

The Ambiguous Boeslunde-figurine

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a unique female figure found in Boeslunde, Zealand, Denmark. It stands at just 1.5 cm and is made of gilded silver with remarkably refined details. The date of the figure is discussed based on details of her garments, accessories, and hairstyle and she is compared to other archaeological representations and finds. Based on these criteria, a dating to the Late Iron Age/Early Viking Age is proposed. Her function is likewise discussed. By means of an examination of parallel finds, the figure's function as a gaming piece or garment accessory is ruled out. It is argued that she functioned as an amulet and her features are evaluated and discussed. Contemplating the figure from a ritual perspective, her necklace appears to be a significant attribute, an observation which has great implications for other representations such as the Odin-from-Lejre-figure. It is, further considered whether her necklace is a representation of Freyja's Brisningamen, and the little figure thus a depiction of Freyja, herself. Lastly, the intentionally differentiated shape and size of her eyes and their symbolic meaning is evaluated, and parallels are examined and discussed.

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Introduction

In January 2020, a remarkable minute female figurine was found near the village of Boeslunde in the Western Zealand region of Denmark. She stands just 1.5 cm tall, dressed in a long cape and displaying a conspicuous necklace on her chest. Her hair is gathered in a high, knotted ponytail (Figure 1).

She is unique; no other figures like her have so far been encountered. In general, plastic figures are rare, and particularly such with a human expression. Therefore, only few known plastic anthropomorphic figures can serve as a basis for comparison. The most immediate parallel is the Odin-from-Lejre-figure. This figure was found in 2009 during excavations of the large hall-buildings in Lejre on Zealand. It is dated to approximately 950 AD. Like the Boeslunde-figurine, it is minute in stature but shows a seated figure on a throne adorned with animal heads and a bird on each armrest (Christensen 2009). The throne, and not least the two birds, have led to the figure's interpretation as Odin, but detailed costume elements, and particularly the distinctive bead-strand across

the figure's chest, bears great resemblance to the Boeslunde-figurine. The other immediate parallel is the Hårby-figure from Funen dated to the 9th century (Henriksen and Petersen 2013). They share the same hair style and plastic design but differ in costume elements and technical execution. In addition, the Hårby-figur carries weapons and clearly represents a Valkyrie known from brooches and other representations. Like the Boeslunde-figurine, the function and symbolic meaning of these parallels are ambiguous and eagerly debated. Was the Boeslunde-figurine an amulet carried hidden in a pocket or mounted for display, or did she serve a more practical function as a dress accessory or gaming piece? And how should she be dated?

As she is unique, it is difficult through parallels alone to determine her function, date, and the role she played in her own time. This article will contextualize the figurine in relation to other finds and find contexts, and through a detailed review of individual elements and possible parallels, her function, symbolism, and date will be discussed. It will also be discussed why such a detached find is of great interest for current re-



Figure 1. The Boeslunde figure. A close-up reveals the refined details in her manufacture (Photo: Museum Western Zealand).

search, and what it can say about its own time and not least about the present.

Context

Today, Boeslunde is a small village between Slagelse and Skælskør approximately five kilometres from the western coast of Zealand. Historically it has enjoyed a strategic position with access to waterways as well as a central route across Zealand between Scania and Funen. It is located on a high plateau, one of three distinct hills dominating the landscape. The small village of Neble to the north has now merged with Boeslunde. As ordinary as it may seem today, it was truly spectacular in prehistory. Boeslunde has revealed some of the most spectacular Bronze Age gold artefacts in Denmark and served as a cultic center in the late Bronze Age. There is a continuity in activity on throughout the Iron Age with a boom in material finds from the Late Iron Age and Viking Age approximately AD 600-1000. The markedly large medieval church presently located in the village further emphasises the significant role Boeslunde played over a period of more than 2000 years.

Only few, isolated excavations have been conducted, but the fields around the village have been the focus of extensive metal detector surveys (Nielsen 1997). Rare and conspicuous objects have been found such as gold and silver ingots, coins, weapon parts, riding gear, imports, and several hoards. Among the more remarkable objects are three matrices for gold foil figures, two Valkyrie fibulas along with a matrix, and a small house amulet with parallels to finds in Scotland. It is in this ritual and prominent environment the little lady was found.

The Lady from Boeslunde

The little female figurine is approx. 1.5 cm. tall and weighs just 5 g. She is made of a silver alloy and has been fully gilded. She is very worn, especially on her head, but two slanted eyes are still visible, one larger than the other, as well as a small straight line representing a mouth.

Her body is slightly rounded to illustrate shoulders or arms tucked under a full-length

cape with beaded borders along the front. Unfortunately, due to extensive wear, it is impossible to make out details of a brooch that would have closed the cape. However, under the chin an empty space leave room for a larger brooch, and as the beaded front line terminates unevenly here, it could suggest that the now worn-down brooch depiction was asymmetrical. On the chest, four bead-strands hangs, one beneath the other, extending to the middle of the figure. Under the bead-strands, a modern scrape makes it impossible to discern any details of the figure's lower dress, for example a decorated apron-like front piece as found on the Odin-from-Lejre-figure. She stands firmly on a small square base with no indications of feet. She is hollow, and a broken casting cone can be observed within her.

The Boeslunde-figurine is clearly a female representation, as her hairstyle, in particular, testifies. The hair is gathered into a high knot in the back with a ponytail extending to the ground. The Odin-from-Lejre-figure wears a gender-neutral helmet or hat that has sparked discussions on its gender (Mannering 2013). Similarly, a braided hairstyle on a small figure from Trønning near Kundby has caused speculation about its gender (Christensen 2010, 7-8). The Boeslunde woman, on the other hand, has a clear and detailed so-called Irish Ribbon Knot, which seems to have been the preferred female hairstyle from the Late Iron Age well into the Viking Age – a period of over 500-year. This knot is found in many different contexts and representations, and its symbolic value seems to take priority to a naturalistic depiction of hairstyle (Arwill-Nordbladh 2016; Hedeager 2015, 134-135). It has been suggested that it was used by unmarried women of high status; apparently it became common for married women to cover their hair as early as the Iron Age (Henriksen and Petersen 2013, 9). But what specific purpose did the little well-dressed lady serve?

Gaming piece

These types of small figures are occasionally referred to as gaming pieces (Ramskou 1976). The existence of board games is evident from early ancient times. Roman influence most likely brought



Figure 2. The cone-shaped figure from Tornes, Norway with ambiguous and symbolic decorations. Note the alteration of the eyes (after: Helmbrecht 2011, 247. Photo: S. Fedje; Measure: 4,4 x 2,1 cm).

games to the north. Miscellaneous finds from the Iron and Viking Ages testify that games were widespread and common (Michaelsen 1992, 24). From Hedeby, for example, several gaming pieces have been found in addition to a preserved wooden game board. The gaming pieces were made from antlers, bones, wood, and amber, and also exotica like walrus tooth and jet were used. They are mainly flat, semi-circular, or conical and only two have a tower-like shape terminating in a stylised 'crown' or 'head' (Schietzel 2014, 287). From Ribe's early Middle Ages, a cone-shaped gaming piece with two triangular stylised 'heads' has been found, along with a number of other pieces with varying shapes of different materials.¹ Gaming pieces have also been found in rural locations such as Herslev in Western Zealand.² A semi-circular gaming piece made of bone, presumably from the Viking Age,

as well as a small cylindrical piece in clay from the Middle Ages, have been found here. In the same area as the Boeslunde-figurine was found, two identical figures made of copper alloy representing male figures were recovered as well.³ These figures are just over 3 cm tall and have been identified as gaming pieces in the National Museum of Denmark. This definition was, among other things, based on their smooth stand base, which is not immediately suitable for fastening or mounting.

Another place where gaming pieces have commonly been retrieved, is at the Viking winter camps in England. At Repton and Torksey in Lincolnshire, many detector finds have been uncovered that testify to the Vikings' pastimes while camping for the winter in foreign lands. Among other things, a number of gaming pieces have been found here, usually simplistic, and roughly composed in lead. Other isolated finds, such as a carved gaming piece from London in bone or ivory, testify, however, that craftsmanship was invested in the design and decoration of such pieces. This slightly damaged game piece from 1100-1300 is carefully carved with human-like elements, however rather abstract.⁴

Another peculiar figure originates from Tornes in Norway made of soapstone (Figure 2). It shows a figure, wearing a pointed hat and a long cape with finely carved but ambiguous details that are difficult to grasp (Ringstad 1996). From Denmark, a unique and outstandingly crafted figure is similarly interpreted as a gaming piece. It is the aforementioned golden figure with braided hair gathered at the neck. The figure was found in a burial mound at Trønning, west of Holbæk, Zealand but lost during World War II, and only sparse information and documentation on the figure remain (Jensen 2006, 353). It was almost 2 cm high and made of gold tin with details in filigree. The figure's attire was finely decorated, and its apron-like design mirrors that of Odin-from-Lejre's, while its jewellery has a unique design. On the front of the figure by the lower edge are two rivet holes of unknown function. The piece resembles a bishop or runner in a chess game, which has prompted interpretation as a chess gaming piece (Ramskou 1976). However, it is dated to the Viking Age based on stylistic and technical elements, while the game of chess first found its current form in Europe during the 12th century

(Michaelsen 1992, 55-56). The Lewis chess pieces are prime examples which testify to this, having been carved around 1170-1230 (Caldwell, Hall and Wilkinson 2009, 198). From Copenhagen, a beautifully carved mounted bishop of walrus tusk from around the 12th century has been uncovered as well.⁵ Until the Middle Ages, the original chess set was common, but quite different in its line-up. It included, among other things, fighting elephants. The game of chess has its origins in the regions around India and was introduced to Europe via the Moors' colonization of Spain. However, travelling Vikings may have encountered it on journeys to the east (Michaelsen 1992, 55).

Finally, it should be noted, that traces of gaming often appear in ship burials and funerals with a high social status (Caldwell, Hall and Wilkinson 2009, 167; Hall 2016, 445-446; Whittaker 2006, 105-106). Accordingly, a whole set of gaming pieces was found in the extraordinary grave in Oldenburg, Holstein from the Viking Age. They are semi-circular in shape and made of walrus tooth and bones. Only one of the pieces is made of a silver-plated copper alloy and resembles a stylised crown (Pedersen 2013, 147). In the Ladby ship burial on Funen where a high-status woman was entombed, corner brackets for a gaming board were found, but no game pieces were recovered. The same applies to the Gokstad ship burial (Michaelsen 1992, 50). Finally, several burials from Birka, Sweden should be mentioned, including a warrior's burial, which contained an intact set of gaming pieces as well as a game board evidenced by corner fittings. These are also made of bone and differentiated in a variety of ways, e.g., by a copper rivet at the top. Analyses have shown that the warrior in the grave was a woman (Price et al. 2019, 184-188). Other graves at Birka demonstrate refined manufactured glass gaming pieces (Whittaker 2006, 105).

Gaming pieces are primarily known from the Viking Age and the Middle Ages, while they are more infrequent in the Late Iron Age. This is probably caused by external factors since games and gaming pieces are found in the Roman Iron Age as well. A motif on the famous golden horns from Gallenus, dated to the 6th century suggest that games were known in the Late Iron Age and may bridge the gap.

Although gaming pieces appear in many different contexts and designs, only few seem to be perceptively or delicately manufactured and decorated. If the Boeslunde-figurine did serve as a gaming piece, one would expect other corresponding examples considering the general frequency of gaming pieces. Particularly, in rich burials where other types of games and gaming pieces often occur, refined examples would be expected, since games and gaming pieces is connected with high social status and identity. Accordingly, it cannot be argued based on comparable material, that the Boeslunde-figurine functioned as a gaming piece. But what was she then?

Dress Accessory, Jewellery or Decoration

An obvious suggestion is that she served as a costume accessory or piece of jewellery or decoration. For example, she could have adorned a dress pin, a brooch, a strap end or decorated a sorcerer's staff. Exquisite jewellery is common but is most often decorated with animal heads of more or less ornamental design. For example, refined and detailed terminals from chains and strap-ends depicting animal heads are found in Herslev and Gudum. Dress pins also have figurative representations, but they are most often stylised masks or animals, such as the lavish dress pin with a beautifully designed dragon head from Hedeby (Williams, Pentz and Wemhoff 2013, 50). From Hedeby and Birka, however, a dress pin with a woman's face wearing a hat is known. They are simplistically designed, made of copper and the head is moulded together with the needle. In addition, they have an eyelet on top of the head for attachment (Helmbrecht 2011, 220). A small bronze figure from Søholt by Maribo found in a burial mound also belongs in this anthropomorphic category. It shows a very stylized human-like figure in copper alloy with only few details (Franceschi, Magnus and Jorn 2005, 104). A special type of dress pin depicts warriors with pelta-shaped 'horns' on their helmet. Such anthropomorphic figures are known from several localities such as Uppåkra, Tissø and Torslunde. They seem to have a uniform and defined symbolic language without significant variation, and therefore appear to be a category in themselves.

Finally, other plastic artefacts deserve mentioning such as the Fenris wolf from Gudum, Zealand. Such objects are few but share a plastic design and communicate a distinct and recognizable message. Often, however, their function, display and handling are ambiguous and cannot be explained. The Fenris wolf lacks both rivet holes for attachment to a staff or the like as found on the Trønning figure, or an eyelet for hanging such as on the Hårby woman. Although the symbolic message may derive from the same mythological background, the symbolic display is equally ambiguous.

Accordingly, there are no immediate parallels that could point to the Boeslunde-figurines's function as a costume accessory, a jewellery or decoration. Nor is her wear compatible with such a function. The gilding on her body is almost intact, while it is totally worn down on her head. Had she been fitted to a dress pin or worn as jewellery, a more uniform wear on one side would be expected. Having excluded these functions, what can bring us closer to an understanding of her function and symbolic message? The devil is in the detail.

Amulets

With a function as a gaming piece or dress accessory unlikely, we may be compelled to regard her as an amulet. We must, however, be careful, not to name artefacts as cultic or symbolic by default when no other probable function can be argued for. In this case, however, it seems like a legitimate suggestion based on her size, her necklace, and the difference in her eye size.

Amulets are well known in the archaeological material. However, in the Late Iron Age they are few in number and limited in format. It has been discussed whether conspicuous artefacts from the Late Iron Age represent prestigious exotica rather than amulets with a symbolic meaning. Also, it must be considered whether amulets from this period were preferably made of non-durable material (Pedersen 2009, 290-292). The prevalence of amulets escalates during the Viking Age, becoming increasingly common throughout the period. They are most often simple and made from non-precious metals like copper or iron but can also be found in silver and gold. They come in different

shapes, sizes, and contexts, like the Valkyrie fibulas or as depictions of the berserks, for example, but also frequently as miniatures. They depict weapon parts, Thor's-hammers, strike-a-lights, combs, books, or chairs. The Boeslunde-figurine seems to correspond to this tradition of miniatures symbolising a special power or force reflected onto the user. They are believed to mimic the essence or a concentration of a specific value or virtue (Hedeager 2015, 132). Even though miniatures are common, few have an anthropomorphic character. In general, plastic figures are uncommon in the Late Iron Age but reappear in the Viking Age though, infrequently. Most are made of copper alloy and rarely gilded, but the work can be detailed and refined (Helmbrecht 2011, 246).

The Boeslunde-figurine's details and attributes may, however, help to understand her symbolic meaning; accordingly, her necklace and the difference in her eyes seem to be significant.

The Necklace

As she appears in her present state, the necklace is prominent. Dress features in the destroyed part below the necklace could have been significant as well, as could a brooch closing her cape. However, even if these elements were still intact, the necklace would have been equally impressive, and its strong manifest seems important in its own right.

The necklace is displayed as four strands of small spherical beads lying close together. The nearest parallels, which offer very uniform impressions, are found on the Odin-from-Lejre-figure and on a pendant from Aska, Sweden. Odin-from-Lejre was found in 2009 during excavations of the hall-building in Lejre, Zealand and is interpreted as Odin on his throne dated to the beginning of the 10th century (Christensen 2009, 12). The pendant from Aska, Östergötland originates from a woman's grave dated to the Viking Age, and is believed to have been part of a larger piece of jewellery. It depicts a woman with a cape and with the same four bead strands across her chest. Along the edge of the cape, small beads are depicted continuing down onto her arms. She wears a helmet or hat on her head. A large fibula, a so-called disc-on-bow fibula, holds the cape togeth-

Figure 3. The Solberga pearl spreader with a symbolic motive including of female with a four-strand necklace, and disc-shaped brooch under her chin (after: E. Arwill-Nordbladh 2016, fig. 5. Photo: Staff/The Swedish History Museum; Measure: 6 x 3 cm).

er under the chin. This brooch is common in the Late Iron Age and the pedant therefore implies a significant time depth in the grave goods. This is supported by extensive wear on the pendant (Arwill-Norbladh 2005, 178-180).

A closer investigation reveals other parallels. A small bead spreader from a grave in Solberga, Östergötland, also shows a graphic representation of a female figure, this time in profile, but with four beads and a disk-shaped brooch on the chest (Figure 3). The disc is believed to be a simplistic representation of a disc-on-bow brooch, when space is limited (Arrhenius 2009, 225; Axboe 1986, 116). She lies deep in the water while a fisherman in a boat above her, throws out a hook. She is very stylised depicted, but the necklace and hairstyle have found room in this small representation, suggesting they were significant. A brooch shaped as a female figure from a grave in Tuna, Uppland offers another parallel wearing a similar piece of jewellery (Figure 4). She is made of gilded silver and depicted in full figure in profile. A great wealth of details shows a knee-length cape over a full-length dress. She has four beads stacked on her chest as well as a larger disk-shaped brooch on the side of the neck. It is reasonable to interpret them as a four-bead sequence seen in profile and with a larger piece of jewellery to close the cape at the neck – perhaps a stylistic representation of a disk-on-bow brooch (Hedeager Krag 2003, 69-79). The same representation is found on several gold foil figures. Here females in profile are depicted with bead strands on their chest (Mannering 2017, 37).

Christensen points to a neck collar on a wooden figure from Rude Eskildstrup as a parallel to Odin-from-Lejre's jewellery and, thus, indirectly to the Boeslunde-figurine (Christensen 2013, 71). How-



Figure 4. The Tuna figure clearly illustrate a four-strand necklace and disc-shaped brooch. The emphasis of the jewellery is noticeable (Photo: SHM/Gabriel Hildebrand; Source: <http://mis.historiska.se/mis/sok/bild.asp?uid=341380&page=2&in=1>; Measure: 3,7 x 1,7 cm).

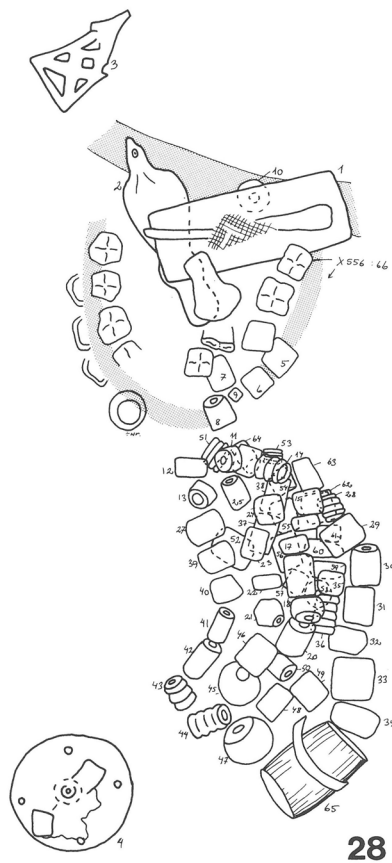


Figure 5. The jewellery set from grav 28, Nørre Sandegård vest, Bornholm. Note how four strands of beads can be discerned (after: Jørgensen 1997, 240)

ever, the collar differs markedly by also covering the neck in the back, suggesting it was placed on top of the clothes. This may, though, be ascribed to the figure not wearing a cloak, covering the jewellery at the back, but only depicted in a shirt. Furthermore, the necklace shows only three strands, however, this type of neck collar comes with three, five and seven strands. These outstanding gold neck collars are known from a handful of archaeological discoveries in Sweden and Denmark. They are made of tubular gold beads varying in shape and garlanded with fine filigree decorations. They have all been discovered without thorough documentation and context but dated to the 6th century. They are affiliated to male figures, although there is no definitive evidence of this (Pesch 2015; Schou Jørgensen 1975, 62-63). A similar neck collar is seen on a 6.2 cm tall copper figure from Søholt by Maribo found in a burial mound, most likely originating from a staff terminal. Here, the collar also extends all the way around the neck, not being covered by a cape in the back, and likewise, the figure is believed to represent

a male figure (Franceschi, Magnus and Jorn 2005, 104). When considering shape and context, it does not seem probable that the necklace on the Boeslunde-figurine, nor perhaps on the Odin-from-Lejre-figure, are representations of these golden neck collars.

However, it is not only the golden neck collars that are found in the archaeological material which serve as parallels. Voluminous sequences of beads are common in burials in the Late Iron Age and Early Viking Age. Numerous beads have, for example, been found in all of the women's graves from Nørre Sandegård Vest on Bornholm from the 6th to the 8th century (Nørgård Jørgensen and Jørgensen 1997, 47-48). Between 12-178, beads have been found in each burial and the number is proportional to the number of other pieces of jewellery. The well-preserved burials illustrate how the bead strands hang from a central brooch on the chest. They are distributed using bead spreaders correspondingly found in the graves (Figure 5). This detail implicates, that the beads

hang closely in the middle of the chest and would be framed by the opening of the cape. The bead sequence in these burials seems to serve a very explicit manifestation and are akin to the jewellery design of the Boeslunde-figurine. In the Viking Age, the symbolic value of beads appears to lose its importance, and far fewer beads are found in the burials: At four burial sites on southern Langeland, Denmark, for instance, 42 beads were distributed over 15 graves, and on Stengade II, northern Langeland, 82 glass beads were distributed over 11 graves (Grøn 1994, 126; Skaarup 1976, 171). Far fewer beads appear in Viking Age graves, and it is a general tendency that the prevalence of beads decreases considerably in all contexts throughout the period (Graham-Campbell 1980, 29; Lind 1984, 25). However, regional differences can have an impact on the costume and jewellery design. For example, a very distinct necklace of fishtail-like pendants is found only in Gotland (Kaland 1992, 192). Variations in women's clothing can also be regarded as an indication of status rather than an indication of chronological or regional difference (Lønborg 1999, 259-267). And beads do continue to be important in the Viking Age as exemplified by the Lille Karleby treasure with over 300 beads of glass, rock crystal, carnelian, and silver (Kastholm, Nielsen and Jensen 2017). However, the beads come from different contexts and have different provenances and appear to represent an economic value rather than a symbolic, which the treasure context emphasizes.

It is far from all anthropomorphic representations that emphasize the jewellery design. Thus, clear bead strands do not seem to be a common feature in connection with the depiction of a typical attire. Anthropomorphic figures are represented with other distinguishing elements such as drinking horns, animals, weapons, or certain postures (Gräslund 2008, 253-255; Petersen 2005, 57-86). The jewellery design on the Boeslunde-figurine seems neither to be common nor random, and, accordingly, appears to be an essential attribute. It must have had a significant symbolic language that could be immediately interpreted in its own time and own right, the question is which?

Arrhenius suggests that the four-strand necklaces together with a brooch represent Freyja's distinct

piece of jewellery, Brisingamen (Arrhenius 2009). The legend of the Brisingamen tells that Freyja saw four dwarfs forging a golden necklace. In order to acquire the piece, she agreed to sleep with the dwarfs in turn (Näsström 1995, 19-20). The Brisingamen is described occasionally in Norse literature, often as an object of envy and conflict. The *Thrymskvida* provides the most detailed description of the necklace describing, how it rested on her chest and busted from anger (Näsström 1995, 178). Although its components are ambiguous and have been debated, Arrhenius argues from parallels to comparable mythologies and from etymology, that it is comprised of at least two components: One being a brooch with garnet inlays symbolising fire, the other being a broad necklace (Arrhenius 2009). The fire symbolised by garnets represents renewal and thereby fertility which is Freyja's sphere. Accordingly, female representations with bead-strands and a large brooch could be regarded as Freyja in her representation of fertility. The Aska pendant, by some argued to portray a pregnant female, has likewise been interpreted as Freyja, possibly symbolising fertility (Arrhenius 2001, 306). However, the Boeslunde-figurine offers another minute detail, that may have great impact on her interpretation: the difference in her eye size.

The Detail in the Eye

A close look at her face reveals that her eyes not only have different sizes but also have different shapes. Electron Spectro-analysis has confirmed that the appearance of the eyes is not a result of extensive abrasion to her head. Although the lower brim of the bigger eye is only 1 mm. long, the craftsmanship is so refined, that it is unlikely to have been caused by insufficient skills. This confirms that the details of the eyes were intentional and deliberate.

A blinded eye is traditionally ascribed to Odin (Price and Mortimer 2014, 532). According to legend, he offered one eye in return for the wisdom from Mimer's well (Faulkes 2004, 17 citing Sturluson, *Gylfaginning* 14). This contract not only gave him wisdom and the ability as a seer, but also established his eternal power. Accordingly, the blinded eye has traditionally been regarded as Odin's attribute symbolising wisdom, foresight, and power.

Eyes are also a common topic in old Norse texts, narrating blindness, gaze, stare, and foresight (Lassen 2003). Descriptions such as a *piercing-gaze* or *snake-eyed* with reference to mythological creatures have been discerned (Hedeager 2015, 144; Marold 1998). These observations can be mirrored in archaeological artifacts giving the eyes a complex dimension. The helmets of the Late Iron Age burials, for instance, were constructed and reworked to clearly imply differences in eyesight. The Sutton Hoo helmet depicts two different eyebrows, where gold foil is deliberately absent on the one side, giving it a dull and dark expression compared to a shimmering glow of the other. Similar traits can be observed on the Swedish helmets in Vendel and Valsgärde (Price and Mortimer 2014). Price and Mortimer, likewise, note that two single eyebrows from helmets presumably from the Late Iron Age have turned up in Gevninge near Roskilde, Zealand and in the sacrificial layers in Uppåkra, Sweden.



Their deposition circumstances are not fully uncovered, but they appear to be deliberately deposited and may be associated with a symbolic meaning of the blinded eye (Christensen 2002, 43; Helgesson 2004, 231-232; Price and Mortimer 2014, 523-524). Other observations regarding eyesight can be found in the Torslunda plate, a matrix for helmet plates found on Öland, Sweden. A laser scan has revealed that one eye of a depicted dancer has been removed with a sharp instrument (Arrhenius and Freij 1992). A similar disassembling is suggested for a buckle needle from Elsfleth, Germany, where marks round the eyes indicate the removal of an inlaid eyeball (Mückenberger 2012, 12). A copper figurine from Uppåkra, Sweden, showing a male figure with pelta-shaped horns on his helmet, provides another good example where one eye is clearly different from the other. This figurine finds its parallel in a similar figure from Lindy, Scania which also has two different eyes. Another figure from Tissø on Zealand also demonstrates a similar trait. A brooch depicts a female figure wearing a long dress, pulling her hair, and displaying a haunting facial expression. The shape of the eyes clearly differs from one another: One is rounded and arched, whereas the other is oblong, pointed, and flat (Arwill-Nordbladh 2013, 91). This obviously was not caused by insufficient craftsmanship, damage, or wear. Other examples, such as the Aska pendant and the Odin-from-Lejre-figure are, however, not as obvious. Here, it is difficult to distinguish whether an erased gaze has been caused by damage or abrasion. Either way, a strong manifestation of the figure's identity through the gaze of the eyes appears less manifest and important.

A final figure that must be mentioned is the soapstone figure from Tornes, Norway mentioned above. The difference in its eyes has hitherto gone unnoticed, though very clear differences in size and shape of the two eyes can be observed.

The blinded, altered or differentiated eye seems to be a much more common trait in the archaeological record than normally recognized. A preliminary glimpse at other archaeological objects demonstrates a striking pattern. From Elstrup, a

Figure 6. Pendant from Vidarshof, Norway depicting a male face with clearly differentiated eyes (after: Helmbrecht 2011, 228; Length: 3 cm).

golden harness bow depicts a small face, but with a clear difference in the eyes. Also, a fibula fragment from Uppåkra, Sweden, and a head-shaped pendant from Vidarshov, Norway shows clear differences in the depiction of the eyes (Figure 6. Helmbrecht 2011, 185, 213, 228). When thoroughly examined, the archaeological record seems to have much to offer to the discussion of the symbolism of the blinded or altered eye. For now, however, I will return to the Boeslunde-figurine and discuss her dating, symbolism and significance based on the above observations.

Discussion

Based on her garments, accessories, and hairstyle the Boeslunde-figurine should be dated to the Late Germanic Iron Age or Early Viking Age. A date to the 7th-8th century is proposed. Admittedly, stylistic details to support a dating, are scarce, apart from her necklace and hairstyle, the latter having a long duration period. The chronological proposal presupposes, that the necklace is a realistic reflection of the female fashion of her time, rather than acting primarily as a symbolic representation, for example, of the Brisingamen. Christensen proposes that the Odin-from-Lejre-figure mimics a symbolic expression of Byzantine attire symbolising high status as part of his attributes, rather than commonly used clothing (Christensen 2009, 19-20). Costume studies, however, generally assume that iconographic depictions tend to reflect genuine attire (Mannering 2017, 182). On that background, it is tempting to narrow the time span of the figure to between 650-750. This is based on comparable jewellery from burials and iconographic depictions where the disc-on-bow, or a simplistic reference to this, is associated with the four-strand necklace. This is evident for example on the Aska pendant and several gold-foil figures. Although, the details of a brooch on the Boeslunde-figurine cannot be discerned due to extensive wear, the empty space under her chin is asymmetrical, leaving room for a disc-on-bow brooch, which supports the chronology proposed. These types of brooches were most prevalent from 550-790 (Glørstad and Røstad 2020, 2-4). However, they had a long period of circulation and were often repaired and reused

(Vennersdorf, Gottlieb and Schnell 2006). Glørstad and Røstad argue that they become mnemonic objects linked to negotiations and conflicts concerning the narrative of the past, and thus used as a political resource in the Late Iron Age and Early Viking Age (Glørstad and Røstad 2020, 1). The disc-on-bow along with the necklace act as a recognizable and communicative attribute, and their symbolic meaning may have found continuity in other similar but later depictions such as the Odin-from-Lejre-figure.

When considering chronology, it may serve to evaluate how she was manufactured and review parallels. The Hårby-figure is dated partly by her manufacturing techniques, as it is argued that silver figures were uncommon in the Iron Age where gold was preferred. It is further noted that gilding and the use of niello are techniques common for the Viking Age (Henriksen and Petersen 2013, 3-10). Christensen uses the same line of argumentation for the Odin-from-Lejre-figure. He argues that the use of niello is often associated with the Jellinge-style, supposedly seen on the figure's chair, which supports its dating to the middle of the 10th century. Although the Boeslunde-figurine does not have niello inlays, niello is found in the Iron Age as well, suggesting that stylistic elements and techniques are not inconsistent with her closest parallels (Petersen 1994). Furthermore, gold deposits decrease by the 6th century leaving room for silver artefacts in the years to follow, which for instance the Aska pendant, made of silver, demonstrates. There is nothing in her manufacture inconsistent with a 7th century dating.

It has been proposed in the above that the necklace of the Boeslunde-figurine is a significant attribute perhaps symbolising Freyja's Brisingamen presupposing a disc-on-bow brooch, closing her cape. Gold bracteates, common in the 6th century, depict the Asa gods indicating that Asa beliefs, including their own symbolic language, were well-known and could be identified and recognised in the Late Iron Age if not earlier (Jensen 2006, 126). It is therefore reasonable to assume that the legend of Freyja and the Brisingamen was known in Late Iron Age. It is acknowledged that the gold foil figures depict cultic scenes, and, accordingly, those with this distinct piece of jewelry could represent Freyja (Axboe 1986, 116). Further, some



Figure 7. Newly found Valkyrie fibula from Boeslunde, Western Zealand (SVM1449x289). She is carrying a sword and shield as well as a drinking horn in the hand clutching the shield. This combination is unusual (Photo: MVE/Morten Petersen).

excessively large disc-on-bow brooches have been found, and their unusual size suggests they served as a cultic attribute rather than a practical accessory (Arrhenius 1962, 84-94). However, it is not conclusive that a necklace along with a brooch symbolises Freyja's Brisingamen as Arrhenius discusses. In the future, iconographic studies and Iron Age research may explore this suggestion further, and the Boeslunde-figurine will serve as a strong contribution to that discussion.

Another topic that may receive more attention in future works is the symbolic expression

of eyes whether being blinded, altered or in other ways differentiated. In general, expressive eye representations seem to have been most influential between 500-700 AD, which supports the proposed dating of the Boeslunde-figurine (Price and Mortimer 2014, 531). Studies have concluded that it is the eyes of military and/or political leaders that are being emphasised, manipulated, and differentiated (Lassen 2003, 17-25; Price and Mortimer 2014, 532). Likewise, it appears that descriptions of the eyes from early written evidence often portray violent scenes and actions, such as the pronouncement of wars and battles in connection with kings and heroes like Odin and Thor (Lassen 2003, 106). In that symbolic language, how do we frame female representations with eye alterations? What implication does the Boeslunde-figurine have for our understanding of attributes, power, and gender? It may serve to note that a warrior burial with extensive weaponry from Birka, has been identified as a female (Price et al. 2019). Other research supports a diverse gender perspective offering an intersectional approach to identity from a study of hunting equipment in female burials (Lund and Moen 2019). Attention must be given to another newly found piece from Boeslunde: a patrice for a Valkyrie fibula (Figure 7). She is quite unusual since she is carrying a drinking horn as well as a weapon and shield. Thereby, she simultaneously portrays two symbolic meanings normally separated, namely either a drinking horn or weaponry. This little piece helps to bring attention to overlapping and concurrent symbolic meanings.

And Freyja, as one of the leading female gods, had, indeed, diverse, and multiple intersectional abilities. She is associated with lust, sexuality, and fertility as well as her ability to conduct magic. But she was also a warrior goddess, sharing the fallen warriors with Odin (Hedeager 2015, 146-147; Price 2019, 69). As demonstrated above, the difference in her eyes seems significant, and connects her with the wisdom usually ascribed to Odin. Accordingly, Raudvere suggests that a precise classification of function and identity is impossible to formulate since a symbolic meaning can be applied in miscellaneous ways (Raudvere 2002 80). Perhaps a specific classification was not as important as a conglomerate of abilities. A Freyja representation would offer a range of

different abilities, guarding and supporting the bearer in various aspects in life.

If the Boeslunde-figurine, as proposed, served as an amulet can we then find support for the use of such symbolic amulets? As demonstrated above, miniatures with a symbolic representation are common and found in settlements as portable antiquities without context, as evident by the Odin-from-Lejre-figure, as well as in burials. Written sources also offer support. Although, they are few and formulated in a Christian context, we do find accounts of the use of amulets: In Hallfreðar Saga, Hallfred is accused of cutting out a tooth and making it into an amulet and carrying it in a bag. Another passage is found in the Vatnsdoela Saga, where King Harald gives Ingimund a small object which portrays Frey and plays a part in the settlement legend of Iceland (Helmbrecht 2011, 249-250).

In the last twenty years, research has reached a consensus in support of a sacral kingship in the Late Iron Age and Viking Age. Most arguments rest on textual and philological evidence, much of it dating to the centuries after the period in question (Dobat 2006; Sundqvist 2002, 2012). Based on the above, it is clear that the archaeological evidence can expand and nuance the discussion but must not fail to include a female and inter-sectional perspective; this minute lady figure is a concentration of multiple abilities; a maki-cube of power.

Conclusion

A unique female figurine from Boeslunde, Zealand has been presented, and her chronology and function discussed. It is argued that she should be dated to the Late Iron Age or Early Viking

Age based on garment elements, jewellery and hairstyle. She finds a close parallel in the Odin-from-Lejre-figure and has implications for the discussion of his interpretation and chronology. Based on an examination of parallels, it can be excluded that these miniatures served as gaming pieces or dress accessories, and it is argued that the Boeslunde-figurine functioned as an amulet. Her necklace appears to be a significant attribute and it is discussed whether she represents Freyja wearing the Brisingamen. Another significant attribute is the difference in the size and shape of her eyes. This was clearly intentional and points to wisdom and foresight as a symbolic relation or concurrence with Odin. From a preliminary examination, it appears that the difference in eyes is not unusual and may refer to a variety of abilities and forms of symbolism. Many questions raised about the little figurine remain unanswered, but she will undoubtedly continue to give way to discussions, reflections, and insights, that will help nuance cultic and symbolic perceptions not only in prehistory, but also in the present day.

Notes

1. <http://sol.sydvestjyskemuseer.dk/?mode=detail&genstandsnr=200153853&typekode=1404> [accessed 2. December 2020]
2. From Museum Western Zealand local database MVE3081 x268 and x1748.
3. From Museum Western Zealand local database. SVM1321 x170 and x280.
4. <https://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/973850>. [accessed 2. December 2020]
5. <https://samlinger.natmus.dk/DMR/asset/168127> [accessed 2. December 2020]

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