Schjødt. (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2012), 26-7.

⁹¹ Frederik Ekengren, “Performing death: The function and meaning of Roman drinking vessel in Scandinavian mortuary practices,” in *Old Norse religion in long-term perspectives*. (*op. cit.*), 109.

⁹² The Ladby ship grave in Funnen, Denmark (dated AD 925), contains impressions of feathers on some fragments of corroded iron. The bird species is not identifiable: the feathers may belong to a bird of prey, just as it may have been part of other commodities. This burial contains artefacts of both eastern and western origins, placing this find in the middle of this eastern-western ‘war’ (the scholar’s own choice of word) on the introduction of falconry in Scandinavia. Bodil Holm Sørensen, “Dogs in the Danish Viking Age—The Ladby Ship and other finds,” in *Hunting in northern Europe until 1500 AD*. (*op. cit.*), 163, 166-7.

two elite residences of Fugledegård (7th to 9th century) and Mysselhøjgård (7th to 11th century). At each of these places, birds of prey or falconry devices have been found, as well as a great number of prey animals⁹³. Female goshawks (*Accipiter gentilis*) were found at Viborg Søndersø and at Mysselhøjgård; another female kestrel (*Falco tinunculus*) at Viborg Søndersø; a female sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*) at Ribe; and a male peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) at Trelleborg. Copper alloy bells were found at Fugledegård.

Referring to Viborg Søndersø, Gotfredsen remarks that “the presence of bones of hawking birds at urban and/or trade centres is in accordance with observations on contemporary Anglo-Saxon sites.” Additionally, “high-status townsmen may have kept hunting birds, and such sites were also centers for commerce, including the trading and exchange of hawking birds”⁹⁴. In concluding her article, the scholar states that falconry did not appear in Denmark before the Viking Age, despite the fact that the chronology of both elite residences begin with the 7th century. Nevertheless, the Anglo-Saxon similitude shared with Viborg Søndersø goes along with the western camp of scholars arguing for a Frisian, Frankish and Anglo-Saxon later importation of the practice to Scandinavia (9th-11th century). Ribe would probably fall into this category as well. Indeed, the chronology that Gunnilla Åkeström-Hougen presents⁹⁵ seems to work better with the Danish evidence.

Moreover, we have seen above that in mid-eastern Sweden, the earliest and continuous bone evidence for falconry is established in the ritualistic context of the pagan grave. In Denmark, no such solemnity is accorded to the birds and their owners conjointly; but then again, elite burials at this time period are not comparable in numbers to Sweden. The 6th century eastern importation of falconry in Sweden seems thus to carry some spiritual meanings that are not shared by the 7th century onwards western path of importation into Denmark, even if the same social strata is thought to have practiced it during that early period. Of course, the Danish birds of prey may have been released in the

⁹³ For concision’s sake, the prey animals are mallards, dabbling ducks, black grouse, European hares, curlew, bar-tailed godwit, godwit, grey heron, stork, spoonbill, geese, teal, water rail, spotted crane, crane, snipe, woodcock, waders, dove/pigeon, corvids, starling, thrush, passerines, a crow and a jackdaw. Anne Birgitte Gotfredsen, *op. cit.*, 374, table 5.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 374.

⁹⁵ That chronology has been discussed above (page 10) and found as constituting an insufficient argument in the context of the earliest introduction of falconry in Sweden (6th-7th century).

course of the falconers' lives or at their demise—something that may or not be related to Christian, feudal practices. It remains though, that falconry is osteologically attested to have been practiced in both Sweden and Denmark at an early time. With the presence of the bones in Swedish graves, some idea of sacredness relative to the birds themselves or to falconry may have played a part in the funerary ritual. Otherwise, either practice or animal, or both, may have become sacred by association.

Devices for falconry

Since leather leashes, jesses and gloves have poor rates of preservation in the soil, we will not consider them here. We will rather focus on the bells. Two Scandinavian sites will be discussed here, the trading centers of Birka (ca. 800-970s) and Kaupang (end of 8th century to early 10th century).

However, we should first define what we mean by bell. The word can indeed be misleading. Its various designations, from word to object, but also from one language to another, may have been one of the reasons why the study of bells, in its inventory, analysis and interpretation, has not yet been done in any exhaustive way in Sweden, Denmark or Norway. These bells are neither named coherently nor systematically in archaeological reports, adding to the difficulty of studying them⁹⁶. There are different types of bells, ranging in size, material, sound, purposes, etc. Those used in falconry are small, sturdy (copper-alloyed), and roundly shaped with a pellet of glass, stone or metal trapped inside.

Birka

According to Gjermund Kollveit, about 60 bells have been found overall in Scandinavia, most of them in Sweden⁹⁷. Indeed, eleven of them belong to the many burials excavated at Birka, in the region of the Lake Mälaren in mid-eastern Sweden⁹⁸. These graves belong to the Viking Period. Little to no bones were preserved, so most of the context

⁹⁶ Although this is the case for the Finnish material, it remains true for the Scandinavian context. Riita Rainio, "Classifying Iron Age Bells, Pellet Bells and Bell Pendants," in *Studien zur Musikarchäologie* 6 (2008), 510.

⁹⁷ Gjermund Kollveit, "Animal Bells in Early Scandinavian Soundscapes," in *Studien zur Musikarchäologie* 6 (2008), 148.

⁹⁸ These graves are Bj 91, 644, 684, 721, 735, 750, 756, 901, 948, 1095, and 1145.

analysis is based on artefacts⁹⁹. Anne Sofie Gräslund interprets them mostly in connection with children, but also to personal items relating to garments of East Baltic influences¹⁰⁰.

The graves containing bells vary in type, which is thought to indicate native and foreign traditions. The former consists of cremation under mounds and other stone shaped-

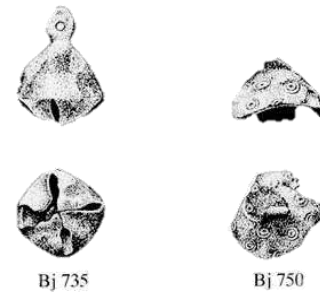


Fig. 11 Two of the bells from the Birka graves. After Arbman (1940-43).

settings; the latter consist of coffin and chamber graves, which might have belonged to foreign merchants, craftsmen and their family¹⁰¹. The bells were found in coffin graves (Bj 91, 721, 756, and 948), shaft graves (Bj 644, 901, 1095), chamber graves (Bj 735, and 750) (Fig. 11), and an unspecified type of graves (Bj 684, and 1145). No pattern emerges between children's grave and types of burial. Based on material analysis, Gräslund categorizes the two chamber graves and one of the shaft graves (Bj 644) as denoting high prestige¹⁰². The bell from the shaft burial has been lost before 1940, and the bell from Bj 750 is in fragments. All three burials contained more than one individual, and most importantly, horses were interred with a man and a woman in the two chamber graves.

Birka has a long excavation history¹⁰³. This means that the archaeological approach has changed significantly since the first studies were performed at the site. Because of this, a lot of information is lost, providing us with a partial picture of the context of finds. The grave goods were not initially and systematically located in the reports. This means that any suggestion regarding the interpretation of the bells (their ownership and their purpose, for example) is speculative. They could have been part of the harness system of the horses; or

⁹⁹ Björn Ambrosiani, "Birka," in *Medieval Scandinavia An Encyclopaedia*, edited by Philip Pulsiano. (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993), 43-4.

¹⁰⁰ More precisely, she identifies these graves as containing children: Bj 644, 721, 756, 901, 948, and 1098. Anne Sofie Gräslund, *op. cit.*, (1984), 119-124.

¹⁰¹ Björn Ambrosiani, *op. cit.*, (1993), 43.

¹⁰² Anne Sofie Gräslund, "Prestige Graves—for men, women and children Mortuary behavior among the elites of the Mälars valley in the second half of the first millennium AD, with some remarks on a gender perspective," in *Herrschaft, Tod, Bestattung Zu den vor- und frühgeschichtlichen Prunkgräbern als archäologisch-historische Quelle*, edited by Claus von Carnap-Bornheim, Dirk Krause, and Anke Wesse. (Bonn: Dr. Rudolf Habelt GmbH, 2006), 161-8.

¹⁰³ Excavations have been performed there between 1871 and 1895, 1969 and 1971, and more recently between 1990 and 1995.

they could have been part of women's jewellery kit¹⁰⁴. They could also have been part of children's rattle toys, as Gräslund suggests. In such an interpretation, she ascribes protective qualities to the object¹⁰⁵. We can even speculate that the bells were used in the context of falconry. Bones were not well preserved in these graves; those of birds are particularly elusive if the sieving of the earth is not done finely enough. However, the bells need not have been attached to a buried hypothetical bird, since it could have been released or lost or dead well before the occupants of the grave passed away. The bells, in this way, can be thought to be a keepsake—that is, if the Birka bells can be linked to falconry at all.

Kaupang

Although Kaupang's excavation history is as old as Birka¹⁰⁶, the evidence from the site is clearer. That is because the archaeological reports are more recent. They take into account modern theoretical frameworks of interpretation as well as more advanced technology and updated excavation techniques. Frans-Arne Stylegar re-interprets the evidence from the Kaupang cemeteries and suggests that one of the high status cremation graves (Ka. 157) may contain the remains of an 800 to 850 AD falconer. Many metallic objects were put on the pyre with the body. The bones did not survive, but it is thought that the grave belonged to a horseman due to the associated equipment of spurs and stirrups found therein. It had also been suggested early on that dogs may have been cremated along with the man. In addition to various iron fragments, a bronze bell and a swivel were found, and while these objects alone are not convincing beyond a doubt that falconry was practiced, hunting certainly was¹⁰⁷.

Every object found in this grave is put to good use in the act of falconry, whether the hunt is performed in a low or a high flight technique. Horses and dogs are useful in both methods. Until the bird is either released to the chase in a wooded area (low flight) or left to take its place in the sky before flushing its prey with dogs (high flight), the falconer needs

¹⁰⁴ Greta Arvidsson, "Das Bronzeglöckchen aus Bj 735," in *Birka II:3 Systematische Analysen der Gräberfunde*, edited by Greta Arvidsson (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell for the Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien, 1989), 72-3.

¹⁰⁵ Anne Sofie Gräslund, *op. cit.*, (1984), 119-124.

¹⁰⁶ Kaupang has first been excavated in 1867, again in 1947, and more recently in 1997, 2000-2002 and 2003.

¹⁰⁷ Frans-Arne Stylegar, *op. cit.*, 93-95.

to travel to the countryside (Útgarðr) where the hunt takes place. He goes there riding a horse, carrying the raptor on the wrist. This leaves one hand to manoeuvre the horse, which make spurs and stirrups invaluable tools for stability and direction. The wrist is protected by a thick leather glove on which the bird is perched. It is held there by leather jesses cuffing its feet. The jesses are gathered into a swivel, linking them to a leash that is held by the hand. As for the bell, it can either be fixed to the feet or to the tail of the bird, jingling at its every move¹⁰⁸.

Falconry as a high social status activity is also evident in the Danish context, given that copper alloy bells were found in connection to the 7th to 9th century elite residence of Fugledegård. Other bells have been found connected to the hall buildings of Uppåkra and Järrestad, both in Skåne, a region which also belonged to Denmark¹⁰⁹.

Every device for falconry accomplished a particular role which ensured that the bird would remain with the falconer or that it could be found again after being released to hunt. The bell was especially important in this latter case, and this prompts us to wonder what more might the object have signified.

Conclusion: the soundscape of falconry

If we take into account the more extensive evidence for the uses of bells in Finland between 550 and 1300, it is possible to draw some parallels with the Scandinavian data. Riitta Rainio has devoted her doctorate thesis to identifying, classifying and analysing close to 500 bells from Finnish archaeological excavations¹¹⁰. The context of everyday use is of course difficult or impossible to ascertain, but Rainio thinks that the bells produced a strong aural indication of social hierarchies, because the lower status graves were comparatively almost always devoid of any objects. Instead, she observes that women, men, children and horses of the higher stratum of society appear to be wearing them, and that it is the sound that was produced that created distinctions between them.

¹⁰⁸ Wietske Prummel, *op. cit.*, 359.

¹⁰⁹ Fugledegård: Anne Birgitte Gotfredsen, *op. cit.*, 374; Uppåkra and Järrestad: Frans-Arne Stylegar, *op. cit.*, 93.

¹¹⁰ Riitta Rainio, "Power, Magic and Bells: A Contextual Analysis of Finnish Late Iron Age Archaeological Findings," in *Studien zur Musikarchäologie* 8 (2012), 373-385.

Elements	Magical Tools
Pellet bell, bell pendant	Cow bell, sheep bell, horse bell
Cruciform pendant	Cross, icon, hymn book
Bird-, horse-, snake-, bear-shaped pendant	Body part of bird, horse, snake, bear, wolf
Axe-, hammer-, knife-shaped pendant	Axe, knife, sword, edge tool
Key-, spoon-, comb-shaped pendant	Key, spoon, comb, brush, sieve
Nut, burl	Nut, burl, seed
Hair, piece of cloth	Hair, nail, piece of cloth
Piece of iron, bronze, sulphur	Piece of iron, bronze, tin, sulphur

Fig. 12 The archaeological elements in chain sets, pouches and boxes of 6th-14th century Finland, compared with the magical tools of the later 17th-19th century folk culture. After Rainio (2012).

Even more interesting, the scholar compares the objects, which include bells that are found in chain sets, pouches and boxes of 6th-14th century, to the magical tools of 17th-20th century folk beliefs and practices (Fig. 12). Her findings are revealing: they are mostly the same, which she think indicates continuity, though she well recognizes that the cultural contexts may have changed in the uses and purposes of these items together. This however leads her to conclude that the bells might have broadcasted an aural aura of protection or that they may have been used in magical context. The protective aspect of the bell is also something that Gräslund suggested in the context of Birka¹¹¹. In fact, it is possible to think that the people occupying those graves might have come from Finland¹¹², chiming away their wealthy status. If this was not the case however, the aural protection of the small metallic device is still something that may have held some powers for the Norse people.

Rainio demonstrates that the tinkling of bells creates aural boundaries for the community and for individuals (Fig. 13): the ringing in a social, communal context is part of the familiar, unconscious background; a sound of safety. In the wilderness its absence emphasizes liminality and possible dangers. One is more alert for wolves, bears, and other perils. Therefore, the practice of wearing bells and fastening them to travelling equipment indicates a belief in creating a protective audible boundary from the encroaching wild “silence” of nature¹¹³. Although the 60 Scandinavian bells do not constitute a fashion or a

¹¹¹ Anne Sofie Gräslund, *op. cit.*, (1984), 119-124. She noted the presence of wild animals’ claws and teeth in some of the burials, which emphasizes the apotropaic nature of all those items together, or else their possible connection with magical rituals or beliefs.

¹¹² Björn Ambrosiani, *op. cit.*, (1993), 43-4.

¹¹³ Riitta Rainio, *op. cit.*, (2012), 376.

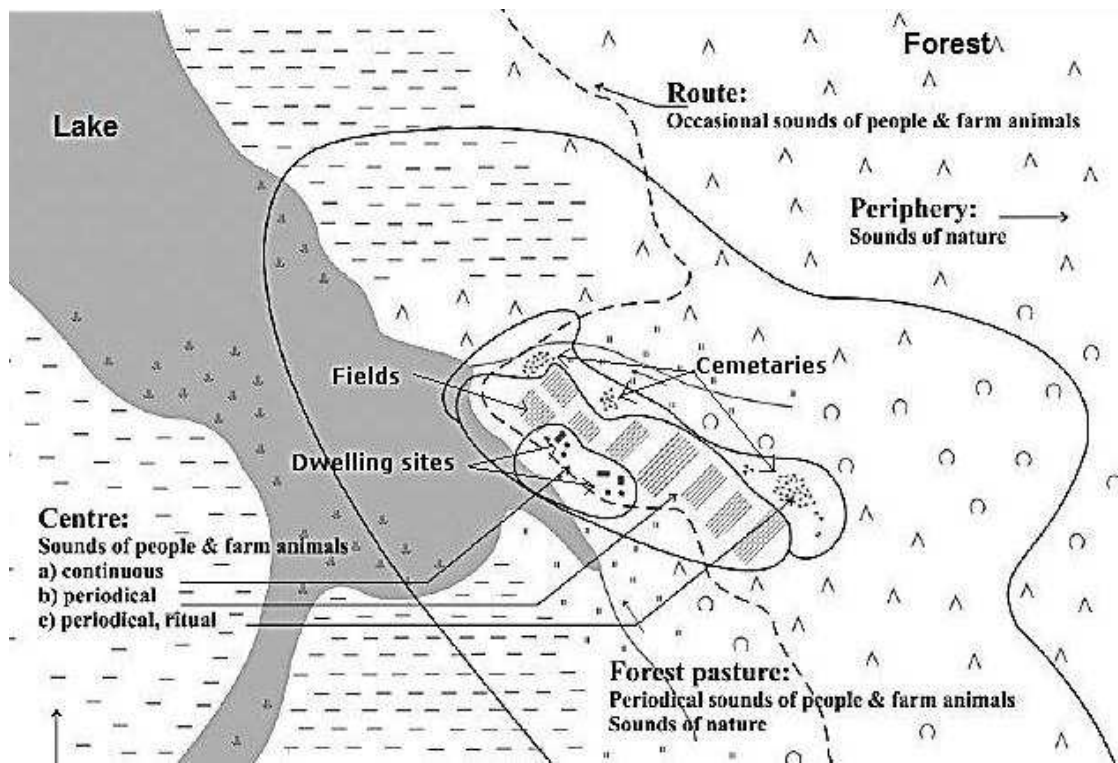


Fig. 13 The soundscape of Sääksmäki Jutikkala (AD 500-1100) (Two digitally merged drawings, from Rainio 2012).

cultural practice comparable to the 486 Finnish examples, the protective powers of the device seem to be shared in both societies. In Scandinavia, bells were part of horse harnesses for example¹¹⁴.

In the context of falconry, the protective power of the bell is revealed. Without it attached to the hawk's feet, the distinction between trained and wild is nil. As we have seen above, the Finnish bells create a soundscape indicative of human activity, a concept easily transferable to the context of falconry. In the settled landscape, where the falconer lives and trains birds of prey, nature is tamed, and despite its trappings, the predator remains wild. Contrastingly, the hunt is performed in the wilderness, and as the falcon is launched to hunt, it carries a jingling object which creates an aural aura of tameness. The bell establishes the boundary between domestication and nature—between *Miðgarðr* and *Útgarðr*. As long as the bird of prey carries its bell, it is secured—or rather kept—from wilderness. A fully trained bird of prey is certainly worth protecting by any and all means.

¹¹⁴ Frans-Arne Stylegar, *op. cit.*, 93

III. Figurative hybridity

In the previous section, I have pointed out that, on a cosmological basis, the earliest practice of falconry in Scandinavia may have harboured some sacral and magical connotations. Indeed, this can be inferred from its enactment in funerary rituals and also in the possible apotropaic uses for the bell during the hunt itself. In the following section, we will explore the shamanistic aspect of falconry by looking at some artefacts bearing relevant figurative expression of the Norse people.

Introduction: the depiction of shamanistic journeys

Figurative representations of falconry in pre-Christian Scandinavia are limited. It can never be clear if it is indeed illustrated. Again, it is a question of interpretation. Swedish and Gotlandic runic stones may lend themselves as the most obvious enduring art form actually depicting such a hunt (Fig. 14). Åkerström-Hougen has studied and compared some of the carvings in detail¹¹⁵, as did Sigmund Oehrl more recently¹¹⁶. On all of these examples, falconers and birds of prey are separate entities. However, our main interest here is to observe the shamanistic aspect of falconry, which I think can be better studied when both animal and human merge together. Various representations of such hybrids can be found on a wide array of special and everyday items of different



Fig. 14 A bird of prey attacking a crane? Close-up on the panel C of the Sparlösa stone, Västergötaland. Wikipedia Commons (Sparlösa Runestone).

¹¹⁵ Gunilla Åkerström-Hougen, *op. cit.*, 263-293.

¹¹⁶ Sigmund Oehrl, "Can pictures lie? Hunting the red deer with raptors—According to visual representations from the Viking Age," in *Hunting in northern Europe until 1500 AD. (op. cit.)*, 515-530.

mediums (textile, wood, stone, and metals). These representations cannot be interpreted as actual falconry. Rather, it is the cognitive ideal of falconry that may be illustrated in this way. This intimate blending together of humans and birds of prey is evidence of a pre-Christian Scandinavian transcendental reality¹¹⁷.

Before we move on to discuss some chosen artefacts, we must define a few terms and concepts. Hybridity is not the same thing as metamorphosis. Figurative representations of humans and animals together may be described as hybrids by scholars¹¹⁸, but that is because such an art form is inherently static. Yet, it does not signify that they were understood as such by the people interacting with those images. Perhaps they capture only a single moment within a process of transformation. Hybrids represent a finite blending of two different elements which will not change in either way¹¹⁹. On the other hand, metamorphosis is a process of continuous change from an initial state into a different one. Metamorphosis of this kind can be observed in the natural world, biologically and geologically. When it relates to humans however, shape shifting is the term we employ. It is used in the context of mythology, folklore, and other types of religious beliefs and practices, that belong to human cognitive expression. Perhaps the figurative art of the Norse people illustrate shape shifters, not hybrids.

Scholars have shown how prevalent shape shifting is in pre-Christian Scandinavia¹²⁰, and this may stem from the suggestion that humans and animals were probably not understood as fundamentally different species¹²¹. What is interpreted as the performance of humans as animals is prehistoric, and that sort of ritual may well be an

¹¹⁷ Lotte Hedeager, "Split Bodies in the Late Iron Age/Viking Age Scandinavia," in *Body parts and bodies whole: changing relations and meanings*, edited by Katharina Rebay-Salisbury, Marie-Louise Stig Sørensen, Jessica Hughes (eds.). (Oxford: D. Brown Bk. Co., 2010), 111-8.

¹¹⁸ Siv Kristoffersen refers to Migration Age bracteates of Style 1 of the 5th and 6th century as a hybrid motif. She comes to recognize a potential for metamorphosis, but only in connection with the stylistic devices of Old Norse poetry, which in effect show some continuation between the Vendel Period and the Viking Age, but also to the early medieval Scandinavian period. Siv Kristoffersen, "Half beast-half man: hybrid figures in animal art," In *World Archaeology* 42: 2 (2010), 261-272.

¹¹⁹ For example, the Egyptian deities sport the head of animals with the body of humans as a static form of being. They are not humans changing into animals, or the reverse. They are hybrids. In biology, this can be observed in animals (mules, ligers, etc.) and in plants (like the strawberry), most often though not always through direct human manipulation.

¹²⁰ Among a very great number of them, see Neil Price, *op. cit.*, 435, and Clive Tolley, *op. cit.*, 589.

¹²¹ Lotte Hedeager, *op. cit.*, (2010), 111-8; Siv Kristoffersen, *op. cit.*, 261-272.

indication or a product of shamanistic shape shifting. *Berserkir* and *úlfheðnar* are the most obvious Late Iron Age and Viking Age shape shifters, whose traditions could be the faded echoes of, or an innovation from Bronze Age practices¹²². In 1951, Mircea Eliade was arguing that warriors from shamanistic cultures sought to liken themselves to animals by behaving like them¹²³. By developing such strong empathy, by *becoming* the animal, these warriors could think themselves embodied with their tutelary animal's strengths¹²⁴. In the mind, if not the flesh, they became these animals.

Shape changing could also occur at the level of the *hugr*, a complicated concept translating plainly as “soul”¹²⁵. Through learning or inborn knowledge, certain individuals of strong *hugr* could undertake shamanistic journeys outside of their bodies. The *hugr* would then take the shape of an animal according to the moral status or intention of the practitioner: a strong defensive bear, an aggressive wolf, or a wisdom seeking eagle. That temporary disguise is called *hamr*, and someone could *leap* into a *hamr* (*hamhleypa*), into an animal shape. Whether this is an actual practice or a literary metaphor, we may never know¹²⁶. However, images of humans and animals merging together are older than the medieval manuscripts consigning the oldest tales and myths on the subject. And even if most of the scholarship concerning this study of the Norse animalistic types of souls is literary in origin, it does not mean that it cannot be applied to the time preceding the Viking Age. It may not have been the same, but maybe it was similar: animal ornamentation is evidence of that, since “the animal style was involved in the creation and maintenance of the socio-cosmological order [...]”¹²⁷. The importance of animals in pre-Christian Scandinavian thinking is too old—prehistoric old—for the concept of animalistic souls to be wholly a literary, medieval invention.

¹²² Terry Gunnell, *op. cit.*, (1995), 64-66-76.

¹²³ Mircea Eliade, *Le chamanisme et les techniques archaïques de l'extase*. (Paris: Payot, 1951), 405. Through Michael P. Speidel, *Ancient Germanic Warriors, warrior styles from Trajan's column to Icelandic Sagas*. (New York: Routledge, 2008), 29.

¹²⁴ Michael P. Speidel, *op. cit.*, 15-46.

¹²⁵ The use of that word is problematic for its obvious Christian ideological meaning; this is why we will prefer using the various Old Norse terms of *hugr*, *hamr*, *fylgja*, etc.

¹²⁶ Catharina Raudvere, “Popular religion in the Viking Age,” in *The Viking World*, ed. Stefan Brink, Neil Price. (New York: Routledge, 2008), 241.

¹²⁷ Lotte Hedeager, “Scandinavia before the Viking Age,” in *The Viking World*, ed. Stefan Brink, Neil Price. (New York: Routledge, 2008), 13.

The point of this discussion is to draw a link between animalistic shape shifting (both body and mind) and animal style of ornamentation. Taken together, they may illustrate a shamanistic journey, frozen in the moment of blending both aspects of the human and the animal¹²⁸.

With birds of prey in the picture, it is possible to add the inherent emotional dimension of falconry. Indeed, the relationship between the falconer and the bird may run deep—for the human at any rate—since great understanding, empathy and devotion must be displayed in the proper and constant care of the bird. In the process of accustoming one to the other, both remain together in close contact for a period of time¹²⁹. Although it cannot historically or statistically be measured for the raptor, “humans most obviously bonded with their birds.”¹³⁰ This attachment may explain their presence in the ritual context of pre-Christian Scandinavian burials. But falconry could also have been taken to be a form of shape shifting in the performance of *seiðr* that is related to the above mentioned *hugr* and *hamr*. Additionally, falconry can be related to the belief in *fylgjur*, another type of externalized “soul”. The *fylgja* is indeed an animal personification of an individual’s personal luck and destiny; it is attached to that individual throughout its life¹³¹. Perhaps the bird of prey is seen as a tangible and living *fylgja* belonging to the falconer. Perhaps it is its physical *hugr* in the shape (*hamr*) of a raptor. Perhaps falconry can be thought, in some respect, to be a shamanistic journey of both the body and the mind, given that, after all, the hunt is performed in the hostile and threatening environment of *Útgárðr*¹³².

¹²⁸ See Lotte Hedeager, *op. cit.*, (2010), 111-8; and Siv Kristoffersen, *op. cit.*, 261-272.

¹²⁹ See note 5.

¹³⁰ Thomas T. Allsen, *op. cit.*, 63. However, Phillip Glasier, himself a specialist falconer, claims that such an attachment to humans from the birds themselves are possible without it being related to food whatsoever. Phillip Glasier, *op. cit.*, 44-5.

¹³¹ Lotte Hedeager, *op. cit.*, (2008), 13; (2010), 111-8; Catharina Raudvere, *op. cit.*, (2008), 240.

¹³² The social performance of the falconer’s identity is irrelevant in *Útgárðr*/wilderness: whether he or she is politically powerful or the poorest of the slaves, the trappings of civilization hold not sway whatsoever in his or her interaction with Nature. The falconer is thus a different person than he or she is in a social context: the recognition of humanity can only be accomplished among other humans in a social setting; in the absence of such a context, a human in the wilderness is just another animal—no matter that it is wearing clothes and boots. To survive therein, he or she may either emulate animals’ strategies of survival or forcefully tame for him/herself a piece of nature. This thought expressed in this footnote is not academically informed; it is rather inspired by a novel from Jean Barbe, *Comment devenir un monstre*. (Montréal: Leméac, 2004), 331.

In any case, the indigenous Scandinavian animal style of ornamentation that developed around 500 AD presents us sometimes with interesting images of humans and birds inseparably linked or simply associated together. Let us now discuss some of them.

The human performance of birds of prey in figurative art

The sword chape from Birka

During the 1990's excavations at Birka, in the Black Earth settlement area, an unusually big (88mm long and 46mm wide) copper-alloyed sword scabbard was found (Fig. 15). The context of deposition is unclear, but Björn Ambrosiani dates it to the mid-tenth century¹³³. Both sides are differently molded, yet they both clearly depict a bird of prey in a dense open-work technique. Each creature stretches its wings against constraining knots of ribbons. One of the raptor is intertwined with a human form.



Fig. 15 Bronze sword chape with a man intertwined with a falcon, Birka. Photo Carl O. Löfman. After Ambrosiani.

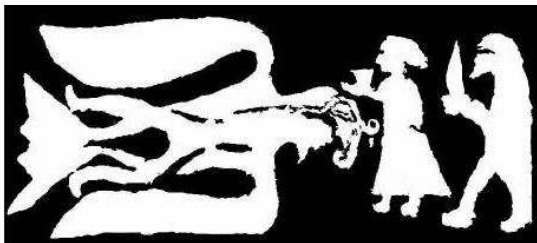


Fig. 16 Lärbro Stora Hammars III, detail. Drawing after Nylén & Lamm.

From the nature of the object, we can deduce that it was part of a sword's scabbard, and the sword is of course the hallmark of the warrior, a person of high social status. Such a person may have hunted, but it is only from the falcons that we may surmise some tentative connection with falconry. The human in their midst however, suggests perhaps some connection to shamanistic journeys in the shape of a bird of prey¹³⁴. It may refer to the possessor of the sword, but also to a mythological character, including a

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Fig. 17 Head and raven silver pendant, Hagebyhöga, Östergötland SHMM.

¹³³ Björn Ambrosiani, "The Birka Falcon," in *Eastern Connections. Part One: The Falcon Motif*, (ed.) Björn Ambrosiani. (Stockholm: Birka Studies 5, 2001), 11.

¹³⁴ Lotte Hedeager, *op. cit.*, (2011), 86.



Fig. 18 Pendant from Tissø. National Museum, Copenhagen

legendary hero¹³⁵. In all of these scenarios, it is possible to argue for a spiritual meaning to the depiction, which would relate to ideas of *hugr*, *hamr* or *fylgja* expressed above. Additionally, the merged figure is represented on the Gotlandic picture stone Hammars III from Lärbro parish (Fig. 16). The scene on the stone is interpreted to be Óðinn stealing the mead of poetry in eagle form¹³⁶, but this view has been challenged¹³⁷.

Similar birds of prey on scabbard chapes have been found in other parts of Scandinavia, but also in Iceland, Russia, the Polish coast and Bulgaria¹³⁸. It is unclear whether they too portray a human in the midst of the bird, as in the Birka chape. However, the similar thematic of human-bird hybridity (or metamorphosis) can be found in a number of different renditions. For example, a man's head with a raven spreading its wings on his pate has been found in Hagebyhöga, Sweden (Fig. 17). Otherwise, the motif has been studied in two pendants from Vidarshof in Norway and from Tissø in Denmark (Fig. 18), and also in a pin from Norelund, Gästrikland, in Sweden (Fig. 19)¹³⁹. In addition to the shamanistic aspect of birds of prey, this widespread icon in ornamentation nevertheless attests to its political significance in demonstrating power, aristocracy, and wealth¹⁴⁰.

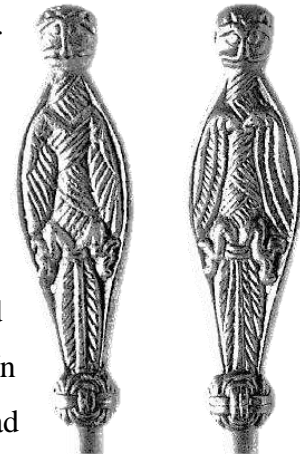


Fig. 19 Pin (front and back), Norelund, Gästrikland, Sweden. From Helmbrecht.

¹³⁵ A late 10th century gilded copper-alloyed mount of a bird of prey entwined with a man has been found in Uppåkra in 2011. It is stylistically very similar to the Birka chape, and Michaela Helmbrecht argues that it may represent the legendary character of Wayland the Smith. Michaela Helmbrecht, "A winged figure from Uppåkra," in *Fornvännen* 107. (2012), 171-8.

¹³⁶ Björn Ambrosiani, *op. cit.*, (2001), 11.

¹³⁷ Michaela Helmbrecht, *op. cit.*, 176.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 175.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 171-8.

¹⁴⁰ Kristina Jennbert, *op. cit.*, 174-79. As an additional interesting detail: "The material evidence of the Huns is restricted to metal objects, where polychrome gold fittings with eagle heads—often in pairs—dominate. The eagle or the falcon is a recurrent animal on gold fittings. It is known that Attila has two falcons as his heraldic weapon symbol [...]." Lotte Hedeager, *op. cit.*, (2011), 195.

The “valkyrja” figures

Hjalmar Stolpe’s 19th century Birka excavations yielded two small silver pendants of profiled women within female graves (Bj 968 (Fig. 20) and Bj 825 (Fig. 21)). In grave Bj 507, a similar woman is depicted on a silver ear-spoon (Fig. 23). These three Birka examples are all dated to the 10th century on the basis of accompanying grave finds¹⁴¹; we

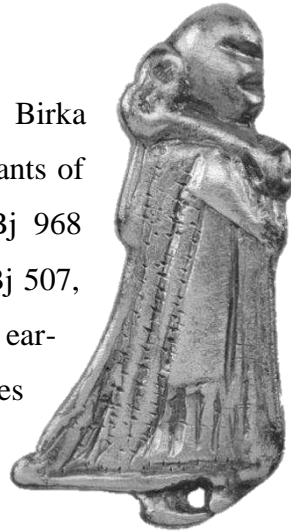


Fig. 20 Silver pendant A from Birka, grave 968. SHMM.



Fig. 21 Silver pendant B from Birka, grave 825. SHMM.

refer to them now as A, B and D respectively. Another similar pendant

has been found in the 8th or 9th century grave site of Sibble, Grödinge in Södermanland (C)

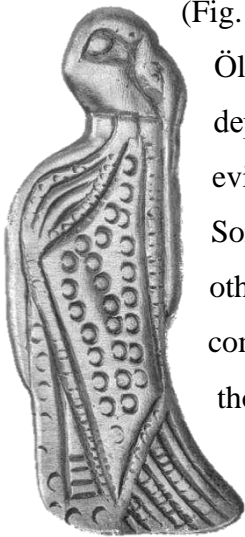


Fig. 22 Silver pendant C, Grödinge, Södermanland. SHMM.

(Fig. 22), and yet another from a 10th century silver hoard from Klinta, Öland (E) (Fig. 24)¹⁴². To these Viking Age examples of pendants depicting women’s dress and hair fashion, I would like to add the evidence of three *guldgubber*¹⁴³. Two of them belong to the settlement of Sorte Muld on the island of Bornholm (F) and G) (Figs. 25, 26), and the other one is from Tørring, Jutland (H) (Fig. 27). Their dating is complicated for various reasons. Although most of the *guldgubber* are thought to have been manufactured between the end of the 6th century and the beginning of the 8th century, these three “may be contemporary with the main group of narrative picture-stones from Gotland and the

so-called ‘Valkyrie-figures’”¹⁴⁴ referred to above.

¹⁴¹ Wilhelm Holmqvist, “The Dancing Gods,” in *Acta Archaeologica* 31 (1961), 112-3.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 113.

¹⁴³ The *guldgubber* are generally thought to be a sort of sacrificial payment due to their specific context of find. Rudolf Simek, “Goddesses, Mothers, Dísir: Iconography and interpretation of the female deity in Scandinavia in the first millennium,” in *Mythological Women. Studies in Memory of Lotte Motz (1922-1997)*, ed. Rudolf Simek and Wilhelm Heizmann. (Wien: Fassbaender, 2002), 103.

¹⁴⁴ Margrethe Watt, “Images of women on «Guldgubber» from the Merovingian Age,” in *Mythological Women. Studies in Memory of Lotte Motz (1922-1997)*, ed. Rudolf Simek and Wilhelm Heizmann. (Wien: Fassbaender, 2002), 83.

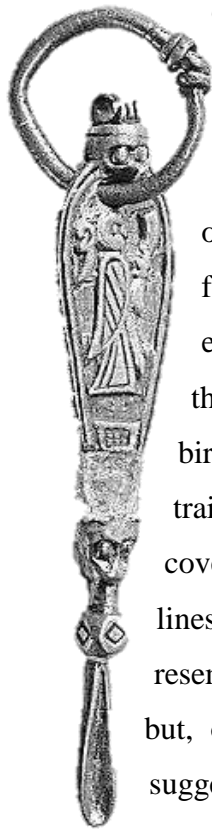


Fig. 23 Silver ear spoon D from Birka, grave 507. SHMM.

Altogether, these figures wear fairly similar clothing composed of different garments. It is clear from the different grooves and etchings that great care was taken in suggesting separate vestments of individual textures, fabrics and ornamentation schemes. The eight chosen figures bear some details that are worth exploring. One way or another, explicitly or not, the clothing of these figures can be associated to

birds. Among their different garments, A, B, D and E wear some back cloth, a train or a caftan pointing out at the back in the bottom and which does not cover their feet (except for C). That piece of garment is striped with vertical lines that are systematically, finely and diagonally ribbed; this motif may resemble that of feathers. That distinctive detail has most often been ignored, but, on the other hand, scholars have emphasizes the pleated nature of the suggested fabric or its rich pattern¹⁴⁵.



Fig. 24 Silver pendant E from Köping, Öland. SHMM.



Fig. 25 Gold foil F from Sorte Muld, Bornholm. After Watt (1999).



Fig. 26 Gold foil G from Sorte Muld, Bornholm. After Watt (1999).



Fig. 27 Gold foil H from Tørring, Jutland. After Watt (1999).

¹⁴⁵ Thor Ewing, *Viking Clothing*. (Stroud: Tempus, 2006), 50-2.

I suggest a different association. Indeed, there is a type of fabric that was produced all over Scandinavia which corresponds closely to this motif; it is the chevron twill, also known as the herringbone pattern (Fig. 28)¹⁴⁶. While herringbone is a good descriptive word, one can also see it as the barbs of feathers. Whether the women represented on the

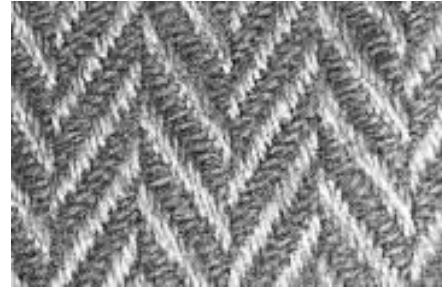


Fig. 28 Chevron twill. Wikipedia Commons (Twill).

pendants are wearing such a fabric or not, it is interesting to note that the garment is worn flaring out in the back, suggesting a bird's tail. Despite the fact that her feet are not sticking out under her dress, C conveys this especially well, considering that her face is pointed like a small beak and that the well-defined almond eye could be that of a bird of prey.

Besides this tenuous suggestion, a significant piece of garment worn by D, F, G and H also link these figures to birds: their cloak is obviously shaped like wings. The three *guldgubber*'s cloaks are even etched with stylized feathers. These "wings" are one of the reasons why all these figures are related to *valkyrjur* by early scholars and to the goddess Freyja somewhat more recently¹⁴⁷.

Rudolf Simek however rejects both interpretations¹⁴⁸. The case of one of his argument against a connection to Freyja is based on her ownership of a feather cloak; one of her well-known attribute that will be discussed in the last section of this paper. Simek's

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 141-5. Thor Ewing argues that this type of weave was less popular than other types of fabric, i.e. diamond twill. However, his evidence is mostly based on a book published in 1986. More textile finds are certain to have occurred between 1986 and 2006 (the publication year of his work), and even between then and today. This would skewer the proportions. Also, textiles are one of the first things to disappear in the ground, which means that we have in effect an incomplete idea of the popularity of different textile types in Late Iron Age Scandinavia. Nevertheless, whether herringbone fabric was common or popular is beside the point, here.

¹⁴⁷ Rudolf Simek challenges these interpretations; the main feature associating them as *valkyrjur* is the fact that they sometimes carry a drinking horn or a goblet. I avoid this particular argument and rather focus on the discussion related to the feather garment. Rudolf Simek, *op. cit.*, 93-213.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 110-1. The argument associating the pendants and the *guldgubber* to *valkyrjur* was based on the fact that these women sometimes carry a drinking vessel in their hand. I agree with Simek that such an association is unlikely, "as these guiding spirits of the dead where (*sic*) hardly likely to be depicted on brooches on female dresses, and thus hardly on the gold foil pictures either" (p. 110). The association to Freyja is based on three other arguments: the wearing of a cloak of feathers, a necklace and a large fibula. Simek summarize all three and argues against them thereafter. In this instance, I will restrict myself to addressing the argument on the cloak of feathers.

reasoning of dismissal is based on textual and art historical evidence. He points out that the first association of the feather cloak with Freyja dates to the 12th century Eddic poem *Prymskviða*, which he says was a source that Snorri Sturluson used in his 13th century *Prose Edda*. If that holds true, this means that the 6th to 8th centuries F, G, and H *guldgubber* cannot represent Freyja and her feather cloak. However logical this reasoning seems, a few things should be pointed out.

While it has not been universally accepted, it has been argued by John McKinnell that *Prymskviða*'s dating should be reevaluated to the 10th century¹⁴⁹. The scholar also shows that the poem may have been influenced by Anglo-Saxon lexical ideas pertaining especially to the feather cloak as a “mechanical” flying device. In the poem, it is called a *fjaðrharmr*, which effectively translates as a feather-shape or skin or cloak. Interestingly, stanzas 5 and 9 put the emphasis on the sound it makes, which, as Maria Elena Ruggerini argues, means that its user is granted flight without actually transforming in bird shape¹⁵⁰. The scholar further compares this usage with Snorri's. This will be discussed in greater detail later on, but it can be said that, in *Snorra Edda*, the means of flight is consistently specific to the type of bird: *valshamr* (falcon-shape), *arnarhamr* (eagle-shape), and so on. Moreover, the avian metamorphosis are complete. This leads Ruggerini to suggest that the *fjaðrhamr* constitutes “a departure from the archaic and shamanic conception of the experience of flight”¹⁵¹, as evidenced by Snorri's *valshamr*, and others. Feather cloaks have spiritual connotations in *Snorra Edda* that are not shared in *Prymskviða*. Moreover, Terry Gunnell independently finds that Snorri Sturluson did not use or did not know *Prymskviða* as a source to his work¹⁵². Therefore, Snorri had access to a different, possibly older tradition for avian shape shifting. This signifies incidentally that Simek's textual evidence for refusing an earlier than 12th century feather cloak is debatable. Indeed, he does not seem to take into account the possibility that this motif may have been transmitted both orally and ritualistically over time. While I share his skepticism to associating the F, G, and H

¹⁴⁹ John McKinnell, “Myth as therapy: The usefulness of *Prymskviða*,” in *Medium Aevum* 69 (2000), 1-20.

¹⁵⁰ Maria Elena Ruggerini, “Tales of Flight in Old Norse and Medieval English Texts,” in *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 2: 1 (2006), 211.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 232.

¹⁵² Terry Gunnell, “Eddic Poetry,” in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature*, ed. Rory McTurk. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 83.

guldgubber to Freyja specifically, these gold foils definitively depict feather cloaks worn by women.

Simek's second argument against a connection to the goddess is his relegation of the feather cloak as a rich cape, denoting wealth and power without any magical, shape shifting associations. This is based on comparative ethnological evidence of unconnected archaic societies, such as the Greenland Eskimos, the arctic Siberian tribes and the Maori of New Zealand¹⁵³. However, his dismissal of the magical properties of feather cloaks in this instance is puzzling, since in the same breath as his statement regarding the social status of the garment in those societies, he says that they were worn by the shamans. Why would such an association be superfluous to the Old Norse context, when other shamanistic societies made use of the feather cloaks in undoubtedly ritualistic circumstances? Maybe because our knowledge of Old Norse magic practices are based on textual evidence, and also because its origin with Freyja and the Vanir is owed equally to a unique and critically difficult 13th century written source. We simply cannot know for certain how ancient or young are any features contained within late Old Norse poem. But Simek does not say anything on that matter, and despite his argument against an association with Freyja, the *guldgubber* probably refer to an old shamanistic practice of avian shape shifting—in addition to denoting power and wealth. This may be owed to the prehistoric practice of bird disguise that we mentioned earlier in this paper or it may have been an intake from the magic practices of the Sámi or of other circumpolar societies. Similarly, the introduction of falconry in Scandinavia sometimes during the 6th century may have inspired this new figurative expression.

Although these women (A to H) may not be actively shape shifting in these particular instances, they do wear associative avian features. They do so passively, unlike the merging man and bird from the Birka chape. This does not mean however that the merging of women and birds of prey should be dismissed out of hand. Indeed, we should not forget that it was the female falcons and hawks that were most often preferred in falconry. A female bird of prey does not need to perform its gender identity—unlike the

¹⁵³ Rudolf Simek, *op. cit.*, 111 fn. 85.

social humans¹⁵⁴. This is something we will explore further when we consider the relationship between falconry and mythology, below.

The bird brooches

In Skåne and Öland, 5 to 6 cm long copper alloy bird brooches have been found in various contexts (Fig. 29). Those from Uppåkra were



Fig. 29 Bird brooch from Uppåkra, Skåne, U560. Length 58 mm. LUHM.

discovered out of depositional context by metal detectorists over a large area, making for an unidentifiable context of deposition. They are therefore interpreted as stray finds. However, some of them have also been found in cremations of unidentified individuals in the cemetery of Gårdlösa, also in Skåne. In Bornholm, they occur in pairs in female graves, which suggest that the brooches were used as part of dress. The same type of bird has also been identified in the Mälaren region, as the nose guard of a helmet found in the boat grave Vendel XIV (Fig. 30)¹⁵⁵. Stylistic comparison indicates that these brooches, which could also be used as pendants, are all dated to the 7th century.

Kristina Jennbert has studied them in detail and remarks that they all display ribbons and bands between their head, neck, body and wings. They have pronounced beaks and claws; their eyes are marked, and they also have ‘eyes’ where the wings meet the shoulders. Some of the birds also have a human head on their back; otherwise the combination of bands and wrist’s eyes make one also think of human facial features¹⁵⁶.

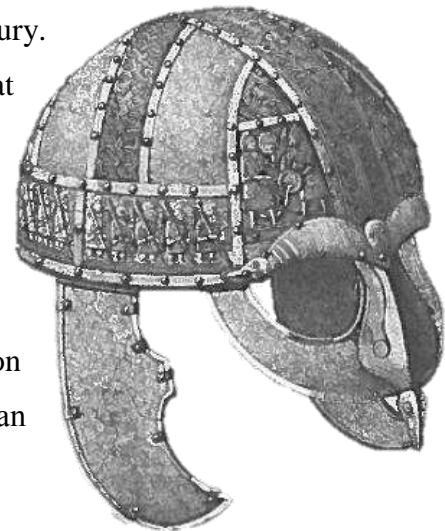


Fig. 30 Helmet with a bird on the nose guard, Vendel XIV. After Stolpe & Arne.

¹⁵⁴ On the performance of gender in Norse society, see (archaeology) Marie-Louise Stig Sørensen, “Gender, Material Culture, and Identity in the Viking Diaspora,” in *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 5 (2009), 253-69; (literature) Carol J. Clover, “Regardless of sex: Men, Women, and Power in Northern Europe,” *Speculum* 68 (1993), 362-387; Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women in Old Norse Literature—Bodies, Words, and Power*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 208.

¹⁵⁵ Kristina Jennbert, *op. cit.*, 174-9.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 174-9.

In the following of the above discussion, Jennbert argues that the brooches found in southern Sweden are associated with women while those from the center of the country are connected with men. She thinks that they are indicative of falconry. Stylistically and methodologically, it could be argued that this representation of bird may have evolved (from molding to open-work technique) to become the type of bird of prey that we have seen on the scabbard's chape above. Both creatures are bound by ribbons, and sometimes a man seems to be part of them, thoroughly. Details are different between the two periods, but the conceptualization of human-bird hybridization is obviously very old.

Jennbert muses on the significance of this, particularly when the bird brooches are found in female graves: “Whose is the prey?”¹⁵⁷. I do not think that either of them — the wearer, the represented human and even the bird itself — can be thought to be a prey: in the context of falconry, raptor and human are of one mind, they work together in symbiosis. Jennbert’s aim with this part of her book is admittedly to reveal the significance of the brooches in communicating social identity, lifestyle and networks. However right she is on these particular aspects, I think the object would also mean something deeper for the falconer him/herself. As stated before, training a hawk is demanding; it can become an obsession¹⁵⁸. A great deal of time, space and empathy are needed in order to recognize and palliate to the needs and cares of this wild animal¹⁵⁹. And so, if the bird brooches are indeed indicative of the sociality of falconry, I also think they can represent this human-animal symbiotic relationship, a shape shifting of sorts. Hawking is after all performed in the wilderness, a liminal space, where falconer and raptor share one will; they temporarily become one in the liminal wilderness.

Conclusion: the significance of the bird—the quest for knowledge

We have attempted in the introduction of this section to define a figurative representation of a shamanistic journey from the point of view of a falconer. We have

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 179.

¹⁵⁸ Wietske Prummel, *op. cit.*, 358: “The 18th-century Count of Ansbach was ruined by his addiction to falconry.”

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 357-77; Robin S. Oggins, *op. cit.*, 251.

followed that with different examples of ornaments, which, over all, show us an enduring though undoubtedly evolving meaning to the association of humans with birds of prey. Indeed, the earliest 7th century examples have changed stylistically in the course of the Vendel Period to the Viking Age, and some distinction seem to have emerged as well where women (passive avian association) and men (active transformation) are concerned. It is interesting to note that this “energetic” display is fundamentally consistent with that of Bronze Age Kivik “female” swan-like figures and the Kallsängen male figures that we discussed earlier in this paper.

What exactly is that evolving meaning? If a clear definition of what a shamanistic journey entails is not fully reached at this point, it is simply because we have dealt with images, not words. The first might be worth a thousand of the latter, but the transition from one to the other implies translation and interpretation. The scholarship on magic and shamanism in the North is studied from the comparison of anthropological and ethnological observations of the Sámi culture with the written and figurative remnants of the faded Norse civilization. Translation and interpretation: a seamless picture of what was and what wasn’t cannot be achieved. However, if our suggestion of a figurative shamanistic journey for the body, the mind and the *hugr*, *hamr* or *fylgja* of falconers is possible, we may conclude that the bird of prey had indeed a profound significance for those engaging with them. The avian relationship and the potential capacity of these individuals to shift their shape into birds of prey could be comparable to those same characteristic attributed to *berserkir* and *úlfheðnar*—as these things are interpreted from figurative ornamentations. If Neil Price and Clive Tolley have successfully studied the relationship of these martial characters in connection to Norse magic, *seiðr*¹⁶⁰, it follows that the same should also be done with birds of prey.

Such a study requires a literary support; and indeed, in that domain, the significance of the bird and of other animals has been studied extensively¹⁶¹. We will come to examine the features of mythological avian shape shifting in the next section, but before we consider

¹⁶⁰ See note 81.

¹⁶¹ Lotte Hedeager, *op. cit.*, (2011), 86; Anne Sofie Gräslund, “Wolves, serpents, and birds. Their symbolic meaning in Old Norse belief,” in *Old Norse religion in long-term perspectives. (op. cit.)*, 124-9.

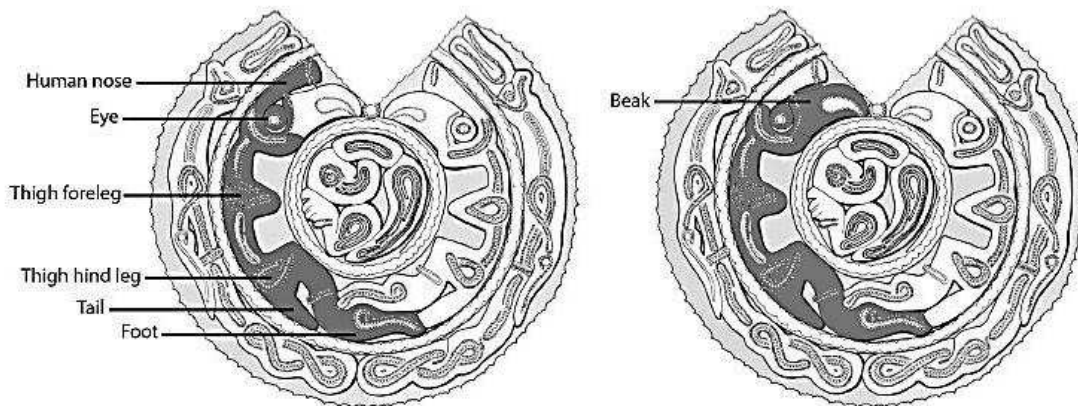


Fig. 31 Hybrid motif on the bracteates from Teig, Rogaland, in Norway, with the human head marked (left); hybrid motif with the bird’s head marked (right). Modified by Kristofferson; After Hauck.

that world of words, we may extract some additional meaning to the figurative representations of humans and birds that we have outlined above, in addition to others that we will briefly mention.

Siv Kristoffersen has studied, from the perspective of human-animal hybridity, two D-type gold bracteates of Style 1 dated to the 5th-6th centuries and found in Teig, Rogaland county, in south-western Norway (Fig. 31). She observes, by shifting her perspective and her focus on the ornamentation, that “body parts from a bird, a human and an animal are integrated in the motif”¹⁶². The human’s and the bird’s head occupy the same space: shifting our focus and perspective on the whole motif permits us to take in this metamorphosis. She compares this positioning with that of the Vendel XIV helmet’s nose guard that we mentioned above in relation to the 7th century bird brooches (Fig. 30). The same mingling can also be found on C-type bracteates (Fig. 32)¹⁶³. Michael Neiß compares this figurative scheme to a puzzle picture. He explains that a picture containing multiple motifs cannot be perceived simultaneously by the viewer, who must go back and forth between observing each of them¹⁶⁴. Neiß has found



Fig. 32 Gold-bracteates from the Migration period depicting a man with a bird on his head. (Left) Skåne; (right) Fynen. After Steenstrup.

¹⁶² Siv Kristoffersen, *op. cit.*, 264.

¹⁶³ *Ibid*, 264.

¹⁶⁴ Michael Neiß, “3D laser scanning as a tool for Viking Age studies,” in *Virtual Archaeology, non-destructive methods of prospections, modeling, reconstructions. Proceedings of the First International Conference held at the State Hermitage Museum 4-6 June 2012*. (St. Petersburg: The State Hermitage Publishers, 2013a), 171.

that, in the context of animal art, a frequent anthropomorphic example “features a head that might be perceived as a bird in its own right”¹⁶⁵. The researcher further asks if such a puzzle picture could refer to one of Óðinn’s name, *arnhöfði* (eagle head). We will not answer that question, but it is interesting to note that the positioning of the bird in ornamentation is almost consistently close to the human head (Fig. 33).

Were we to return to the three types of objects and ornamentation that we have presented above (the sword chape, the “*valkyrja*” pendants, along with the *guldgubber*, and the bird brooches), it is possible to make the same observation as Neiß. In the case of the sword chape, the human body is aligned with that of the falcon, indeed placing both human’s and bird’s heads closely together. The “*valkyrja*” pendants and the *guldgubber*

clearly depict women with passive association to birds of prey through their clothing. We do not see on them or by them a bird’s head. However passive they are in showing avian attributes, perhaps they may already embody the bird without having to display any effort in doing so, contrarily to the more masculine figures that are active in their transformation. This may be reflected by the goddess Freyja who owns a falcon form, but is never actually described to transform into that shape; and yet, her powers cannot be readily denied. We must remember also that the female hawks were preferred in the hunt. Nevertheless, that is a discussion that would need to be taken elsewhere. The bird brooches are sporadically represented with a human head on their back, between the top of the wings and the bird’s head. Else, the bird’s head is sometimes suggested by being replaced by a man’s whose beard is pointed as a beak. It also

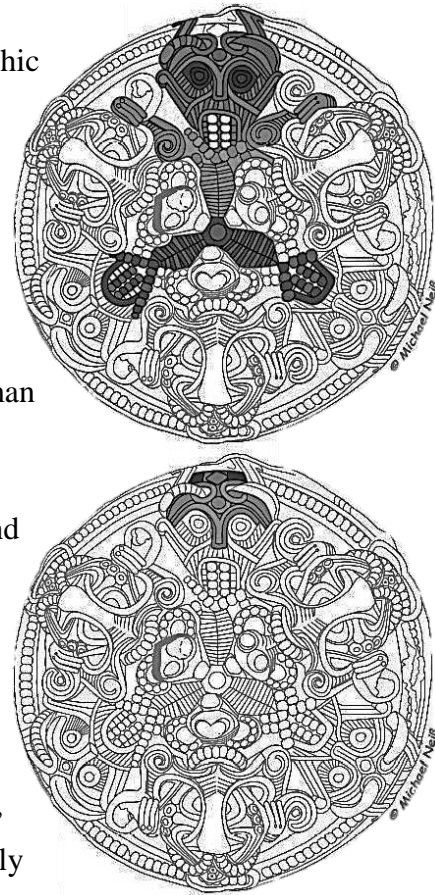


Fig. 33 Puzzle pictures in the form of an anthropomorphic motif and a bird. Suggested reconstruction of a circular baroque shaped brooch from Vestervang, Denmark. Roskilde Museum. By Neiß (2013b).

¹⁶⁵ Michael Neiß, “Viking Age Animal Art as a Material Anchor? A New Theory Based on a Head Motif,” in *The Head Motif in Past Societies*, eds. Leszek Gardęła and Kamil Kajkowski. (Bytów: West-Cassubian Museum, 2013b), 78.

happens that no human features can be determined. A sizable portion of avian ornamental features may thus be located in connection to the head, but also to the whole body. What does that entail?

Though this stems from a study within literature, the most famous birds of Old Norse mythology and cosmology are Huginn and Muninn, whose name translate as Thought and Memory. Pernille Hermann is one scholar among many others who observes that the two ravens are thus the animal embodiments of the Old Norse concepts of wisdom, cleverness and intelligence. That birds in general were conceptualized as such is common to many traditions around the world and across historical periods¹⁶⁶. Birds of prey, stylistically associated with a human head, or vice versa, can therefore be thought to share these connections well before Scandinavia became literate. To push this idea further, it is accordingly possible that avian shape shifting was the actual and spiritual way of acquiring knowledge and wisdom. Lotte Hedeager and Anne Sofie Gräslund argue that the eagle signifies Óðinn's power "during a journey to the other world"¹⁶⁷, and it will be shown below that the god's avian transformation translates as a practical quest for knowledge.

The same can be speculated from pre-Christian Scandinavian falconry. If we are to accept the association made earlier between the *fylgja*, *hugr*, *hamr* and birds of prey, then the falconer could effectively be communing, in the course of the hunt, with the host of spirits and forces of nature inhabiting Útgarðr. Old Norse religious studies show that pre-Christian religions were based on rituals and behaviours that were not necessarily distinguished from normal, everyday behaviour, both at the level of the individual and the community¹⁶⁸. It is thus tempting to see falconry as an additional form of ritual, where visits to the wilderness could be made and sacrifices were performed as part of an expected successful hunting behaviour; much like, perhaps, the Sámi hunters mentioned earlier¹⁶⁹.

¹⁶⁶ Pernille Hermann, "Key Aspects of Memory and Remembering in Old Norse-Icelandic Literature," in *Minni and Munnin, Memory in Medieval Nordic Culture*, eds. Pernille Hermann, Stephen A. Mitchell, Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 16. Lotte Hedeager also makes this connection. Lotte Hedeager, *op. cit.*, (2011), 88.

¹⁶⁷ Lotte Hedeager, *op. cit.*, 88.

¹⁶⁸ Catharina Raudvere, *op. cit.*, (2008), 235.

¹⁶⁹ Lauri Honko, Senni Timonen and Michael Branch (eds.), *op. cit.*, 117-139.

IV. Shifty gods

In our discussion so far, we have dealt with archaeological and art historical evidence for falconry in Scandinavia according to the chronology of each of these types of sources. We will now consider the references to falconry as they may have been recorded in written form. The Old Norse mythology that we know is patchy and incoherent. It has also been mostly preserved by medieval Icelandic Christian men who translated into written form an older but still living, evolving oral culture sometimes between the 12th and 14th century. Although space does not allow me to present a critical analysis of the selected texts, my use of them is careful. The following discussion aims to inquire as to the mythological traces of the spiritual connotations of falconry, for which I have argued above.

Introduction: Shape shifting and other means of transformation

Shape shifting has been studied extensively in the literature¹⁷⁰, and Catharina Raudvere remarks that this concept is so pervasive within the Old Norse texts that the phenomenon “is hardly regarded as magical at all in many of the sagas”¹⁷¹. Neil Price finds, as did Lotte Hedeager from her own archaeological perspective¹⁷², that “[shape shifting] is not so much a dimension of sorcery as something more fundamental about the way in which human beings—and, by extension, animals—were understood in the Viking Age”¹⁷³. That does not necessarily mean that the Norse people considered shape shifting as common place and normal; one must distinguish between the sagas’ audience and the sagas themselves as the vessel of merging facts and supernatural elements¹⁷⁴.

¹⁷⁰ Neil Price has studied the subject from the perspective of Sámi shamanism but mostly from that of the óðinic warriors *berserkir* and *úlfheðnar*. His book presents a very interesting and critical assessment of the previous studies on the subject, and I therefore refer the reader to it. Neil Price, *op. cit.*, (2002), 435.

¹⁷¹ This is a quote from Neil Price, *op. cit.*, (2002), 364; who interprets Raudvere’s findings. He specifically refers to Catharina Raudvere, “Now you see her, now you don’t: some notes on the conception of female shape-shifters in Scandinavian tradition,” in *The concept of the Goddess*, eds. Sandra Billington and Miranda Green. (London: Routledge, 1996), 41-55; which I have not had the opportunity to consult for myself.

¹⁷² Lotte Hedeager, *op. cit.*, (2010), 113.

¹⁷³ Neil Price, *op. cit.*, (2002), 364.

¹⁷⁴ See Ármann Jakobsson’s useful discussion on the subject in “Beast and Man: Realism and the Occult in Egils Saga,” in *Scandinavian Studies* 83: 1 (2011), 29-44.

Avian shape shifting however does not seem comparable to the martial attitude of the most recognizable Old Norse shape shifters, namely the *berserkir* and the *úlfheðnar*. The comparative understanding of the terms forming these names indeed strengthens the association we have made above regarding the figurative representation of birds of prey with the human head and its mental faculties, as well as the spiritual nature of avian transformation. The construction of the words *berserkr* and *úlfheðinn* emphasize the material and assembled character of these warriors' guises. Indeed, the sark or the shirt (*serkr*) and the jacket of fur or skin (*heðinn*) are garments that have been treated (skinned off the animal, scraped, stretched, etc.) and put together (sewn). That is not to say however that these warriors shape shifted exclusively at the level of the body. *Boðvarr bjarki* is an example of a metaphysical metamorphosis, which is characterized as happening outside of his sleeping body¹⁷⁵.

Contrastingly, avian shape shifters have no specific Old Norse name which may hint at their means of transformation, although the device of the transformation can be found in the mythological corpus: the *fjarðhamr* and the [type of bird]-*hamr*. However, the materiality of such devices is ambiguous. *Hamr* may be understood as a substantial "skin" or "slough", but also as a conceptual "shape" or "form". In both categories, the raw nature of the *hamr* is made evident: it is not man-made or manufactured in the same way that a piece of clothing is. The slough can be shed or cast (*hleypta hömum*) or the form can be (ex)changed (*skipta hömum*), but the essence of the *hamr* itself is unaltered in both its fabric and fabrication, unlike an animal's skin made into a shirt. *Hamr* is the visible and tangible shape that the insubstantial *hugr* takes when it is acting outside of the physical body¹⁷⁶.

It is the historical study of these terms that permit us to say that Old Norse beliefs in *hugr*, *hamr*, *fylgja*, and other concepts for the 'soul' may have permeated the pre-Christian Scandinavian perception of one's spiritual identity. It seems indeed to merge together notions of physicality and insubstantiality that are represented in the various literary descriptions of *berserkir*, *úlfheðnar*, and other animal shape changers. The falconers' will

¹⁷⁵ *Hrólfs saga kraka*, ed. Desmond Slay. (Copenhagen: Den Arnamagnæske Kommission, 1960), 132.

¹⁷⁶ Catharina Raudvere, *op. cit.*, (2008), 241.



Fig. 34 Men in animal disguise from the Toroslunda stamp, Sweden. After Arbman (1980).

take the material form of the bird, a concrete *hamr* or *fylgja* released for the hunt. This can be thought of as a ritualistic performance accomplished in the liminal space of the wilderness, and it may share some similarities with the type of sacred performance of dramas for which Terry Gunnell argues. Primarily based on the eddic corpus, but also on a multitude of archaeological finds, the scholar demonstrates convincingly that disguises and costumes were used to alter one's identity, and ultimately, one's humanity (Fig. 34). At the proper place, in the proper context, and with the proper accessories, one could *become* a mythical character, as well as an animal, in the created liminal space and time of the settled area (*Miðgarðr*)¹⁷⁷. Falconry is performed, but not for a human audience. Similarly, its spatial liminality needs not be reproduced or constructed since it is already being carried out in *Útgarðr*. Aside from these important details, the falconer becomes its bird of prey, fulfilling its will in catching a prey. Moreover, considering the permeating association of birds as observers of the world and gatherer of knowledge—as *Huginn* and *Munnin* are wont to do—the shape-shifted falconer can thus, perhaps, be taken to accumulate numinous wisdom in the same way.

These overall performances were otherwise brought together and fossilized in typical themes and images which were successively carried over long periods of time by the oral culture, in the form of poetry and mythical and legendary narratives, but also by the artistic production of the society. In the end, dramatic reenactments may be necessary for humans to reach a liminal space and state of mind, but the same cannot be said for the gods themselves. These beings are not as magically restricted as humans; this is why myths are the ideal vessel of communication for the temporary performance of an animal identity. And since gods are described to shift their shape into that of birds of prey, perhaps that

¹⁷⁷ Terry Gunnell, *op. cit.*, (1995), 414.

particular type of transformation is a long-time metaphor that has evolved conjointly with the practice of falconry hunting¹⁷⁸.

Shape shifting gods and mythological beings

At this point of the paper, I hope to have brought together sufficient evidence suggestive of a link between the practice of falconry and its influence in certain beliefs, rituals and stylistic outputs. Before becoming a folkloristic element¹⁷⁹ however, shape changing was certainly found in the Norse mythology. This is indeed what we will briefly explore in the following pages.

Although animal metamorphosis occurs in nearly every types of the Old Norse/Icelandic literature, avian transformation is comparatively rarer. We will however focus on the evidence provided us in the anonymous poem of *Þrymskviða* (10th-11th century)¹⁸⁰ and in *Skáldskaparmál*¹⁸¹, which is attributed to Snorri Sturluson (1179-1241) ca. 1220. Because Maria Elena Ruggerini has already made a very convincing and thorough analysis of flight in Old Norse mythology¹⁸², and because I agree with most of her observations, I will be brief in summarizing the relevant aspects of her findings.

The scholar has identified three ways in which mythological beings achieve avian transformation or flight. The first one pertains to *jötnar*. In several instances they appear *í arnarham* (in the shape of an eagle) and they also *taka sér arnarhamr* (take the shape of an

¹⁷⁸ Kristinna Jennbert suggests a similar connection between prehistoric practices of meaningful interactions with animals that would have changed over millennia into bodily metaphors as we seem to find them in funerary contexts for example. These metaphors are thought by Jennbert to constitute cosmological themes after still longer periods of time, resulting in the mythology that was recorded later on. Kristinna Jennbert, *op. cit.*, 137-8. The next question regards the age of the Norse gods as we know them. At any rate, Lotte Hedeager has her own ideas pertaining to Óðinn from the 5th century AD on. Lotte Hedeager, *op. cit.*, (2011), 286.

¹⁷⁹ Such as the motif of the Swan maiden: Arthur T. Hatto, "The Swan Maiden: A Folk-Tale of North Eurasian Origin?," in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 24:2 (1961), 326-352.

¹⁸⁰ *Þrymskviða* is contained within the *Poetic Edda*, and it seems that it was unknown to Snorri. Terry Gunnell, *op. cit.*, (2005), 83.

¹⁸¹ Contained within the larger body of work of the *Prose Edda*, *Skáldskaparmál* (Poetic diction) is a prosimetrum discussion between the gods Ægir and Bragi about the composition of skaldic poetry, the construction and meaning of kennings and their mythological background. Peter Orton, "Pagan Myth and Religion," in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature*. (*op. cit.*), 302-19.

¹⁸² Maria Elena Ruggerini, *op. cit.*, 201-238.

eagle)¹⁸³. Due to their antiquity, she argues, they may hold ancient rights of transformation into that specific shape. This is based on her analysis of the late 9th century skaldic poem *Haustlong* by Þjóðólfr ór Hvini, in which Þjazi seems entitled to fly in accordance with ancient law¹⁸⁴. It is unclear if the *jötnar* don a special garment which bestows that power, but if that is the case (from the use of *-hamr*), that garment is their own property. It is also relevant to mention that in avian form, *jötnar* steal or desire goddesses, because they effectively gain in this way the cultural knowledge of the Æsir, whereas they are mostly associated with the primordial forces of nature. As birds of prey, they literally acquire knowledge—or die in the attempt.

The second type of avian shape shifting is characterized by the mischievous employ of magic, evidenced by the formulation *bregða sér í líki e-s* (turn one's self into the shape of something/someone) in order to trick others on one's identity. Óðinn is a master at this type of magic, which enables him to transform into an eagle, thereby escaping the *jötunn* Suttungr with the mead of poetry¹⁸⁵. It is interesting to observe that there is no mention of Óðinn's *hamr* in this context of transformation. It is equally interesting to note that, by stealing the mead of poetry in the shape of a bird, the god gains one of the most significant founts of wisdom known to the Old Norse world.

The third type of avian metamorphosis is somewhat more complicated. It involves the word compound that we have mentioned above regarding the giants: *arnarhamr* and *valshamr*, but also the less specific *fjaðrhamr* used in *Prymskviða*¹⁸⁶. The nature of these terms is ambiguous because of the word construction with *hamr*. It is indeed unclear if it refers to a piece of clothing that is worn or if it is the immaterial *hugr* in bird-shape (*hamr*).

¹⁸³ Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*, tr. Anthony Faulkes (London: Dent, 1987), 60, 64. Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Skáldskaparmál I*. (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1998), 2 line 4, 2 line 15, 4 line 39 to 5 line 1.

¹⁸⁴ Maria Elena Ruggerini, *op. cit.*, 208. That poem is quoted by Snorri in *Skáldskaparmál* following his prose account of the theft of Iðunn and her apples.

¹⁸⁵ Snorri Sturluson, *op. cit.*, (1987), 63; Snorri Sturluson, *op. cit.*, (1998), 4 line 38.

¹⁸⁶ Maria Elena Ruggerini, *op. cit.*, 211. Compared to the *valshamr* and the *arnarhamr*, the *fjaðrhamr* is less specific, and for Ruggerini, this is indicative of foreign influences on the present version of the myth, which origin's is probably older than the 13th century, possibly the 10th or 11th century — it is in the 13th century texts that *fjaðrhamr* eclipses the bird compounds. From the use of this new word, it can be thought that the feather garment grants the ability to fly, while no shape shifting is required. The devalued terminology seems to reflect a change in the Scandinavian rationalization of flight. On the dating argument, see John McKinnell, *op. cit.*, 1-20.

In *Skáldskaparmál*, the Old Norse text does not necessarily lend itself to the first clothing-interpretation, but in *Prymskviða*, *fjaðrhamr* does so readily¹⁸⁷. Freyja and Frigg are said to own such an avian-*hamr*, but in Frigg's case, her ownership is only attested by Snorri, whereas Freyja's is also found independently within *Prymskviða*¹⁸⁸. In any case, neither of the goddesses is described wearing it or taking that shape; instead, it is Loki who borrows it (except in *Prymskviða* where Þórr borrows) and transforms. It is nevertheless assumed that Freyja can change her shape to that of the bird of prey. Her power is implicit.

Conclusion: Loki in Geirrøðargarðr, two interpretations¹⁸⁹

In the myths, Loki changes three times his shape to that of a falcon: he rescues Iðunn from Þjazi and he transforms for his own amusement in the prologue to the myth of Þórr visiting Geirrøðargarðr; both in *Skáldskaparmál*. In the third instance, contained in *Prymskviða*, he goes to Jötunheimr for information. His avian metamorphosis is interesting for several reasons. Indeed, compared with the *jötnar* and with Óðinn, he shows no mastery of either transformation or flight. Indeed, he must borrow a bird-*hamr* since he doesn't own one, or else he does not know the magic that governs this specific changing of shape. Moreover, in his recapture of Iðunn from Þjazi, he only escapes the latter because the Æsir light fires under the giant eagle's path. In fact, as Ruggerini remarks in a kenning by the author of *Haustlǫng*, the skald Þjóðólfr ór Hvini, Loki is likened to the eagle Þjazi's offspring (st. 12, line 7: *oglis barn*)¹⁹⁰. His inadequacies at avian shape shifting are thus effectively emphasized.

However, Loki also gains valuable knowledge in all three instances of his metamorphosis. Indeed, in *Prymskviða*, he learns of Þórr's hammer's whereabouts and of Þrymr's demands of exchange. In *Skáldskaparmál*, if Iðunn can be a source of cultural

¹⁸⁷ Maria Elena Ruggerini, *op. cit.*, 210-1.

¹⁸⁸ Snorri Sturluson, *op. cit.*, (1987), 60, 81; Snorri Sturluson, *op. cit.*, (1998), 2 line 11, 24 lines 22-3. "Prymskviða," in *Eddukvæði I*, eds. Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason. (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenska Fornritafélag, 2014), 422 st. 3.

¹⁸⁹ References to the myth correspond to (Skáldskaparmál) Snorri Sturluson, *op. cit.*, (1987), 81; and Snorri Sturluson, *op. cit.*, (1998), 24 lines 19-36; (Prymskviða) "Prymskviða," in *Eddukvæði I*, eds. Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason. (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenska Fornritafélag, 2014), 422-7.

¹⁹⁰ Maria Elena Ruggerini, *op. cit.*, 208-9. The kenning is situated stanza 12, line 7, or stanza 103, line 11 of Snorri Sturluson, *op. cit.*, (1998), 33.

knowledge to the *jötnar*, as suggested above, she is equally valuable to the gods, as she is the only one who harvests successfully the apples of youth (a literal kind of culture!). Loki retrieves her in falcon form. Finally, Loki's transformation in the prologue to the tale of Þórr visiting Geirrðargarðr, and his acquisition of wisdom and knowledge thereof, merits a longer and fuller treatment. Two interpretations will be proposed, which cancel out and unify at the same time Loki's acquisition of knowledge. The first one relates to shamanistic journeys, and the second to falconry. This will effectively take into account nearly every piece of evidence that has been gathered throughout this paper.

To start with, it can be useful to reiterate a previous argument from an earlier section of this paper, which regards the Old Norse word *garðr*. It has been said that it translates as a fenced area, and that it is used in the cosmological distinction of the settled space of Miðgarðr against the uncivilized wilderness of Útgarðr¹⁹¹. The same distinction exists at the mythological level: the cultured Ásgarðr opposed to Jötunheimr's primal nature. The location of Geirrðargarðr can be likened to that of another *jötunn*'s abode in the mythology: that of Útgarða-Loki described in *Gylfaginning*¹⁹². The latter is clearly situated in Jötunheimr, but it isn't so clear for Geirrðargarðr. However, since Geirrðr is a *jötunn*, it is fair to consider his domain within Jötunheimr too¹⁹³. It thus comes as evidence that Geirrðargarðr is, for the Æsir, similar in respect to the human's Útgarðr; it is fundamentally a liminal space.

In the prologue to Þórr's visitation there, Loki borrows Frigg's *valshamr* to fly according to his own amusement. This is an anomaly for two reasons. This is the only instance where Frigg is associated with the *valshamr*, which makes scholars think that it is an invention from Snorri¹⁹⁴. Also, Loki takes this form for fun¹⁹⁵. He flies for curiosity's

¹⁹¹ See note 70.

¹⁹² For a discussion of the linguistic origins of Útgarða-Loki, see Per Vikstrand, *op. cit.*, 354-7.

¹⁹³ The association of Geirrðargarðr to Jötunheimr is not recent; it is already implied in late 19th century: Viktor Rydberg, *Teutonic Mythology*, tr. Rasmus B. Anderson. (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1891), 211.

¹⁹⁴ Maria Elena Ruggerini, *op. cit.*, 230; Ingunn Ásdísardóttir, "Frigg and Freyja: One Great Goddess or Two?," in *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature. Sagas and the British Isles, Preprint Papers of the Thirteenth International Saga Conference, Durham and York 6th-12th August 2006*, eds. John McKinnell, David Ashurst and Donata Kick. (Durham: The Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006), 421.

sake into Geirrøðargarðr, this wild other world, where he himself has crossed the boundaries of his own identity and of his own body. This would be modeled after Óðinn who is said to do the same in *Ynglinga saga*, chapter 7¹⁹⁶. Loki is obviously undergoing a shamanistic journey, a quest for knowledge in the form of a bird of prey. His experience takes a turn for the worse however, when Geirrøðr sees him through the window of his castle and wants him brought to him. The *jötunn* successively locks falcon-Loki in a chest for three months without food.

From the stance of the shamanistic journey, this seems rather similar to the adverse effects of one of Óðinn's spells against spirit-riding magicians, which is contained in the *ljóðatal* section of *Hávamál*, stanza 155¹⁹⁷. That spell effectively keeps the spirit of a shaman from returning to its body. Indeed, the last two lines cannot be more specific in that both *hamr* and *hugr* are affected: *sinni heimhama / sinni heimhuga*. If this doesn't kill the shaman outright, it does keep both body and mind in darkness and in starvation, like Loki's *hamr* in the chest. Obviously, Loki was foolish to go into such a journey: he was clearly unprepared against the dangers. One might think that, similar to his questionable prowess at flying against Þjazi in eagle form, he is as a child, uninitiated and wilfully careless of the dangers. Loki's systematic negligence can explain why he does not own his own falcon form: one must be wise in the first place to take that avian shape.

Were we to take his metamorphosis in a more literal sense, in that he is an actual bird of prey, an obvious correlation to falconry emerges. As we consider Geirrøðr's order for the capture of the falcon, we may well think of him as an eager, if somewhat cruel falconer. What happens next is a description of Loki perched atop the wall of the hall, relishing in the efforts of the man climbing up to retrieve him. When he decides at last to fly off though, he finds he is unable to, since his feet are stuck. At this point of the tale, it is possible to compare Loki to a nestling (eyass), as Þjóðolfr ór Hvíni has done in a

¹⁹⁵ Maria Elena Ruggerini, *op. cit.*, 207-8.

¹⁹⁶ Snorri Sturluson, "*Ynglinga saga*," in *Heimskringla I*, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson. (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenska Fornritafélag, 1941), 18-9.

¹⁹⁷ "*Hávamál*," in *Eddukvæði I*, eds. Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason. (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenska Fornritafélag, 2014), 353-4.

kenning¹⁹⁸. The natural nesting areas of birds of prey are crevasses in high rocky cliff walls. They do not build nests per se, but they are known to occupy abandoned ones from other avian species¹⁹⁹. His inability to escape his captor can be taken for the fact that he is still too young to fly properly or with enough strength which would enable a greater speed. Accordingly, a falconer would look for a new eyass away from civilization, in the crevasses of cliff walls, which he would have to climb like it is described here.

Until the eyass is ready for the actual training for falconry, it would be taken care of and nurtured carefully. Before beginning the proper training for hunting on the command of and release by the falconer, and the taking down of preys bigger than itself, the hawk needs to become accustomed to humans, something we have briefly mentioned above. This process is called “manning”²⁰⁰, and to carry it through properly, the bird’s eyelids are sewn shut, which is called “seeling”²⁰¹. This is important because every nervous reaction from the bird stems from its sight. Darkness automatically calms it, rendering it more docile and receptive to manning. Additionally, it is kept hungry in order to coach it to associate food with diverse cues created by the falconer: its given name or some words, a whistling song and some other such things²⁰². In the mythical prologue, Geirrøðr shows his caricatured know-how by keeping his newly acquired falcon in the darkness of a chest and by starving it for three months; such a length of time is course exaggerated in the context of actual falconry.

As manning is accomplished, which is to say that the bird becomes less afraid of humans in a civilized setting, the eyelid stiches are loosened incrementally. In Loki’s case though, he is let out of the chest, and now his real training for chasing and killing bigger preys may begin. That however is a process that is not described in the prologue to the myth. We can argue that Loki either shows his gratitude for his release or that he attempts

¹⁹⁸ See discussion above (page 54, fn. 188).

¹⁹⁹ Robin S. Oggins, *op. cit.*, 13, 54; Thomas T. Allsen, *op. cit.*, 62, 248.

²⁰⁰ See note 5.

²⁰¹ To seel is “the Eastern practice of sewing a newly-trapped hawk’s eyelids together with silk thread, to save using a hood. Never done in the West”. Phillip Glasier, *op. cit.*, 301. Glasier’s unequivocal denial of practice in the West may be biased and historically inaccurate, since the use of the hood for keeping the bird in the dark has only been introduced in Europe following Frederick Hohenstaufen’s initiative in the 13th century.

²⁰² Phillip Glasier, *op. cit.*, 44-5; 119-124. Thomas T. Allsen, *op. cit.*, 62-3.

to redeem his life when he swears to Geirrøðr that he would get Þórr to come to Geirrøðargarðr, but whether or not Loki acts according to fear or conditioning, he does as he is bid, and the bigger Thunder god is effectively his prey.

This prologue is consistent with the acquisition of birds of prey in the wild. It is also consistent with some of the most important features of raptor training in falconry, such as manning and starving as a mean of associating food with hunting behaviour following a human command. As a cautionary tale, it exemplifies the dangers an avian shape shifter may encounter when engaging in a shamanistic journey outside of its body. Some may think that these interpretations may contradict each other from the point of view of the acquisition of knowledge and wisdom. Indeed, on the one hand, the shaman-Loki learns nothing from his capture in spirit form; on the other hand, he learns to hunt prey bigger than himself in the context of falconry. However, if we consider that Loki doesn't actually die in his spiritual travel and that it is not he who gains wisdom but rather the recipient of this mythical story, both interpretations effectively agree with each other regarding the acquisition of knowledge. Furthermore, from the point of view of the falconer, falconry is threatened by the same deprivations Loki experienced. Indeed, the loss of the bird by injury leading to death or by its escape is akin to closing the lid on an emotional chest. It also means that no spoils of the hunt are to be had that day. Darkness in the sense of mourning and starvation.

V. General conclusion

From the onset, this paper has set out to discuss the possible emerging context and development in time of the practice of falconry in Scandinavia. This has been carried out with the aid of different disciplinary approaches. Without necessarily embedding them in the text of this research, we have sought to answer specific questions, which have led us to conclude that it is quite possible that falconry in pre-Christian Scandinavia had a spiritual, shamanistic or ritual dimension.

How did Late Iron Age Scandinavian society influence falconry , and how did the practice influence that society thereafter?

In the course of this paper I have attempted to show that falconry may have been influenced by a multitude of factors in ways that probably made the practice fundamentally different in its heathen Scandinavian context from that of feudal Christian Europe. I first traced back to prehistory the somewhat symbiotic nature of human-animal relationships in the North—as evidenced by rock carvings of humans disguised as animals and by the placement of animal body parts in a funerary context. Following that, I showed how a certain continuity in that relationship can be detected in the figurative art of the Late Iron Age—as evidenced by multiple examples of hybrid motifs. As this pre-Christian Scandinavian perspective to animals is revealed, it is possible to suggest that falconry may have been influenced by this relationship, and that it subsequently had an effect on that society. The nature of that influence seems to be predominantly spiritual or shamanistic. This of course hinges upon the acceptance of an eastern introduction of falconry into Scandinavia by Eastern, shamanistic tribes such as the Huns, the Alans, the Sarmatians or the Vandals. The contrary western importation would otherwise possibly carry Christian and feudal connotations which may go against the prehistoric human-animal relationship.

Was falconry sacred? Was it ritualistic?

The answer to these questions is complicated and branches out to nearly every aspect of this paper. When we ask whether falconry may have held some sacral ideas or some ritualistic features, it is clear that such a spiritual dimension cannot have been shared

by Continental Europe. This is, for example, because falconry seems to be represented in the funerary practices of the social elite through the ritual sacrifice of birds of prey. However, such a thing speaks more of the ritualistic nature of the funerary ceremony than to falconry itself. Although we cannot pretend to know for certain the cognitive ramifications of that particular ritual, this does not mean that we should not attempt to uncover that meaning. The same thing applies to falconry. We should not dwell on the mechanics of the hunt; this would be akin to reducing a grand piano to a wooden and metallic sound machine. This effectively strips the instrument of its powers of wonder. This is why we need to expand our point of view on falconry hunting by considering the cognitive context of an Old Norse cosmology, such as scholars have carefully reconstructed from the myths. Indeed, the idea of a *Miðgarðr* center where everything is tamed and ordered is opposed to the wild dangers of *Útgarðr*, where, in addition to varying cultic practices, any kind of hunt is carried out. In the same way that Sámi hunters approached the unsettled landscape with appropriate behaviour and sacrifices, falconers may have done the same towards their bird of prey. Indeed, the raptor may in itself be the recipient of such offerings: after all it is rewarded with a portion of the hunt's yield. Is it going too far to reinterpret this feeding in a sacrificial light? The similarities with Finno-Ugric populations may not cease there.

It is argued that between 550-1300 AD Finland, navigating the dichotomy between civilization and wilderness was facilitated by wearing small copper-alloy bells, creating in this way an aural aura around a person. In a settlement environment, this may signify a particular social status or wealth, while it may broadcast an audible area of protection in the wilds. The same idea can be applied to falconry's use of bells. The traditional understanding of the bell's purpose is to know the whereabouts and general condition of the raptor while at a distance and out of sight. As a mechanic device, they cannot of course be taken as sacred objects in falconry; but again, we need to expand our point of view in order to consider their possible cognitive significance. Indeed, considering that the bird is never actually tamed, that its innate nature is never altered significantly other than to overcome its natural fear of humans, the shackling of a bell to its feet and or tail forces the bird to carry with it this ringing piece of civilization. In this way, the creature is effectively wielded by

the falconer, as an extension of him or herself, of his or her will. It is also sonorously protected from its natural habitat. If that seems strange, this is because, as the hunt is carried out in Útgarðr, shamanistic journeys of the mind take place there as well, as it is essentially a liminal space.

Can ornamentation depict shamanistic journeys?

I argue that the ideal symbiotic relationship of birds of prey and humans is represented in the hybrid motif of figurative ornamentation. This falls in line with scholarly studies that has already inferred from Scandinavian animal art the idea of shape shifting. However, unlike animal warriors, avian metamorphosis is rather more elusive in the sources, especially if we forego the support of textual evidence. It is elusive because it seems to be better associated with internal feats of the mind rather than the outward martial display of courage and strength in the heat of battle. In the figurative art, birds are indeed often associated with the head, but also with the whole body. It is similar in the myths, where ravens symbolize memory, thought, intelligence; all synonyms for wisdom. Moreover, it has been argued that the Norse people may have believed in a multiplicity of animalistic souls and spirits, which may be similar to some of the Sámi's shamanistic practices. It may be that transforming one's self into a bird of prey may not be accomplished at the level of the physical body, but rather at that of the mind, *hugr*, which takes the shape of the bird, *hamr*. Such an ethereal metamorphosis may entail a quest for knowledge: a liminal form in a liminal place. This can translate as the mind's Útgarðr. Obviously, hunting with a bird of prey is carried out away from civilization—our conceptual Útgarðr—and, while the falconer may not physically change its shape to that of a bird of prey, his or her mind becomes the bird. Indeed, as in a quest for knowledge, the raptor leaves the body behind as it is released to the chase. The wild animal may of course never come back; but it is the most important aspect of falconry that, through its training, the bird returns—and that may have been thought as magical in some ways. Indeed, as with the shaman, the falconer's *hamr* comes back to its body, and both the hunt and the spiritual journey are accomplished. Of course, the animal style of pre-Christian Scandinavian art may symbolize something else entirely.

Are myths reflecting a spiritual attitude to falconry comparable to archaeological and art historical evidence?

One of the difficulties of researching the subject of this paper was to separate from the archaeological and art historical evidence the interpretation of motifs that we gain from the study of texts. By presenting chronologically the different sources mentioned it is made clear that the relationship between humans and birds of prey is very old and that it is independent from any textual interpretation of both falconry and shamanistic journeys. However, given the intangible nature of falconry, the need to interpret is unavoidable, thus my proposed reading of the prologue of Loki in Geirrøðargarðr. This piece of a myth effectively showcases at least three levels of meaning. At a first glance, we learn of the ludic but disastrous experience of a god who changes his shape to that of a bird and goes flying somewhere dangerous. We may also interpret this as the remembrance or instruction of some of the features of bird acquisition and falconry training. A third level of meaning may exemplify the dangers of shamanistic journeys. It cannot be known for sure that these are the surviving motifs of an older, spiritual practice of falconry in Scandinavia. However, the possibility can neither be ruled out. Surely, mythological features are reflective of real ideas and concerns of people. These may of course have been bloated out of proportion, just as their possible original meaning may have changed over the course of time. If shamans wore covering garments made of feathers and if they indeed engaged in shamanistic journeys of the mind in the form of birds of prey, it follows that this is akin to shape shifting. Such ideas were obviously potent to the collective culture of the Old Norse people. It is doubtful that it would have been represented in the hybrid motifs of animal art otherwise. Avian shape shifting is in turn found in the mythology in the very specific context of quests for knowledge. This type of shape shifting it is also rather restricted to the specific elite of knowledgeable individuals: *jötnar*, Óðinn, and Freyja; much like shamans in a human context. I have argued that falconry act as a catalyst and as a complementary factor to some and all of these features.

It may be unnecessary to say that much more research remains to be done in order to provide a fuller historical context for the practice of falconry in both pre-Christian and Christian Scandinavia. It would indeed be fruitful to scour the many different genres of

saga literature, but also the poetry and the legal sources. Some chronological comparisons between evidence for the practice's spiritual dimension should also be conducted, as well as comparisons between Scandinavia and the rest of Europe and Asia. Indeed, perhaps I was hasty in dismissing the spiritual dimension of falconry in medieval Christian Europe. It is known after all that the higher ranks within the clergy were avid falconers. It may be worth it to explore this question further in the future and to expand it to other religious cultures that are known to hunt with birds of prey.

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