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A silver figurine from Lejre

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The current article describes in detail the Lejre figurine found in 2009, inside the mail hall-area at the settlement. The silver figurine depicts a small, anthropomorphic person seated on a throne, with a larger bird on each side. The description includes the context and circumstances of the find location – the aristocratic settlement of Lejre – as well as a thorough evaluation of the attributes of the figurine itself. In the article it is argued that the figurine presents a male personality, which presumably is of a noble status, dressed in a ritual garment and placed on a high seat, thus bearing similarities with the historic descriptions of the Norse god Odin. The garment might even be that of a coronation costume as it has been described and depicted in contemporary continental sources.

Keywords: Viking Age; Lejre; pre-Christian religion; Odin; aristocracy; rites of initiation; clothing customs

It's not that big – just 1.75 cm tall, 1.98 cm wide, and 1.25 cm deep, made of silver with niello inlay and weighing only 9 grams. But what the Lejre figurine lacks in size and heft, it makes up for in significance and in a wealth of unparalleled detail. At a glance, no one can be in doubt as to what it represents: a person sitting on a finely carved chair with a large bird on each armrest. The two stylized beast heads on the back of the chair pertain stylistically to the Viking Age and date the figurine to the period AD 900–950.[1] (Figures 1 and 2).

It was found one September day in 2009 at Roskilde Museum's excavations at Lejre, where an archaeological examination of the soil was underway.[2] The work in progress at that time had been preceded by a long, hot, bone-dry summer that had facilitated the excavation of some large and complex buildings, the biggest of which was a hall 60 meters in length. The ground linking the new excavation site to excavations that had been undertaken in prior years – work that had been broken off in the mid-1990s – was now to be investigated. It was here that the find was made, in between the two hall complexes (the older one that had been discovered in the 1980s and the new one that was being excavated in 2009), in a culture layer that lay between the arable soil and some underlying glacial deposits (Figure 3).

After the top layer of soil was removed by earth-moving machines, the field was explored by metal detector. Here many find-markers were placed into the ground, for – in distinction to the ground adjoining the newly discovered halls, where finds were scarce – numerous objects were found in these low environs, including gold and silver ingots, rare coins, and spectacular jewelry: so many items of interest that the workers who had been excavating the postholes of the hall came over to see the latest metal-detector finds. Whether it was the shout of 'Find!' or the subsequent dancing about that caused a crowd to form is unclear, but people started talking about it right away. 'Is it the King of Lejre?' 'No, it's Odin with his ravens.' 'Maybe, but isn't that a lady sitting on the throne?' And that is precisely the question: What – or, better, who – does the Lejre figurine represent? An answer to that question will be proposed in the following pages (Figure 4).

The figurine consists of three main components, each of which will be analyzed in turn:

- A finely carved high seat
- Two birds perched on the armrests of the chair
- The human-like figure seated in the chair.

The high seat

The high seat is designed as an upright chair whose four pillar-like legs are connected by inset pieces of wood or

The current article is a slightly revised English version of an article in Danish, which was published by the author in ROMU, Årsskrift for Roskilde Museum 2009. The reason for this English reprint is that the figurine has drawn a lot of attention by research worldwide and has been the topic of many a debate. By this article we, the editors, hope to have made available for a broader group of audience the description of the figure and the interpretation made by the head of excavation, Tom Christensen. Furthermore, by choosing the Lejre figurine as a subject matter for the debate section of our first issue, we also provide two additional interpretations by Ulla Mannering and Elisabeth Rudebeck, respectively. These two papers are intended to bring forth novel interpretation on the figurine.

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Translated by professor John Niles.

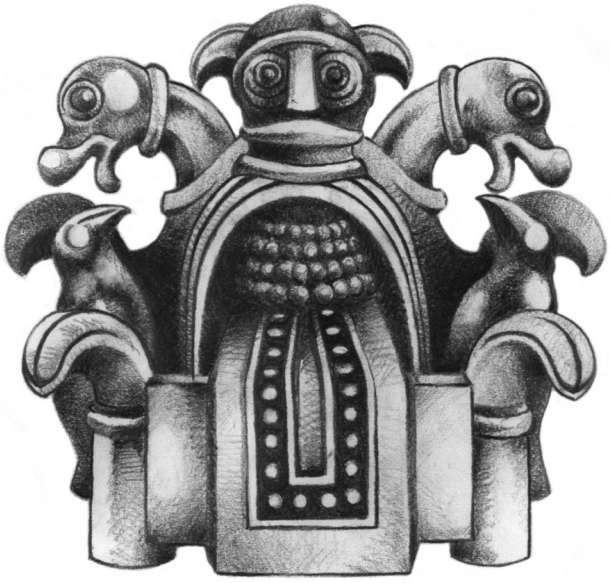

Figure 1. Drawing: Rune Knude/Zoomorgraphic.

Figure 2. The figurine is cast in silver with inlayed niello, a black copper- and sulfur-containing alloy that contrasts with the shiny silver. Photo: Ole Malling, Roskilde Museum.

panels. Each of the four corner posts is topped by a stylized beast head. These might be stylized griffin-heads or snake-heads, though the right front post is broken off. But first and foremost what gives the chair its character is its elaborately carved backrest. Markings or incisions on the rear face of the backrest, behind the seated figure, suggest that this is not to be construed as a smooth surface, but rather that it too includes carvings and decorations. The upper part of the backrest is adorned with two fantastic beast heads with sharply accentuated neck-collars and eyes, while the beasts' open mouths are biting down on the tops of the two rear corner posts. At the top of the backrest, there might also be depicted a smaller pair of stylized beast heads (Figures 5 and 6).

To judge from the seat's shape, with these details, one can infer that it is modeled on an actual item of furniture. Little furniture from this historical period survives, however, and among these remains, which are often fragmentary, there are no examples of high seats or thrones. From the Oseberg burial, which dates from AD 834, was recovered a fairly simple seat with a built-in chest for storing utensils (Brøgger et al. 1917–28). Also, worth noting in this connection are the so-called beast-head posts that

Figure 3. The place where the item was found, in between the two hall complexes. To the left, the 'old' Lejre hall is outlined in the terrain; to the right, one of the newly discovered halls is marked out in white. Photo: Roskilde Museum.

Figure 4. The Lejre figurine has just been discovered by amateur archaeologist Tommy Olesen of Osted. Photo: Roskilde Museum.

were found at this same site: five carved wooden figures, each one about 50 cm long, whose function is still unknown. When one takes into account the beast heads on the Lejre throne, it is possible that these Oseberg posts might have been parts of a high seat.

In any event, miniature chairs have been found at several Viking Age archaeological sites in Denmark and other parts of Scandinavia (Arrhenius 1961, pp. 149ff; Zeiten 1997, pp. 21ff). Most of these items are made of silver and seem to represent *knub*- or *kubbestole* – that is, chairs carved from a single block of wood. Most come

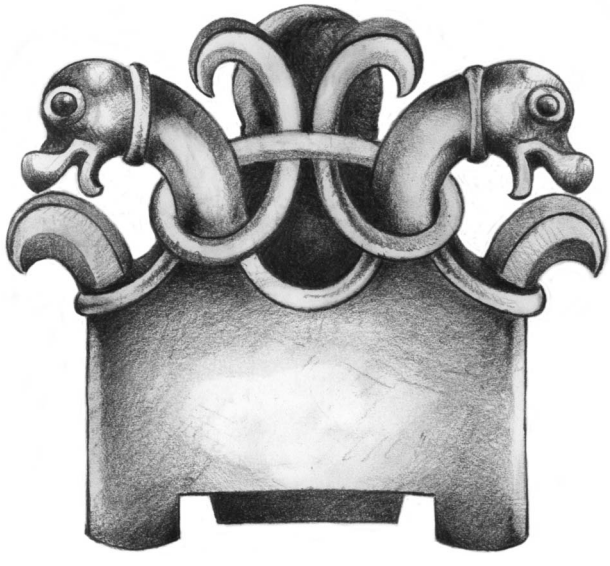

Figure 5. Drawing: Rune Knude/Zoomorgraphic.

Figure 6. The back side of the high seat. Photo: Ole Malling, Roskilde Museum.

Figure 7. The throne from Hedeby is the closest parallel to the Lejre high seat. There is every indication that a person was originally seated on the chair. The find was made in a woman's grave dating from ca. 900 at Hedeby near Schleswig. Photo: Hedeby Museum.

from hoards, but a few were found in graves. For example, one was found in a richly furnished female grave (grave 4) in the burial grounds near the Viking fortress at Fyrkat (Roesdahl 1977, p. 8). This little chair is fitted with an eyelet so that, like many of the other miniature chairs, it could have been worn as an amulet, either as an individual piece of jewelry or as part of a set.

But the find most pertinent to the one at Lejre is a small silver throne from Hedeby, one that was probably worn as an amulet and was found in a female grave (Zeiten 1997, pp. 41, 60) (Figure 7). This chair, which is 1.52 cm high and 2.5 cm wide, is similar to the Lejre piece in that it is shaped as an upright chair with four round corner posts and a backrest. At the armrests are two bird-like animals, swan-like in appearance (Petersen 2005, p. 66). The ends of the armrests possibly represent animal heads, perhaps lions or wolves. There was once a figure sitting on the chair, though now it is lost. The find is commonly known as 'Odin's throne'. The grave and thus the chair can be dated to ca. 900.

The chair from Lejre is a representation of a throne or a high seat (*há-sæti)*, as distinguished chairs are called in the sagas. In the *Prose Edda* of Snorri Sturluson as well as in skaldic poetry and the *Elder Edda*, mention is made of *Hlidskjálf*, Odin's high seat (Lindow 2001, p. 176). It has the property that when Odin sits in it, he can oversee all the worlds and take in everything that is happening.

The birds

On each side of the high seat is perched a bird whose attention is focused on the enthroned person that it faces. On the backs of the two identical birds, inlaid patches of niello highlight the pair of intersecting wings that cross one another over the bird's tail. The birds' sharp beaks, as well, help establish their identity as two ravens perched on the armrests (Figure 8). And indeed, depictions of ravens are well known among the colorful animal ornamentation that fills the surfaces of jewelry and other decorative objects of the late Iron Age and the Viking period. Certain types of jewelry are fashioned in the shape of birds, with ravens, among others, being clearly portrayed (Petersen 2005, pp. 64ff).

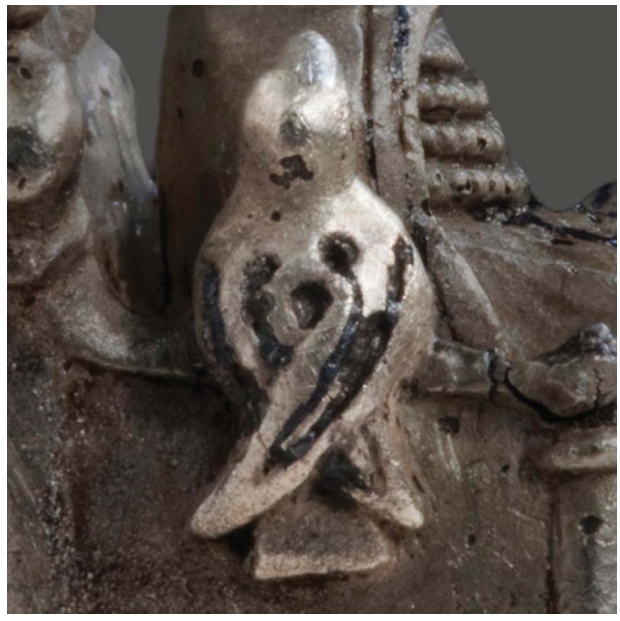

Figure 8. A raven on the armrest of the high seat. Photo: Ole Malling, Roskilde Museum.

It is worth noting that the two birds on the Lejre figurine are not to be understood as parts of the high seat. While the beast heads on the backrest of the chair are portrayed in the stylized manner of carved wooden figures, the ravens, despite their small size, are presented as lifelike animals that are independent elements of the design.

The interpretation of the two birds is therefore obvious: they must be Odin's ravens Huginn and Muninn. The literal meanings of those two names are 'Thought' (bringing to mind) and 'Memory' (recollection) – qualities that were good for the birds to have, for their function was to fly out every morning into the worlds, whether of men or of gods, and in the evening to come back and tell Odin all that had happened.

The enthroned person

The long robe

The person sitting on the throne represents the figure's third element. The attire consists of a cloak; a long tunic, robe, or caftan; and, at the chest, a distinct outline of a piece of jewelry or regalia consisting of four rings or chains (Figure 9).

Figure 9. The Lejre figure's clothing. Among other details that can be seen are the bands that are superimposed on the garment. Photo: Ole Malling, Roskilde Museum.

Figure 10. The attire of this small (3-cm high) male figure from Gudme on Funen consists of sharply outlined bands, whose relation to the upper body is reminiscent of the bands to be seen on the Lejre figure. With reference to the Christ image on the large standing stone at Jelling, it has been proposed that this find from Gudme should be considered a Christ figure. Viking period. Photo: National Museum of Denmark.

Along the edges of the cloak are two parallel grooves with remnants of inlayed niello. On the robe, two vertical bands are conjoined at the bottom by a short horizontal band. The bands are adorned with small round ornaments whose silver hue stands out against the black niello. The person is wearing a hat or helmet with a clearly marked edge or shade.

We have information about late Iron Age and Viking Age clothing both from the archaeological record – primarily the remains of textiles from grave-finds – and from pictorial representations, whether these are freestanding figurines of wood or metal or, more commonly, pictures on metal in the form of jewelry. Most interesting in this connection are the pictorial images, for objects made of wood or metal are more likely to provide parallels to the garments of the Lejre figure (Figure 10).

In 1868, at the village of Trønninge in western Zealand, a small gold figurine was found of approximately the same size as the Lejre find (Mackeprang 1935, pp. 228–43) (Figure 11). It depicts a person wearing a cloak and a long article of clothing, reaching to the feet, on which bands are superimposed. In both form and ornamentation, this attire is similar to what we see on the Lejre figure. This find from Trønninge has been interpreted as a game piece for a board game, and – perhaps because of the ecclesiastical look of the garments – the suggestion has been made that this could have been a

Figure 11. This little gold figure from Trønninge disappeared during World War II and now can be studied only through photographs. Photo: National Museum of Denmark.

Figure 12. 'Freyja' figure from Stavnsager, near Randers. This bronze figure, 3.8 cm high, may be a mold for the manufacture of press blech figures. Photo: Randers Museum.

Figure 13. This figure from Rude Eskilstrup was found in a marsh in central Zealand approximately 75 m away from solid land. It is construed as a sacrificial gift. Around the neck and upper chest can be seen a piece of jewelry consisting of sharply outlined rings. The male gender of the figure is indicated by a prominent mustache. Photo: National Museum of Denmark.

bishop (Ramskou 1976, p. 45). However, the figure has a distinct hairstyle, a feature that has led to new interpretations. It is now thought to be a woman wearing a dress called a *seledragt* – a garment, typical of the Viking Age, that is characterized by superimposed bands. This type of costume seems to be associated with the more wealthy segment of society, but not the highest rank (Jensen 2004, pp. 353ff; Roesdahl 1980, p. 20).

By Stavnsager near Randers, Jutland, a bronze matrix was found depicting a person wearing a long garment with a knee-length ornament suspended from the neck (Nielsen and Højlund Fiedel 2001, pp. 82f) (Figure 12). Like other representations of people (particularly women) who tear out their hair, this image has been associated with the

Figure 14. Two gold foil figures from Sorte Muld on Bornholm, each approximately 1.5 cm high, depicting men in long robes, both of them with long hair and one with a beard as well. Photo: Cille Krause, National Museum of Denmark.

goddess Freyja. Among the Norse gods, it was Freyja and Odin, who were well versed in *seidr* or sorcery (Lindow 2001, pp. 265f). A term that is most readily used today as an equivalent to *seidr*, though not a fully adequate translation, is shamanism.

In a richly furnished woman's grave of the Viking Age located near Hägebyhöga Aska in Östergötland was found a small silver pendant that was once part of a large necklace (Figure 13). This item depicts a woman wearing a cape and a long robe, and so it bears comparison with the item from Lejre. On the chest are three well-defined chains that make up a large necklace. This Swedish find, too, is interpreted as a depiction of Freyja, here wearing the *Brisingamen*, a large gold necklace that was forged for her by the four dwarfs Alfrigg, Berling, Dvalin, and Grerr, who were called *brisingerne* (Arrhenius 2009, pp. 223ff).

It is not only women who are depicted wearing full-length garments and necklaces. A carved wooden figure, 43 cm long, from Rude Eskilstrup in central Zealand depicts a seated male figure wearing a long tunic or cloak. Around his neck can be seen a necklace composed of several broadly profiled rings. The enthroned posture, the long clothing, and the necklace all find their equivalents in the Lejre figure. The find has not been carbon-14 dated, but the composite necklace has actual parallels in pure gold from Swedish finds that date from ca. 500. A pin on the bottom of this item indicates that it was once mounted on a base – perhaps a pedestal or more likely a seat. One can imagine that what is depicted is a deity prepared to engage in ceremonial processions and cult activities (Ørsnes 1990, Jensen 2004, p. 106).

A 6.5-cm high bronze figurine or baton-end found at Søholte on Lolland similarly depicts a male person with a necklace or collar much like the one on the wooden figure from Rude Eskilstrup (Franceschi et al. 2005, p. 104).

Though of somewhat earlier date than the Lejre find, gold-foil figures are another source of information for the clothing of the period. These small paper-thin gold-foil sheets, which are believed to have had a religious or cultic context, often feature the stamped images of male and female characters. These images pertain to a numinous world and represent either mythological beings or a worldly elite that had religious functions. Among these figures are men dressed in knee-length or ankle-length robes or caftans, and likewise men wearing long cloaks (Watt 2003) (Figure 14).

Hat and facial hair

The face of the Lejre figurine is not particularly rich in detail with the exception of two eyes and a nose, while neither mouth nor ears are highlighted. While the surface of the nose and the left eye appears slightly brighter than the rest of the face, this difference may have resulted from

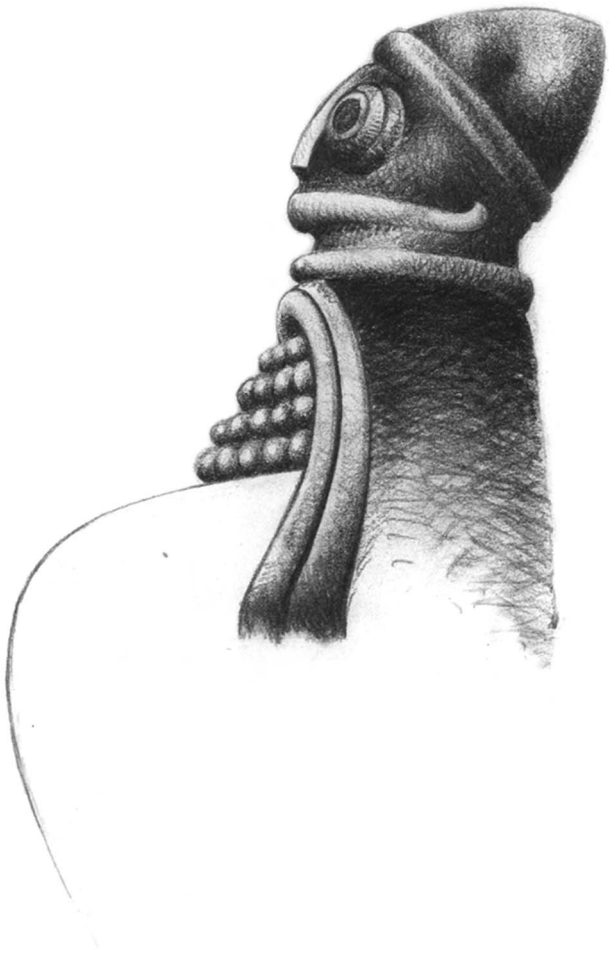

Figure 15. The drawing gives the headgear the character of a helm, and the mustache is almost of the handlebar type. Drawing: Rune Knude/Zoomorgraphic.

Figure 16. One of several male heads, carved in wood, from the Oseberg burial. The mustache is portrayed as a prominent double bulge. Photo: courtesy of the Museum of Cultural History, Oslo.

wear or damage accrued later. Directly under the nose can be seen a horizontal bulge that extends out towards the cheeks, where it diminishes (Figure 15). This can be interpreted as marking out a mustache. There are many examples of Iron Age and Viking Age artifacts where beards or, in many instances, mustaches are prominent on the representations of male heads. In the grave from Oseberg that has been mentioned above, several carved heads of men were found where the mustache is highlighted by horizontal ridges (Figure 16).

Around the neck of the Lejre figure there is another bulge, or rather a ring. It is clearly segregated from the upper edge of the cape and should not be construed as part of the clothing. It may be a representation of a heavy gold necklace of the kind that several of the Iron Age and Viking Age male figures are fitted with (Jensen 2004, pp. 105f) (Figure 17).

The figure's headgear is set off by a prominent edge or shade. Whether this feature is a cap, a helmet, or a hat cannot be determined upon first glance. Here it is natural to consider a number of bronze statuettes of the late Iron Age where such facial features as the mustache and hat or hairstyle are highlighted (Voss 1990, p. 138). With these objects, there is no point in trying to determine where the beard growth is located, whether over or under the chin; more important is to take into account the whole look of the head. In some instances the head is interpreted as having a bowl-cut hairstyle with the hair parted in the middle (Thrane 2005), but this could in other cases alternatively be construed as a hat or helmet. The figures are often single finds and dating them is a difficult enterprise, but there seems to be a consensus that they are depictions of gods and that they belong temporally to

Figure 17. The photo shows the bulge/mustache under the nose. Photo: Ole Malling, Roskilde Museum.

the fourth to sixth centuries AD (Voss 1990, p. 138) (Figures 18 and 19).

'Odin from Ribe' is the name given to a mask, made of lead, that was allegedly found in the oldest remains of Ribe (Jensen 1990, p. 178) (Figure 20). In addition to a mustache that can scarcely be overlooked, plus markings suggestive of a hat or helmet, a stylized bird can be seen on each side of the head. This find is construed as a representation of Odin with the ravens Huginn and Muninn. Similar finds are known from other locales.

To portray gods with beards and hats is not just a Danish or Nordic phenomenon. In the Slavic area, south of the Baltic Sea, there are similar examples of this practice (Gabriel 1991, pp. 279ff).

God of magic

Just as we see with the throne and the birds, the figure's clothing too is full of detail – and this is hardly accidental, but rather these details must symbolize features or characteristics of the person who is depicted. Thus we move into an area where religious power converges with secular power, and where male or female characters are depicted in special situations in which there was no need for them to be attired in easily recognizable gender-specific clothing.

Odin is a multifaceted god who pertains to many contexts and has a wealth of by-names, depending on what role he is attributed. As the supreme god of the Old Norse pantheon, he is called *Alfader* (All-father); and as he is a god of war, battle, and death, he is also called *Hærfader* (lord of armies) and *Valfader* (lord of the slain). The name Odin denotes 'the furious, the ecstatic one,' and this quality makes him a god of wisdom, magic, runes, and poetic inspiration. The fashion of his clothing, with its symbolism, can help to convey the particular mode in which he is represented. The Lejre figure represents him not as a god of war on his horse Sleipner, armed

Figure 18. This figure from Højby by Odense, which is 16 cm high, depicts a seated man with a mustache and hat that lend character to the face. Each hand is closed into a ball, the right one horizontally and the left one vertically. What he held in his hands is not known, but the figure was obviously made in a larger context, and he may therefore have been sitting on a chair or throne. Photo: National Museum of Denmark.

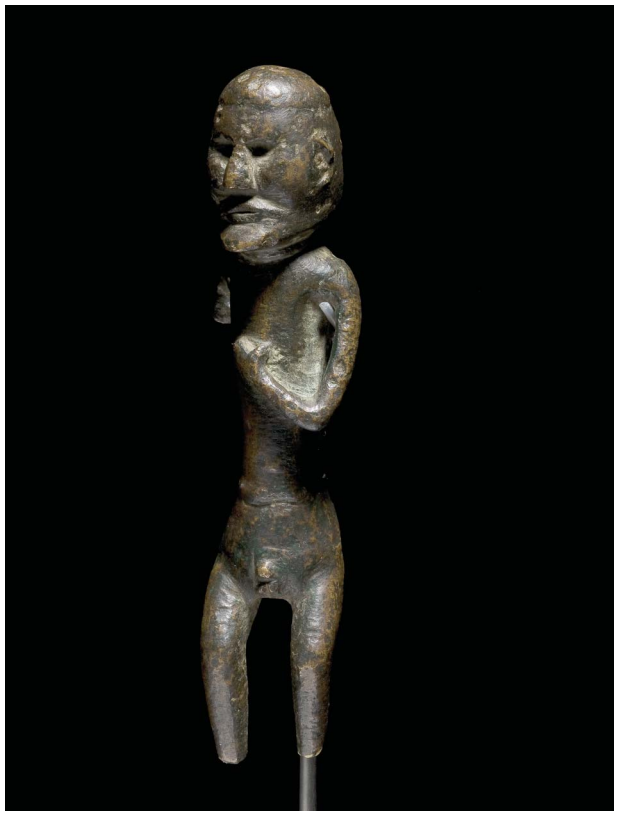

Figure 19. The Figure from Brejnebjerg, Funen, 12 cm in length, has a sitting pose and wears a heavy neck ring in addition to his beard and hat. Photo: National Museum of Denmark.

Figure 20. 'Odin from Ribe'. The head is made of lead, which is an unusual material for jewelry and amulets; it is thought to be a model for a cast-metal worker. At the site of the same workshop in Ribe, 11 casts matching this figure were found. Photo: Museums of Southwest Jutland.

with his spear Gungnir, but rather as the god of wisdom, as is indicated by the high seat and ravens.

Many of the Gotland picture stones feature representations of scenes from Norse mythology. On a stone from Sora Hammers in Lärbro parish is depicted a man with a beard and long clothing who is hanging from a tree (Figure 21). On a stone from Garda Bote are depicted no fewer than seven men who likewise wear long robes and hang from the branches of trees. These scenes can be construed as representations of human sacrifice (Pesch 2005, p. 124). These visual images can perhaps also be related to the myth of Odin's self-sacrifice. For nine nights, the god hung himself in the tree of life, Yggdrasil, in order to gain insight into the secrets of the underworld. If it is Odin, who is depicted on the Lejre figurine, reference is likely to one of those situations where he is represented as skilled in *seidr*.

Seidr is the Old Norse word for cultic rituals that traditionally were practiced by a special category of female cult leaders called *völvur* or *seidkonar* (women skilled in magic). In rare instances, these rituals could also be performed by men, but that was a potential cause for social opprobrium. Since, among his other attributes, Odin was a god of *seidr*, this endowed him with female attributes, and in certain situations, he had the capacity of donning women's clothes. He can therefore be perceived as somewhat ambiguous as regards gender (Solli 2002).

It is therefore possible that a long garment with distinctive properties can be linked to the role of one who is skilled in *seidr*. In any event, the Lejre figure has a certain ambiguity as regards gender. Certain features suggest that a woman is represented, but substantial arguments can be made that it is a man, Odin, who sits on the throne. With

Figure 21. This detail from a picture stone at Stora Hammars on Gotland shows a hanged man wearing long robes. (Imer 2004, p. 60).

interpretations of the figure, we move into a sphere where, as was said above, the properties that pertain to deities are not always clearly defined as either masculine or feminine. Before the matter is finally resolved, what has been stated here provides at least one possible basis for interpretation.

Odin as majestas Domini?

If the figurine appeals to the viewer so strongly, perhaps that is first and foremost because it is easy to decode, even more than a thousand years after it was cast. Even without any background, we can understand it because we readily recognize its overall symbolism: the ruler on his throne. This is an image that is deeply rooted in our culture – roots that in large part lie in the ancient world, especially in the Byzantine Empire (330–1453), which grew out of the eastern part of the Roman Empire with Constantinople (present-day Istanbul) as its capital. The system of governance was imperial, and Christianity was adopted as the state religion (Figure 22).

When Caesar or Christ are depicted as rulers, they are often shown as frontally enthroned, a posture that signals authority. This same motif is known in Danish Romanesque church art, among other examples, in which Christ is seen represented on murals in the pose of *majestas domini* (the Lord in majesty), seated on a throne. Also, just south of the Danish border in the Carolingian kingdom, during the eighth and ninth centuries, the throne played a prominent role as a symbol of royal power. This motif is known not only from visual depictions, but also from surviving thrones or the parts thereof (Klæsøe 2003, pp. 101ff).

In many depictions – be they paintings, mosaics or reliefs – the enthroned ruler is wearing long robes whose individual components, ornamentation, and color have symbolic value. Along the outer edges of the Lejre figure's cloak can be seen sewn or woven bands, while the niello inlay on the lower part of the clothing seems to mark off a separate garment or ornamental bands. Particularly in the Byzantine Empire, a tradition developed – Roman in origin – whereby sewn or loose bands called *clavi* were attached to clothing. Originally associated with Roman senatorial attire as a sign of social rank, these bands were later depicted in early Christian and Byzantine art. The *omophorion* was another significant ornament of dress. This consisted of broad bands that were commonly worn as part of episcopal dress, similar to the *pallium* in the Roman Catholic church (Fleischer 2003) (Figure 23). Again, the question is the interpretation of the Lejre figure's clothing as being an unequivocally male or female attire. In its clearly emphasized details, there may reside a hidden significance that goes beyond simple gender and instead is attached to the office that the enthroned figure holds. Whether one can gain a greater understanding of this item by reference to parallels drawn from the costume culture of the Roman or, later, the Christian Byzantine era should not be decided here. Still, with all its harmoniously balanced symmetry together with its clearly defined symbolism of power, one gains the impression that what we are viewing is a pagan god fashioned in a classical/Christian iconographic tradition (Figure 24).

Odin and Lejre

That a heathen god is depicted here, there can be no doubt; but is it Odin? While this question cannot be answered definitively, manifestly the throne or high seat Hlidskjálf is Odin's, even though, according to Old Norse sources, others dared to sit in it on rare occasions (Larsen 1991, p. 59). The two ravens Huginn and Muninn also pertain uniquely to Odin's attributes. The gender of the figure can be assessed with reference to its attire; in the present paper, I have emphasized an interpretation of the face as having a mustache and a hat. All in all, it seems most likely that it is Odin who is depicted here, by a skilled craftsman, in 9 grams of silver.

An amulet is an object that protects the wearer from injury and helps in difficult situations. This term is used for several of the miniature chairs mentioned above, but unlike them, the Lejre figurine is not provided with an eyelet, nor is evidence of wear visible at the hole in the center of the chair's back-support that could have been used for suspending it. An amulet can also be stored on the body in a bag or purse. The Lejre figure is, however, hollow. While its cavity might be no more than a product of the casting process, it could also be intended to help mount or secure the piece to a base. In this context, when one takes into account the figurine's subject matter, it is worth mentioning the so-called *völustafir* (cunning-woman staves) that are discussed in the Old Norse sagas

Figure 22. This ivory panel depicting the coronation of the Byzantine Emperor Romanos II (939–963), to the left, and Queen Eudokia, to the right, could be contemporary with the Lejre figurine. The coronation attire of the two royal figures is strikingly similar. (Mango 2002, p. 228).

and are also found in Viking Age graves. These were used in connection with the practice of *seiðr* and were employed in cultic rituals. The staves found in graves, which are made of metal, are most often associated with female burials, for instance grave 4 from Fyrkat (which is mentioned above), but they are also known from male burials (Pentz et al. 2009). The Lejre figurine might have been mounted on one of these staves or on some other symbol of authority. It is also conceivable, of course, that it could have been tucked away in a bag or purse and brought out on special occasions.

With the latest discoveries of large halls at Lejre, we venture to say that this center has been archaeologically proven to be one of the most important sites of Viking Age Denmark. Medieval written sources take it for granted that Lejre was the earliest royal seat of the Danes. Even though the stories of the kings of Lejre that circulated in later times have been shown to be historically unreliable, that fact should not obscure the significant point that Lejre in the year 1000 is referred to as a 'central' location and, in skaldic verse, is associated with Danish kingship (Christensen 1991, p. 18). Whether or not

Figure 23. The coronation of Harold Godwinson as seen on the Bayeux Tapestry. The king is depicted seated on his throne, wearing a symmetrically clasped mantle and a long robe that consists of several folds. To the right is the archbishop, who both wears the ribbon of office himself and stands with one in his hand; ca. 1075.

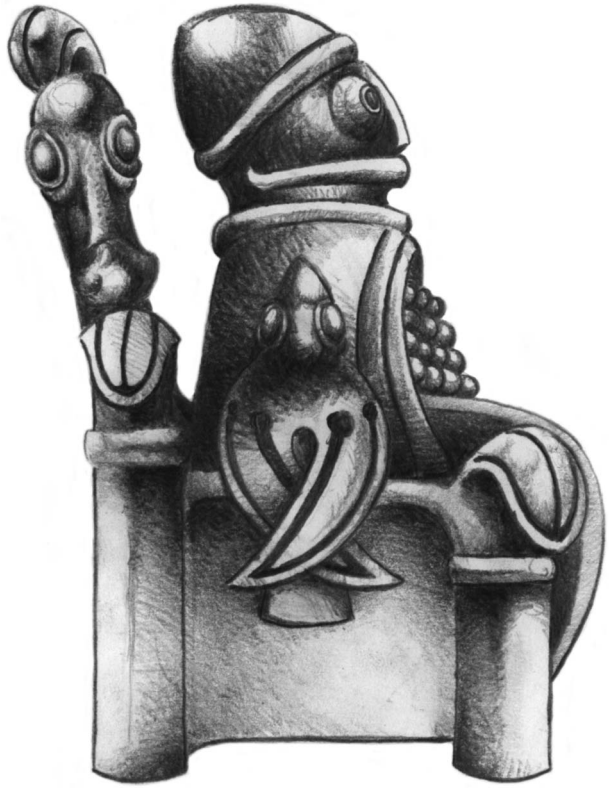

Figure 24. Drawing: Rune Knude/Zoomorgraphic.

Figure 25. Drawing: Rune Knude/Zoomorgraphic.

Figure 26. Photo: Ole Malling, Roskilde Museum.

actual kings lived at Lejre obviously cannot be proven. However, Odin was the king of the Norse gods and also the god of earthly kings, and he seems to have been worshipped among the upper ranks of society in particular. On the Lejre figurine, Odin is depicted in the posture of a ruler on the high seat Hlidskjálf along with the ravens, Huginn and Muninn, who bring him the insight and knowledge that make it possible to rule the world – features for which one or another of Lejre's residents must have had particular use (Figures 25 and 26).

Notes

1. Notwithstanding the short time, it has been on display as a museum exhibit, this little silver figurine has attracted attention and debate that is unlikely to cease any time soon. Future analyses, whether iconographic or technical in nature, will bring forth new interpretations of it. My colleagues at Roskilde Museum deserve thanks for their suggestions and comments, as does illustrator and graphic designer Rune Knude, who made line drawings of the figurine and has also been an inspiring discussion partner. Thanks are also due to museum curator Anne C. Sorensen and editor Christian Adamsen for their constructive suggestions.
2. Roskilde Museum journal no. 641. The excavations took place from June to October 2009 and were funded by the Foundation of 29 December 1967, which was established by Eilif Krogager.

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