

# Performing the Vikings

## From Edda to Oseberg

NEIL PRICE

*ABSTRACT: With a starting point in Jens Peter Schjødt's studies of Ibn Faḍlān, this article explores the performative dimensions of late Iron Age ritual practice, as mediated especially through mortuary behaviour and ceremony. The interplay of textual and archaeological perspectives is in focus here, including a critical contribution to the interdisciplinary discussion on what has been termed the 'performance turn' in Viking studies. In several short case studies, notably the new work on the textile fragments from the Oseberg ship burial, the positive potential of this line of research is asserted as a source of considerable insight into Viking-Age world-views.*

*RESUME: Med udgangspunkt i Jens Peter Schjødts studier af Ibn Faḍlān, undersøger denne artikel de performative aspekter af den ældre jernalders rituelle praksis som den kommer til udtryk i begravelsesadfærd og -ceremoni. Samspillet mellem skriftlige og arkæologiske perspektiver er i fokus i denne artikel, inklusiv et kritisk bidrag til den interdisciplinære diskussion omkring det, der er blevet kaldt 'the performance turn' i studier af vikingetiden. Gennem flere korte casestudier, især nyt arbejde omkring tekstilfragmenterne fra Oseberg-skibsbegravelsen, fastslås det positive potentiale i denne form for forskning som en kilde til betragtelig indsigt i vikingetidens verdenssyn.*

*KEYWORDS: Viking ritual; performance studies; performance turn; Ibn Fadlan; Oseberg tapestry*

In 2007, Jens Peter Schjødt published what has come to be regarded as a classic work on the ritual world of the Viking Age, analysing the famous account of a ship cremation witnessed on the Volga in 922 by Aḥmad ibn Faḍlān. Jens Peter's was one of the first detailed explorations of that text in the formal context of history of religions and the study of Norse mythology, and now regularly features in every new engagement

with the *Risāla*. As it has for many other Viking scholars, Ibn Faḍlān's description has long fascinated me, not only as the most vivid eye-witness relation of the Rus' that we possess, but also as a textual source with such a myriad of reflections in archaeology and other disciplines. I have returned to Ibn Faḍlān repeatedly throughout my career, and in honour of JPS I want to discuss some of the questions that his account raises for our understanding of mortuary behaviour, with a particular focus on the notion of ritual performance in Old Norse spiritual practice.

## Setting the Stage

Since the mid-1990s at least, the broad spectrum of performance studies (Schechner 2020) has played a significant role in the understanding and interpretation of Viking-Age ritual. Initially these perspectives were applied to texts, in particular some of the Eddic poems and their potential to be seen as containing traces of what were once 'dramatic works', in the literal sense of something declaimed, acted, and performed, for an audience in a particular space, which was itself temporarily changed in the process (cf. Gunnell and Ronström 2013). However, archaeologists were also quick to see the applications of these ideas to their own studies of Viking-Age material culture, especially with regard to the remains of arguably ritual activity.

With inspiration from the work of earlier scholars such as Bertha Phillpotts (1920), the primary textual research here has been published by Terry Gunnell, first in his 1995 thesis and then in a range of subsequent papers developing this approach over more than twenty years. Gunnell's studies often relate to specific dialogic and monological poems of the Eddic corpus such as *Skírnismál*, *Hárbarðsljóð*, and others (e.g. 1999a, 2008, 2012a, 2013), but his work has also embraced the history of these performative models (1999b), dramatic space and temporal motion (2005a, 2006a-c, 2011, 2020), seasonal ritual (2005b), guising traditions (2001, 2007, 2012b), and more. Over this same time period, other textual scholars have also begun to analyse the poems in this way (e.g. Harris 2000, 2008; Millward 2015; Nygaard 2019a&b).

Among archaeologists, the performance turn has been broader due to the ever-expanding material corpus, and the greater variety of contexts in which these approaches can be applied. Whether in the form of burials, 'cult sites', 'ritual structures' or 'sacrificial' deposits (for want of better terms), and more, a major feature of these environments is the potential to archaeologically recover not just the artefactual components of ritual performance, but evidence for the sequence of actions of which it was composed.

An early link between funerary monuments and narrative – the idea of mortuary behaviour being in some way linked to stories – came with Anders Andrén's game-changing analysis of the Gotland picture stones, specifically a group of the later Viking-Age examples with horizontal image panels.

Published in 1989 with an English version in 1993, this work appeared almost simultaneously as Gunnell's thesis was being written and is an interesting example of disciplinary advances moving in parallel. Examining motifs on the picture stones that

seem to have been set up around the borders of estates, commemorating the dead while also marking out the family land they owned, Andrén was able to trace sequential episodes in the well-known story of Sigurðr. In addition to acting as locative signals of inheritance (functioning much as burial mounds in that respect), crucially this connection seems to have been expressed through a dynastic story built up in successive visual 'chapters' as leading figures from each generation died. In addition to this stimulating discovery, Andrén also suggested a new reading of the large ship images that appear in the lower section of almost every stone, namely that the unique Gotlandic medium of picture stones was effectively a visual equivalent to the ship burials that are found elsewhere in Scandinavia but not on this one island. In this interpretation, the narratives of various kinds (at least partly mythological in content) that can be arguably read on the stones might have a counterpart in the material tableaux of the literal ship burials on the mainland. The startling implication is that the burials of the Viking Age, or at least very elaborate ones such as boat graves, could represent the remains of funerary stories expressed in material form – in other words, as dramas. The link with Gunnell's ideas is obvious.

All this came together in 2004, a watershed in archaeological performance studies of the Viking Age, when Terje Gansum published his reconstruction of how the Oseberg ship burial unfolded. Working from a new analysis of the original excavators' notes, Gansum was able to reveal that the Oseberg vessel was initially covered only by a half mound, leaving a vertical 'cross-section' of earth falling almost exactly along the open gable end of the onboard grave chamber. As a result the open foredeck of the ship formed a kind of stage, with access into the burial chamber itself (*Fig. 1*). It is impossible to say precisely how long the ship was left partially exposed in this way – the original estimate of some years was arguably revised to a few months by the late Sæbjørg Walaker Nordeide (2011) – but clear possibilities remain for long sequences of complex actions and material manipulations to have taken place there, before the chamber was very hastily sealed and the mound completed (Bill 2016; Price 2020a: 253).



Fig. 1. The Oseberg ship burial, Vestfold, Norway, as it may have appeared with the mound half complete, c.834 CE. Reconstruction by Anders Kvåle Rue, used by kind permission.

In the earlier boat burials at Valsgärde in Sweden, Herschend (1997: 49-59) had previously suggested that the disposition of the onboard grave-goods mirrored the use of space in a hall, thus making the ship a kind of residence for the dead – a notion of symbolic space and activity that would fit well with the kinds of rituals envisaged at Oseberg. The same suggestion of open ‘stages’ formed by partially accessible boat burials was later made at other sites, after re-evaluations of cemeteries such as Sutton Hoo (Mortimer 2011: 223-6; cf. Carver 2000). Developing from all this work was the notion of detailed interplay between the dead, the objects interred with them, and the use of space within and around the boats – effectively, the beginnings of an archaeological path to ‘reading’ what the ship graves ‘meant’, as articulated through the material actions of those doing the burying.

A similar model to Andrén’s was also developed for the smaller Gotland picture stones, which have been found sometimes as four sides of a ‘box’ containing cremated human remains (Snædal 2010). Several of these stones depict what seem to be feminine figures in horse-drawn wagons, the latter with a distinctive curving side panel that is replicated in the uneven upper edge of the stones themselves. Were these mortuary ‘boxes’ intended as symbolic stone wagons, in the same way as the larger picture-stones may have represented iconographic ship burials? Snædal makes a compelling argument, and a gendered one, in that ship burials are primarily associated with men (though with spectacular exceptions), while graves in which a wagon body is used as

a 'coffin' are generally those of women (Hägg 2009). Just like ship burials, wagon graves are also so far unknown on Gotland.

## Time and Motion

The sense of material narratives in the boat burials, possibly reflected in their Gotlandic pictorial analogues, links naturally to a feeling for their complexity and duration, of ritual acts involving many participants over considerable time – all of which are of course found combined in Ibn Faḍlān's relation of the Rus' funeral (Montgomery 2000, 2017). A detailed summary is redundant here, but in the present context the chief value of Ibn Faḍlān's account is the vivid detail of unequivocally performative acts that we cannot find in the archaeology or retrieve from the Old Norse sources. In no particular order, and merely scratching the surface: the ethnic context of the burial (Rus', Bulgars, Arabs, and perhaps more are present); the large numbers of people involved; the intricacy of the rituals, taking place over ten days, a period so long that a temporary grave is required in advance of the final one; the distinctions of freedom and its lack, of status, and gender; the organisation; the inherent roleplay, the women who run things, and their relationships; the role of the kin and comrades of the deceased; the fact that the dead man's clothing is specially made for the funeral; the interplay of things and people, who carries what, where they place it, when, and in which contexts; the role played by music, speech, movement, giving and receiving; the element of feasting, drinking, apparently near-continuous intoxication; the many sexual acts, arguably consensual until they are definitively not; the violence, the careful, studied killing of animals – many kinds – and finally the ritual rape and murder of a young woman; the meanings of nudity, and clothing; the role of fire, and the circumstances in which it is kindled and fanned; the notion of memory and monumentality, in the form of the mound and the carved pole left behind. And ultimately, the fact that this is all being done by people far from home (what on earth do they do when they have more time and resources?).

The account of Ibn Faḍlān has naturally attracted a huge literature, ranging from annotated early editions, before and after the discovery of the Mashhad manuscript, through a long sequence of post-war translations in many languages, and on into numerous academic meditations (for comprehensive references, see Price *In Press*, and Montgomery's editions). Again, performative perspectives began to appear from the mid-1990s (e.g. Warmind 1995; Taylor 2002: chap. 4), contemporaneously with earlier-noted work on the Eddic corpus and the archaeology. I first explored Ibn Faḍlān's report and its wider implications repeatedly throughout my doctoral thesis (Price 2002, especially chap. 3), and later developed my observations in relation to funerary drama in a series of papers, several of which focussed in part on boat burials (Price 2008a, 2010, 2012, 2014a; see also Price 2020a: chap. 8, and Price *In Press*). In addition to comparing the Volga episode with excavated examples (for example, the discovery of actual 'temporary graves' adjacent to boat burials; Roberts and Hreiðarsdóttir 2013),

these also encompassed ritual performance in and around so-called cult sites such as Götavi in Närke and Lilla Ullevi in Uppland, both in Sweden (see further below).

The performative aspects of Viking-Age funerals have been nuanced by numerous other studies, both of individual rites and more general trends. Among the former are explorations of the agency of weapons in burial practice (e.g. Nordberg 2002; Pedersen 2014; Sayer, Sebo and Hughes 2019); seated burial (Robbins 2004); colour symbolism (Thedéen 2010); and tree imagery in the form of stone grave settings (Andrén 2004), to mention but a few. The more general studies include considerations of so-called deviant burial customs (e.g. Arcini 2010; Gardela 2013); the complex behaviour around the reopening and manipulation of burials (e.g. Klevnäs 2007, 2015, 2016; Bill and Daly 2012); the 'citation' of motif and material expression between burials (e.g. Williams 2016); regional variation (e.g. Svanberg 2003; Stylegar 2005; Pétursdóttir 2009; Ulriksen 2011; Norstein 2020); the long-term reuse and manipulation of mortuary environments, harking back directly to the burial-as-stage (e.g. Pedersen 2006; Hållans Stenholm 2006, 2013; Thäte 2007); and the landscapes of funeral commemoration as manifested in a regionally-specific 'grave-language' (Sw. *gravspråk*; Andersson 2005; Friðriksson 2013).

These perspectives were incorporated as they appeared into my larger surveys of Viking-Age mortuary behaviour and ritual (Price 2008b, 2014, 2020b), presenting an encompassing view of archaeological performance research set in the comparative and illuminating context of the textual work. However, the interplay of written sources and material culture also continued in other fields, focusing more on the 'actors' themselves. To take just a handful of examples, all containing references to more, scholars have considered the performative elements that can arguably be read in ritual procession (Nygaard and Murphy 2017); in assembly practice (Sanmark 2015); in the image of the *berserker* (Dale 2014) and possible archaeological correlates such as the so-called 'weapon dancers' (Lanz 2021); in the uses of war-gear (Price and Mortimer 2014); and in battle itself (Shema 2014). This is just the tip of a very large iceberg indeed.

### Questioning the 'Performance Paradigm'

The sheer variety of approaches to Viking-Age ritual performance, especially in archaeology but no less important in the textual disciplines, is evident from the brief review above, which is naturally also selective. It nonetheless serves as a fruitful example of how the different strands of Viking studies can come together with their respective strengths, and how their separate disciplinary contributions can generate independent results. This is relevant here because although Gunnell's explorations of ritual performance have won sufficient acceptance to now be incorporated in general handbooks and companion volumes to Old Norse textual studies (e.g. Gunnell 2008, 2016, 2018), there has also been pushback to such approaches from a few literary scholars, who extend their scepticism to archaeological research and interdisciplinary perspectives in the same vein.

Before going any further, it is worth paying some attention to these voices of dissent. In one of the most recent examples, Margaret Clunies Ross (2020: 120-1) has argued that what she calls the ‘performance paradigm’ is the field of archaeological engagement with Norse ‘religion’ that has “borrowed most from textual studies”. This is perhaps a debateable claim, but she goes on to give a really effective summary of the core features of ritual performance as articulated in mortuary behaviour, which accurately reflects my own view (cf. Price 2010):

Thus the dead in their graves are among the actors in a funerary spectacle, their living relatives or attendants also participate as actors, and the grave goods are the props for the spectacle. The *mise-en-scène* is the whole accumulation of natural setting, man-made additions (mounds, stones, platforms, ships), and technological processes (building, clearing, processing, burning, etc.) that has taken place over a period of time, continuous or discontinuous. (Clunies Ross 2020: 121)

However, taking issue with the “script” of these postulated funerary dramas, it becomes clear that she views this as relating solely to poetic performance, and that “the accompaniments to ritual were sacred narratives” (Clunies Ross 2020: 121). This argument is then developed into an apparently fundamental – and curiously literal – misunderstanding of how poetry has been discussed in this context, as if Gunnell in his work seeks to turn the *Poetic Edda* into a sort of Shakespearean First Folio for the Vikings, while archaeologists talking about performance are merely pondering which particular burial was the material manifestation of *Lokasenna*. In fact, Gunnell’s research has never had the poetry as an end point, or even the extant Old Norse texts as such, but a clear-eyed concern for performance of various kinds forming part of the *behavioural experience* of Viking-Age spiritual practice. Like me, he is also cautious about the concept of any set ‘religion’ ever having existed in the pre-Christian North (Price 2014b), preferring to explore something much more diffuse, contingent, and mutable – crucially drawing on a multitude of sources in a manner that goes far beyond the folkloric label that is sometimes misapplied to his work.

This feeds back into the ritual performances of the Viking-Age Scandinavians. The ‘script’ may indeed have been sacred in nature, relating to what later ended up as a mythological construct (even sometimes forming part of its ultimate origins, as I argued in my 2010 paper), but the stories may also have been heroic, or tragic, or political, or funny, or bawdy, or some equally profane combination of them all. I suspect that at least for the elites they were probably highly personal tales, including family and community histories alongside the larger designs, “all woven together through material culture and verbalised into something just for *this* grave, *this* corpse, *this* time and place” (Price 2010: 150). It is highly unlikely that they ever involved recited performances of the extant poetic texts, many of which are essentially the recorded remnants of oral traditions passed down over several centuries (see Gunnell 1995: 356).

The funerary 'dramas' may have been improvised, even spontaneous. They may have been shocking or surprising, at least to some. Equally, they may have incorporated a strong feel for tradition and for the repetitiously expected, whether or not they understood it, in effect a sort of non-Christian liturgy. All these moods, and many more, can be present together: they are integral components of what performance *is* (see, for example, the early post-processual explorations of theatrical models in archaeology, there unrelated to Viking-Age ritual but still of relevance; Pearson and Shanks 2001). There may have been differing degrees of audience initiation - those in the know, and those who were baffled at a gesture or a remark that went over their heads. However, at other moments of the rituals, both the included and the excluded may also found themselves experiencing a sense of what Schechner (2020: 149-50, following V. Turner 1969: 96-7 and E. Turner 2012) refers to as *communitas*, sharing similar experiences at the same moment, becoming 'one' as part of the ritual.

This is precisely the multi-faceted dimension of performative ritual that is starting to come to light through archaeological studies (with the help of other fields), but here again there have been objections from certain literary scholars, once more concentrating on the issue of archaeologists 'borrowing' from the surviving texts.

### Behind the 'Mythic Detail'

The main bone of contention here seems to relate to selectivity of citation from the "mythic detail" in the Old Norse corpus, as part of an attempt to approach a holistic sense of the rituals in context, what Clunies Ross calls "cherry-picking" on no less than six occasions in her above-mentioned essay (2020: 122-4). As she sees it, the failing of such engagements with written sources is that they provide the archaeological interpretations with "a kind of bogus certainty and depth that is belied by a dispassionate examination of the actual mythological texts" (*ibid* 2020: 122).

Leaving aside the question of whether a 'dispassionate' study of the Old Norse texts is ever possible, selectivity only makes sense here as a term of negative critique if one assumes that what the sources refer to was ever a coherent and integrated entity to begin with - let alone whether it 'originally' took the form in which it has come down to us. As I have written elsewhere (Price 2014: 166; 2020: 32-3), the Norse did not know that they possessed 'the Norse myths'. These are a creation of later times, when the organic and fluid story-world of the late Iron Age was codified, effectively fossilised, through the medium of its textual survivors, with all their well-known problems. Old Norse poetry and prose has its own taphonomy of a sort, and it is clear that none of this represents an argument for any kind of orthodoxy in pre-Christian beliefs and practices.

This disconnect also surfaces in other literary scholars' even stronger critique of material performance studies, with a suggestion that when archaeologists cite an individual Eddic verse or a line from Snorri, they "misrepresent individual mythic motifs for the whole mythology, in other words they are engaging in ideological work" (Meylan and Rösli 2020: 19). This firstly makes the mistake of assuming that there ever



was a “whole mythology” or “mythic motifs” outside the academic discourse of recent centuries, and secondly ignores the inter-textual comparisons and connections that literary scholars have always pursued in order to better understand larger mythological themes. Any engagement with these medieval collations is selective, not least because these materials are themselves selections, and presented in terms that are not of our choosing. Indeed, in their extant form many of the stories are thoroughly contradictory - as is evident, for example, in the hot mess that has become the textual Norse cosmogony. Similarly, the archaeology also reveals the existence of contemporaneous variation on a vast scale.

To take a useful example, we can return to Anders Andrén’s interpretations of how some Gotland picture stones ‘performed’, which in part depend on texts (the story of Sigurðr Fáfnisbani) in order to make sense of the patterns revealed in the archaeology. As Andrén would be the first to admit, this reading cannot be applied to all the stones, or even a majority; many do not have images organised in horizontal panels at all, and most do not have recognisable sequential narratives. However, the case study of the Sigurðr story that he explores *clearly does work for some of the stones*. Is this, then, ‘cherry-picking’? In a sense, yes, but to take this view is to suppress the complex, heterogeneous realities of actual Viking-Age behaviour in favour of the relatively coherent but illusory ‘religion’ mediated in medieval texts. It would actually be unexpected to locate a key that somehow turned in the interpretive lock of all the picture stones.

Another approach to archaeological performance studies can be found in my own earlier paper on time and motion in Norse ritual (Price 2014a), which has attracted critique relating specifically to the enigmatic site of Götavi in Närke, Sweden. Excavations there revealed how nine carefully constructed linear stone packings had been laid down side by side in a marsh, before being covered by a clay platform (Svensson 2010). Rows of posts were set up on top, and chemical analysis has indicated the spilling of blood and fats – animal, or human, sacrifice? – within the perimeter, bounded by fires. All this was taking place astonishingly late in the eleventh century, clear evidence for the slowness of Christianisation, at least in that region of Svealand. As part of the speculative interpretation of the site, I listed a variety of mythological textual contexts in which the number nine appears (Price 2014a: 184), some sixteen in all. In contesting the accuracy of two of them, Clunies Ross (2020: 123-4) seemingly misses the point that my attempted reading of the site, the activities that took place there, and not least the significance of numbers, does not express a “bogus certainty” at all, but is instead *deliberately vague*.

At Götavi, it is entirely logical to consider those nine lines of stone in the context of Norse numerology, that the sacred number was important and its presence must be deliberate – but without the misplaced confidence to declare What It All Means. This relates to a wider discussion of the place, taking in the implications of knowledge and its lack, thinking of the invisibility of the stone lines under the clay, which some of those using the site had once seen but others presumably had not. One can explore the creation of boundaries and borders, in the posts set up around the platform. Details of behaviour and activity can be seen in those blood spills and their spatial distribution.

There are also issues of sight and access, the visual effects of the smoky fires round the site, its isolation and difficult location in a swamp. For all the uncertainty inherent in exploring the Viking-Age mental landscape, it is clear that whatever was going on at Götavi was deeply performative in nature. If we are to gain any real understanding of how such things worked, of the multiple levels of experience that they entailed, then multidisciplinary approaches will be required – approaches that in turn demand mutual respect, and the opening of doors rather than closing them.

A concern for scholarly rigour is naturally appropriate and commendable, but it should not become a vector for an unjustified rigidity in the conception of what the cited texts actually represent – as if a poetic verse can be mapped inseparably onto an imaginary larger, fixed and ancient religious edifice that archaeologists, or historians of religion, can somehow misquote in its detail. When such an unbending understanding of text, belief, and practice is applied to the performance paradigm, it displays a strange disregard for the element of immediacy that is so very evident, and disturbing, in Ibn Faḍlān’s eye-witness account from the Volga shore – and even in the Old Norse sources themselves, which in their earlier forms would have regularly interacted with material objects and spaces. To my mind, archaeology is particularly well-placed to physically access this excitingly puzzling variety – to paraphrase Larkin (1974), the million-petalled flower of being there – a dynamic, performative world that scholars like Gunnell have illuminated. All the same, one must remember that many aspects of the archaeological data, including burial tableaux, can never be ‘matched’ with any textual source, regardless of which disciplinary perspective one is working from.

One of the earliest and most prominent material reflections of the performance turn related to the great ship burial of Oseberg in Norwegian Vestfold – as we have seen above, Gansum’s rediscovery of the ‘unfinished’ mound, with all its challenging behavioural implications. At the conclusion of this paper I wish to revisit the performative dimensions of the Oseberg grave, in the context of a major new study that has the potential to significantly expand our understanding of Viking-Age ritual, largely *without* recourse to textual comparisons.

## Performing Oseberg

The Oseberg ship burial, excavated in 1904-5, is arguably the most famous of all Viking funerary monuments, and certainly the richest. The find was published in four volumes (Brøgger, Falk, and Shetelig 1917-28), supplemented of course by more focussed studies that have appeared in the archaeological literature regularly ever since. A major reassessment was produced as part of the cultural programmes associated with the Winter Olympics held in Lillehammer (Christensen, Ingstad, and Myhre 1992), collecting several essays focussing on aspects of the burial. The textiles were absent from the original report, being intended to form the fourth volume of a planned five. They were initially explored only in a short paper (Hougen 1940), and taken up more comprehensively later by Ingstad (1992a, 1992b) with substantial numbers of the reconstructions by Sophie Krafft, Mary Storm, and Tone Strenger appearing for the first time. In 2006

the long-awaited final textile report volume was at last completed by Christensen and Nockert, based in part on the late Bjørn Hougen's manuscript. At the same time, DNA results from one of the skeletons were published that suggested she might have been of Persian descent (Holck 2006), followed by new work after the bodies of both women were exhumed in 2007 (Holck 2009; Fahre 2008).

The grave has been interpreted through a variety of lenses over the years, primarily as the resting place of a queen, with various historical candidates put forward, and/or a person with cultic, sorcerous functions possibly connected with the worship of Freyja (Ingstad 1992c, 1995). Given the presence of two women in the grave, and revisions of their relative ages and apparent social status, there has also been speculation as to their relationship and which of them, if either, was the 'primary' occupant. One archaeologist has even suggested that the grave was actually made for a man, whose body was subsequently removed or decayed without trace (Androschuk 2005), though this idea is not widely accepted. Most recently, the 'robbing' of the burial and its related interventions have been elucidated by new work dating the event to the period 953-90 and thus most likely the reign of Harald Bluetooth, the predatory and expansionist king of Denmark (Bill and Daly 2012: 813).

One of the more prominent aspects of the material assemblage in the Oseberg grave has always been the textiles which, alongside the Gotland picture stones and other wall hangings such as those from Överhogdal in Swedish Härjedalen, have long formed one of the primary sources for Viking-Age narrative imagery. The Oseberg tapestries carry an added charge in that they were almost certainly made by women, if we are correct, as I believe, in seeing textile work as a predominantly female activity. There is a real possibility, especially in the later Viking Age, that a large proportion of cloth production was carried out by unfree people (e.g. Price 2020: 392-3), but this is unlikely to have applied to high-status embroidery and the weaving of pictorial tapestries. Several studies have explored this kind of work as an explicit arena of women's agency, expressed in the power to literally shape a narrative of visual communication that would then be widely seen (e.g. Norrman 2008; Hayeur-Smith 2020; Vedeler In prep.). This is likely to be true for Oseberg too, not least in the context of the funeral rites for two women.

Building on the previous textile publications, in 2019 Marianne Vedeler published her groundbreaking book *The Oseberg Tapestries*. Focusing on the wall hangings themselves rather than the many other textile remains from the grave, Vedeler presents new reconstructions of these exceptionally fragile and problematically preserved objects, which have survived in numerous fragments and also in piles of irregularly folded fabric, perhaps resulting from the disturbance to the chamber in the tenth century. A number of iconographic motifs are seen for the first time in Vedeler's work, alongside new reconstructions (by Stig Saxegaard) of key fragments that show greater detail than ever before. In the context of this paper, the importance of Vedeler's study is the potential it brings for renewed engagement with the tapestries as images of ritual performance, arguably the clearest such that we have. That the larger fragments depict some kind of procession moving right to left has been obvious since the excavation (Nygaard

and Murphy 2017; Vedeler 2019: 47-64), and the same images tend to appear in countless books on the Vikings, but now we can observe the proceedings in unprecedented detail.

Vedeler addresses issues such as the clothing, its variation and accessories, in some depth (2019: 37-9), with reference to works on gender signals in dress (e.g. Mannering 2012, 2016) that suggest there are clear and genuine distinctions of masculine and feminine figures, as has long been thought. This is important, as it enables a more confident reading of what seems to be going on in the images, especially the divisions of gender in terms of who is doing what and where. There are also significant numbers of figures that do not necessarily appear to be human at all – not just the well-known ‘boar-women’ of Fragment 16 or the ‘bird-headed’ being of Fragment 7b, but others with unusual proportions, oddly-shaped heads and bodies that seem to flow into strange shapes (Vedeler 2019: 39, 55, 72, 76, 120; see also Price 2002: 369-78 on ritual animal disguise, and Gunnell’s work on masking referenced above).

To take an example of the major Fragments 1-2 (*Fig. 2*), the ‘procession’, it is clear that majority of the male figures are depicted armed, all with spears and some with what seem to be sheathed swords. They are not identical, but exhibit variations in clothing (pinned cloaks seem common, worn with either trousers or a skirt-like garment that is perhaps the lower edge of a kaftan), and even hairstyle. One of the ?male figures by the lower border holds a curious object, a staff-like item of some kind with an extension at the top, where the man grasps it.



Fig. 2. Fragments 1-2 of the Oseberg tapestries. Reconstruction by Stig Saxegaard, Storm Studios; note, all colours are fictive. After Vedeler 2019, used by kind permission.

There is a similar variation in women’s dress, though here all the figures seem to have hoods or caps rather than the flowing hairstyle seen on other fragments. One of the women, apparently near the front of the procession, carries what is very clearly an oil lamp of the kind actually found in the burial, and also known from other high-status graves such as the so-called Gausel ‘queen’ (see Price 2010). Why a lamp? Does this

suggest that the procession took place at night? Another woman near the 'rear' of the procession (at least on this fragment) holds what seems to be a spear with the point down, but with a forked base shown differently to the fletched arrows on other fragments. What is this object? Could it be connected with the staffs of sorcery associated with the *völur* and other seers (Gardeła 2016; Price 2019)?

The colours on the new reconstruction (Fig. 2) are fictive, but work is beginning on retrieving the original pigmentation, another dimension of the image and its meaning. Already, here and on other fragments, the detail is startling - a feminine figure wearing a red robe, lined with white, and a white hood; elsewhere, a blue cloak; multi-coloured shields in ornate designs.

On Fragments 1-2, a lone horse appears prominently, with a rider that seems to be male, and unarmed. Two birds are shown just above him. Three wagons are depicted clearly, and one implied by what is obviously a harnessed draught horse at the right-hand edge where the fragment breaks off. One of the wagons has a female driver, the others have no humans onboard but seem to contain what look like made-up beds – are these the two bodies of the women buried on the ship? Interestingly, they face in different directions, another tiny detail.<sup>1</sup>

The horses have a curious gap shaved into their manes, perhaps to leave a space for reins held by a rider, though in some images the harness lies across the mane itself. Most of the horses' tails are also knotted in similar fashion to the long pony-tail hairstyle usually taken as the primary feminine marker in late Iron Age anthropomorphic art. Are these mares, do they belong to women or female divinities, or does this mean something else?

The draught horses depicted pulling wagons are also harnessed in different ways. On the wagon shown with a driver, this person holds the reins directly, but when horses draw unoccupied loads the reins are hand-held by someone walking alongside. This also provides a clue to the dimensional depth of the tapestry images, as these reins-holders are some way behind the horse they are 'leading', suggesting that the horizontal rows of figures shown in two dimensions might represent a wider procession of people walking side by side. In one instance, the reins are pulled tight but appear to come together in a blank space, as if held by an invisible being, though the cloth is damaged here and it may be a feature of preservation.

There is also the matter of the 'free floating' icons that dot the tapestries' scenes, either singly or in groups, positioned adjacent to figures and vehicles or along borders. These include the 'looped square' known in Swedish as the St. Hans Cross and sometimes included in the complex of *valknut* patterns; both right- and left-facing swastikas; chain-like symbols of varying length with both open and closed 'links'; birds, perhaps corvids, positioned with their beaks pointing directly towards either the upper or lower edges of the tapestry; what seem to be spears, of different lengths, all positioned

<sup>1</sup> On another piece of the tapestries, Fragment 39a, a wagon is shown entirely covered by textile; on Fragments 11a and 37a, the procession is almost entirely of horses with male riders, surrounded by armed men; Fragment 18a shows several horses of different colours, without riders, bunched together and overlapping, all facing right; Vedeler (2019: 49, 64, 68, 70).

with their points towards the top of the weave; and perhaps arrows, which appear identical to the 'spears' except for a forked end (fletching?) at the butt of the shaft. None of these icons seem to be purely decorative, but instead to be deliberately placed in association with specific images. It is hard not to see them as indicative of meaning, perhaps functioning as labels, captions, or sounds, somehow explaining the content of the overall frieze.



Fig. 3. Fragment 13b2 of the Oseberg tapestries. Reconstruction by Stig Saxegaard, Storm Studios; note, all colours are fictive. After Vedeler 2019, used by kind permission.

Not every tapestry, or section of one, depicted a procession. Fragment 13b2 (Fig. 3) has been suggested as a battle scene, showing numerous armed figures on foot facing in different directions. These include two ?men wearing what seem to be animal costumes with hoods (and ears!) that leave their faces visible. Remarkably, there are also no less than five feminine figures clearly delineated with shields and spears (this is naturally of relevance to the ongoing debate on women warriors in the Viking Age; cf. Hedenstierna-Jonson et al 2017; Price et al 2019; Gardeta 2021). There is also a male rider, and what seems to be a large force of men armed with long spears, shown as a single rank backed up by crossed arrays of weapons behind; 28 spears are shown, in four groups, and the line continues off the frayed edge of the fragment. This image also has notable numbers of ‘free floating’ spears and arrows, perhaps indicating their path in flight. Whether this is a real or ritualised battle, or a function of the burial ritual, is impossible to tell.

The Oseberg tapestries have long been known for unique textile depictions (on Fragments 2 and 13b2) of the ‘horned figure’, of the kind more familiar from metalwork and often labelled as a ‘weapon dancer’ or identified with Óðinn. However, it is now clear that two more such figures are also present, on Fragment 16, and that they are wearing the sweeping gown normatively associated with women. What does this mean? One can note here that ‘horned figure’ pendants are especially known from the graves of women, not least on Birka, so the association is intriguing (Lanz 2021: 219).



Fig. 4. Fragment 4 of the Oseberg tapestries. Reconstruction by Stig Saxegaard, Storm Studios; note, all colours are fictive. After Vedeler 2019, used by kind permission.

This same Fragment 16 (Vedeler 2019: 76) also shows at least 12 armed women – if we can trust the gender signal of the sweeping, floor-length gowns – with hexagonal

shields and spears. On top of the gown, four of them wear some kind of animal costume, resembling boars and perhaps birds. To the right is a large force grouping of a different kind to that in Fragment 13b2, but including the same kind of figures and implying up to 30 more armed females. To be clear: that would make more than 40 women with weapons on this one fragment alone.

Fragment 4 (Fig. 4) is different again, depicting the famous image of a tree with hanging men. There appear to be seven of them clearly depicted among the branches (there are no ropes or nooses), their feet pointing down, with one more to the right who might be associated with a horse, and possibly another to the left near a large but unclear feature that may be an outgrowth of the tree or something else entirely; if both these latter figures are included, there are nine in all. The tree has several roots, clearly delineated, or perhaps there are two trees. Apart from one male figure with a spear (top right), all the other figures around the tree appear to be female, some with the knotted ponytail and others with hoods or a different hairstyle. One carries an X-shaped object similar to those held by the 'horned figures', two are perhaps clapping, while one holds a sword in both hands (Fig. 5). The blade of the sword is carefully patterned, suggesting either a scabbard or maybe damascening.



Fig. 5. Close-up of three female figures from Fragment 4 of the Oseberg tapestries. Reconstruction by Stig Saxegaard, Storm Studios; note, all colours are fictive. After Vedeler 2019, used by kind permission.



Beyond these few fragments with larger, relatively intelligible images, there are so many more offering us only small glimpses of this long-lost world, of which these are just a selection:

- A row of men holding spears or staffs, all of them bound together and attached to a horse by two threads sewn over the main weave (Fragment 30a; Vedeler 2019:57)
- Nine small figures side by side, their arms held aloft (Fragment 13B2; Vedeler 2019: 57)
- A tree with two birds in its branches (Fragment 15a1a; Vedeler 2019: 95)
- A building, or perhaps a mound, its top crowned with spears (Fragment 13c; Vedeler 2019: 96)
- Two feminine figures, similar to those ‘clapping’ on Fragment 4, facing each other holding small, crossed sticks; a swastika is sewn between them (Fragment 12a1; Vedeler 2019: 113); something similar may appear on Fragment 25a1 (Vedeler 2019: 115)
- A row of men, facing right, hold up what appear to be musical instruments, and a ring (Fragment 27h1; Vedeler 2019: 124)
- Most of the spears are shown with straight shafts held vertically, but a smaller number have shafts depicted as wavy lines, which Lanz (2021: 223-4) suggests may indicate the act of shaking them.

So many questions, some relating to textual comparisons, some not. Do the tapestries depict one continuous event, or are the same ‘actors’ repeated sequentially, comic-strip style, as on the Bayeux Tapestry but lacking clear panel dividers? Are the armed women Valkyries? Can we identify individual gods and goddesses, or are there only mortals here? Are those ravens? What *is* that tree, could it be Yggdrasil? Not least, are these scenes from contemporary reality, or legend, or historical memory? Can we see representations of the actual Oseberg people, even things present in the grave (the oil lamps, the wagons that seem to bear bodies within them) sketched out in coloured threads? We are unlikely to find clear answers, though continued research by Vedeler and her colleagues will sharpen the resolution of this imagery, tell us more about how it was made, perhaps even give us additional pictures.

The new work on the Oseberg tapestries is a gift indeed, but one that essentially reinforces and confirms what scholars already suspected. It should by now be obvious that *all* this is nothing if not ‘performance’, and its ritual nature seems undeniable. However uncertain we may be about the detailed connections between the material culture of the grave and the objects depicted in use on the tapestries, the agency of *things* is clear. Moreover, it is not hard at all to link the frightening funerary scenes witnessed on the Volga by Ibn Fadlān with the comparable end products that we see in the Oseberg burial, and in many other complex graves (whether in ships, chambers, or taking other forms). By extension, we then have the image-world of the Gotland

stones, and Viking-Age iconography in general. Moving still further, beyond the graveside, there are the dramatic environments of the cult sites (or whatever they precisely are), the sacred groves, the epic spaces of the halls, and the monumental landscapes in which they are situated.

Faced with this vast corpus of material, there can be a temptation to over-interpret its detail and content – perhaps plausibly, but still beyond the borders of what might be source-critically wise. At the same time, we should not straitjacket the archaeological evidence according to its degree of supposed correlation with much later, textual descriptions. To pursue a metaphor that fits well in context, we can hear the shouts, the conversations, the whispers, and the murmurs of the players, and we can dimly make out what those actors seem to be doing (sadly, we have one of those theatre seats with a Restricted View); but we cannot really understand what they say, and we can rarely follow the plot in detail. This can be frustrating, though we should not be surprised given the limitations of our data. Instead, we should be grateful for the insights that it nonetheless permits into the intricate mental world of the Viking Age.

The performance paradigm is here to stay.

### *Acknowledgements*

Jens Peter embodies the very best of academia, combining scholarly rigour and insight with the most human of attitudes to collegiality and constructive debate. I always learn something (in the best sense!) from our conversations, and this comes with a hearty *skål* in his honour. JP my friend, enjoy your retirement, whatever you choose to do with it, though personally I can't wait to read what you write next. As always, Terry Gunnell has my thanks and friendship, specifically here for his help with accessing literature and his detailed comments on the text in draft. This paper would not have been possible without Marianne Vedeler's 2019 book on the Oseberg tapestries, a work of immense importance. I am very grateful to her for commenting on the text, for permission to reproduce Stig Saxegaard's marvellous reconstructions, and for inspiring conversations over the years. My thanks also to Anders Kvåle Rue for allowing me (again!) to use his dramatic image of the funerary rites. Lastly, thanks to Simon Nygaard and Shannon Lewis-Simpson for their peer-review comments. This paper has been prepared with funding from the Swedish Research Council project *The Viking Phenomenon* (2015-00466).

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Andersson, Gunnar. 2005. *Gravspråk som religiös strategi: Valsta och Skälby i Attundalund under vikingatid och tidig medeltid*. Stockholm: National Museum of Antiquities.
- Andrén, Anders. 1989. "Dörrar till förgångna myter. En tolkning av de gotländska bildstenarna." In *Medeltidens födelse*, edited by Anders Andrén, 287-319.

Krapperrup: Gyllenstiernska Krapperrupsstiftelsen.

- Andrén, Anders. 1993. "Doors to Other Worlds: Scandinavian Death Rituals in Gotlandic Perspective." *Journal of European Archaeology* 1: 33-56.  
<https://doi.org/10.1179/096576693800731154>
- Andrén, Anders. 2004. "I skuggan av Yggdrasil: trädet mellan idé och realitet i nordisk tradition." In *Ordning mot kaos – studier av nordisk förkristen kosmologi*, edited by Anders Andrén, Kristina Jennbert and Catharina Raudvere, 389-430. Lund: Nordic Academic Press.
- Androschuk, Fedir. 2005. "En man i Oseberggraven?" *Fornvännen* 100: 115-28.
- Arcini, Caroline. 2010. "Kopparsvik: ett märkligt gravfält från vikingatid." *Gotländskt Arkiv* 82: 11-20.
- Bill, Jan. 2016. "Protecting Against the Dead? On the Possible Use of Apotropaic Magic in the Oseberg Burial." *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 26: 141-55.  
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0959774315000438>
- Bill, Jan and Aoife Daly. 2012. The Plundering of the Ship Graves from Oseberg and Gokstad: an Example of Power Politics? *Antiquity* 86: 808-24.  
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003598X00047931>
- Brøgger, Anton Wilhelm, Hjalmar Falk and Håkon Shetelig (eds.) 1917-28. *Osebergfundet*. 4 vols. Oslo: Universitetets Oldsaksamling.
- Carver, Martin. 2000. "Burial as Poetry: The Context of Treasure in Anglo-Saxon Graves." In *Treasure in the Medieval West*, edited by Elizabeth Tyler, 25-48. Martlesham: York Medieval Press.
- Christensen, Arne Emil, Anne Stine Ingstad and Bjørn Myhre. 1992. *Osebergdronningens Grav*. Oslo: Schibsted.
- Christensen, Arne Emil, and Margareta Nockert (eds). 2006. *Osebergfundet. Vol.4. Tekstilene*. Oslo: University of Oslo.
- Clunies Ross, Margaret. 2020. "Archaeology and Textuality in the Study of Pre-Christian Scandinavian Religion." In *Old Norse Myths as Political Ideologies: Critical Studies in the Appropriation of Medieval Narratives*, edited by Nicolas Meylan and Lukas Rösli, 117-28. Turnhout: Brepols.  
<https://doi.org/10.1484/M.AS-EB.5.120089>
- Dale, Roderick. 2014. *Berserkir: A Re-examination of the Phenomenon in Literature and Life*. Unpublished PhD thesis. Nottingham: University of Nottingham.
- Fahre, Lena (ed.) 2008. *Levd liv: Om skjelettene fra Oseberg og Gokstad*. Oslo: Museum of Cultural History.
- Friðriksson, Adolf. 2013. *La place du mort: les tombes vikings dans le paysage culturel islandais*. Diss. Paris: Université Paris IV Sorbonne.
- Gansum, Terje. 2004. *Hauger som konstruksjoner – arkeologiske forventninger gjennom 200 år*. Göteborg: University of Göteborg.
- Gardela, Leszek. 2013. "The Dangerous Dead? Rethinking Viking Age Deviant Burials." In *Conversions: Looking for Ideological Change in the Early Middle Ages*, edited by Leszek Stupecki and Rudolf Simek, 99-136. Vienna: Fassbaender.

- Gardela, Leszek. 2016. *(Magic) Staffs in the Viking Age*. Vienna: Fassbaender.  
<https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv24q4z0f>
- Gardela, Leszek. 2021. *Women and Weapons in the Viking World: Amazons of the North*. Oxford: Oxbow.
- Gunnell, Terry. 1995. *The Origins of Drama in Scandinavia*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer.
- Gunnell, Terry. 1999a. "The Myth as Dramatic Performance: Remnants of Pagan Ritual in the Poetic Edda." In *Perspectives on Mythology*, edited by Esi Sutherland-Addy, 37-48. Accra: Goethe Institute.
- Gunnell, Terry. 1999b. "Dame Bertha Phillpotts and the Search for Scandinavian Drama." In *Anglo-Scandinavian Cross-Currents 1850-1914*, edited by Inga-Stina Ewbank, 84- 105. Norwich: Norvik Press.
- Gunnell, Terry. 2001. "Grýla, grýlur, "grøleks" and skeklers: Medieval Disguise Traditions in the North Atlantic?" *Arv: Nordic Yearbook of Folklore* 2001: 33-54.
- Gunnell, Terry. 2005a. "Hof, Halls, Goðar and Dwarves: An Examination of the Ritual Space in the Pagan Icelandic Hall." *Cosmos* 17: 3-36.
- Gunnell, Terry. 2005b. "The Season of the Dísir: The Winter Nights and the Dísarblót in Early Scandinavian Belief." *Cosmos* 16: 117-49.
- Gunnell, Terry. 2006a. "'Til holts ek gekk': Spatial and Temporal Aspects of the Dramatic Poems of the Elder Edda." In *Old Norse Religion in Long Term Perspectives: Origins, Changes and Interactions*, edited by Anders Andrén, Kristina Jennbert and Catharina Raudvere, 238-42. Lund: Nordic Academic Press.
- Gunnell, Terry. 2006b. "Ritual Space, Ritual Year, Ritual Gender: A View of the Old Norse and New Icelandic Ritual Year." In *Proceedings of the First International Conference of the SIEF Working Group on the Ritual Year (Malta 20-24, 2005)*, edited by George Mifsud-Chircop, 285-302. Msida: University of Malta.
- Gunnell, Terry. 2006c. "Narratives, Space and Drama: Essential Spatial Aspects Involved in the Performance and Reception of Oral Narrative." *Folklore* 33: 7-26. <https://doi.org/10.7592/FEJF2006.33.terry>
- Gunnell, Terry (ed.) 2007. *Masks and Mumming in the Nordic Area*. Uppsala: Royal Gustav Adolf Academy.
- Gunnell, Terry. 2008. "The Performance of the Poetic Edda." In *The Viking World*, edited by Stefan Brink and Neil Price, 299-303. London: Routledge.
- Gunnell, Terry. 2011. "Performance Stages of the Nordic World." *Ethnologia Europaea* 40.2: 5-13. <https://doi.org/10.16995/ee.1065>
- Gunnell, Terry. 2012a. "The Drama of the Poetic Edda: Performance as a Means of Transformation." In *Progranicza teatralności: Poezja, poetyka, praktyka*, edited by Andrzej Dąbrowski, 13-40. Warsaw: Instytut Badań Literackich Pan Wydawnictwo.
- Gunnell, Terry. 2012b. "Masks and Performance in the Early Nordic World." In *Masken der Vorzeit in Europa (II)*, edited by Harald Meller and Regine Maraszek, 183-96. Halle: Landesmuseum für Vorgeschichte.

- Gunnell, Terry. 2013. "Voluspá in Performance." In *The Nordic Apocalypse: Approaches to Voluspá and Nordic Days of Judgement*, edited by Terry Gunnell and Annette Lassen, 63-77. Turnhout: Brepols. <https://doi.org/10.1484/M.AS-EB.1.100823>
- Gunnell, Terry. 2016. "Eddic Performance and Eddic Audiences." In *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry: Myths and Legends of Early Scandinavia*, edited by Carolyne Larrington, Judy Quinn and Brittany Schorn, 92-113. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316471685.006>
- Gunnell, Terry. 2018. "Performance Studies." In *Handbook of Pre-Modern Nordic Memory Studies: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, edited by Jürg Glauser, Pernille Hermann and Stephen A. Mitchell, 107-19. Berlin: de Gruyter. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110431360-012>
- Gunnell, Terry. 2020. "Performance Archaeology, *Eirismál*, *Hákonarmál*, and the Study of Old Nordic Religions." In *John Miles Foley's World of Oralities: Text, Tradition, and Contemporary Oral Theory*, edited by Mark C. Amodio, 137-54. Leeds: ARC Humanities Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv22d4zhq.18>
- Gunnell, Terry and Owe Ronström. 2013. "Folklore och Performance Studies: An Introduction." In *Folkloristikens akutella utmaningar: Vänbok til Ulf Palmenfelt*, edited by Owe Rönström, Georg Drakos and Jonas Engman, 21-55. Visby: Högskolan på Gotland.
- Hägg, Inga. 2009. "Om vikingatidens vagnskorgsgravar." *Saga och Sed* 2009: 91-9.
- Harris, Joseph. 2000. "The Performance of Old Norse Eddic Poetry: A Retrospective." In *The Oral Epic: Performance and Music*, edited by Karl Riechl, 225-32. Berlin: VWB.
- Harris, Joseph. 2008. "*Speak Useful Words Or Say Nothing*": *Old Norse Studies*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Hayeur-Smith, Michèle. 2020. *The Valkyries' Loom: The Archaeology of Cloth Production and Female Power in the North Atlantic*. Tallahassee: University Press of Florida. <https://doi.org/10.5744/florida/9780813066622.001.0001>
- Hedenstierna-Jonson, Charlotte, Anna Kjellström, Torun Zachrisson, Maja Krzewińska, Verónica Sobrado, Neil Price, Torsten Günther, Mattias Jakobsson, Anders Götherström and Jan Storå. 2017. "A female Viking warrior confirmed by genomics." *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 164/4: 853-60. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ajpa.23308>
- Herschend, Frands. 1997. *Livet i hallen: tre fallstudier i yngre järnålderns aristokrati*. Uppsala: Uppsala University Press.
- Holck, Per. 2006. "The Oseberg Ship Burial, Norway: New Thoughts on the Skeletons from the Grave Mound." *European Journal of Archaeology* 9 2/3: 185-210. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461957107086123>
- Holck, Per. 2009. *Skjelettene fra Gokstad- og Osebergskipet*. Oslo: University of Oslo.
- Hougen, Bjørn. 1940. "Osebergfunnets billedvev." *Viking* 4: 85-124.
- Hållans Stenholm, Ann-Mari. 2006. "Past Memories: Spatial Returning as Ritualised Remembrance." In *Old Norse Religions in Long-term Perspectives: Origins, Changes and Interactions*, edited by Anders Andréén, Kristina Jennbert and

- Catharina Raudvere, 341-5. Lund: Nordic Academic Press.
- Hållans Stenholm, Ann-Mari. 2013. *Fornminnen: det förflutnas roll i det förkristna och kristna Mälardalen*. Lund: Nordic Academic Press.
- Ingstad, Anne Stine. 1992a. "Tekstilene i Osebergskipet." In *Osebergdronningens grav*, edited by Arne Emil Christensen, Anne Stine Ingstad, and Bjørn Myhre, 176-208. Oslo: Schibsted.
- Ingstad, Anne Stine. 1992b. "Hva har tekstilene vært brukt til?" In *Osebergdronningens grav*, edited by Arne Emil Christensen, Anne Stine Ingstad, and Bjørn Myhre, 209-23. Oslo: Schibsted.
- Ingstad, Anne Stine. 1992c. "Oseberg-dronningen - hvem var hun?" In *Osebergdronningens grav*, edited by Arne Emil Christensen, Anne Stine Ingstad, and Bjørn Myhre, 224-56. Oslo: Schibsted.
- Ingstad, Anne Stine. 1995. "The Interpretation of the Oseberg-find." In *The Ship as Symbol in Prehistoric and Medieval Scandinavia*, edited by Ole Crumlin-Pedersen and Birgitte Munch Thye, 138-47. Copenhagen: National Museum of Denmark.
- Klevnäs, Alison. 2007. "Robbing the Dead at Gamla Uppsala, Sweden." *Archaeological Review from Cambridge* 22.1: 24-42.
- Klevnäs, Alison. 2015. "Abandon Ship! Digging Out the Dead from Vendel Boat-graves." *Norwegian Archaeological Review* 48: 1-20.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00293652.2015.1007892>
- Klevnäs, Alison. 2016. "'Imbued with the Essence of the Owner': Personhood and Possessions in the Reopening and Reworking of Viking-Age Burials." *European Journal of Archaeology* 19: 546-76.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14619571.2016.1190202>
- Lanz, Nicolai. 2021. *The Enigma of the Horned Figure. Horned Figures in Pre-Christian Germanic Societies of the Younger Iron Age*. MA thesis in Old Norse Religion. Reykjavík: University of Iceland.
- Larkin, Philip. 1974. "The Old Fools." In *High Windows*, by Philip Larkin, 19-20. London: Faber and Faber.
- Mannering, Ulla. 2012. "Man or Woman? Perception of Gender Through Costume." *Danish Journal of Archaeology* 2/1: 79-86.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/21662282.2012.760893>
- Mannering, Ulla. 2016. *Iconic Costumes: Scandinavian Late Iron Age Costume Iconography*. Oxford: Oxbow. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvh1dkfn>
- Meylan, Nicolas and Lukas Rösli. 2020. "Introduction." In *Old Norse Myths as Political Ideologies: Critical Studies in the Appropriation of Medieval Narratives*, edited by Nicolas Meylan and Lukas Rösli, 9-25. Turnhout: Brepols.  
<https://doi.org/10.1484/M.AS-EB.5.120084>
- Millward, Anna. 2015. *Skaldic Slam: Performance Poetry in the Norwegian Royal Court*. Unpublished MA thesis. Reykjavík: University of Iceland.
- Montgomery, James. 2000. "Ibn Fadlān and the Rūsiyyah." *Journal of Arabic and*

*Islamic Studies* 3: 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.5617/jais.4553>

- Montgomery, James (ed. and tr.). 2017. *Aḥmad ibn Faḍlān: Mission to the Volga*. New York: NYU Press.
- Mortimer, Paul. 2011. *Woden's Warriors: Warfare, Beliefs, Arms and Armour in Northern Europe During the 6th and 7th Centuries*. Ely: Anglo-Saxon Books.
- Nordberg, Andreas. 2002. "Vertikalt placerade vapen i vikingatida gravar." *Fornvännen* 97: 15-24.
- Nordeide, Sæbjørg W. 2011. "Death in Abundance – Quickly! The Oseberg Ship Burial in Norway." *Acta Archaeologica* 82 (1): 7-15.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1600-0390.2011.00373.x>
- Norrman, Lena. 2008. *Viking Women: the Narrative Voice in Woven Tapestries*. Amherst: Cambria Press.
- Norstein, Frida Espolin. 2020. *Processing Death: Oval Brooches and Viking Graves in Britain, Ireland, and Iceland*. Göteborg: Göteborg University.
- Nygaard, Simon. 2019a. "Poetry as Ritual in Pre-Christian Nordic Religion." Unpublished PhD thesis in History of Religions. Aarhus: University of Aarhus.
- Nygaard, Simon. 2019b. "Being Óðinn Bursson: The Creation of Social and Moral Obligation in Viking Age Warrior-Bands through the Ritualized, Oral Performance of Poetry: The Case of *Grímnismál*." In *Social Norms in Medieval Scandinavia*, edited by Jakub Morawiec, Aleksandra Jochymek and Grzegorz Bartusik, 51-74. Leeds: ARC Humanities Press.  
<https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvpb3xck.8>
- Nygaard, Simon and Luke John Murphy. 2017. "Processioner i førkristen nordisk religion." *Religionsvidenskabeligt Tidsskrift* 66: 40-77.  
<https://doi.org/10.7146/rt.v0i66.26447>
- Pearson, Mike and Michael Shanks. 2001. *Theatre/Archaeology*. London: Routledge.
- Pedersen, Anne. 2006. "Ancient Mounds for New Graves: An Aspect of Viking Age Burial Customs in Southern Scandinavia." In *Old Norse Religions in Long-term Perspectives: Origins, Changes and Interactions*, edited by Anders André, Kristina Jennbert and Catharina Raudvere, 346-53. Lund: Nordic Academic Press.
- Pedersen, Anne. 2014. *Dead Warriors in Living Memory. A Study of Weapon and Equestrian Burials in Viking-Age Denmark, AD 800-1000*. 2 vols. Copenhagen: National Museum of Denmark.
- Pétursdóttir, Þóra. 2009. "Icelandic Viking Age Graves: Lack in Material – Lack of Interpretation?" *Archaeologia Islandica* 7: 22–40.
- Phillpotts, Bertha. 1920. *The Elder Edda and Ancient Scandinavian Drama*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Price, Neil. 2002. *The Viking Way: Religion and War in Late Iron Age Scandinavia*. Uppsala: Uppsala University.
- Price, Neil. 2008a. "Bodylore and the Archaeology of Embedded Religion: Dramatic

- Licence in the Funerals of the Vikings." In *Belief in the Past: Theoretical Approaches to the Archaeology of Religion*, edited by David S. Whitley and Kelley Hays-Gilpin, 143-65. Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press.
- Price, Neil. 2008b. "Dying and the Dead: Viking Age Mortuary Behaviour." In *The Viking World*, edited by Stefan Brink and Neil Price, 257-73. London & New York: Routledge.
- Price, Neil. 2010. "Passing into Poetry: Viking-Age Mortuary Drama and the Origins of Norse Mythology." *Medieval Archaeology* 54: 123-56.  
<https://doi.org/10.1179/174581710X12790370815779>
- Price, Neil. 2012. "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*, edited by Catharina Raudvere and Jens Peter Schjødt, 13-46. Lund: Nordic Academic Press.
- Price, Neil. 2014a. "Nine Paces from Hel: Time and Motion in Old Norse Ritual Performance." *World Archaeology* 46.2: 178-91.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00438243.2014.883938>
- Price, Neil. 2014b. "Belief and Ritual." In *Vikings: Life and Legend*, edited by Gareth Williams, Peter Pentz, and Mattias Wemhoff, 162-95. London: British Museum Press.
- Price, Neil. 2019. *The Viking Way: Magic and Mind in Late Iron Age Scandinavia*. Oxford: Oxbow. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvhhhgz3>
- Price, Neil. 2020a. *The Children of Ash and Elm: A History of the Vikings*. London: Allen Lane.
- Price, Neil. 2020b. "Death Ritual and Mortuary Behaviour." In *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North: Histories and Structures II*, edited by Anders Andrén, Jens Peter Schjødt, and John Lindow, 853-96. Turnhout: Brepols.  
<https://doi.org/10.1484/M.PCRN-EB.5.116960>
- Price, Neil. In press. "Vikings on the Volga? Ibn Fadlan and the Rituals of the Rūssiyah." In *Muslims on the Volga in the Viking Age: Diplomacy and Islam in the World of Ibn Fadlan*, edited by Jonathan Shepard and Luke Treadwell. London: Bloomsbury.
- Price, Neil, Charlotte Hedenstierna-Jonson, Torun Zachrisson, Anna Kjellström, Jan Storå, Maja Krzewińska, Torsten Günther, Verónica Sobrado, Mattias Jakobsson, and Anders Götherström. 2019. "Viking warrior women? Reassessing Birka chamber grave Bj.581." *Antiquity* 93: 181-98.  
<https://doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2018.258>
- Price, Neil and Paul Mortimer. 2014. "An Eye for Odin? Divine Role-playing in the Age of Sutton Hoo." *European Journal of Archaeology*.17/3: 517-38.  
<https://doi.org/10.1179/1461957113Y.0000000050>
- Roberts, Howell and Hreiðarsdóttir, Elín Ósk. 2013. "The Litlu-Núpar Burials." *Archaeologica Islandica* 10: 104-30.
- Robbins, Heather. 2004. *Seated Burials at Birka: A Select Study*. MA thesis in archaeology. Uppsala: Uppsala University.



- Sanmark, Alexandra. 2015. "At the Assembly: A Study of Ritual Space." In *Rituals, Performatives, and Political Order in Northern Europe, c. 650–1350*, edited by Wojtek Jezierski, Lars Hermanson, Hans Jacob Orning, and Thomas Småberg, 79-112. Turnhout: Brepols. <https://doi.org/10.1484/M.RITUS-EB.5.108540>
- Sayer, Duncan, Erin Sebo and Kyle Hughes. 2019. "A Double-edged Sword: Swords, Bodies, and Personhood in Early Medieval Archaeology and Literature." *European Journal of Archaeology* 22: 542-66. <https://doi.org/10.1017/eea.2019.18>
- Schechner, Richard. 2020. *Performance Studies*. 4th ed. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315269399>
- Schjødt, Jens Peter. 2007. "Ibn Fadlan's Account of a Rus Funeral: To What Degree Does It Reflect Nordic Myths?" In *Reflections on Old Norse Myths*, edited by Pernille Herman, Jens Peter Schjødt, and Rasmus Trandum Kristensen, 133-48. Turnhout: Brepols. <https://doi.org/10.1484/M.VMSS-EB.3.4380>
- Shema, Steven D. 2014. "Grímr-Visaged War: Viking Age Battle, with an Eye to Performance." Unpublished MA thesis. Reykjavík: University of Iceland.
- Snædal, Þórgunnur. 2010. "Ailíkn's Wagon and Óðinn's Warriors: The Pictures on the Gotlandic Ardre Monuments." In *The Viking Age: Ireland and the West*, edited by John Sheehan and Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 441-9. Dublin: Four Courts.
- Stylegar, Frans-Arne. 2005. "Kammergraver fra vikingtiden i Vestfold." *Fornvännen* 100: 161–177.
- Svanberg, Fredrik. 2003. *Death Rituals in South-East Scandinavia ad 800–1000*. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell.
- Svensson, Kenneth. 2010. "Götavi - en vikingatida kultplats i Närke." In *Makt, kult och plats*, edited by Peter Bratt and Richard Grönwall, 68-77. Stockholm: Stockholm Länsmuseum.
- Taylor, Timothy. 2002. *The Buried Soul: How Humans Invented Death*. London: Beacon Press.
- Thäte, Eva S. 2007. *Monuments and Minds. Monument Re-use in Scandinavia in the Second Half of the First Millennium AD*. Lund: University of Lund.
- Thedéen, Susanne. 2010. "Immortal Maidens: The Visual Significance of the Colour White in Girls' Graves on Viking-Age Gotland." In *Making Sense of Things: Archaeologies of Sensory Perception*, edited by Fredrik Fahlander and Anna Kjellström, 103-20. Stockholm: Stockholm University.
- Turner, Edith. 2012. *Communitas: The Anthropology of Collective Joy*. New York, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Turner, Victor. 1969. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Chicago, Aldine.
- Ulriksen, Jens. 2011. Vikingetidens gravskik i Danmark: spor af begravelsesritualer i jordfæstegrave. *Kuml* 2011: 161-246. <https://doi.org/10.7146/kuml.v60i60.24527>
- Vedeler, Marianne. 2019. *The Oseberg Tapestries*. Oslo: Scandinavian Academic Press.
- Vedeler, Marianne. In prep. "Tapestries in Visual and Oral Storytelling. The Oseberg Example." In *Interior Textiles In and Beyond the Viking Age*, edited by Eva

Andersson Strand, Charlotte Hedenstierna-Jonson, Marianne Vedeler and Ulla Mannering.

Warmind, Morten Lund. 1995. "Ibn Fadlan in the Context of his Age." In *The Ship as Symbol in Prehistoric and Medieval Scandinavia*, edited by Ole Crumlin-Pedersen and Birgitte Munch Thye, 131-37. Copenhagen: National Museum of Denmark.

Williams, Howard. 2016. "Viking Mortuary Citations". *European Journal of Archaeology* 19: 400-14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14619571.2016.1186882>