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From Torksey to Füsing and Hedeby: gambling warriors on the move?

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In the early 1980s the metal detector revolutionized Danish archaeology. Like no other surveying method before or since, the metal detector and the many voluntary amateur archaeologists using it, have contributed with an enormous increase of finds and find-spots from the metal-rich periods (Bronze Age, Iron Age and the medieval period). Since the beginning of metal detector archaeology, the number of find-spots producing ‘Danefæ’ finds (treasure trove) has increased tenfold and the tendency looks as though it will continue in the years to come. Virtually all the spectacular discoveries of the past decades are owed to metal detectors in the hands of amateur archaeologists.

In contrast to the situation in many other European countries and worldwide, the contribution of the metal detector to Danish archaeology has turned out to be substantial and positive (at least until today). Not only has it radically altered our understanding of central aspects of Scandinavian societies during the metal-rich periods, it has also opened new research perspectives. Furthermore, as an integrated tool of heritage practice, metal detecting has secured an important part of cultural heritage and ensured the identification of countless archaeological sites which otherwise would have been in danger of irreversible destruction (HENRIKSEN 2005; ANDERSEN/NIELSEN 2010; BAASTRUP/FEVEILE 2013).

The success of the liberal Danish model, where everyone is free to use metal detectors (except on protected monuments), is based on a complex interplay of legislative, historical, cultural and social parameters, which to a large extent are specific if not even unique for the cultural context of Denmark (DOBAT 2013). In a larger perspective, recreational metal detector archaeology is a subject of great controversy and official stakeholders’ attitudes and practical approaches towards it differ across Europe and also within individual countries, as is the case in Germany, where federal states

have responded very differently to the challenge of recreational metal detecting (see for example HUTH 2013; VON CARNAP-BORNHEIM et al. 2015; SCHESCHKEWITZ 2015).

For more than a decade now, Schleswig-Holstein has embraced recreational metal detector archaeology and developed a legal framework and best practice approach that both allows and controls the use of metal detectors by non-professionals (SEGSCHNEIDER 2008; MAJCHCZACK 2016). With the launch of the so called ‘Schleswig model’, based on a certification process and a claim system, Schleswig-Holstein seems to have found a well-functioning compromise between the two dominant paradigms governing official stakeholders’ attitudes and practice within Germany and Europe, the one extreme being the restrictive approach trying to prevent (or at least disguising) any form of non-professional detector archaeology, and the other being the liberal model practised in the UK and Denmark. With this model, Schleswig-Holstein has been showing the way towards an integration of non-professional detectorists and provided a best practice model for tackling the challenge of recreational metal detector archaeology.

Since 2005, close to 200 individuals have followed the educational programme at the State Archaeological Department of Schleswig-Holstein and earned a certificate allowing them to use metal detectors within personal ‘survey claims’. Today, the Detector Group Schleswig-Holstein is partly in charge of the schooling of new metal detectorists and some of its members even act as voluntary local heritage custodians. Thus the same group of people who previously had acted against the federal state’s monument protection act now take an active role in its execution on a municipality level (for a more detailed overview see VON CARNAP-BORNHEIM et al. 2015; MAJCHCZACK 2016).

As in Denmark, the embracing of recreational metal detector archaeology in Schleswig-Holstein and the



Fig. 1 Two of the four gaming pieces or weights from the Füsing site. Left: AU 2014-174-X28 with plane surface. Right: AU 2014-174-X203 with cross and dot ornamentation (Photo: C. Skaaning Andersen).

implementation of the model of ‘state supervised’ detector archaeology has had a substantial effect on archaeological research and heritage practice. Metal detectorists have salvaged artefacts on destroyed grave fields, they have discovered new and hitherto unknown settlement sites, and they have established the basis for new insights into more recent military conflicts.

Claus von Carnap-Bornheim has been the driving force in the development and implementation of the ‘Schleswig Model’ and the change of attitudes towards metal detector archaeology in Schleswig-Holstein. It therefore seems obvious, in the context of this ‘Festschrift’, to present a small group of metal detector finds that have been uncovered as a direct consequence of this development.

Weights or gaming pieces (?)

The most substantial contribution of metal detector archaeology is the growth of find-spots from the early medieval period, shedding light on the complexity of the cultural landscape of the Schleswig region, and in particular the wider hinterland of Hedeby/Schleswig and the Danevirke. One of these sites is the Viking Age settlement site at Füsing, which was discovered in 2003 through a metal detector survey. It is situated on the northern shore of the Schlei Fjord, within the range of vision from Hedeby and with a direct connection to the Danevirke (DOBAT 2010). The site has since been the subject of intensive metal detector and geomagnetic surveying; and from 2010 to 2014, the first excavations were conducted on the site. The evidence, not least the many detector finds,

suggests that the settlement flourished from around 700 AD to the end of the 10th century. Exclusive finds and building features such as several longhouses indicate a high-status residence, and although the preliminary character of the present state of research forbids definite conclusions, Füsing can be interpreted as a manorial estate. As such, it may have had military functions relating to the Danevirke, and it may possibly have served as the seat of a royal representative in connection with the emporium of Hedeby. As a regional centre of production and trade/exchange, Füsing would have fulfilled a role as a reloading point, linking supraregional and regional exchange networks.

In the following, we will focus on a small group of altogether four rather inconspicuous objects which have been found both as surface finds (AU 2014-174-X203; AU 2014-174-X28; Füsing 2003-X1261) and in the context of pit house no. OA 104 (AU 2014-174-X129). The peculiar artefacts are made of a lead alloy and shaped like hollow domes with a semi-spherical form and cross section. Roughly 18 mm in diameter, between 16 and 20 mm in height, they have roughly the size of a grown man’s thumb tip, weighing between 17 and 21 g. Two different designs or types are present in the Füsing material, one of domed shape and even surface, another with protruding ornamentation consisting of a cross and four dots/projections (Fig. 1). Against the high-quality standard of Viking Age metalwork, the pieces seem crudely made, which, however, is a typical trait of lead artefacts from the period. Nevertheless, they were obviously carefully designed, and the fact that they were produced in a lost wax form indicates that someone in possession of at least basic metalworking skills made them. Unfortunately, most of the pieces are in rather poor condition and show no clear traces of wear, except find 2014-174-X28, which has a distinctly flat base rim, indicating that the piece had been pushed or moved around on a rough surface for some time.

Their chronological framework is given by one of the objects’ find context – the secondary filling layers of pit house no. OA 104. Other finds from the pit houses include bone artefacts, pottery and various iron implements. The only artefacts providing a chronological framework for the construction and use of the building, however, are ten glass beads of varying shape and design. Based on the stratigraphic and absolute chronology of glass bead types in the Ribe settlement layers (FEVEILE/JENSEN 2006, 119–150; oral comm. Claus Feveile, Danish Agency for Culture), the house can be tentatively dated to the decades around either the middle or the second half of the 9th century. Against the stylistic similarities, one can assume a similar chronological frame for the three metal detector finds from the ploughed soil.

After now more than 30 years of metal detector archaeology in Denmark, archaeologists rarely encounter previously unknown object types or finds that have not appeared before in some other context. The four lead pieces from Füsing apparently are an exception from this rule.

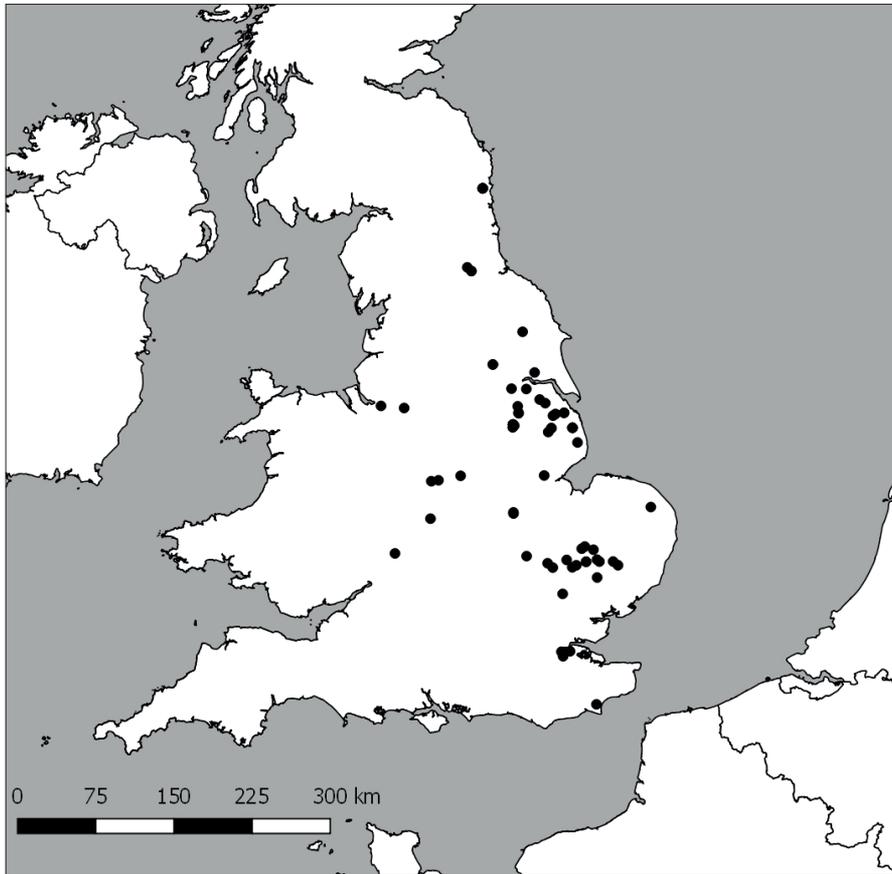


Fig. 2 Distribution of lead artefacts dating to the early medieval period interpreted as possible gaming pieces in the Portable Antiquities Scheme for England and Wales. Several dots cover multiple recordings (data PORTABLE ANTIQUITIES SCHEME, 2017; drawing: D. Stott).

So far, the only obvious parallels for the lead objects from Füsing are known from nearby Hedeby, where three similar cylindrical objects of roughly the same dimensions have been found during the intensive metal detector surveying projects. Also here, two types are present, one with a plane outer surface and another with a cross and dot ornamentation, though slightly deviating from the Füsing pieces in shape and design (I am grateful to Volker Hilberg for providing me with information on these finds). Yet in spite of repeated inquiries in the Danish metal detector network and among find specialists at Danish museums, it has proven impossible to identify any additional parallels. The absence of evidence is not the evidence for absence, and it is very plausible that similar pieces will be brought to light in the future, as is often the case in archaeology. At present, however, the pieces from Füsing and Hedeby are more or less unique – at least in a southern Scandinavian context.

The situation is very different if one includes the Scandinavian settlement areas in present-day England. In contrast to the situation in Denmark, the heritage sector in England and Wales has been quick to recognize the need for a central registration of metal detector finds and as of 1996 the majority of the growing number of metal detector finds produced by non-professionals are recorded in the open access database of the British Museum's Portable Antiquities Scheme (PORTABLE ANTIQUITIES SCHEME). The PAS database contains a considerable number of lead objects, which, although they

are characterized by a great variety in shape, design and dimension, very much resemble the odd lead pieces from Füsing and Hedeby (Fig. 2). See for example KENT-9AA591, which has very similar dimensions and the same type of cross and dots ornamentation as two of the Füsing pieces, or DUR-5F614C with a similar domed shape and even surface.

They are often associated with other finds of early medieval date and artefacts of Scandinavian or Anglo/Norse origin. The site which has produced by far the largest assemblage of these objects is Torksey in Lincolnshire, where metal detector surveying has led to the identification of the Viking Great Army's winter camp, known from an entry in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for 872 AD (HADLEY/RICHARDS 2013). To date, 272 hollow, and mostly conically or dome shaped lead artefacts have been uncovered at Torksey, along with coinage, hack-silver and various pieces of jewellery of Anglo-Saxon, Frankish, Irish and Norse origin. The pieces show a great variety in design, shape, ornamentation and size and were obviously made individually. However, many of them share the same basic features of the four lead pieces from Füsing with either cross and dot ornamentation or even surface (Fig. 3). PAS find liaison officers and the research team behind the Torksey investigation interpret the English lead objects as gaming pieces belonging to board games such as Mill or Hnefatafl, which all require two different types of or differently coloured gaming pieces. The interpretation of the many English parallels as gaming pieces fits well with the



Fig. 3 Selection of the 272 lead artefacts, interpreted as gaming pieces, from the site of the Viking winter camp at Torksey, Lincolnshire, England (after RICHARDS/HADLEY 2016).

two different designs of lead objects found at Füsing (plane surface and cross and dot ornamentation), which would have made them clearly distinguishable from above. It is further supported by the one piece's flat base rim, which may have been caused by its use as a gaming piece.

Even though a functional interpretation of the lead objects in question from Füsing and Hedeby is plausible, one has to take into account an alternative interpretation as weights. All over northern Europe, weights of different shape and material were an important element of the bullion or hack-silver economy of the early medieval period, prior to the introduction of monetary systems. Although the majority of these obviously highly standardized weights were made of either copper alloy or even copper-coated iron, lead weights of different shapes and dimensions are also a recurring element of the find assemblages of a large number of trade and production sites all over southern Scandinavia. In Birka, central Sweden, 68% of the known weights from the settlement area are made of lead or tin, and in the assemblage from the settlement excavations at Kaupang, southern Norway, the ratio of lead weights to those of other materials is even 82% (PEDERSEN 2008, 135). A lead weight, which very much resembles the outer shape of the pieces from Füsing while lacking the characteristic hollow shape, was found together with other weights and a pair of scales in a boat grave at Kiloran Bay, on the Hebrides (GRAHAM-CAMPBELL 1980, 88 pl. 307,1; see also BIGGS/WITHERS 2000).

Even though lead weights in early medieval Scandinavia seem to have been less standardized compared with their counterparts made of copper alloy, the clear majority of lead weights are of a cylindrical or flat conical shape and they lack the characteristic hollow shape of the supposed gaming pieces.

Gaming pieces, in some cases together with gaming boards, are a common phenomenon in Iron Age and Viking Age burials all over Scandinavia. Especially common in burials of a male elite, gaming sets as parts of grave furnishings probably first and foremost were to convey the deceased's high social status. But it has also been proposed that the gaming sets had an additional symbolic significance, evoking associations with concepts of fate and destiny as well as the transformation of the deceased into the afterlife (ANDRÉN 2007; SOLBERG 2007).

During the early medieval period in Scandinavia, gaming pieces were produced in varying shape and of different materials, ranging from flat cylindrical or semi-spherical pieces made of bone, amber or antler to elaborately decorated examples made of glass or ivory. Apart from a few rare exceptions, however, gaming pieces made of copper alloy are rare, and lead gaming pieces in particular are unknown in the Scandinavian material – at least from a burial context (LINDQUIST 1984; WHITTAKER 2006). So although the known gaming pieces from an early medieval burial context do resemble the lead pieces from Füsing, Hedeby and various sites in England in shape, they generally seem to have been made of very different materials.

One of the reasons why gaming pieces made of materials other than bone, antler, amber, glass and ivory might be under-represented in archaeological records is the biasing factor that the majority of known finds stem from an elite context. However, finds of gaming boards or simple 'game plans' scratched on stone or wooden planks in various non-elite contexts indicate that gaming also was a common leisure activity, not limited to the upper strata of early medieval society but widely practised across different social groups. A prominent example is the plan for a game of Mill engraved

on what can be assumed to have been a ship's deck plank or rowing bench from Aarhus (Denmark) which was used in the construction of a well in the early urban community, at some point during the 10th or 11th century.

But what was the background to Scandinavian war bands on the British Isles producing gaming pieces of lead? In early medieval Britain, in contrast to Scandinavia, lead was a common raw material. In Roman times, lead from the mines in Wales and the southern and western parts of modern-day England was used on a large scale for plumbing, roof covering material, kitchenware and a host of different uses, in particular in urban centres. This tradition was continued in the early medieval period, and written evidence testifies to the use of lead as roof covering material in ecclesiastical architecture. For the Viking Great Army, lead was thus a cheap and easily accessible raw material. In contrast, those materials which were used to manufacture gaming pieces in Scandinavia, in particular antler, ivory and amber, were comparably rare. More recent analysis of combs from Scandinavian emporia indicates long-distance trade – as early as the 8th century – in antler from various species of deer (*Cervidae*) for the production of combs (ASHBY et al. 2015) and amber does not occur naturally in the British context. Under these circumstances, lead would have simply offered a cheap alternative.

According to the historical references, the winter camp at Torksey, yielding the biggest collection of lead gaming pieces from the period, was occupied over the winter of 872–873 AD. The metal detector finds, at present our primary source, indicate that the site covered an area of more than 20 ha, which can be taken as support for the contemporary written accounts numbering the Norse forces in the thousands. By the time the Great Army encamped itself on the prominent high ground at Torksey, overlooking the Trent's floodplain, they had already been campaigning all over modern-day England for seven years, and the year before the army had been reinforced by another warrior band, presumably coming from Denmark. It is easy to imagine the battle-worn warriors passing the long winter days and nights over a game of Mill or Hnefatafl, gambling for the silver of which they had deprived English towns and ecclesiastical institutions in the previous months.

Gaming and warrior life

Members of the armies represented by the huge assemblages of military equipment from the Late Roman Iron Age in Illerup Ådal, Nydam and Vimose carried with them gaming boards and gaming pieces (ILKJÆR/IVERSEN 2009, 144). And in many of the above-mentioned elite burials, for example the Danish equestrian burials of male warriors dating to the second and third quarters of the 10th century, gaming sets are associated with weaponry (PEDERSEN 2014, 139). Another example are the newly discovered burial ships at Salme, on the island of Saaremaa, in Estonia (CURRY 2013). The burials can be assumed to represent the fallen members of a raiding

war band and their leaders. They had been put to rest according to contemporary Swedish burial custom, in two boats, together with weaponry and other grave furnishings, among these 71 gaming pieces made of bone and antler. In the case of Saaremaa, the link between gaming and military campaigning seems particularly obvious, as the war band apparently had been on a campaign along the coast of Estonia, when they – this being at least one of the many possible scenarios leading to these unique burials – were attacked and overpowered by another war band.

Board games seem to have been an integral element of military life in early medieval Scandinavia, both in the higher strata of the military hierarchy and among low-ranking warriors, and one can point to several underlying reasons for this connection. As was the case in more recent conflicts and today, military campaigns involved a considerable amount of waiting periods. In these situations, on board ships, during sieges or in military camps, board games offered a good opportunity to simply 'kill time'.

In its very essence, the rules of Hnefatafl, where a king has to be defended against an attacking party, mimics a military conflict. Winning the game requires, beyond luck, considerable tactical skills and board games would have been seen as mirroring the player's personal qualities, such as intelligence, cunning, wisdom, and will to take decisions. Although this dimension of playing board games was probably relevant primarily for the few leading figures of Iron Age and early medieval war parties, the practising of tactical skills and the demonstration of psychological superiority to friend and foe alike might have been an important factor behind board games' popularity among warrior elites.

In early medieval mentality, the outcome of a battle depended not only on personal skills or physical strength, but also (and possibly primarily) on the will of supernatural powers. For the early Germanic tribal societies, historical sources testify to the significance of prophecies prior to military conflicts, and the ritual depositions of war booty in Scandinavia provide insight into the complex nature of the religious ceremonies following such events (VON CARNAP-BORNHEIM/RAU 2009; DOBAT 2009). Also in the early medieval period, mythological conceptions, religious rituals and oracles played an important role in the preparation and planning of military campaigns and the concepts of fate and destiny were a decisive element of the warrior mentality of the time (PRICE 2002; HELGESSON 2004). Seeing it in this light, we can assume that playing board games also had a symbolic significance as a game of fate in which the higher powers decided who was to keep the upper hand.

And finally there might be another reason, which, however, needs some more thorough argumentation: throughout prehistory, the ultimate goal of military campaigns was to gain booty in the form of livestock, slaves, precious objects or currency. In the Viking Age, the primary form of tribute was the payment of silver, either hack-silver or coinage, and

the individual members of Viking war bands active on the British Isles or on the western continent were paid by receiving a share of the gathered booty. Especially in the 10th and 11th centuries, English kings and towns paid large amounts of ransom sums ('Danegæld') to raiding war bands in order to escape the pillaging of their territories. In 991, in the aftermath of the famous Battle of Maldon, the Anglo-Saxon king Æthelred was forced to pay the hitherto unseen amount of 10 000 pounds of silver to a plundering army, probably under the command of the Norwegian king Olaf Trygvasson. Converted to the standard of approximately 240 pennies to the pound by weight, this would have been equivalent to 2 400 000 single coins. The Anglo-Saxon sources do not contain trustworthy information as to the size of the Scandinavian army fighting at Maldon. But even if we assume a large force of 4000 men, and if we presuppose an equal sharing of the total sum, each warrior would have received an equivalent of 600 coins.

Even though of largely speculative character, this calculation provides an impression of the staggering amounts of silver in the hands of individual warriors participating in the military campaigns of the time. And even though the calculation does not necessarily apply to the earlier phase of Scandinavian plundering activity on the British Isles in the late 9th century, it still provides a background for the archaeological record at sites like Torksey and other military camps on the British Isles, where the detector finds indicate that large amounts of silver and coinage were circulating among the occupants of these sites. In this light, the 300 lead game pieces at Torksey might testify not only to games of leisure but also to games involving gambling, in which the warriors put at stake their share of the previous campaign's booty.

Returning warriors?

Based on the lack of comparable finds in a Scandinavian context, it seems reasonable to assume that the possible lead gaming pieces from Füsing and Hedeby represent a specific English type of gaming piece; and their prevalence at the Viking winter camp at Torksey and other Anglo-Norse settlements in England suggests that the type was introduced and used among the Scandinavian war bands on the British Isles at some point during the 9th century. Even though one would have to conduct a more detailed analysis of the pieces from Füsing and Hedeby to further substantiate this hypothesis, it is plausible, also in the light of the 9th century date of at least one of the pieces from Füsing, that the objects originate from England.

Artefacts of British origin occur on a regular basis in the find assemblages from Danish metal detector sites and in recent years also in Schleswig-Holstein (BAASTRUP 2012; TUMMUSCHEIT 2012). The variety of these finds ranges from strap-ends, various kinds of mounts and fittings to fragments of ecclesiastical equipment, many of which were reworked and given an alternative function in their new Scandinavian

context as brooches or mounts. They mirror the extent of Danish involvement in the military campaigns during the 9th and 10th centuries and suggest that a considerable amount of the participating warriors returned to their former home regions. For the later phases of Scandinavian settlement in Britain in the 10th and 11th centuries, detector finds of similar artefact types, in some cases even artefacts seemingly coming from the same workshops, in both Denmark and the area of the Danelagen, even suggest regular communication and exchange between the Scandinavian communities east and west of the North Sea (JEPPESEN 2011; KERSHAW 2013).

Also the detector find assemblage from Füsing contains artefacts, which can be related to the Scandinavian campaigns in Britain. The most illustrative example is a former silver strap-end (Füsing 2005-X1310), 56 mm in length, with ornamentation in interlaced ribbons and stylized animals and traces of niello inlay (Fig. 4). As a classic example of the Trewhiddle style, the piece resembles countless similar strap-ends found on the British Isles and can be dated to the 9th century (THOMAS 2001). Originally produced in England, like many objects brought home by Scandinavian raiders, it had been reworked into a brooch by fastening a pin and a pin-rest on its rear side. Similar strap-ends with Trewhiddle style ornamentation were found in Hedeby. As these, however, lack any trace of secondary reworking, they do not necessarily relate to Scandinavian plundering activities in Britain, but may rather reflect the intensive trade connections between English and Scandinavian urban communities (HILBERG 2008).

The many finds of British origin in the assemblages of metal detector sites in Denmark and Schleswig-Holstein suggest that there was a significant 'backflow' of warriors who had participated in the military campaigns of the 9th and 10th centuries in Western Europe. Not all of them had apparently joined the various raiding parties and war bands with the aim to permanently settle in the conquered territories, but returned to their former home regions – some presumably with a significant amount of silver and other form of booty, allowing them to establish themselves as members of an increasingly competitive society (BARRETT 2008). This backflow was to prove to have a crucial impact on Scandinavian society. The large amount of silver cash flowing into the Scandinavian economy radically transformed the economic organization of Scandinavian society and led to a flourishing of trade and exchange. And together with the many low-ranking warriors, some of the leading commanders of the different war bands also returned to their Scandinavian home countries. It is probably not a coincidence that we witness the emergence of the first states after the European model in Denmark and Norway in this period. Here, a Europeanized Scandinavian elite, the former warlords, applied the experience they had gained through the encounter with the feudal societies in Western Europe. In this light, the state formation of the 10th and 11th centuries in Scandinavia can be seen as

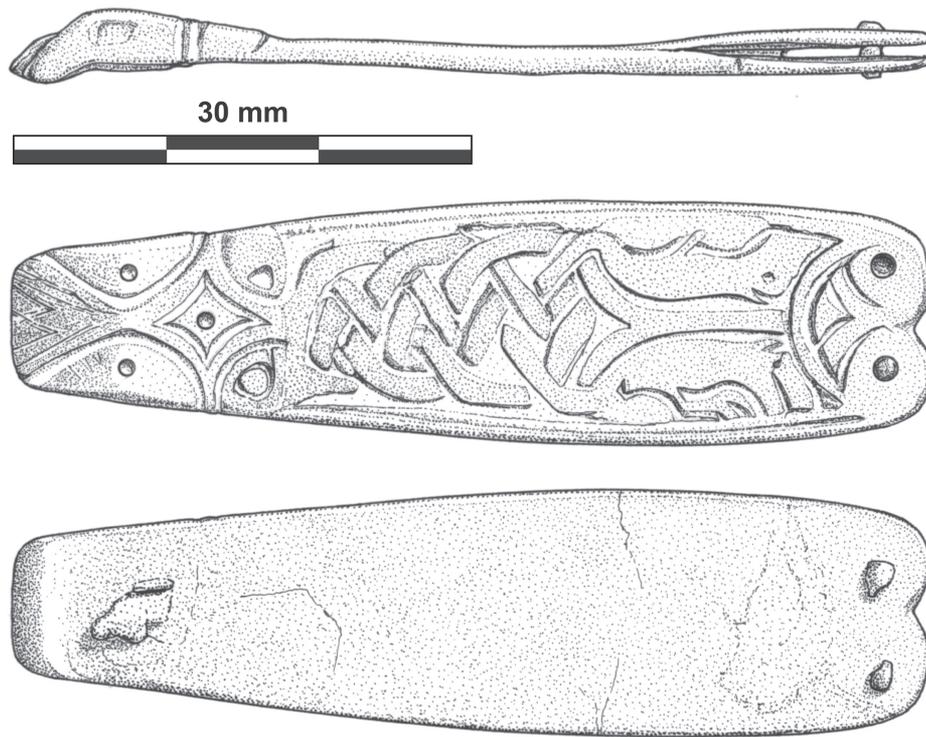


Fig. 4 Silver strap-end/brooch (Füsing 2005-X1310), 56 mm in length, with ornamentation in interlaced ribbons and stylized animals and traces of niello inlay (Drawing: G. Hagel-Bischof).

an echo of the Viking expansion. The recent excavations at Füsing revealed a surprisingly large assemblage of arrowheads and axe blades, which substantiates the hypothesis that one of the site's probably many different roles was that of a strategic and military position. Situated less than 1500 m north of the submarine barrier at Reesholm, which was established around 737 AD as an element of the Danevirke defence system, the site overlooked a strategic key point within the military infrastructure of the Schleswig region. In this strategic setting, Füsing may have fulfilled an essential role in the defensive system, not only as a garrison behind the Reesholm barrier, but also as one of the strategic nodes in the organization and defence of Danevirke and Hedeby. In the situation of a military attack, both the western and the eastern sections of Danevirke were in easy and quick reach via the open waters of the fjord. Given the significant role of ships and naval transportation in warfare during that period, this would have been a crucial factor.

The inconspicuous lead gaming pieces from the plough soil and pit houses at Füsing suggest that at least some of the warriors based here, at this highly strategic point in the early Danish kingdom, were battle-worn warriors who had already gained experience during the Scandinavian campaigns in Britain.

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