Intimate Economies and the Objects of Affection

Gifting and intimate personal relationships in Viking Age Scandinavian society c. 800-1100 AD

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Abstract

This dissertation presents a heuristic case for identifying an intimate life course shared between men and women through inter-gender gifting practices, as a suggested way in which Viking Age society functioned and remained stable. It is suggested that evidence of inter-gender gifting practices could represent a vital way in which ideas about the relationship between female and male identities could be accessed archaeologically. Whilst this remains to be proven through the archaeological case study present here, it is suggested that this might be more related to limitations within the evidence itself, as opposed to the methodology. It is concluded that the theoretical case presented here, might be a valuable tool, as our knowledge of the late Scandinavian Iron Age develops.
Chapter One

Introduction

Aims and Research Questions

This dissertation will explore the existence and potential nature of intimate personal relationships of the male-female partnership in Viking Age society c. 800 - 1100 AD, through gifting practices. It will focus particularly on the idea that the intimate personal relationship can be viewed as a tangible context of the ‘life course’ (Gilchrist 2013, 1), composed of events such as courtship, marriage and family. It is argued that such events in the life course of intimate personal relations generate an associated material culture of exchange or gifts that can be logically identified and studied archaeologically. The first aim thus, is to construct a theoretical model that may realise how gift-exchanges of the intimate personal relationship context might be manifest materially. The second aim will be to assess if such a model may be useful in understanding the nature of Viking Age personal relationships between men and women, the scholarship around which remains troubled by theoretical and methodological problems. Finally, the utility of this model to aid unanswered questions in debates regarding male-female relationships will be explored specifically through a relevant case study; that of debates surrounding the nature of imported ‘insular’ objects found in female graves (Petersen 1940, 1).

My research questions will ask:

- Did intimate personal relationships exist in the Viking Age?
- What is the relationship between gifting and intimacy?
- Can we reasonably identify gifted items of intimate personal relationships in the archaeological record?
- To what extent may it contribute to wider debate and influence current preconceptions of Viking Age gender identity?
Objectives

1. To develop a theoretical framework by which evidence of intimate personal relationships, or in other words, intimate gifting, may be logically identified.

2. To analyse and assess possible case study evidence for this in the archaeological record of the Viking Age.

3. To apply this theory within a specific case study, in order to ascertain if such a framework bears any meaningful significance to Viking Age identities.
Definitions

Much of this research is founded on concepts that have not previously been established or standardised in archaeological discourse. Therefore a few definitions are required in order to clarify the key concepts that will be analysed in further discussion. These concepts should be kept in mind throughout the reading of this thesis.

**Intimacy: practices, contexts and roles**

Intimacy, as presented by Jamieson (2011, 1), refers first to the quality of close connection between people and second to the practice of building this quality. This feeling of closeness is emotional and cognitive, often described as feelings of mutual love and appreciation, sharing an affinity or having a feeling of being special to one another (Jamieson 2011, 1). It is argued in sociological theory that the feeling of intimacy can only be enabled by the act of ‘doing’ intimacy (Morgan 2011, 1). Such acts are defined (although not limited to) interactions such as giving to, sharing with, spending time with, knowing, practically caring for, and expressing affection for another person (Jamieson 2011, 3). Intimacy develops only within contexts of people that are intimately close in character, or in other words, those that perceive themselves as holding sustained familial-like attachments. Attachments of this kind are usually defined as personal relationships between husband and wife, parent and child, siblings, or close friends. The extent to which such intimate personal relationships have been shown to exist cross-culturally and throughout history, suggests that there is a basic element to intimacy within human nature that might be considered universal (Jamieson 2011, 4).

In sociological theory, intimacy as an act is argued to be a fundamental element in developing a relational understanding of ‘self’ and ‘other’, and as such, may be used to understand theories of self-identity and other social worlds, such as the reproduction of social roles, integration or exclusion, or gender and sexuality construction (Jamieson 2011, 2-4). It is the latter
element, that of gender and sexuality construction, that will be the most interesting subject within this study of intimacy and the Viking Age male-female partnership.

The Life Course and the Intimate Life Course

The concept of the ‘life course’ is a recent archaeological approach developed by Gilchrist (2013). It is an approach that views social identity as built from a series of events within a human lifetime, or what otherwise might be deemed the ‘ageing process’ (Gilchrist 2013, 1). In this way, the human life is considered the most accurate scale, and most important subject for analysis in understanding human existence in the past. Her logic follows that in order to understand how a select human life course might be characterised within a certain culture requires an understanding of the kind of events, activities and interactions that may occur within a cultural context. Gilchrist (2013) demonstrates how this might be achieved within the context of Medieval England, through an in depth analysis of varying cultural practices that would have dictated the life course in this period.

The second principle to be taken from Gilchrist’s approach is, that at every point, life course events are mediated by the objects that we enable within our lives; what Gilchrist (2013, 3) deems the ‘ontological’ relationship between people and things. Whether they are objects that belong to us, those which we use and discard, or those which hold a specific symbolic meaning, each object that is engendered within human existence can be defined by its place and agency within our life courses. Lastly, Gilchrist (2013, 2) notes that objects may often take on an agency, which can prove an active structuring agent in our lives.

For the purpose of this dissertation, it is argued that in the same way that the events and objects that occur within an individual’s Life Course are central to the creation of their own personal social identity, events and objects that are
shared between individuals are central to the creation of a shared social identity.

The intimate partner context, where men and women make unions and co-habit, represents a significant aspect of social identity within a shared life course. Individuals develop social identities that are relational to one another through a series of intersecting shared events and objects, examples of which may be courtship, marriage or parenting. On the basis of Gilchrist’s theory of how objects are fundamentally involved in life course events, it could be argued that contexts of shared social identity are also mediated by a culturally defined material culture, which can be defined and interrogated. It is these objects within the life course of the intimate personal relationship, which forms the primary concern of this dissertation.

The Intimate Economy

The ‘intimate economy’ as defined by Price (1975, 5), defines a structural organisation found universally within inter-generational groups of people, that is based on the production and redistribution or ‘sharing’ of basic subsistence needs, such as food and clothes. He argues that is it brought about by human biological behaviours, which promote social solidarity, and allow kinship contexts to occur (Price 1975, 12). It is argued within this dissertation that the definition of the intimate economy requires theoretical review, to refer not only to the simple close-scale kinship context as in Price’s definition, but rather to the processes and exchanges that develop and maintain contexts that are intimate in character.

Summary

The study of intimate personal relationships should be considered an important subject for archaeological research. Intimacy, as an emotion and as an attachment, has been demonstrated as a vital factor in social identity construction. Therefore, an understanding of how, where, and in what form
intimacy materialises, should be considered an equally important means through which to understand identity and relationships in the past, in a way that is arguably more emotionally complex in dimension.
**Rationale**

*Re-contextualising the Viking Age: making women ‘visible’*

In the study of Viking Age identity, it is fair to say that men have received far greater attention than women. Indeed, the relative abundance of male archaeological material culture over females, has naturally offered greater opportunities to explore the particularities of male identity, which have been vital to the overall understanding of the Viking Age (Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle, 1992; Hedeagar, 1994; Stocker, 2000; Clarke and Heald, 2002; Curta, 2006). However, at the same time, it has been argued that the archaeological focus on male identity, has led scholars to explanations of the Viking Age, which are often expressed solely in masculine terms (Curta, 2006; Roesdahl 1982, 23, 25). Comparatively the identity of women has been considered as largely ‘invisible’, her role confined to a ‘private’ domestic sphere that is subordinate to a system of hierarchical patriarchy (Roesdahl 1982, 132), with restricted agency and scope to influence (Jesch 1991, 3).

However, more recently, it has been argued that this marginalised view of female identity has come about more as a result of outmoded conceptions of the relationship between gender and material culture, founded in traditional archaeological methods, than reflective of any true social reality (Conkey and Spector 1984, 1). Gender identity is now considered just one of many traits in our social identity that constructed and performed (Butler 1990, 40). In this way it is now recognised, that the invisibility of women within the archaeological record, may be a result of our failure to understand and delimit past gender constructs (Moen 2011, 5-6).

In light of such evidence, much of the current archaeological agenda emphasises the need to redefine archaic notions of the Viking Age female gender, and re-contextualise contemporary social relations (Moen 2011, 3). Whilst many important steps have been taken towards this (Hayeur-Smith, 2003; Kershaw, 2009), the lack of professionally excavated contexts remains a significant barrier in our understanding of the female gender. The body of
research surrounding women is still largely stifled by its reliance on the evidence presented within antiquarian catalogues, which now is considered to be partial and unreliable.

The rationale for this dissertation is, therefore, to test that if by using new theoretical approaches, specifically that of the ‘life course’ (Gilchrist 2013, 1) and the ‘intimate economy’ (as defined by the present author, see Definitions), we might be able to bridge the ‘quirk of survival’ of male material culture over female (Hadley 2008, 270). Through achieving this, we can create a useful avenue for evidencing Viking Age female identity and re-contextualise the balance between genders, in the absence of comprehensive contextual data (Graslund 2001, 82). This endeavour is consistent with the current academic belief that in order to grasp an accurate and holistic understanding of past society, archaeological narratives must necessarily be plural and multi-vocal in method (Gilchrist 2007, 333).
Methods and materials

The method applied here will be executed in three steps. The first will consist in the development of a theoretical framework through which to identify intimate gifting in the archaeological record that unites key methodological concepts developed in recent scholarship; specifically that of gender theory, the life course, object biography and the archaeology of emotion. This will draw on concepts from a wide range of disciplines, particularly the sociological, anthropological and ethnographic traditions. Secondly, I will test the applicability and relevance of this theory against the established scholarship of the Viking Age. This will involve reviews of the heuristic, archaeological and literary evidence appertaining to specific Viking Age social structures and relationships. I will then use this evidence to identify the correct criteria and materials for further analysis. The third step of this investigation is to assess the overall significance of this theoretical approach to Viking Age gender identities, first by analysing specific evidence for intimate gifting in the Viking Age archaeological record, and by then testing the utility of such a framework in relation to a pertinent case study in archaeological debate. In order to theorise new interpretations, this dissertation adopts a questioning and hypothetical approach to the body of evidence that seeks to problematize traditional discourse, and present alternative explanations.

The materials I will use for analysis will be drawn from catalogue evidence of Viking artefacts, primarily from two significant syntheses of ‘insular’ artefacts in Iron Age Scandinavian contexts compiled by Jan Petersen (1940) and Egon Wamers (1985), the latter of which has been translated from German by the present author. A lesser amount of primary evidence is derived from broader catalogue research and recent research papers. The scope of research presented here, has necessarily been limited to those publications written in English, and as such, has not been able to access potentially valuable information readily available in Scandinavian resources and research institutes. However, it should be noted that the state of research and knowledge surrounding this body of evidence has remained relatively static.
since the publication of Wamers’s catalogue in 1985. It should also be stressed that the current dissertation has been developed in response to a fundamental methodological problem in Viking Age archaeology, inherent in how these artefacts were initially excavated and documented contextually. This is an issue that pervades the archaeology of this period in both English and Scandinavian literature, so whilst the obstruction to Scandinavian sources may present complications within the research, it does not obstruct the overall goal presented here.

It is also important to note here that whilst there are multiple varieties of intimate relationships between men and women, the present thesis is limiting itself to gifting practices that specifically reference an amorous male to female exchange, as a means through which attitudes between men and women can be investigated. The material for study will therefore be limited to examining proven female contexts.
Chapter Two

Gifting and Gender in the Viking Age

Introduction

It has long been recognised within the social sciences that gifting practices hold an important role in structuring and regulating relationships (Mauss 1925, 53; Gouldner 1975, 1; Fowler 2004, 53). It is therefore correspondingly accepted the study of gifts can provide useful entry points into understanding the nature of relationships between people and within a given society. Before attempts to articulate any new theory of intimate personal relationships and gender identities through gifting, it is first important to establish how the role of gifts in society has been approached within previous scholarship. Traditionally, gift-giving in society has been argued as the main mechanism that societies use to prevent intra-group violence, through the strong principles of reciprocity and obligation invoked (Gouldner 1975, 1). This model has had significant consequences regarding how past societies have been interpreted (as we will see explored throughout the chapter), which has subsequently generated much criticism and cause for theoretical response. A review of the literature on this subject will reveal why there is a need for exploring gift-giving specifically within intimate personal relationships, and how this might be approached.
Review of the literature on traditional approaches to gift-giving and gender relations in the Viking Age

Gift exchange, marriage and the political economy

The study of gift-exchange has a long history within heuristic Viking Age scholarship, stemming from the strong precedence of gifting set within Old Norse literature. Sagas are littered with examples of gift-exchange, which serve not only to colour the narrative, but also as devices for plot development. The considerable extent to which gift exchange features in Saga literature arguably verifies the importance of the act within the contemporary mind. As a proto-urban society, items of gift exchange are in the first case, basically understood to have represented the basic means of exchange that preceded the transition to a standardised monetary economy by the 12th century. Archaeological analysis of changing character of hoard compositions, demonstrating a higher presence of intact ‘giftable’ items in earlier hoards, is often forwarded as evidential proof of this system (Samson 1991, 123). These gifts are most commonly featured within the Sagas, in the form of agricultural wealth such as cattle or hay, but are also in the forms of more precious objects such as valuable jewellery or clothes (Sindbæk 2011, 46).

Traditional formulations of Viking Age social relations have been modelled on the basis of a highly competitive ‘open’ situation in society, whereby individual groups were constantly motivated to accumulate a greater wealth of giftable goods in order to defend their own position within the overall system. In this way it is argued that gift-giving also functioned as a symbolic ‘debt-inflicting strategy’ (Miller 1986, 23), that was valued as part of a political economy and means of achieving power (Curta 2006, 677). Indeed, these attitudes are largely corroborated by close literary readings of Old Norse mythological and religious documents that evoke social norms of behaviour governed by strong ego-centric principles glorifying heroism, honour and power, juxtaposed by a fear of shame and humiliation (Vestergaard 1991, 33). It is argued that marriage is one of key assets within exchange systems, key to maintaining the stability of relations within society (Vestergaard 1991, 30-33).
The negotiation of bride-wealth and dowry, or ‘Mundr’ and ‘Heimanfylgia’, is well documented in all the Sagas (Jochens 1885, 26), and indeed been shown as a method of marriage all around the world (Bossen, 1988, 136). Similarities regarding the place of marriage with the milieu of Viking Age gift exchange have been drawn from comparable ethnographic studies of societies with similar organisational hierarchies, for example Strathern’s (1988, 67) seminal work on the marriage exchange system of New Guinea.

The belief that the marriage exchange was of crucial political-economic value in the open society of the Viking Age has been highly influential in terms of archaeological study. The hunt for more durable forms of bride-wealth is now considered a significant theory behind the large-scale socio-economic changes seen as a trigger for the Viking Age, primarily that of migration, growth in urbanism and trade (Sindbæk, 2011, 55). The extent to which this presents a viable systems theory will not be dealt with here, although it is widely agreed, this theory represents but one of several factors in a multitude of causes behind the Viking Age migrations (Barrett 2008, 681). What will be dealt with is the ramification of such an interpretation on our understanding of contemporary social relations.

Public and private domains

Since the advent of Gender Theoretical perspectives in the 1980s, this model of marriage as gift-exchange has been widely criticised as a useful way of understanding pre-medieval societal identities, through its lack of disregard to gender agents. Proponents argue that this explanation incorrectly marginalises women as a homogenous group, who are passively bought and traded, subordinately according to the will of the active male political agents (Bossen 1988, 133). Moreover, it is argued that this model favours a history that is told solely through the actions of male agents, which by comparison relegates the female existence to a private, passive domestic sphere, and which does not prompt any greater particularisation (Haugen 1987, 16).
This exclusion of the female identity from the public sphere, on heuristic and anthropological grounds, is a situation that is undoubtedly mirrored within our archaeological interpretations. The prevalence of domestic items within female burial contexts has often been used to verify that the extent of female agency was restricted from political activity, and limited to domestic tasks (Foote and Wilson 1970, 110). Subsequently, this attitude has been widely renounced within academic scholarship as top-down 'presentist' (Conkey and Spector 1984, 1) applications of pre-conceived notions of gender roles and labour division, inherited from the attitudes of Victorian antiquarians (Haugen, 1987, 17). Current theory furthermore, argues this attitude naïvely pegs a diagnostic quality between gender and object that is overly reductive and deterministic in methodology. Debate in recent archaeological discourse shows the extent to which the antiquarian legacy still plagues our interpretations. One such example is Graslund’s (2001, 91) critique of Mytum’s (1992, 236) argument that imported spindlewhorls may be used to demonstrate the movement of women upon marriage, as an overly simplistic approach to female material culture. It should be said that whilst the domestic character of the female role in marriage might provide a basic description of marriage practices in the Viking Age, it should be not extended as a definitive explanation of gender roles and identities. Gender theorists have committed much effort to rebuilding the context of gender identities in what they recognise as more rigorous theoretical practice.

Vinsrygg (1987, 27) argues that in subsistence economies, the domestic sphere is at the centre, not the periphery of political-economic activities, in which all members are co-operatively involved. The appreciation of the woman as an equally important socio-economic contributor, redefines her place as a valued member, and indeed often arbitrator of household labour and the redistribution of goods within it (Vinsrygg 1987, 28).
The repositioning of the female identity

The redefinition of the domestic sphere and female gender roles in the light of recent gender theory has opened up many new spheres of interpretation within the identity of the Viking Age woman. Greater emphasis has been turned to considering the particularities of female archaeological material culture, as opposed to the homogenous, diagnostic qualities. Stalsberg (1991, 79-80) interprets evidence from sites such as Birka and Kaupang where weights and balances feature in female graves, as evidence that women actively participated in trade, and as the holder of keys may have even been in charge of the wealth of the household. The proposition that women might be independently engaged in mercantilism or some form of cosmopolitan culture is further supported by the evidence of Scandinavian female graves containing weights and balances in the farther flung contexts of Russian trading sites, such as Staraya, Ladoga and Smoklensk (Jesch 1991, 36).

Graslund (2001, 99) argues that keys found in female graves suggests her power over the domestic household, responsible for its economy and the conducting of feasts, emphasising the hall as a place of importance, where official public matters meets private space, and one in which women regularly participated. This is based on the contemporary belief that the Ætt (family), was the most important nexus of interaction (Domasnes 1991, 69). Archaeological evidence of female involvement in ritual drinking can, furthermore, be associated with aristocratic feasting halls, by artefacts such as the drinking horn mounts found in a Birka grave BJ 523.

Sawyer's (2000, 67) study of runic commemorations identifies several cases throughout Scandinavia, where women have been identified as the commissioners of stones. One significant case of the Sonder Vissing stone from Denmark, was commissioned by a woman, to another woman. In addition six Swedish rune stones from Snottsta commissioned by Inga after the death of her husband Ragnfast, detail comprehensively the inheritance of property owned by Inga in the instances of her husband and father’s death, and suggests an ego-centred political concern for the maintenance of family
posterity and legitimacy (Jesch 1991, 55). Also documented with the corpus of rune stones is a common habit of women to commemorate the erection of bridges, for example the case of Sigrid on the runestone from Bro in Uppland, Sweden, suggests women could attain a right to inherit and achieve some form of economic autonomy (Jesch 1991, 59).

Other runic inscriptions also suggest a degree to which a complementary relationship existed between genders. The prominent Jelling stone, erected by King Gorm, referring to Queen Thorvi as ‘Denmark’s adornment’, represents a relationship a more genteel and equal attitudes between genders, almost in the tone of revering women. Evidence of what is commonly referred to as ‘powerful women’ (Jesch 1991, 28) is manifest in the overt examples of high status burials for females including the wagon burial at Hedeby and the ship burial at Oseburg, Norway which contained two women, accompanied with many elaborate grave goods and sacrificed horses (Jesch 1991, 31, 32). The fifty cremations at Tuna, all furnished elaborately, have been taken to signify a matriarchal clan (Jesch 1991, 29).

A final, important case which suggests a level of autonomy experienced by Viking women is forwarded by Magnusdottir (2008, 46) who presents several examples from Saga literature of women who go against their husbands, participate in fights, and act independently to take political decisions without them. There is even evidence of women divorcing their husband (Jochens 1995, 56). She furthermore argues, that whilst women may not have been able to assert themselves visibly in public political spheres, they could articulate their identity and even achieve social mobility through their sexual manipulation of men; what she refers to as ‘sexual politics’.

**Summary: A need to re-contextualise**

In sum, it should be seen that conventional explanations regarding Viking Age male and female relations are highly problematic, firstly because of the inadequate archaeological methods on which they are founded, and secondly
in the light of recent gender theoretical arguments. The body of evidence demonstrating that women in fact should be considered as active agents within the public domain suggests there is a greater need to redefine and particularise the female identity, away from the marginal character, which has been institutionalised through the marriage-as-gift-exchange model. At this point, however, it is important to reiterate that the main aim of this dissertation is not to investigate the place or role of women in Viking Age society through the nature of their specific material culture, but rather to explore the relationship between men and women the attitudes between. In this respect the previous literature review provides the theoretical foundation by which both gender identities should be handled critically. It also highlights that the fallacies created within the gender narrative of male and female, are not just a result of misconceived attitudes towards how gender is approached, but also a result of the way in which marriage and gift-exchange have been approached.

**New Approaches to Gifting and Gender**

*Instrumental vs. Intimate gift-giving*

In reviewing the ways in which gift exchange has been traditionally approached, it is clear that previous understandings were not only deterministic in the sense that they were schemed only on the basis of male attitudes, but also in that all relationships within the gift exchange cycle are presented as instrumental, unaffectionate, and motivated by egotistical concerns. Indeed, this is an attitude that extends to female-male personal relationships of an intimate nature, in the sense that marriage is pursued by men, out of sense of their own prestige, as opposed to any sense of love or affection. By contrast, modern Western intimate relationships are broadly characterised as operating within a value system that cherishes loving, affectionate relationships between intimates (Thoen 2007, 16). Within this context, gifts operate in a completely different way, primarily as means through which to convey a sense of affection, and to support intimacy in relationships. If intimacy affects the way in which gifts are given, it therefore
follows that in order to understand the nature of gift-giving within society requires an understanding of the character of personal relationships within a certain culture, and whether they should be considered as predominantly instrumental or whether they may also be considered as affectionate. The next section will deal with this issue, with regard to the Viking Age.

**Intimacy in the Viking Age**

In tracing the cultural history of intimacy, or what might be referred to as ‘love’ in the modern sense, it has been argued, that the kind of romantic, courted relationships we experience today, are a phenomenon only of the modern world originating in Christian Medieval courts (Bandlien 2005, 3). From a theoretical viewpoint, it has been argued that love and intimacy can only develop in a society that is individualistic and stable, and has the freedom to make choices, free from concerns for decisions or alliances, or from threat of impending violence, unlike the ‘open’ society of the Late Iron Age Scandinavia (Vestergaard 1991, 33). Examples used to support this claim, are often taken from the particularly violent or instrumental practices within Viking Age literature, such as instances of polygamy (Magnusdottir, 2008), the acceptance of slavery within daily life (Jochens 1995, 35), and on occasions, instances of rape and violence towards women in the Saga of Ibn Fadlan (Parker Pearson 1999, 2). This is contrasted, on the other hand, with the attitudes of compassion, inward piety, and consent in marriage, that are seen to characterise the Christian era (Jochens 1995, 45). Such a dichotomy should be highlighted as a gross generalisation of some of the more extreme aspects of both eras. Recent studies have been aimed at representing a more holistic and ordinary range of activities.

In terms of intimacy, much literary evidence has been found, to suggest that amatory or affectionate relationship existed between men and women in the Viking Age (Karlsson 2011, 190). Indeed, proclamations of affections occur frequently throughout the Saga tales. A particularly potent example is a
lengthy verse in the Cormacs Saga (Saga database 2013), where Cormac finds himself completely enamoured with a young woman.

“…There breaks on me, burning upon me,  
A blaze from the cheeks of a maiden,  
I laugh not to look on the vision in the light of the hall by the doorway.  
So sweet and so slender I deem her,  
Though I spy bug a glimpse of an ankle  
By the threshold: and through me there flashes  
A thrill that shall age never more… “

A corpus of ‘posy’ type runic inscriptions found in the late Viking, early Medieval period also attests to the existence of amatory type relations around this era (McLeod and Mees, 2006, 60). One example from Bergen reads:

“So do I love a man’s wife  
that even fire seems cold to me.  
And I am a friend of this woman  
Asa…”

Another, from Oslo around the time 1075-1100 AD, simply states ‘Kiss me…’ (Figure 1). A final source that attests to contemporary feelings of compassion and affection is one significant epigraphical source from the area of Hassmyra in Vastmansland, features commemorative rune stones on which ‘The good farmer Holmgot’ remembers his wife Odendisa with the inscription ‘There will not come to Hassymra a better house wife who runs the farm’ (Graslund 2001, 84).

Whilst the final source may be seen to be reliable, given its early dating Magnusdottir (2008, 41-42) emphasises the caution with which the Saga sources should be read, given the majority of them were not written until the 13th century, and therefore should be questioned as reliable insights into Viking Age social relations. This is also true of the runic inscriptions found in the Viking Age, most of which are on the threshold of the same period in
discussion here. Whilst these sources may be considered as representing some continuity with earlier Viking Age ideological structures, the evidence of amatory courtship is one which requires a little more critical treatment, given the significant effect to which Christianity was seen to transform traditional marriage structures. It is often seen within the Sagas that there is a tendency to present Christian rites, for example Baptism, as historical Pagan traditions.

In recent years objections have been made against the notion of intimacy as a completely modern western phenomenon, on a sociological and anthropological basis. Opponents argue that links made between the intimate and feminine, and the rational and masculine (Bandlien 2005, 8), are eurocentric and ethnocentric assumptions of the Western world (Appadurai 1996, 4; Jamieson 2011, 7). Indeed, anthropologists have documented experience of love and intimacy on every continent (Cole and Thomas 2009, 5; Janowiak 2008, 1; Hirsch and Wadlow 2006, 23). It is the conclusion of most cross-cultural studies that intimacy and affections exist regardless of patriarchy or the level of individual autonomy in the marriage process or gender inequalities and demonstrate a pervasive level of intimacy between the agents in marriage, or what can be more standardly referred to as kin, or family (Spiro 1954, 840).

A study by Rottger-Rossler (cited in Jamieson 2008, 5) of the Makassar people of Indonesia, documented the development of intimacy within arranged marriages, as proof that intimacy develops regardless of the socio-cultural structures. The Makassar people live gender segregated lives up until marriage arrangements are made, after which several measures are made to ‘trigger the appropriate feelings’, conducted over a period of months. The first steps are the making of ‘speaking partners’ after the marriage, whilst after 40 days of the marriage the couple are placed in bed together. Rottger-Rossler (cited in Jamieson 2008, 5) argues that although triggered by certain procedures, the relationship it generates is still one of intimate quality. On the other hand, Jamieson (2008, 7) point out how societies with evident gender inequalities, like the patriarchal societies of Mexico, actively practice ‘confianza’, the principle of intimate and mutually pleasurable sex.
Many scholars argue that sexual intimacy involves more basic emotions such as excitement, fun and feelings of security that are initially harboured within the mother-child relationship, and which provide the ontological security to develop into social adults (Douglas et al. 1988, 48). Whilst it should be recognised that there exists no fixed correlation between a sexual relationship and an intimate one, it might be considered that the pursuit of intimate partnerships, is motivated by an ontological desire to recreate this positive feeling, against a fear of being without this security (Douglas et al. 1988, 85).

Reciprocal altruism is also used to explain the motivations of parents nurturing intimacy toward their children for a variety of reasons, either as a learnt behaviour, or out of empathy, or alternatively as a long term investment, in which children remain in gratitude and indebted to parents (Croll 2006, 479). Reciprocal altruism is an important concept in the study of behavioural ecology. Trivers (1971, 35) argues that reciprocal altruism occurs within symbiotic relationships as a result of evolutionary motives, whilst Toi and Batson (1982, 281) propose that empathetic concern evokes an altruistic motivation.

**Summary: towards intimacy and gift-giving**

On balance, the evidence suggests that intimacy can exist beyond non-Western, non-Christian societies. Moreover, anthropological and scientific studies suggest that intimacy is inherently commensurate within symbiotic, familial contexts. Therefore, it is fair to say, that intimacy would have existed in the Viking Age, given the inter-generational, inter-gender nature of its settlement structures (Vestegaard 1991, 32). With regard to intimacy and gift-giving there is evidence to suggest that this also occurs at a fundamental level within ecological systems. Reciprocal altruism in gift-giving has been argued as evident within mutualistic ‘intimate economies’ (Price 1975, 9) of resource sharing, demonstrated by many mammals, such as monkeys. Undoubtedly it should be noted that whilst this evolutionary form of altruism should not be considered as a definitive marker of intimacy, its importance within this theory
is that it demonstrates a ‘practice of intimacy’ (Jamieson 2011, 3; see Definitions), at a basic biological level. The fundamental sharing involved within the intimate economy, necessitates situations of mutual dependence and obligation, or reciprocal altruism, which is at the heart of intimate attachment formation between people. Further considerations of the relationship between intimacy and gift-giving may be developed from this fundamental principle, as will be explored in the next chapter.
Chapter Three

A ‘Life Course’ of Viking Age intimacy: identifying intimate economies and affectionate giving

Introduction

In review of the discussion above, it is fair to suggest that there is a good case for intimacy in the Viking Age, based on anthropological, sociological and ethnographic arguments regarding the nature of human relationships. The notion of reciprocal altruism, combined with the notion of the necessary intimate economy represent a strong case for existence of intimate gifting or the ‘practices of intimacy’, as necessary within intimate contexts (Jamieson, 2011, 1) (see Definitions). This chapter deals with the more challenging task of identifying the kinds of gifts, in the life course of the intimate economy between men and women, both generally and specific to the Viking Age.

Defining the Gift

Broadly, a gift can be defined as an expense made on the part of one person or group, to another, that is not treated as a commodity to gain commercial wealth (Fowler 2004, 53). Common categories include, food, drink, artistic and intellectual gifts, as well as hospitality and support (Thoen 2007, 11). However, this definition represents three significant problems in attempting to define the life course of the intimate economy. The first is that gifts given within this context can represent any type of material, and immaterial items that represent both can be both perishable and intangible (Thoen 2007, 11). The second is that is that the types of gifts given within a particular situation are governed by cultural practices that are often unintelligible to the present day (Thoen 2007, 223). A third, more difficult problem, is that gifts give between people are also ‘inter-subjective’ (Cheal 1987, 150), in so much as the specific meaning of that particular gift, is specific only to that particular circumstance, and the particular signifiers involved. Given these substantial
difficulties, how then are we to go about identifying items of such highly coded meaning in the past?

Returning back to the first chapter of definitions, there are two main instances in which objects are engendered within the life course, which structure social identity. It is clear that there are two key distinctions between intimate gifts; those that appertain to the everyday, quotidian aspects of daily life and co-existence, and those that demonstrate a special, communicative quality. In both instances, these gifts can be used to signify intimacy, although in varying degrees. Everyday gifts are those that most fundamentally characterise the intimate economy in a basic sense, such as those like food and drink, subsistence and clothes (Price 1975, 5). They are not gifts that are specific to the intimate context, however they do necessarily occur within it. The second category of gifts, are defined as special gifts and communicative gifts. In Gilchrist’s (2013, 1) definition, these gifts are engendered within our lives under special circumstances, as through the specific life events of a particular culture. They are objectified symbols of this event (Gilchrist 2013, 223). Such rituals may involve birth, baptism, festivals, and marriage, to name but a few. They are usually given between intimates, but more commonly are involved as part of group giving events, for example parents to children, that are normative and generalised. Examples of this latter situation may include first experiences or coming of age gifts, such as first clothes for babies.

However, this latter category may also take place on a more intimate scale that represents a specific message from one individual person to another. These messages are the most intimate type of gift, imbued with a meaning that is distinctively affectionate, and exists as part of the system of reciprocal altruism. In reference to the meaning behind this act, Mauss (cited in Cheal 1987, 158) states that ‘to give something is to give a part of oneself… a part of one’s nature and substance, while to receive something is to receive a part of someone’s spiritual essence’. It is an ‘emotionally significant performance’ (Cheal 1987, 153), which is used to communicate and validate meanings of value and affection or specialness between people (Beatty et al. 1991, 152).
Items which exist in this category are those such as heirlooms and curated objects (Gilchrist 2013, 237).

As communicative gestures, affectionate gifts may broadly be defined as a symbol of the 'supportive ritual' (Cheal 1987, 151). In other words, it is a ritual offering that is a sign of involvement in and shows connectedness to another person, or what Goffman (1977, 65, 66, cited in Cheal 1987, 152) terms 'identificatory sympathy'. The degree of this message may vary in sentiment, from those, generally affectionate in meaning, sincere, but prompted by social norms, to those which are highly meaningful, personal value and investment.

It is these affectionate or 'special' (Beatty et al. 1991, 152) gifts that represent the most interesting category for the study of intimacy. Cheal (1987, 158) states that anything may be a gift of an intimate nature, as long as it is implicated in an act, which is symbolically transformed and labelled. The question that follows here is how to identify the gifted quality, without discrete information of the inter-subjective systems of meaning that define them.

**Characterising the affectionate object**

This type of gift can be grouped into three types, which are used to communicate a sense of valued relationship between one person to another. The first is that of the value of labour, or what Cheal (1987, 157), terms the magnitude of the sacrifice. This might involve sacrifice of time, labour or expense in the production or acquisition of the gift. The second is a great consideration to personalise the gift to the specific likes or dislikes of the other person, which demonstrates, special knowledge of the receiver (Cheal 1987, 158, 162). The third indicator of affection or specialness is a gift's relational quality, or uniqueness to other previous shared experiences, memories, such as an heirloom or souvenir (Cheal 1987, 154).

The idea that objects can be imbued with symbolic meaning is a key archaeological concept, explored by Weissner (1983, 357-358) in her study of
the emblematic and assertive style of the Kung! Kalahari San projectile points. Her research has shown how objects can be personalised in order to embody an element of that person’s identity. In this way the biographical nature of these objects, takes on an agency that reciprocally structures that person’s identity. The idea of the object biography will be a useful theme for analysis later on.

Male-Female Special Gifts in literary documents: The life course

It is perhaps at this point that the concept of the life course (Gilchrist 2013, 1) may be most useful to defining objects that have affectionate meaning that mediate male-female intimate personal relationships. Her study highlights several points in the female life course, which are intersected with shared objects of male gift-giving. These include courtship, the wedding rite, the marriage lifestyle, birth, death and commemoration (Gilchrist 2013, 110, 113, 124, 135). Whilst these categories are studied specifically in relation to Medieval life, it should be noted that they broadly correlate to significant events in the life of Viking Age women, as demonstrated by Jochens’s (1995, 20, 24, 79,), in depth study of Old Norse literary documents. The concept of ‘supplementary gift’ or ‘tilgjof’ (Jochens 1995, 26) might be considered the most useful addition to this study. A few key examples of objects used in the Sagas between men and women, within the courtship and marriage rituals. From the Laxdaela Saga, come examples of headdresses, finely woven cloaks and gold items (Laxdaela, Sagas database, 2013). It is well recognised that Viking Age people greatly valued precious metals and lavish items of jewellery, given the large body of jewellery present with graves and hoards. Indeed Sinbæk’s (2011, 47) discussion on the increasing weight of oval brooches over the course of the Viking Period, arguably demonstrates that the attainment of precious metals, was increasingly sought after. Hayeur-Smith (2004, 10), advocates that humans use such adornment items to articulate and display their identity to other people. An instance from an Eddic verse The Lay of Thrym (15-16) (Kristoffersen, 2004, 32), comes an example where the Thunder God, Thor is dressed up like a bride in specific dress:
“Let a housewife’s door keys dangle about him
Let woman’s weeds be worn by him
Let him bear on his breast bridal jewels,
On hood his head, as behooves a bride.”

Kristoffsen (2004, 30) makes an observation, key to the consideration of the life course of the woman, that the female housewife identity is one that is established from the day of her marriage. This suggests that we might be able to view burial, as a specific life course context. In this view Kristoffsen (2004, 34), focuses particularly on artefacts such as bronze keys and iron weaving swords, as objects that particularly signify the housewife status within the burial context. The examples detailed above, illustrate the kind of items, which might have been meaningful to the contemporary Viking woman.

In looking to the literary sources for clues for valued objects, it is true that not much is said regarding specific objects gifted between men and women. To this extent, Gilchrist’s (2013) study may be used as valuable source in the types of gifts that are given between genders, purely from an anthropological perspective. Most typically, objects that are given as affectionate gifts between men and women, take the form of high value goods, such as jewellery and precious metals, such as rings, pendants, badges and brooches (Gilchrist 2013, 110-111). Other examples include ‘miniatures’, small replicas imitating courting gifts, such as purses, combs, shoes, chaplets and jewel-boxes, items which would be viewed as promises of prospective gifts to be given in marriage. Love tokens from the Medieval period often display a specific love-iconography, such as the shape of a heart, that was considered as the inner location of self and the source of feeling (Gilchrist 2013, 111), the ‘clasped hand’ pose, which referenced the deep marital bond (Gilchrist 2013, 112), as well as other figurative motives, such as hunting or hawking, as metaphors for sexual pursuit (Gilchrist 2013, 110).

Whilst these examples cannot be used specifically, as direct suggestions for identifying courtship or intimate relationships in the Viking Age, they do
usefully demonstrate the manner in which objects gifted between men and women were imbued with amatory and devotional intentions, such as faithfulness and protection (Gilchrist 2013, 111). An example from the Laxdaela Saga (Laxdaela Saga, Saga Database 2013) is particularly illustrative of the existence of this practice in the Viking Age. In this case Melkorka gives a gift to Olaf, to take back to her parents in Norway. This gift consists of a ‘teething’ gift, in the form of a gold finger-ring, that was gifted to her from her father, as well as a ‘belt and blade’, to be given as ‘tokens’ to her nurse (Laxdaela Saga, Saga Database 2013). The extent to which we can understand the types of objects as typical, might be questioned from a historiographical point of view, on the other hand however, it is more the sentiment behind these ‘tokens’ which is interesting for the purpose of this study. That on receiving the gifts, the foster-mother weeps with joy, suggests that contemporary Viking people also cherished biographically relational objects.

Archaeologically, the biographical nature of objects might be forwarded on the basis of recent studies. Glorstad’s (2012, 39) research into imported Penannular brooches throughout burials in Norway, shows that over time there was a stronger presence of Penannular brooches in female graves in earlier periods, whilst in later periods, these brooches were found predominantly within male graves. Could the presence of the penannular brooches, initially markers of female identity, represent inter-generational, or token gifts between intimates?

**Summary**

This chapter has demonstrated that there is a strong link between intimacy and gift-giving, and moreover that gift-giving within intimate relationships has significant implications for the cultural development of gender. The difficulty in defining and locating a gift of intimate or affectionate motivations is that, like gender itself, these gifts are governed by culturally defined principles that are
not accessible to us in the present. However, it has also been noted that there are certain qualities regarding such gifts that operate according to logical principles. To this extent we can generalise that intimate gifts, which are affectionate or special in quality demonstrate one or more of the following:

- A high labour value
- A high-personalised value
- An emotional relational/biographical value.

It is these categories that will be the subject criteria for further assessment in the following case study.
Chapter 4

Case study in application

Introduction

The purpose of this case study is to explore the extent to which we might identify gifted items of intimate personal relationships in the archaeological record, and the extent to which such material may contribute to wider debate and preconceptions of Viking Age gender identity, as presented within the previous chapters. This material will be interrogated with regard to the 'intimate' categories outlined above, specifically, in relation to characteristics of high labour value, high-personalised value, or a high emotional relational and biographical value. It should be noted that this study presents an initial exploration into possible evidence of intimacy, and as such should not be considered in conclusive terms of proven or unproven.

Introduction: the ‘Insular’ items from the British Isles in Scandinavia

The strong presence of items of insular origin (objects from the British Isles), specifically within female graves has been a subject of fierce and on-going debate, entangled with wider issues regarding the nature and extent of the Viking Age (Wamers, 1998, 54). Initial interpretations argue that such objects represent the product of Viking-expedition acquisition activity, or what some scholars have deemed ‘looting’ (Bakka, 1963; Wamers, 1985, 39), which may represent gifts given to women (Graham-Campbell, 2001, 33). Alternative arguments, however, pose that such items may represent Christian missionary activity, on the basis that much of the items are distinctly ecclesiastical in nature (Blindheim, 1976, 173), although this idea is seen as contentious. It has also been suggested that the insular items could represent merchandise, or products of second-hand trade in insular goods, given that some of them are found at trade sites such as Kaupang and Birka (Blindheim, 1976, 175). On the other hand, Wamers (1998, 44-5) argues that whilst the
evidence of insular goods at trade centres may indicate an element of ‘pillage
trading’, the amount of insular items found here are too little in number, to
warrant any serious second hand trade. This issue remains largely a matter of
open debate, with no clear conclusions. The purpose of this case study then
is to test if a specific theory of gift giving between men and women of intimate
attachment, as has been presented in the previous chapters, can be used to
add clarity to this issue.

The body of insular style goods are made up of groups of objects of various
function, which have been grouped into items of dress and other jewellery,
harness mounts, weapons, objects of jet, bronze vessels, scales and other
miscellaneous metal ornaments (Wamers, 1998, 37). Insular items are found
in both female and male graves, hoards and stray finds, although a larger
amount are from female graves, with only scales and weapons having a
higher representation within male graves.

Distribution plots of this material have revealed distinct groupings of western
imports, particularly on coastal regions of Rogaland, Sogn, More, Trøndelag,
Troms and Vestfold. Their location at coastal sites adds additional weighting
to their involvement in Viking excursion activity. Further proof of this evidence
is suggested by the fact that three-quarters of the burials can be dated to the
period from c. 800 to the late ninth century, whilst one-quarter is dated to the
period from the late ninth to the tenth centuries (Wamers 1998, 51, Table 2).
This case study will, therefore, focus on the earlier graves of the Viking
period, specifically from West Norway, so as to avoid association with trade
items.
Application of theory: the female items

Who were these women?

Before interrogating the body of evidence here in terms of intimacy, it is first important to clarify what might be extrapolated about these women on the basis of their contextual positioning, and associated grave goods. Hayeur-Smith (2004, 78), argues that the oval brooch should be considered a marker of status within the lives of the Viking Age women. Based on her study of male and female graves in Iceland, Hayeur-Smith (2004, 68) separates three groups of status, based on the presence of two, one or no oval brooches, which correlated to the relative number of goods within the burial context. This ranking system for status is also broadly agreed to be the case in Scandinavia (Domasnes 1987, 76). Given that most of the women here were accompanied by oval brooches and accompanied by several burial items, it should be considered that these women would have represented high status women (Table 1). Common burial goods include the presence of several items of jewellery, textile equipment, functional tools and vessels of various materials.
The status position as housewife may be suggested by the inclusion of items such as keys or high-status vessels, which may indicate the power of these individuals over the charge and activities of the homestead. The fact that these women would have been in charge of the household might be a particularly interesting thought in the debate surrounding the nature of the acquisition of insular items. Whilst it is now recognised that women may have been included in excursions abroad, more than was previously thought, it should be considered that prominent housewives such as those presented here, would have probably remained sedentary within the Scandinavian context. This is particularly suggested of the group of female burials found at Hopperstad in Vik (Table 1) (Sørheim 2011, 33).

In looking at the body of items from female graves, we see that most of the female graves presented here are inhumation graves, and as such have retained a good preservation of grave goods. However, the overwhelming majority of the finds are in the form of small pieces of decorative metal work that have been reworked into metal items. As such, the majority of the discussion here will be framed predominantly around the subject of the reworked brooches, as the most provocative subjects for the investigation of intimacy within this case study.

*High labour value*

The items presented here demonstrate a high amount of labour value commitment. Not only are they sourced from a different continent, but also by the virtue of their reworking, they also suggest that someone has invested a considerable amount of time in reworking and refitting as brooches. Scholars have suggested that this may have been through a trade motivation (Blindheim 1976, 175), however the high labour value of acquisition, and the uniqueness of these objects, in relation to other objects suggests this should be questioned. Surely such items would have been too precious to have been sold on as trade? The retention of exotic items within graves has long been argued as the contemporary belief in the value of these items (Gilchrist 2013, 244). An example within this case study is the inclusion of jet beads at a
female grave in Refnes, Rogaland. It has been argued that jet would have been considered an extremely rare exotic item, given that it could only be sourced from Whitby, in North England (Gilchrist 2013, 244). Examples of where items of precious metalwork have been worked into jewellery for amorous purposes has been demonstrated in the Medieval period, such as a gilt brooch from Winchester that was refashioned into a pendant by bending the terminal into the shape of a heart (Gilchrist 2013, 110).

![Fig. 3 Example of a reworked bronze fitting, from Birka, grave 464, c.800-850](image)

**Personalisation**

Aspects of personalisation in the case of the insular items, are perhaps harder to identify, given the fairly straightforward nature of the way in which they have been transformed. Adornment Theory, as laid out by Hayeur Smith (2004, 71), suggests that jewellery was greatly valued by women in the Viking Age. However, more often than not, jewellery appears as standardised forms, such as the oval brooch, the trefoil or penannular (Glørstad 2012, 32). The highly varied character of insular items on the other hand, suggests they might have been given on the basis of personal preference, or a particular knowledge of that person’s preferences. The use of insular items as
pendants, suggests they might have been incorporated into other forms of dress, such as chains or necklaces, as a part of a process of personalisation (Figure 4).

In Viking Age theories of adornment and embodiment, Hayeur-Smith (2004, 72) sees as the chest most sexual part of the female body. She argues that the use of oval brooches may have served to accentuate the breasts. It is possible that pendants like the ones depicted here might have served the same purpose, as a means to display the sexual courtship of partners.

It is often posited that these brooches, represented a ‘third brooch’ (Graham-Campbell, 2001, 33), worn by women in addition to the two oval brooches, used to hold their clothes in place. As such it can be seen that these items served non-functional role. On the other hand heir smaller, more amulet-like size in form, may also suggest a more intimate and inward relationship to the
body, that was perhaps more meaningful to the individual, than communicative to others (Figure 5). Jewellery was frequently used in the Viking Age as amulets (McLeod and Mees 2006, 2). Important categories evoked here as outlined by McLeod and Mees (2006, 73), might be the use of amulets as part of protective and enabling charms. In which case, gifted items may have represented a notion of compassion and care for each other’s safety, and a wish to be in each other’s lives, beyond basic embodiment.

**Relational and biographical**

The high labour value involved here, also suggests that these objects would have been highly relational, to those who were involved in acquiring them. The distinctive, and often irregular form of these objects suggests they would have been highly differentiated from the rest of the female dress. In one way, the relational aspects might be seen in those items that mimic male dress, for example, strap ends and belt hooks (Hayeur Smith 2004, 68), which could suggest an affinity between genders, or ‘tokens’ of each other. Gilchrist (2013, 110) highlights how in Medieval history, women often gave gifts that she made herself, that were distinctly feminine in quality, such as towels, kerchiefs, girdles, or purses. Could the presence of male items, such as strap
ends, belt hooks (Figure 6.), or even the evidence of insular weights or weapons, within the body of insular finds in female grave attest to a biographical nature of the objects.

![Fig. 6. Male items?](image)
Left: Strap end from Sanddal, Breim, Gloppen, Rogaland  
Right: Belt hook from Laland, Klepp, Rogaland

**Conclusion**

This case study has sought to problematize this body of evidence in a way that moves away from an interpretation of insular items as commodities, and towards an interpretation of these items of gifts between men and women. Whilst the investigation here provides a fresh insight into the possible alternative realities of this evidence, it cannot fully overcome the significant problems and questions surrounding the presence of insular items in female graves, particularly those regarding their origin and cultural iconography. The lack of contextual information remains a significant barrier to understanding the full nature of how these items were used in contemporary society. What is important within this study is the idea that such items might have had overlapping significance, as markers both referential to ideas of personal, status and relational identity. So whilst objects of insular origin found in female graves, cannot definitely be discounted as commodities, they cannot
reasonably be denied as objects representing intimate or affectionate relationships. It is important to note that there have been many additional discoveries of insular metalwork in Scandinavia since Wamers (1985) catalogue of insular items in Norwegian graves. This body of evidence is not presently published, and therefore cannot be interrogated, but will be an important source for further research, into the investigation of intimacy and gift-giving in the Viking Age (Skre 2008, 96).
Chapter Five

Conclusions and Further Research

What has been identified through this study is that gifts of an intimate nature should be considered as one of the key elements of the vocabulary of caring between people (Cheal 1987, 155). It is argued that gifts between intimates, demonstrate a sense of commitment and value that is vital to the maintenance of happy relationships (Thoen 2007, 99). In this sense, it should be recognised that gifts of a special nature must have been given between men and women, as a means through which stable cohabitation would have been achieved in the Viking Age. Cheal (1987, 155), argues that gifts to women, in particular, are specifically referential to the familial context of care within the home, and as such, evidence of gifting to them is a specific acknowledgement of the high value in the role of feminine care and love within the household.

Evidence from the Sagas suggests that women had a degree of autonomy in Viking Age society that allowed her to divorce herself from the marriage agreement (Jochens, 1995, 58). I believe that gifting practices were one of the vital strategies used to prevent this from happening. This form of gender relations has been deemed a ‘Heroic Love’, as opposed to a ‘Courtly Love’ (Bandlien, 2005, 39). Bandlien (2005, 33) argues that Viking Age social values of men, were stimulated and reinforced by their relationship to women, whose freedom of thought and action represented a challenge for a man, should he seek to court her. In this way he argues that women would have played a key role in the construction of heroes in the Viking Age and the mythological embodiment of the social values associated with honour and shame (Bandlien 2005, 33). The idea that gifts are important in the construction and reinforcing of gender values, has been shown through Joyce’s (2000, 473), study of gifting rites in Ancient Mesoamerica.
With regard to the usefulness of the framework within archaeological practice, the framework for identifying gifts that is presented here is not perhaps so successful within the case study above, although it could be argued that this is more perhaps a result of the limited contextual information supporting these items, given that none have been professionally excavated or recorded. To make any positive assertions about the nature of these grave goods at all, is a contentious situation in itself. Interrogations into the nature of these female graves, more often than not, provokes further questions, such as could these women have been involved in the migrations themselves? Or could they have transformed and reworked the insular goods of their own accord? Could women command their own economic wealth to have bought such items, if they were a produced within some kind of trade system? More evidence regarding the regional and gendered variations in adornment practices (for example where on the body they were worn) is necessary before these questions can be undertaken.

Certainly evidence through rune stones and law codes, suggests that women could possess a degree of economic autonomy through inheritance; the majority of burials here seem to relate to wealthy house wives who would have fallen into this category. To this extent, the framework for identifying gifts in this case falls short of proving, without any doubt that these items were given as gifts between men and women. What might be argued instead is that even if these items did represent a second-hand or pillage trade, the fact that they represent such luxury items, suggests that their purchase would have been an economic decision of both the heads of the household, and therefore could still represent aspects of the shared life course between men and women. However, without the vital added contextual information, analysis remains largely dependent on the assumptions prevalent within burial contexts. One example might be that these women represent wives. Whilst these artefacts should be considered as strongly referential in character, it is uncertain whether this biography relates to that which the woman would have created for herself, or that which was developed through her life course of interactions amongst male counterparts. One consideration is that there was probably an overlap of both. Therefore, the equal credence to the possible
realities surrounding the insular goods, suggests that interpretations regarding their nature should be encouraged, and may be valuable for further research. In this sense the theoretical methodology presented here, should be considered as useful in further research. A list of grave goods, as presented in Table 1 may be considered a starting point for further research. in required in order to understand how these items were worn.

In sum, I believe that whilst this dissertation has not been completely successful in the attempts to empirically identify gifted items of the intimate personal relationship, it provides a useful framework through which further interpretation and analysis can be supported. Attempts to add emotional colour and dynamism to contemporary relations in this way are highly valuable assets to our archaeological interpretations (Tarlow 2000, 719).
Bibliography


