

**The ‘Living’ Sword in Early Medieval Northern Europe:  
An Interdisciplinary Study**

Volume 1: Thesis, Appendices and Bibliography

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**Signed declaration:**

I, Susan Elaine Brunning, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own.

Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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**Volume 1**  
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## Abstract

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This thesis explores perceptions of two-edged swords as ‘living’ artefacts in Anglo-Saxon England and Scandinavia between c. 500 and 1100. Taking inspiration from recent anthropological and archaeological research into ‘artefact biography’, it considers two interlinked avenues of ‘life’: (1) the notion that swords could acquire life-histories, personalities and other person-like qualities; and (2) the nature of their relationship with warriors (as opposed to other members of society).

The thesis compares Anglo-Saxon England and Scandinavia across a broad chronological period in order to identify how attitudes towards swords developed over time. The almost unique proximity to bloodshed which swords, by contrast with other weapons, provided for their wielders is considered key in fuelling perceptions of swords as ‘living’ artefacts, and strengthening the bond between warrior and weapon. This special connection between swords and violence is interpreted as contributing to the symbolic potency of swords in early medieval Northern Europe.

This thesis adopts an interdisciplinary approach, discussing archaeological, pictorial and written evidence within a carefully-constructed methodological framework. The different sources are integrated in a discussion chapter which attempts to arrive at a holistic understanding of perceptions of ‘living’ swords in early medieval Northern Europe. Finally, the interdisciplinary method deployed in the thesis is assessed, and suggestions for future interdisciplinary research frameworks are made.

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## Introduction

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Swords inspire endless fascination. They are prominent in the mythology and history of many cultures, from King Arthur's Excalibur in the west, to Japanese Samurai *katana* in the east, via the weapons described by Islamic philosopher al-Kindi in his ninth-century treatise on sword-making (Hoyland and Gilmour 2006). Despite being long out of general use on the battlefield, swords still fire the imagination. In the past decade, two major UK museums have presented exhibitions about swords – *The Noble Art of the Sword: Fashion and Fencing in Renaissance Europe* at The Wallace Collection (2012) and *Cutting Edge: Japanese Swords in the British Museum* at The British Museum (2004-5); while Stirling Council's decision to lend the Claymore sword popularly associated with Scottish hero William Wallace to a New York exhibition made national news in 2005 (Seenan 2005). Swords also occupy a pivotal role in modern popular culture, be it the fragmentary weapon Narsil in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*; the Atlantean sword wielded by Robert E. Howard's fantasy hero Conan; the sword Green Destiny which fuels the plot of Ang Lee's Oscar-winning *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*; or The Bride's quest to obtain a *katana* forged by legendary sword-smith Hattori Hanzō in Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill* film series.

Such fascination is not solely attributable to the morbid appeal inherently associated with instruments of death. To take the best-known example, the symbolic power of swords is widely acknowledged to be part of Japanese culture (Harris 2004, 8-10), but in early medieval northern Europe they are primarily read as status symbols, despite many signals from contemporary art, literature and material culture that they were far more than this. To date, perceptions of swords and their

significance in early medieval society have not been subjected to a dedicated study (Chapter 2.2). Certainly the picture is beginning to broaden, thanks to research into ‘artefact biography’ which offers new ways of approaching objects and interpreting their significance to human beings (Chapter 2.2d). Fresh views of early medieval swords are now highly relevant following the discovery of the Staffordshire Hoard in 2009. This unprecedented assemblage of Anglo-Saxon metalwork, uniquely dominated by sword fittings, has placed these weapons back upon the research agenda. Therefore, the time is right and the methodological tools in place to revisit early medieval swords from a new perspective, which looks beyond their material value and combat function.

This thesis focuses upon one theme relating to artefact biography: the idea that swords could be perceived as ‘living’ artefacts (defined in Chapter 3.2a). It considers their physical and visual characteristics, life histories and even their personalities; and also questions the nature of their connection with warriors: particularly the idea that the identities of sword and owner became intertwined, transforming swords into an ‘extension of self’ with intriguing implications. The entire early medieval period is covered, in order to identify chronological developments in perceptions of swords; and evidence from Anglo-Saxon England and Scandinavia is compared to determine how far attitudes about these weapons were shared or culturally unique. A full description of the topic and its parameters is given in Chapter 3, together with an outline of aims and research questions, and the themes addressed in each chapter. It is an interdisciplinary study, using three types of early medieval evidence – images (Chapter 4), archaeology (Chapter 5) and texts (Chapter 6) – in an effort to arrive at a holistic, multi-layered understanding of the topic at hand (Chapter 7). While interdisciplinary research is unquestionably valuable

and increasing popular, its execution is fraught with methodological perils and some scholarly scepticism. Accordingly, this study employs a careful method outlined in Chapter 3.3. By combining the stimulating approaches of artefact biography and interdisciplinarity, this thesis aims to uncover new insights into the social relevance of early medieval swords, thereby expanding our understanding of the interactions between persons and artefacts at this time.

## Literature Review

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Of all weapons available to early medieval warriors, the two-edged long sword has received the most scholarly attention (Dickinson and Härke 1992, 1). Experts from various disciplines have addressed its form, function and significance, generating a considerable body of research. Despite this, underdeveloped lines of enquiry, fresh discoveries and new methodological approaches hint that much remains to be learned or re-assessed. This chapter reviews the primary themes addressed within studies of early medieval swords to date. In accordance with the parameters of this thesis, it focuses upon Anglo-Saxon England and Scandinavia between around 500 and 1100. The first section reviews scholarship concerning the material and functional nature of swords; the second considers investigations into their social, cultural and symbolic significance; and the final section identifies lines of enquiry which have yet to be fully exploited. These issues form a large part of the current thesis.

### **1) Form and Function**

#### a) Typology

From an early date, archaeologists have studied the physical form of early medieval swords. Essential work has been undertaken in typology, a classification method which organises artefacts into types based upon shared characteristics. These types form the basis for a chronological sequence of swords. Several early medieval sword typologies have been devised, some of which have proved more influential than others: for example, Jan Petersen's 1919 classification of Viking period swords based on eighth- to eleventh-century Norwegian finds remains a routine reference-



point in the twenty-first century (Pedersen 2008, 205). Petersen's typology was largely determined by the chronological development of sword hilts (Fig. 1), and comprises twenty-six types plus several sub-types denoted by letters (Type A, B, C etc.). Twenty years later, Elis Behmer classified swords from the pre-Viking or Migration period (c. 400-800) into nine types and sub-types labelled with Roman numerals, also based primarily on the hilt but also covering scabbard fittings and blades. Despite Oakeshott's (1960) and Wheeler's (1927, 31ff) respective simplifications of Behmer's and Petersen's typologies, scholars have tended to refer to the original studies. In the last thirty years sword typologies have grown increasingly complex. Published in 1983, Wilfried Menghin's study classified fifth- to seventh-century Anglo-Saxon, Continental and Scandinavian swords by their hilt and scabbard fittings, naming his types after the find-spots of distinctive examples (Beckum-Vallstenarum, Bifrons-Gilton etc.). More intricate was Alfred Geibig's 1991 categorisation of late eighth- to twelfth-century German sword-finds based upon combinations (nineteen types) and constructions (three types) of hilt fittings, and precise measurements of blades (fourteen types plus sub-types). Arguably Geibig's typology has proved less influential, possibly due to its intricacy (Eaves 1992): Petersen's (1919) more user-friendly types have yet to be superseded for swords of this period, although finer-grained analyses could be achievable using the more up-to-date classifications.

Other sword parts that have been classified include scabbards and sheaths (Cameron 2000), pommels with ring fittings (Montelius 1917-24; Evison 1967a; Fischer 2007) and inscriptions upon blades (Stalsberg 2008 and 2010 with references). Typological studies provide an essential foundation for studies of early medieval swords. Nonetheless their applicability is limited, particularly in terms of

chronology and dating. Swords consisted of multiple components – hilt fittings, blade, scabbard, scabbard fittings, belt or harness, and belt or harness fittings – each of which was replaceable. Consequently, any one sword could comprise pieces spanning several different type categories, meaning that we cannot date the whole weapon but only its individual parts (Ellis Davidson 1962, 52; Fischer 2007, 26; Theuvs and Alkemade 2000, 431-435). Various ‘hybrid’ swords have been discovered, such as that from Brighthampton in Oxfordshire (MacGregor and Bolick 1993, 234-235) and Vallstenarum on Gotland, Sweden (Arrhenius 1985, 145; John Ljungkvist pers. comm.). The ramifications for certain enquiries, such as the curation of swords or the dating of archaeological assemblages, are clear (Chapter 5). Nonetheless, future revisions to sword classifications are essential following the 2009 discovery of the Staffordshire Hoard, a vast assemblage dominated by sixth- to eighth-century sword fittings (Carver 2011; Webster 2011; Fischer and Soulat 2010).

#### b) Production and distribution

A considerable amount of research has focused upon the manufacture of early medieval swords, covering the materials used, the technologies deployed, and the provenance and distribution of weapons. Most of this work concerns blades. A perennially popular topic is pattern-welding, a complex manufacturing technique in which bundles of twisted iron rods are hammered and welded together, resulting in rippling patterns in the finished blade. Generally, this process has been treated from a practical viewpoint: the combinations of rods used, the methods and skills of the smith, the types of patterns created, the blades’ effectiveness, the chronology of the technique and so on (Anstee and Biek 1961; Jones 2005; Lang and Ager 1989). However, certain scholars have explored the symbolic dimension of pattern-welding:

most recently, Gilmour (2007, 2010) has considered technological aspects alongside social and cultural issues, placing pattern-welded swords into context alongside other edged weapons made in this way.

Also popular in research are inscribed blades, particularly those marked ULFBERHT which are traditionally dated to between the ninth and eleventh centuries. Andresen (1993) has used experimental techniques to determine how the inscriptions were created, but much discourse has centred on the provenance of these blades. Their typology, distribution and characteristics of the inscriptions themselves have led scholars to locate their manufacture to the Lower Rhineland region, although some have been identified as locally-made imitations (Pedersen 2010 and Stalsberg 2010, with references). Conversely, Allan Williams (2009) has argued that the volume of high-carbon steel in their metallurgy suggests that the original ULFBERHT swords were made in the Baltic Sea region, close to the riverine trade routes which brought this material from the east. Modern scientific methods are identifying growing numbers of inscribed blades, and ongoing research will enhance our understanding of them (Pedersen 2010; Stalsberg 2010, 450, 458).

### c) Combat function

General studies of early medieval warfare routinely discuss swords. Their combat function, effectiveness and role in the warrior's panoply is typically reconstructed from written accounts, pictorial sources, burial evidence and surviving swords (Brooks 2000; Griffith 1995; Halsall 2003; Hawkes 1989; Hooper 1989; Kim Siddorn 2005; Pedersen 2002 and 2008; Stephenson 2007 and 2012; Underwood 1999 and 2000). Research has shown that two-edged swords were slashing and chopping rather than stabbing weapons, and later developments in blade form and

metallurgy led to changes in tactical function (Cameron 2000, 76; Tylecote and Gilmour 1986, 247, 249). Such observations made from a broader chronological perspective are valuable, since many discussions focus upon the early or later period only and therefore may overlook important developments: for instance, alterations in form and function may have affected swords' social, cultural and symbolic significance.

#### d) Concluding remarks

While specific topics require further investigation or refinement, the form and function of early medieval swords are quite well understood. Undoubtedly new discoveries like the Staffordshire Hoard, fresh scientific techniques like computed tomography (CT), and the development of different academic approaches including experimental archaeology will generate new perspectives. For now, the fruits of previous scholarship in this area appear in numerous catalogues, cemetery publications and individual reports of significant finds, all of which routinely deploy information on typology, manufacture and use.

## **2) Social, Cultural and Symbolic Significance**

Regardless of their discipline or topic of study, early medievalists have long acknowledged that the two-edged sword possessed a social, cultural and symbolic significance that transcended its function as an offensive weapon. However, this aspect has yet to benefit from a substantial study: instead, pockets of discourse are scattered throughout early medieval scholarship in the form of individual articles, chapters or discussions within broader studies. Overall, the body of work is uneven: certain themes have received disproportionate attention while others are under-

developed, leaving current understanding in a disjointed state. Nonetheless, social and symbolic aspects have been more fully discussed for swords than for any other item of war-gear, reflecting an academic bias towards this weapon (Pedersen 2008, 208; cf. work on Anglo-Saxon shields in Dickinson 2005 and Dickinson and Härke 1992). The comparative neglect of other war-gear has had a detrimental effect upon our understanding of swords, since it is difficult to estimate their true importance without the ability to contextualise them amongst other weapons. The following discussion evaluates key research themes concerning the social significance of swords.

#### a) Identity and status

##### *i) Social status*

Like many artefacts, two-edged swords were interred in furnished Anglo-Saxon burials between the fifth and seventh centuries (with a limited regional revival during the ninth to tenth centuries), and in Scandinavia into the eleventh century (with regional variation). However, not all weapon burials contained swords: with regional exceptions such as Kent in England and Norway in Scandinavia, the rarity of this weapon coupled with its material value has helped to generate the traditional view that sword ownership was restricted to high status individuals, and consequently swords acted as markers of that status (Ellis Davidson 1962, 9-10; Martens 2003; Williams 2008, 105ff; DeVries and Smith 2007, 30-31). In recent decades, developments in archaeological theory (particularly the branch known as ‘post-processualism’) have caused artefacts to be interpreted less as passive reflections of an individual’s status and identity in life, and more as active participants in the production and maintenance of these things (Johnson 1999, 98-115; Hadley 2004,

2006b and forthcoming). In this vein, Jakobsson (1992, especially 79-104, 181) has argued that ‘social climbers’ during the Viking period used specific types of sword as symbolic tools to justify and secure their ascendant position, while others used them to maintain the current social hierarchy.

However, the academic focus upon swords risks overlooking the fact that they were neither the costliest nor rarest piece of early medieval war-gear. Brooks (1978, 82, 92) has argued that swords, alongside mail-armor and helmets, were the key attributes of elite warriors, citing a passage from *Beowulf* in which the Danish king Hroðgar claims that Beowulf’s magnificent equipment equates him and his men with earls (*Bwf*.ll.229-370). However, while the poet repeatedly mentions helmets and mail-armor, he does not refer to swords: only shields, spears and weapons in general – thus, Brooks may be replicating typical scholarly assumptions regarding the sword’s elite associations. In fact, helmets and mail-armor are not only rare finds in early medieval burials: they are rare in any archaeological context, particularly in England, and consequently they have also been associated chiefly with high status groups (Gannon 2003, 62-63; Härke 1990, 26). Even spear- and axe-heads, which are far more common, have been interpreted as status symbols when ornamented with precious metals (Pedersen 2008, 206; Trotzig 1985). Combining these discussions highlights the importance of treating swords in context with other war-gear, and it raises questions which have not been fully addressed: if multiple weapons could function as elite symbols, where did swords fit in? Were rarer and costlier items like helmets and mail-armor more relevant to elite identity? Did only finely decorated axes and spears function like this, whereas all swords, irrespective of their opulence, denoted high status?

A long-running discussion concerns the role of war-gear in expressing the ultimate elite status: royalty. Scholars have categorised specific items as ‘regalia’ – objects capable of symbolising royal power, and from the tenth century onwards, those used in coronation rituals (Webster 1998, 387). Helmets have been most frequently interpreted as regalia (Nelson 1980, 44-46; Chaney 1970, 137-138; cf. Gannon 2003, 51-54), but Ambrosiani (1983, 25) has queried this in relation to the helmets found in the rich boat burials at Vendel and Valsgärde in Uppland, Sweden. He argues that the volume of helmet fragments discovered in graves on Gotland suggests that helmets were not so exclusive, and the region’s involvement in the Continental iron trade probably meant that helmets were accessible to leading non-royal families: in other words, helmets were linked with wealth and status, but not necessarily with royalty. Swords have not been widely interpreted as regalia, but Karkov (2004, 135-136, n. 76, 79) has explored their use as regal motifs in Anglo-Saxon art. Her thought-provoking analysis argues that the eleventh-century portrait of Knútr (Cnut) in the New Minster *Liber Vitae* (London, British Library MS Stowe 944, fol. 6r), is the earliest depiction of a king of England with a sword. In the image, Knútr is shown dedicating an altar cross to the New Minster at Winchester, but in earlier portraits kings performing similar acts do *not* wear swords: Æðelstan presenting a copy of Bede’s *Vita Cuthberti* to Saint Cuthbert in 934 (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 183, fol. 1v); and Eadgar presenting the New Minster Charter to the New Minster, Winchester in 966 (London, British Library MS Cotton Vespasian A.VIII, fol. 2v). Karkov (2004, 156, 172) proposes that Knútr’s successors Edward the Confessor, Harold Godwinsson and William the Conqueror adopted his iconography of kingship by including swords in their portraits. Subsequently, she shows how a sword was used to demonstrate royal legitimacy on the Bayeux

Tapestry. At his coronation Harold, labelled *rex* ('king'), is accompanied by a man indicating Harold with one hand and raising an upright sword in the other (Scene 31 in Wilson 1985); but in the next scene, Harold – now minus the *rex* title – slumps upon his throne while his companion holds a reversed sword. For Karkov, this contrasting iconography signifies the illegitimacy of Harold's position caused when he broke his oath to William of Normandy – ultimately foreshadowing his demise at Hastings (Karkov 2004, 169-170; see Chapters 4.2c, 4.5 and 7.5c).

Karkov's study reveals the value of iconographic approaches to swords, but having developed the idea that swords only became royal symbols in England after Knútr, she does not ask why they were *not* beforehand. Her discussion implies but does not articulate a division between Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian (not to mention Continental) attitudes towards swords. Was the apparent detachment between Anglo-Saxon kings and swords simple pictorial convention, or were swords not equated with royal power in England before the eleventh century? Alternatively, might an Anglo-Saxon preference for sword-bearers conceal its significance as a kingly symbol? Written (*Ælf.Ead.5-7*), pictorial (British Library, MS Cotton Claudius B.IV, folio 38; Bayeux Tapestry scene 31) and onomastic evidence (*Gesecg*, 'Sword-bearer', an ancestor of Offa: Parker Pearson *et al* 1993, 45) show that important Anglo-Saxon men used sword-bearers. Was royal status therefore exemplified by the king's sword being borne by a third party rather than by the king himself? And was the latter custom more distinctive of Scandinavia, where evidence for early medieval sword-bearers is sparser?

Ultimately there is a lack of consensus over which items of war-gear qualified as regalia, particularly since certain scholars have minimised its significance altogether. Blair (2003, 204-207) argues that the only kingly emblems at



Sutton Hoo, the early seventh-century ship burial that may commemorate an East Anglian king, are the enigmatic iron stand and whetstone (Enright 2006) despite the ornate war-gear interred within – including a helmet. Similarly, Ambrosiani (1983, 23, 28) interprets the arms and armour from Vendel and Valsgärde in Sweden as symbols of personal rather than royal power, preferring sceptres and standards as well. Raw (1992, 172), discussing *Beowulf*, concedes that helmets and mail-armour may have been symbols of kingship but places greater significance upon neck-rings and standards. Others have speculated that shields may have functioned as royal symbols (Chaney 1970, 148; Dickinson and Härke 1992, 72). Dobat (2006) has proposed that the axe-hammer from Sutton Hoo was used by the king to slay oxen in pre-Christian rituals, and its position within the coffin while other war-gear was placed outside signifies that it was a powerful symbol of authority. However, the relevance attributed to axe-hammer's position in the burial is problematic because scholars disagree about the presence of a coffin (East 1984; Carver 2005, 192-194; Sonja Marzinzik pers. comm.). Discussions of 'regalia' would benefit from a more rigorous definition of the term, and a deeper consideration of how royal symbols developed over time and space. The real picture is undoubtedly subject to chronological and regional variation, and the sword's relevance in this issue remains unclear.

#### *ii) Military Identity and Status*

The varied weapon combinations discovered in furnished burials have led certain scholars to interpret them as direct reflections of the deceased's military status or 'rank' in life. This view has grown less fashionable amongst Anglo-Saxonists (Geake 1997, 4, 75; Härke 1990, 22-25), but Scandinavian scholars have continued to seek

historically-attested ranks within buried weapon sets (Nørgård Jørgensen 1992; Pedersen 1997 and 2002; Redmond 2007, 10; Rundkvist 2007, 49; Solberg 1985). Swords are often treated alongside other weapons in these discussions, rather than isolated for specific comment. However, a specific type of sword has been discussed in this context: ‘ring-swords’, in use between around the sixth to eighth in England, Scandinavia and on the Continent. Their name derives from rings attached to the hilt (usually the upper guard and pommel) in the form of a free-running hoop encircling a staple, or a fixed knob-like fitting cast to resemble the free-running type. Scholars generally agree that these rings had a symbolic rather than a practical or ornamental function (summarised by Fischer 2007, 25). They have been interpreted as gifts for loyal service (Fischer 2007, 26; Härke 1990, 35 n.25; Steuer 1987, 226), tools for oath-swearing (Ambrosiani 1983, 24; Bone 1989, 64-65; Oakeshott 1960, 102; Steuer 1987, 203-205; Underwood 2000, 57-58) and markers of rank and status (Solberg 1995, 719; Steuer 1987, 222). Ellis Davidson (1962, 76-77) proposed that rings symbolised royal rank and were ceremonially touched by those swearing oaths to kings or princes. Conversely, Evison (1967a, 63) and Steuer (1987, 32ff) have argued that rings symbolised the *retainer’s* rather than the leader’s rank, as several so-called ‘princely’ burials including Sutton Hoo, Taplow and Prittlewell in England and Valsgårde graves 5 and 6 and Vendel grave XII in Sweden did not contain ring-swords: in other words, they were owned by the receivers rather than the givers of rings. Underwood (2000, 57-58) takes the middle ground, proposing that ring-swords could be wielded either by the giver or receiver of oaths. Certainly, the presence of both ring- and non-ring-swords in Vendel grave I and Valsgårde grave 7 invite further thought. The idea that specific types of sword were reserved for specific ‘ranks’ of warrior raises questions about the nuanced nature of early medieval

warrior identity: for instance, there may have been differences not only between spearmen and swordsmen, but also between *types* of swordsmen. These issues are investigated by this thesis. However, discussions of sword-rings have not fully addressed the significance of similar rings attached to other objects: a drinking horn from Valsgärde grave 7 (Arwidsson 1977, 'Horn I', 66-67) and the Sutton Hoo shield (Bruce-Mitford 1978, 1ff). Bruce-Mitford (1978, 133-137) argued that these rings were intended for these objects rather than being recycled from swords; but if rings could be fixed to other artefacts, how should ring-swords be interpreted? Can they still be described as badges of rank, rewards for military service, or symbols of oath-swearing? Ellis Davidson (1962, 75-76) argued that rings on horns fit well with oath-swearing ceremonies but did not address the appropriateness of the Sutton Hoo shield ring in this context. It is therefore worth considering which object carried the symbolic force: the sword or the ring? These discussions re-emphasise the value of examining swords in context with other artefacts.

Other scholars have considered the general role played by swords in the relationship between leaders and retainers. Two substantial studies of lordship in Old English literature show how lords gave swords and other items to their followers in order to secure fidelity and reward military service. According to Bazelmans (1999, 151-154), the detailed descriptions of swords in *Beowulf* underline their suitability as lordly gifts. He is surprised that Hrunting, the sword that Unferð lends to Beowulf, receives more attention (*Bwf*.ll.1455-1464, 1488-1491) than Beowulf's own sword Nægling, but does not offer an interpretation. An answer may lie within Bazelmans' initial interpretation: the gifting of a sword was an important lordly act carrying connotations of loyalty and indebtedness, and therefore the poet may be lingering over the act in which Hrunting is involved, rather than Hrunting itself. The episode

has extra gravitas because it is the moment in which Unferð and Beowulf are reconciled after trading insults earlier in the poem (*Bwf*.ll.499-606). These things together may have made Hrunting more worthy of detailed description. Hill (2000, 25-26) investigates the anonymous sword owned by Wiglaf, Beowulf's most loyal retainer. The weapon was given to his father Weohstan by King Onela of Sweden as a reward for slaying his seditious nephew (*Bwf*.ll.2610-2625). This act, argues Hill, infused the weapon with a 'kin-making' power that raised Weohstan, a simple retainer unrelated to the king, to almost familial status. Through the process of gifting, Hill continues, the sword helped to maintain social cohesion. Härke' (2000, 380) has quantified the types of war-gear that lords gave to retainers in *Beowulf*, and found that swords, mail-armor and helmets were given in a roughly equal ratio. This interesting observation is a further reminder that swords cannot be fully understood in isolation: a comparison with other war-gear should be drawn where possible.

Härke's (2000, 380) calculations also demonstrate that when the recipient is named, war-gear accounts for over 50% of lordly gifts, outstripping land, precious metals, rings, clothing and other treasures. Nevertheless, some have downplayed the role of military equipment in this context. In an earlier study of lordship, ostensibly from a historical perspective but also drawing heavily on *Beowulf*, Abels (1988, 30-31) emphasised the role of treasure, mead, rings and land 'above all', citing lines 2490-2496 in which Beowulf extols the gifts he received from his lord Hygelac. However, a deeper reading suggests that the hero's concern lies less with land and more with treasures, explicitly the sword – mentioned again a few lines later (2509) – which seems important to Beowulf in the context of what he is discussing at that precise moment: being a warrior. This is not to devalue the significance of a land grant to a retainer: instead, there may have been a difference between the *kinds* of

status conferred by land and by fine war-gear. Certain scholars have tackled this complicated issue. Gillingham (1995, 136-137) argues that increasing production of war-gear in the eleventh and twelfth centuries drove down its cost, enabling more modest warriors to arm themselves more grandly than their seventh- to ninth-century counterparts (also Williams 2008, 110). This caused elite heriot – a form of death duty by which retainers bequeathed war-gear to their lords (Lapidge 1998b, 235; Brooks 1978) – to increase, as traditional rates now seemed inappropriately low, and measures such as that in the *Norðleoda laga* (Whitelock 1979, no. 52b, lines 9-10), which decreed that a *ceorl* (a low ranking Anglo-Saxon free man) who owned less than five hides of land remained a *ceorl* even if he owned a helmet, mail-armor and gold-fitted sword. Inherent within this discourse is the notion of a difference between *social* status, conferred by land or royal connections (Brooks 1978, 83) and the kind of status associated with ownership of war-gear: Jakobsson (1992, 79-104, 179-180) argues credibly that weapons were more potent as symbols of *warrior* than of social status. In societies in which power was entwined with violence, war-gear behaved as a metaphor for that power: therefore, he continues, men who wielded or wished to wield authority would project warrior identity through the ownership of weapons irrespective of their actual combat experience. This provokes further complex questions: what, or who, possessed the symbolic power in the relationship between warriors and their weapons? Were certain weapons seen as more important because they were wielded by powerful men? Or were powerful men made more important because they wielded certain weapons (Chaney 1970, 131; Jakobsson 1992, 180-181)? This is almost a circular argument, but it suggests that focusing upon rank may obscure the social significance of a general ‘warrior’ status, and by extension the sword’s relevance to warrior, as opposed to elite, identity.

At this point it is important to summarise a key issue relating to warrior identity and the role of weapons therein. The traditional view that weapon burials contained warriors has been dismantled by Heinrich Härke over the past twenty-five years (1989, 1990, 1992a, 1992b, 2004). Based on a sample of inhumations from forty-seven fifth- to eighth-century Anglo-Saxon cemeteries, Härke identified weapons buried with individuals deemed too young, old or physically impaired to be ‘warriors’ in the traditional sense (1990, 35-37; 1992b, 150-153). Drawing on written evidence including Gildas’ *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae* (c. 540) and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (compiled from the later ninth century), Härke found that weapon burials peaked during a period of supposed peace, when one might expect to find fewer ‘warrior’ burials. From this he concluded that warriorhood did not determine burial with weapons (1990, 28-33). His argument has been widely accepted (Halsall 2003, 163-164; Pedersen 2002, 34; Rundkvist 2007, 49), but potential problems with his thesis should be explored.

The first, highlighted by Lucy (2002, 166-167), relates to Härke’s interpretation of written evidence. He deduces a period of ‘peace’ during the mid-sixth century from both the lack of battles recorded in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and Gildas’ statement that the Britons and Saxons were at peace following the British victory at Badon Hill (c. 500: *Ex.Brit.*26.2). However, as the *Chronicle* was compiled some three centuries after the period in question it is unlikely to provide an accurate record of all battles that occurred before living memory. Moreover, its West Saxon compilers would have had limited access to non-Wessex sources (evident in the *Chronicle*’s Wessex-centric flavour: Keynes and Lapidge 1983b, 39-40), meaning that any significant battles that occurred beyond or did not involve Wessex may have been omitted. Meanwhile, Gildas’ agenda in *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae*

was to admonish a generation of Britons who, in his view, had grown immoral during the post-war period (Dumville 1984, 67-68; Morris 1978, 1; Winterbottom 1978, 5). Winterbottom (1978, 5) and Dumville (1984, 69-70) argue that Gildas exaggerated the peacefulness of his own day in order to sharpen the parallel with the previous generation who, after defeating Pictish and Irish invaders, became equally corrupt and were punished by God with the Saxon invasion (*Ex.Brit.*20.3, 21.3, 6) – the implication being that another punishment was pending unless the current generation improved.

The second problem relates to Härke's definition of 'violence', which is largely based upon recorded instances of battles. Battles account for a fraction of early medieval violence alongside blood feuds, duels, assassinations, executions, sacrifice, border conflicts, property and livestock raids, simple fights and so on (Andrén 2006, 35; Halsall 1989; Halsall 2003, 14ff; H. Williams 2005, 264). Full-scale warfare was not the only context in which an early medieval man would need weapons.

The principal problem, however, relates to Härke's definition of a 'warrior', as a man who was not only capable of fighting in battle, but actively did so, and probably had the wounds to prove it (1990, 33, 35-37); but early medieval warriorhood may have been less distinct. As previously noted, men had plenty of opportunities to display their physical prowess *off* the battlefield: should such individuals not be viewed as 'warriors'? Other scholars have proposed the young and disabled may have been buried with weapons in order to invest them with an honorific warrior status that was denied them in life; while older men interred with weapons may represent elderly warriors who had lived to old age and retained their war-gear and status as a mark of honour (Arnold 1997, 178). Moreover, as Jakobsson

(1992, 79-104, 179-180) has argued, the power that accompanied warrior identity may have been so desirable that those who were *not* warriors wished to project this image via ownership of weapons: therefore, he continues (1992, 18-21), weapon burial does not reflect the deceased's actual social role but his ideological outlook (or that of his mourners: Carver 2000, 42). The question surrounding these less tangible notions of warriorhood is, how far were these groups perceived by others, and by themselves, as 'warriors' if they did not physically fight? It seems likely that early medieval definitions of 'warrior' were more complex and fluid than modern ones, and individuals who today would not be described as warriors were perceived differently by their contemporaries.

### *iii) Gender*

In recent years explorations of gender have become increasingly popular, and given their martial nature it is unsurprising that scholars have emphasised a link between weapons and masculinity (Stoodley 1999, 30, 35, 44, 74; Dickinson 2005, 110, 161). Hadley (2004, 2006b) has explored how far carved stone images of armed men, which appeared in northern England during the tenth century, functioned as statements of real or projected male power at a time of political instability brought about by Scandinavian raiding and settlement. In these studies Hadley treats weapons generally, but a forthcoming paper focuses specifically on swords. Drawing upon archaeological, written and pictorial evidence, Hadley argues that swords were entwined with adult males from the point of manufacture, through their use (in combat or as a symbol) and ultimately to their deposition, for instance in a grave. From this, she concludes that swords behaved as active components in early medieval masculine identity, capable of symbolising, constructing and even



challenging it (Hadley forthcoming). Other war-gear also had life-long links with males, particularly exclusively martial items such as helmets and shields (Dickinson 2005) as opposed to those which doubled as tools, such as axes. A broader comparison that treats swords alongside other weapons might reveal more about what was different or special about the significance of swords to masculine identity.

Swords have also been viewed as masculine symbols because of their apparently phallic shape. This comparison, originating in Freudian psychology, has influenced several studies of early medieval literature. For instance, Oswald (2010, 97-101) has interpreted Beowulf's failing swords as mirroring a deficiency in his manliness, citing in particular the hero's encounter with Grendel's mother (*Bwf*.ll.1518-1569), which descends into a grappling match when his sword will not cut her. He finally kills her with an ancient giant's sword which he finds nearby, but only because, in Oswald's reading, the giant's masculinity was preserved in its blade. Other scholars are sceptical about such interpretations (Orchard 2003, 198 with references), and certainly, Oswald overlooks crucial contextual points. First, the sword that fails to cut Grendel's mother is not Beowulf's: it is Unferð's sword Hrunting. If a wielder's masculinity resides within his sword, as Oswald suggests, then Hrunting's failure reflects Unferð's lack of manliness rather than Beowulf's (indeed, Unferð's masculinity is questioned earlier in the poem: *Bwf*.ll.581-606). Second, Beowulf's reaction to the sword's failure leaves no doubt about his virility: flinging the weapon aside, he trusts his physical strength alone: 'So must a man do who intends to gain enduring glory in a combat. Life doesn't cost him a thought' (*Bwf*.ll.1534-1536). Moreover, the poet declares that the giant's sword was 'so huge and heavy of itself only Beowulf could wield it in battle' (*Bwf*.ll.1561-1562). Finally, when Beowulf's own sword Nægling breaks in his fatal duel with the dragon, the

poet is clear that the cause is Beowulf's excessive male strength, not a lack of it: 'When he wielded a sword, no matter how blooded and hard-edged the blade, his hand was too strong, the stroke he dealt (I have heard) would ruin it' (*Bwf*.ll.2684-2687: described as a 'stock characteristic' of heroic tales by Garbáty 1962). Similarly, Karkov criticises Caviness' (1998, 169) phallic interpretation of William of Normandy's sword in Scene 51 of the Bayeux Tapestry as 'a case of over-interpretation' (Karkov 2004, 170, n.78). In this scene William, facing right, wears his sword at his left hip, thereby obscuring much of the blade with his body whilst leaving the hilt visible and projecting upwards in a suggestive position. Karkov rightly points out that many warriors on the Tapestry wear their swords in this position: moreover, this simply happens to be the way in which swords were worn – at the left hip – and a review of the designer's treatment of swords throughout the embroidery reveals a concern to accurately depict the side upon which swords were worn: on the left, even if, as with William, it meant that the sword was mostly hidden by the wearer's body. Contextualising evidence in this way would avoid the rather forced interpretations that can follow if theoretical ideas are applied to material that does not entirely fit. It is certainly possible that swords functioned as phallic symbols in the early medieval period: while they were not the only long, pointed weapon in existence, their particular connections with men who were wealthy or successful enough to acquire them may have made them more appropriate markers of male power.

Other discussions have explored intriguing links between women and swords. A number of early medieval burials contain apparently female remains alongside weapons, including swords (Stoodley 1999, 30). Interpretations have varied, with sceptical readings identifying the weapons as recycled tools or weaving battens, the

skeletons as improperly sexed, or the context as disturbed (Evison 1987, 126; Geake 1997, 60, 70; Härke 1990, 35). Female weapon burials are exceptional and, as Hadley (forthcoming) argues persuasively, do not negate the powerful connection between swords and males; but Lucy (1997) justly emphasises that weapons (and other artefacts) in burials represented a broader range of notions than simply gender, such as cultural affiliations (Härke 1990, 1992a, 1992b, 2004). Swords were undoubtedly relevant to women in certain respects: sword-shaped amulets have been found both in Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian female graves (Meaney 1981, 148-159; Näsman 1975; Koktvedgaard Zeiten 1997, 15-18); women are shown wielding swords in images from both areas (Oseberg Tapestry fragments: Christensen and Nockert 2006; Anglo-Saxon Prudentius manuscripts: Stettiner 1905); and an Anglo-Saxon will records a woman bequeathing swords, albeit jointly with her husband (Whitelock 1930, no. 11: Will of Brihtric and Ælfswið; 973-987; Chapter 6.3d). The precise nature of any link between women and swords remains obscure, but Harrington's (2008) work on weaving beaters contains some fascinating suggestions. After drawing attention to the resemblance of certain types of iron weaving beater to swords, Harrington gives examples of Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian beaters made from modified swords (2008, 29-34, 52). As the weight of iron beaters probably rendered them less practical than wooden ones, Harrington (2008, 31, 52, 73-78) proposes a symbolic function instead, for instance imbuing cloth with protective qualities and demonstrating the high status of the women who owned them. These observations imply that for women, the relevance of swords was purely symbolic: the limited functionality of beaters made from or resembling swords suggests that the dual function available to males – as a weapon or a symbol – was unavailable to women. Weaving beaters and swords may share characteristics or materials, but

could not share precisely equivalent meanings to the different genders: for instance, Harrington (2008, 53-54) also found that in female graves, weaving beaters were generally placed in locations that differed to the dominant left-side position for swords in male graves, as if creating a deliberate differentiation between the artefacts and their connotations. These valuable ideas can be developed further to enhance our understanding of the sword in early medieval society.

#### b) Ritual significance

Most intact early medieval swords from England and Scandinavia have been recovered from burials or watery contexts like rivers or bogs. Accordingly, they are often included in discussions of ritual deposition. Burial studies have treated swords alongside other grave goods in explorations of why people chose to bury their dead with artefacts during specific periods. Certain scholars have linked these practices with pre-Christian beliefs in an afterlife (particularly Scandinavian scholars since the mid-1990s: Rundkvist 2007, 47-48), although others are unconvinced by this interpretation (Geake 1997, 4). Ellis Davidson (1962, 10-11) suggested that deliberately damaged swords discovered in a number of early medieval burials represent a desire to 'kill' the artefact so that it could follow the deceased into the afterlife (also Andrén 2006, 34-35 with references), although she acknowledges a pragmatic, if not entirely convincing, alternative: to render the weapon worthless to looters. Nordberg (2002) argues that edged weapons (including swords) that were thrust into or adjacent to cremation deposits in Viking period Scandinavia reveal a belief that those who had not died in battle could be 'pledged' posthumously to the god Óðinn if weapons were plunged into their graves. Alternatively, Gräslund (1980, 30, 76) proposes that a similar custom observed at Birka, Sweden in

which spears were embedded into grave chamber walls was intended to prevent the dead from rising. Meanwhile Roesdahl (1992, 161) attributes the high frequency of offensive weapons and the scarcity of helmets and mail-armour within 'princely' burials in Conversion-period Scandinavia to a belief in Valhöll (Valhalla), Óðinn's mythical 'hall of the slain', where defensive equipment was unnecessary because warriors who went there could not die. However, the presence of shields in some of these burials challenges this interpretation.

The meaning of swords (and other weapons) deposited in watery locations has received increasing attention in recent years. This phenomenon is now generally viewed as a deliberate ritual act rather than accidental loss (Ellis Davidson 1962, 8-9; Watson 1995). Julie Lund's (2005, 2010) insightful and methodical explorations, which valuably compare Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian evidence, have been expanded by Reynolds and Semple (2011), with both sets of scholars promoting the idea that lakes and rivers may have been viewed as appropriate sites for the disposal of weapons with complicated or chequered histories: an issue particularly relevant to swords, since they could remain in circulation for extended periods (Chapter 5.2). Continuing research into the wetland deposition of weapons will provide an important balance to the volume of work focusing on weapon burials.

### c) Ancient swords

Early medievalists have commented upon the regard attached to ancient swords in early medieval literature, including *Beowulf*, *The Battle of Maldon* and countless later Icelandic sagas (Brady 1979, 90-91). Härke (2000, 393-394) convincingly asserts that this concept was not confined to literature, but was a real early medieval attitude. Old swords recovered from burials in England and Scandinavia demonstrate

their longevity, and many scholars propose that a long history heightened a sword's prestige (Ager 2006; Bazelmans 1999, 155-156, 174-175; Bone 1989, 63; Oakeshott and Peirce 2005, 2-3; Steuer 1987, 222-226). Contrary to Ellis Davidson's (1962, 13, cf. 144-145, 171-175) assertion that an old, repaired sword in a Valsgårde burial represented 'the rather mean policy of one family', it seems likely that the placement of old swords in burials was deliberate and meaningful. Researchers have made important observations about the interchangeability of sword fittings, which could result in a weapon made from a mixture of old and new components (Ager and Gilmour 1988, 19-20; Reynolds and Semple 2011, 42). Often the focus is upon hilt fittings, but the discovery of old or recycled scabbards and scabbard fittings (Cameron 2000, 75-76; Edwards 2002, 326-327; Hedenstierna-Jonson 2002, 108-109) have led to suggestions that *all* parts of a sword, not just its hilt fittings, were considered worthy of keeping.

Some studies have proposed that ancient swords were visually recognisable. Ann Williams (2008, 105-106) draws a useful distinction between gold- and silver-fitted swords: the former were exceptionally rare by the tenth and eleventh centuries, meaning that the gold-hilted swords wielded by Byrhtnoð at the Battle of Maldon in 991 and mentioned in Anglo-Saxon wills were generations old. Of course, these fittings may simply have been gilded rather than solid gold, but it is interesting to consider whether contemporary observers drew this distinction. Carver (1986) and Lewis (2005a) have both contemplated images of outdated sword-types in the eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon Harley Psalter and Bayeux Tapestry respectively. Carver (1986, 117-118, 129) proposes that the 'prestige' associated with the 'tri-lobed' sword pommel, of ninth-century origin, led Anglo-Saxon manuscript illuminators to depict it as late as the thirteenth century. Lewis (2005a, 51-56)

attributes the appearance of the same sword-type (and other pre-eleventh century sword- and spear-types) in the Bayeux Tapestry to the copying of manuscript exemplars, causing outmoded weapons to become ‘fossilised’ in art. While it is true, as Carver (1986, 117) and Lewis (2005a, 16-17) both indicate, that the copying of earlier models was routine in medieval art, deeper contextual analysis may reveal more. Carver’s comment regarding the tri-lobed pommel’s ‘prestige’ is significant. If older swords were particularly prized, then it may not have been so anachronistic for an eleventh-century artist to depict a ninth-century sword since these weapons may still have been ‘contemporary’ to some people. It is not clear whether artists deliberately portrayed old swords in order to make a particular statement about their wielders, or whether they were merely representing a well-known contemporary practice of keeping old swords. There is some evidence for the latter. In 1015 Æðelstan, son of Æðelræd Unræd, left ‘the sword which belonged to King Offa’ to his brother Eadmund ‘Ironside’ in his will (Whitelock 1979, no.130), which, if authentic, would have been over two centuries old and potentially older if, as some suspect, it was the Avar sword which Offa himself had received from Charlemagne (Loyn and Percival 1975, no. 28; Whitelock 1974, 95). A century earlier the Frankish duke Hugo is said to have given the Anglo-Saxon king Æðelstan the sword of the Roman emperor Constantine, making it some six centuries old (WM.*Gest.Reg.Angl.*2.6; Dodwell 1982, 74). It would be easy to dismiss this as fantasy, but while the sword may not have been as old as was claimed, it was *perceived* to be – and its age seems to have made it suitable as a diplomatic gift. The significance of archaic swords and the messages they transmitted would benefit from careful contextual analysis, since other scholars have highlighted that swords were not the only piece of war-gear preserved for generations and featuring in outmoded

form in art and literature (Alkemade 1991, 291-292; Norr 2008b; Steuer 1987, 222; John Ljungkvist pers. comm.).

#### d) Artefact biography and 'living' swords

The significance of ancientness correlates with a recent research trend known as 'artefact biography'. This approach, deriving from anthropological work, views the life-history ('biography') of an artefact – the circumstances of its manufacture, ownership, circulation, use, modification and ultimate deposition or destruction – as crucial to its meaning (Lillios 1999; Hadley forthcoming; H. Williams 2006, 59 and 2007, 5). Archaeologists are now approaching swords from this perspective, with valuable results (Reynolds and Semple 2011, 42; Androschuck 2010; Hadley forthcoming; Fischer 2007, 26).

This approach could illuminate a more unusual facet associated with early medieval swords: the idea that they could be perceived as 'living' objects – in other words, thought to have their own characters, personalities, social relationships, perhaps other person- or animal-like qualities such as names, 'faces', and at the very extreme, a sense of being animated, capable of physical action. To date, this issue has been mainly addressed via contemporary literature (although not fully enough according to Brady 1983, 104-105, n.4). Scholarship has noted how swords, more often than other war-gear, are presented as characters in their own right (Cherniss 1973, 244-245; Halsall 1989, 171-172; Oakeshott 1960, 106; Price 2002, 356-357). A thought-provoking strand of discourse explores how swords formed acquaintances, like human beings. In her thorough study of *Beowulf's* words for war-gear, Brady (1979, 103-104) highlights the use of the Old English word *guðwine*, 'friend in war', to describe the sword Hrunting, commenting that this is the sole occasion in which



the element *wine*, ‘friend’, is applied to an inanimate object in the poem. She concludes that the word exemplifies a ‘peculiarly intimate relationship’ between warriors and their swords. Cherniss (1973) likens the treatment of weapons in Old English heroic poetry and riddles to the celebrated personification of Christ’s cross in *The Dream of the Rood*. He proposes (1973, 245-246) that these sources present swords as the ‘retainers’ of their wielders, who decorated them with treasure in the same way that lords gave valuable gifts to their retainers. Cherniss highlights the *Beowulf* poet’s use of the noun *dom* to describe the kind of glory won both by warriors and the sword Hrunting, and how difficult it is to determine whether the solution to two particular Old English riddles preserved in the Exeter Book (Exeter Cathedral 3501, riddles 18, 69) is ‘sword’ or ‘warrior’ (1973, 244-247). It would be useful to explore how far these issues are paralleled in Old Norse literature, but a substantial survey has yet to be undertaken.

In certain cases a lack of critical rigour has given rise to assumptions that ‘personified’ swords from literature crossed over into early medieval society. For instance, numerous scholars have accepted without question that warriors named their swords (Arent 1969, 139; Cameron 2000, 75; DeVries 1999, 195; Griffith 1995, 173; Shetelig and Falk 1937, 382), despite the fact that most evidence for named swords derives from Icelandic sagas written down from the twelfth century onwards (see Falk 1914, 47-64 for a collection of names). Others are more cautious, if still optimistic (Ellis Davidson 1962, 98-103; Foote and Wilson 1970, 272-274; Underwood 2000, 54), even proposing explanations for the origin of the naming custom (Drachmann 1968, 30-35; Miller 2002, 207-208). There have been many attempts to connect literary references with enigmatic runic inscriptions upon swords. A popular example is a late fifth- to sixth-century scabbard fitting from

Chessell Down, Isle of Wight. Runologists have transliterated this inscription as something like *aeco soeri* in Old English, translated by some as ‘increaser’ or ‘augmenter of pain or wounds’; by others as a personal name like ‘Acca’ or ‘Acco’ and the word ‘invokes’, perhaps reflecting the owner’s desire to summon divine protection; or as a reference to the object as ‘a sword’ (Ellis Davidson 1962, 100ff with references; Fischer 2007, 142 with references; Macleod and Mees 2006, 83; Gaby Waxenberger pers. comm.). Another runic inscription upon a sword pommel from Ash, Kent has been read as ‘Sigimer named the sword’ which implies that the sword *had* a name, even if it is not supplied. However, alternative readings include ‘Sigi owns me’ and ‘edge, Sigimer, edge’, again perhaps naming the sword’s owner coupled with an apotropaic invocation (Ellis Davidson 1962, 78ff with references; Fischer 2007, 90 with references; Macleod and Mees 2006, 83). Ultimately, a survey of research into these inscriptions reveals that nobody is certain what they say, and sword-names cannot be definitively identified (Fischer 2007, 73; Hawkes and Page 1967, 4-6).

There has been little discussion of why sword-names have not been found inscribed upon surviving swords, despite the fascinating questions provoked by this: were real weapons ever actually named? If they were, why were their names not recorded upon them? Was it a matter of practicality, relating to cost or literacy? Was it inappropriate for some reason, or did swords go through several names in a lifetime? Or was naming an informal arrangement between weapon and warrior, which did not require an inscription? These questions may be unanswerable, but they should be considered when attempting to place named weapons in the real world.

There have been fewer explorations of ‘living’ swords using archaeological or pictorial sources. This will undoubtedly change as artefact biographies continue to

be explored: recent papers by Reynolds and Semple (2011), Lund (2010), Hadley (forthcoming) and Androschuk (2010) move in this direction, offering useful observations that could be expanded in a more substantial study. For instance, Androschuk (2010), drawing on the work of sociologist and anthropologist Marcel Mauss (1990), speculates that animal ornament on Viking period swords infused them with an aura of animation on account of the many faces therein. While the proposal is intriguing, such motifs adorned many different artefacts and thus a greater focus on what was distinctive about sword decoration would be helpful: for instance, the two faces of pommels are often decorated differently, providing two opposing aspects: might this have helped to construct a sword's 'personality' (Chapters 5.2e and 7.2b)? Gansum (2004) has also considered the significance of decoration on swords, but goes further by suggesting that the use of animal and (potentially) human bone in the manufacture of iron and steel may have imbued swords with their characteristics. The ritual and symbolic connotations of metalworking have been widely discussed, and while Gansum speculates substantially regarding the use of human bone, the central idea is compelling.

### **3) Areas for Future Study**

Swords have received considerable attention in early medieval studies, often to the detriment of other war-gear. Nonetheless, several underdeveloped issues invite further study, and new scholarly approaches could be mobilised to cast new light on this weapon. Future research would benefit from a greater degree of contextual analysis: swords were just one component of the early medieval panoply and their full significance cannot be understood if isolated from other war-gear. In addition, too few studies have exploited the many surviving images of swords: those that have,

outlined in the preceding survey, have had provocative results that encourage further investigation.

An issue with considerable potential is the significance of swords with biographies, and by extension, the notion that they were viewed as somehow ‘living’. This may uncover fresh reasons for the sword’s significance within Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian society, expanding upon traditional views based upon its material value and elite connotations. Other issues feed into this theme: especially relevant in light of the Staffordshire Hoard is the meaning of ‘loose’ sword fittings – detached pommels, guards and scabbard mounts discovered in hoards, as stray finds and as grave goods. Various explanations for the Staffordshire Hoard have been proposed, some more compelling than others, ranging from a craftsman’s kit to battle booty to a sacred pre-Christian offering in temple grounds (Carver 2011, 201; Webster 2011). The assemblage may never be fully understood, but loose fittings like these represent stages in a sword’s biography, in that they were made for one weapon, removed from it and directed to some other purpose.

Detached sword fittings also provoke an interesting philosophical question that has not been widely addressed: what exactly *was* a sword in the early medieval mind? Was it the blade and all the fittings together, or could it be the blade alone? Where do ‘extras’ like scabbards and sword-belts or harnesses fit in? Could individual components act as short-hand for swords, or did they have their own significance independent of the rest of the weapon (Hedenstierna-Jonson 2002; Pedersen 2008, 205 with references; Reynolds and Semple 2011, 43)?

Also relevant to artefact ‘biography’ is the nature of the relationship between objects and human beings: after all, objects build biographies via these associations (Gosden and Marshall 1999, especially 169-172; Hallam and Hockey 2001, 41-43;

Hoskins 1998, 7; Knappett 2002). For swords, it is important to explore not only their relationship with the individuals that owned and used them, but also other social groups who are less readily associated with them, including women – which, as noted above, is a relationship with interesting features. The present unease with identifying those buried with weapons as ‘warriors’ may have caused scholars to downplay or lose sight of what swords *were*, at the most fundamental level: weapons, designed to kill (Gilmour 2007, 91; Theuws and Alkemade 2000, 422). As Hadley implies in her forthcoming paper, the presence of swords in the graves of women and those deemed too young, infirm or physically impaired (in the modern sense) to fight, while importantly challenging established ideas, does not subvert the reality that most swords were buried with adult men of fighting age and ability. These primary aspects of a sword’s life should be placed back on the research agenda: the influence of violence and warrior identity may have been crucial in shaping perceptions of swords. Given the current trajectory of early medieval research towards artefact biography and the various issues therein, it is a favourable moment to undertake a study of this nature.

**1) Introduction: Interdisciplinarity in Medieval Research**

Medieval studies encompass a plethora of academic disciplines. These include (but are not limited to) archaeology, art history, epigraphy, history, literature, numismatics, onomastics, palaeography, runology and various sub-disciplines therein. These seem to offer boundless opportunities for interdisciplinary research, defined by Capper (2009, 10) as making use of ‘the concepts, theory or evidence of other disciplines’ including those not overtly linked to the study of the past, such as social sciences. Nonetheless, the default position between disciplines has been one of disassociation rather than collaboration. Historically attitudes towards interdisciplinary approaches have fluctuated: as early as the 1920s, the French *Annales* school of historians advocated cross-disciplinary co-operation to create a more complex, holistic view of the past which, they argued, traditional politically-oriented approaches had failed to achieve (Bintliff 1991a, 1-5; Burke 1990; Halsall 2005, 57-58; Roberts 2004). Many of the key figures in this still-influential movement were medievalists: Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, Jacques Le Goff, Georges Duby and Marc Bloch – one of the founding *Annalistes* (Bintliff 1991b; Burke 1990, 94-111; Hedeager 2008, 11; Roberts 2004, 78; Sherratt 1992, 131-142). During the last century, however, the development of disciplinary professionalisation, specialisation and theoretical and methodological approaches (Capper 2009, 10) has contributed to a progressive separation between academic disciplines and the compartmentalisation of types of evidence within them: material culture with archaeology, written sources with history, coins with numismatics and so on.

In the 1960s the situation intensified with the development of a branch of archaeological theory known as ‘New’ or ‘Processual’ archaeology. On a basic level, this movement looked towards scientific and anthropological methods, thereby creating a further rupture between the two disciplines most readily associated with the study of the past: archaeology and history (Johnson 1999, 33-47). While New Archaeology did not infiltrate medieval studies until the 1980s (Halsall 1997 and 2005, 79), these developments helped to fuel a lengthy, often bitter debate centring on the use of types of evidence by researchers who were not specifically trained to use them (Andr en 1998, Arnold 1986, Austin 1990, Carver 2002, Driscoll and Nieke 1988b, Dymond 1974, and Moreland 2001, 2006 on archaeology and history; Green 1998, 1-2 on archaeology, history and philology; Meulengracht S orensen 1993 on philology, history, literature and anthropology; V esteinsson 2005, 8-10 on archaeology and literature; Corbey, Layton and Tanner 2006, Taylor 1987, 117-118 and Wicker 1999 on archaeology and art history; Gaskell 2001 on art history and history). Typically the debate hinges on the methodological issue of whether different types of evidence should be studied in isolation or considered in parallel (Dickinson 1983, 41; Ellis Davidson 1962, 4-5, 211; Green 1998, 2; Hills 2005, 140; Moreland 2001, 83-84; Schroeder and Bray 2007, 13; Webster 1986, 156; Wicker 1999, 170).

Since the 1980s the situation has altered again. The development of ‘Postprocessual’ theoretical approaches in archaeology has re-energised interdisciplinary research (Johnson 1999, 98-115), proving far more influential to medieval studies than the previous Processual movement (Halsall 2005, 80). Recently a greater awareness of and engagement with methodological problems surrounding interdisciplinary research has emerged, with scholars contributing

suggestions or practical frameworks for studies of this kind (Capper 2009; Carver 2002; Halsall 1997, 2003). A growing consensus, both in and outside medieval studies, is that the benefits of interdisciplinary research outweigh the disadvantages (Carver 2002, 491; Gaskell 2001, 214; Green 1998, 1-2; Halsall 2005, 80-81; Lord Smail 2008, x). Some have even argued that research based upon a single type of evidence is the weaker approach (Meulengracht Sørensen 1993, 180; Moreland 2001, 83-84), as combining multiple sources results in a richer, more comprehensive understanding of the past (Austin and Thomas 1990, 50-51; Blench 2006, 52-53; Corbey, Layton and Tanner 2006, 371; Hadley 2006a, 21; Halsall 1997, 823; Hills 2005, 140; Lamb 2007, 29). It might, however, be advisable to limit the geographical and chronological range of study in order to broaden the types of evidence used (Capper 2009, 10).

Despite the scepticism and hostility still demonstrated towards interdisciplinary research in some corners of the debate (Capper 2009, 10-12), calls for greater interdisciplinarity within medieval studies are being answered. During the past decade, such work has appeared in the form of monographs (Hadley 2006a; Halsall 2003; Jesch 2001; Price 2002; Wheatley 2004), as collaborations in edited volumes (Andrén *et al* 2006; Brink and Price 2008; Devlin and Holas-Clark 2009; Hines 2003; Karkov *et al* 2006; McTurk 2005) or book series (*Studies in Historical Archaeoethnology* from Brewer and Boydell, 1995-present; BRILL's *The Northern World*, 2001-present; *Transformation of the Roman World*, 1997-present), and is encouraged by journal editors (*Anglo-Saxon England*; *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History*; *Medieval Archaeology*; *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia*), conferences, seminars and university courses (Capper 2009, 11-12; Richards 2009). The current trajectory of medieval research indicates that this trend



will continue, and interdisciplinary methodologies will continue to be refined. The present study places itself within this positive movement.

## **2) Aims**

This study has five specific aims. Three relate to the selected topic and two to interdisciplinary research in general.

### a) Topic aims

The first aim of this study is to investigate swords as ‘living’ artefacts in Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian culture between around 500 and 1100. This line of enquiry is inspired by explorations of ‘artefact biography’, as summarised in Chapter 2.2d. Swords particularly invite this approach, given that they could remain in circulation for long periods, change their fittings and owners, were deposited in various contexts, and are given names, characters and personalities in contemporary literature. While previous work has recognised this, the issue has yet to be thoroughly examined in a focused study.

In this thesis, the term ‘living’ refers primarily to an artefact having a life-history, namely a period of time with stages, actions and events between creation and destruction, comparable to a human life. It also includes the idea that the artefact could become animated, able to act independently of its owner. These themes intersect with anthropological and archaeological discussions of the relationship between humans and objects, in which the boundary between the two can become blurred until the latter could appear like a person (Fowler 2004, especially 59-71; Hallam and Hockey 2001, 42-43; Hoskins 1998, especially 7; Knappett 2002; all with references). These studies emphasise the role played by interactions between

persons and objects in this process, and accordingly this thesis examines the relationship between swords and warriors: arguably the principal social associate of weapons in early medieval society, and as highlighted in Chapter 2.3, a connection that has been neglected in recent years. This relationship shall be contextualised by considering interactions between swords and other social groups, primarily women. Four research questions, outlined below, have been designed to serve this aim. It is hoped that the resulting research will enhance current understanding of the sword's significance in early medieval culture, and by extension, provide a broader insight into contemporary thought.

The second aim of this study is to compare and contrast Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian evidence in a rigorous and nuanced way. Historically in warfare studies, England and Scandinavia have been treated together due to their interactions throughout the period, including close political, geographical and to some extent cultural links. This can result in the arbitrary transposition of evidence from one region to the other, particularly where material is sparse (Hall 2007, 21; Halsall 2003, 9-10). Despite efforts to distinguish the many Germanic peoples of early medieval Europe (Bazelmans 1999, 1-2), Anglo-Saxons and Scandinavians continue to be merged in some quarters with the justification of *faute de mieux*: 'for the lack of something better' (Lewis 2005a, 42). A typical example is the use of later Icelandic saga literature as an interpretive tool for early Anglo-Saxon material (Ellis Davidson 1962; Stephenson 2002; Underwood 2000). Consequently meaningful parallels and distinctions between the two cultures risk being overlooked. Therefore, this thesis carefully compares Anglo-Saxon England and Scandinavia. Material relating to other early medieval cultures on the Continental mainland (Franks, Lombards, Visigoths, Ostrogoths etc.), in Britain (Welsh, Irish, Pictish etc.) and

Scandinavian settlements beyond Scandinavia and England (Ireland, Scotland, Isle of Man, Baltic Sea regions, Russia etc.) are not considered in detail. While these cultures offer opportunities for future study along similar themes, interdisciplinary researchers working with a greater volume of evidence do well to limit their focus in order to make their studies manageable (see above, 48).

The third aim of the present study is to attempt a subtle chronological analysis of the issues at hand. At a micro level, swords themselves underwent significant changes throughout the early medieval period, including the end of furnished burial in Anglo-Saxon England and various typological, constructional, ornamental and functional developments which probably influenced their significance within society. At a macro level, the great political, social, cultural and religious transformations of the period would also be relevant. Halsall (2003, 9-10) has complained that medievalists' widespread neglect of chronology, demonstrated by the assimilation of evidence from diverse periods (historically Tacitus' first-century *Germania* and Icelandic sagas from the twelfth century onwards) creates an implausibly static image of warrior culture – an exception being studies of weapon burials, the decline of which has prompted scholars to explore the causes of this change (Halsall 1995, 9; Müller-Wille 1995, 237). Therefore, this study selects the broad chronological scope of 500 to 1100 in order to identify how perceptions of swords and the nature of their social relationships responded to change throughout the period.

#### b) Interdisciplinary aims

The first interdisciplinary aim of this thesis is to develop and apply a practical interdisciplinary methodology, based upon recommendations made by medievalists,

to the current topic. The second interdisciplinary aim is accessibility. A truly interdisciplinary thesis is comprehensible regardless of the reader's academic background: unexplained specialist terminology or dense exposition can exclude scholars from one of the relevant disciplines (Schroeder and Bray 2007, 14; Taylor 1987, 117-118; Halsall 1997, 821, n.35, on Tabaczynski 1993). On the advice of other interdisciplinary scholars (Arnold 1986, 38; Capper 2009, 15; Graff 2000), this study strives for parity of expression and meaning across the disciplines, defining key terms or issues in the text and providing diagrams where appropriate.

### **3) Methodology**

#### a) Types of evidence

The methodology followed in this thesis is interdisciplinary, in that it uses types of evidence usually associated with separate disciplines (Capper 2009, 10): images, material culture and texts. Its starting point is the concept that basic parallels exist between these sources (Austin and Thomas 1990, 50; Carver 2002, 466-473; Driscoll 1988, 164-168; Lord Smail 2008, 5-6; Moreland 2001; Small 1995b, 11; Taylor 1987, 118). First, all are modes of human expression which convey information or messages that were understood in the past, and which modern researchers can interrogate to gain insight *into* the past; and second, all are shaped by comparable intentional or unintentional processes, for instance biases of survival, which affect the quality of information conveyed (Arnold 1986, 33; Carver 2002, 466-467, 473). This simplifies a complex academic debate which need not be repeated here, but at a basic level, it has been argued that treating different sources as essentially similar in nature frees scholars to apply common analytical methods to them, particularly the

collection of data or information, and the seeking and interpretation of patterns, themes or anomalies therein (Carver 2002, 473; Halsall 1997, 822).

In accordance with these perspectives, the present study focuses upon pictorial, archaeological and written evidence, each within an independent chapter. The match-up between these sources is uneven in places. Conceptually, strong parallels exist between archaeological and pictorial evidence because the latter is arguably a form of material culture, in that images appear on, in or comprise artefacts. Moreover, data from both can be subjected to similar enquiries based loosely on statistical analysis, for instance using a relational database (see below, 62): while certain texts can be analysed in this way, for example the ratio of swords bequeathed in Anglo-Saxon wills or the things that swords are likened to in Scandinavian poetry, the approach is not so applicable to texts in a broader sense. Finally, while the chronological and geographical overlap between pictorial and archaeological evidence is substantial enough to cover both the selected timespan of 500 to 1100 and the selected regions of England and Scandinavia, texts exist for the latter part of the period alone, with most being Anglo-Saxon in origin: the only truly contemporary Scandinavian texts are runic inscriptions, which by their commemorative and formulaic nature rarely contain information about swords. Icelandic sagas are often set in the early medieval period, but their late date (twelfth century and later) combined with their strong Icelandic viewpoint has caused many to question their value as evidence for earlier periods on the Scandinavian mainland (Chris Abram pers. comm.). However, 'skaldic' poetry, though preserved only in later manuscripts, is generally accepted as contemporary (the earliest attributed to the ninth century) and provides rich evidence for swords. These issues are fully explored in Chapter 6.1.

Despite these problems, the decision was taken not to omit or marginalise texts in this study. To do so risks perpetuating the problems which have hampered interdisciplinary evidence in the past: cherry-picking the most supportive evidence and overlooking contradictory issues. Instead, written evidence is assigned an individual chapter in which it is examined on its own terms in proper context, using appropriate critical tools. Moreover, the valuable evidence which texts provide for this inquiry cannot be ignored: so many ideas relating to ‘living’ swords – swords with names, personalities and bonds with their wielders – derive from literature that it must be reappraised in the light of recent work on ‘artefact biography’. Texts were chosen carefully to create the best match-up with pictorial and archaeological evidence (see Chapter 6.1b).

These problems emphasise the difficulties which attend interdisciplinary research. Accordingly, the Conclusion of this thesis (Chapter 8) evaluates the chosen methodology and suggests where improvements to interdisciplinary approaches could be made.

#### b) Research questions

The present investigation is directed by four thematic research questions:

##### *1. The sword as a ‘living’ object*

How far were swords perceived as ‘living’ objects in the early medieval period, according to the definitions outlined in this study?

## *2. The sword-warrior relationship*

What was the character and significance of the relationship between swords and warriors, as opposed to other social groups?

## *3. The 'living' sword in time*

How far did the 'living' sword and its social relationships change during the period under discussion?

## *4. The 'living' sword in space*

What parallels and distinctions can be apprehended between Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian perceptions of the 'living' sword and its social relationships?

### c) Structure and method

Three framing chapters (Introduction, Literature Review and Aims and Methods: Chapters 1-3) are followed by the main body of the thesis, divided into four chapters which are structured according to the four research questions (Chapters 4-7). The first focuses on images and representations of swords; the second upon archaeological evidence, namely surviving swords and their find contexts; the third upon contemporary texts about swords; and the fourth is a discussion which attempts to integrate the results of the evidence-based chapters in an effort to draw secure conclusions for the research questions. Integration can only take place where the sources genuinely converge, and this is assessed by strict adherence to two 'rules':

1. Appropriate source criticism;
2. Contextual appreciation.

These tenets of interdisciplinary study help researchers to evaluate whether different sources truly express the same concepts, and consequently whether they can (or should not) be integrated. This method, based primarily upon the ideas of Carver (2002), Halsall (1997, 821-822) and Capper (2009, 18), was chosen in response to a scholarly consensus regarding how best to integrate diverse material (Austin 1990, 9-12; Balzaretti 1999, 390-391; Bazelmans 1999, 5-6; Brady 1979, 79-82; Carver 2002, 468, 480-481; Dymond 1974, 77; Gaskell 2001, 212; Halsall 1997, 805-806, 814, 822 and 2003, 10; Hills 2005, 140; Meulengracht Sørensen 1993, 178; Moreland 2001, 82-83; Morgan 1988, 10; Sawyer 1983, 46-47; Small 1995b, 11-12; Taylor 1987, 118; Vésteinsson 2005, 23-25). As Halsall (1997, 821-823) has shown, it ensures that sources are considered with equivalent complexity and avoids the superficial plucking of evidence from different disciplines, ignorant of context and with little critical analysis, which has undermined some interdisciplinary work.

#### **4) Outline of Research Chapters**

Each of the three source-based chapters opens with an introduction to the type of evidence, acknowledging important critical and contextual issues. Chapters 1-3 (introductory and framing material) and 8 (concluding remarks) are self-explanatory and are not outlined here.

##### a) Chapter 4: Images

This chapter addresses the research questions via images and representations of swords. As discussed in Chapter 2, pictorial studies have yielded valuable results but have yet to be fully exploited in terms of the role of swords in early medieval society. All surviving media bearing or comprising representations of swords (stone



sculpture, illuminated manuscripts, metalwork, organic carvings, textiles, coins) are included.

Two particular problems attend pictorial evidence. First, each medium is subject to differing survival rates: the exceptional (if fragmentary) preservation of a ninth-century embroidery from Oseberg, Norway warns that much has been lost, or remains to be found. Second, the balance of media between Anglo-Saxon England and Scandinavia is uneven: for example, illuminated manuscripts were produced in England but not Scandinavia during this period (Nilsén 1995, 463), preventing a direct comparison of this medium. However, analysis of the full range of surviving sword imagery reveals patterns and themes which can be explored. These and other critical and contextual issues are discussed fully in Chapter 4.1.

Chapter 4 undertakes iconographic analysis of sword imagery. Iconography can be defined as the study of the content and meaning of representational (as opposed to ornamental) art, including individual motifs – for instance, of swords (Morgan 1988, 10-16; D’Alleva 2005, 20-21). The analysis applied in the present study draws upon the classic approach of art historian Erwin Panofsky (1972, originally published 1939) and Lyvia Morgan, who considers the iconography of weapons in her study of Bronze Age Aegean wall-paintings (1988, 105-115). Morgan argues that pictorial motifs function both as representations of physical objects – in this case, swords – and as concepts or ‘ideas’ relating to cultural beliefs, perceptions and attitudes (Morgan 1988, 11): an attractive approach for studying perceptions of ‘living’ swords. In Chapter 4, iconographic elements including composition, juxtaposition, accuracy of depiction and pictorial associations (for instance between specific weapons, wielders and functions) are analysed, and underlying attitudes relating to ‘living’ swords are sought where trends or deviations

in the collected material suggest a deeper meaning (Morgan 1988, 11, 15; Panofsky 1972, 7ff).

To facilitate this analysis, images and representations of swords were collected and stored in a custom-made relational database created using Microsoft Access 2010 (Database 1). In order to contextualise swords, representations of other early medieval war-gear (spear, shield, seax, bow, helmet, mail-armor) were also collected. A sample record from the database, an outline of the database's structure and a full description of the fields used is supplied in Appendix 1. The relational nature of the database facilitated the performance of queries that were carefully tailored to address the thesis' research questions.

#### *Chapter 4.2: The sword as a 'living' object*

This section approaches the 'living' sword by examining its pictorial personality, for example the contexts in which it appears (violence, ritual, ceremonial, domestic) and whether it is shown in action (unsheathed, held upright) or in a more passive manner (sheathed, held point downwards) – although the distinction between 'active' and 'passive' representations of swords is often unclear. The depiction of archaic sword-types – those with long life-histories – is thoroughly examined to determine whether these resulted simply from the copying of earlier models, or were deliberately shown. Certain composition details that hint at animated swords are discussed, as is the differing detail applied to representations of swords and spears.

#### *Chapter 4.3: The sword-warrior relationship*

After defining 'warrior' iconographically, this section explores the pictorial associations between swords and warriors. It considers the frequency with which

warriors are shown wielding swords as opposed to other weapons, particularly spears: a query which may reveal the items that were most intrinsically associated with warrior status. This leads to a consideration of the ways in which sword motifs were manipulated in order to shape and express warrior identities pictorially. Connections between swords and women are also analysed. The discussion then takes a broader perspective, considering who deployed sword motifs and why such images were or were not relevant to different social groups.

#### *Chapter 4.4: The 'living' sword in time*

In this section, the iconographic data is analysed chronologically across three 'phases': Phase I covering 500-700, Phase II 700-900 and Phase III 900-1100. Significant trends and developments are highlighted and interpreted: for example, an increase in Anglo-Saxon representations of war-gear during the tenth century, which has been traditionally attributed to Scandinavian influence.

#### *Chapter 4.5: The 'living' sword in space*

Here Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian representations of swords are compared. Major parallels and distinctions are identified and discussed, for instance the depiction of 'wielderless' swords as a feature of Scandinavian but not Anglo-Saxon imagery.

#### b) Chapter 5: Archaeology

This section addresses the research questions via archaeological evidence, namely surviving swords and their deposition in weapon burials. Specific regions were selected for focus, based on the frequency of surviving swords and chronological issues (fully explained in Chapter 5.2a). Data relating to the swords and their grave

contexts was collected and stored in a custom-made relational database created using Microsoft Access 2010 (Database 2). In order to contextualise swords, information about other war-gear (spear, shield, seax) placed in the same burials was also collected. A sample record from the database, an outline of the database's structure and a full description of the fields used is supplied in Appendix 1. The relational nature of this database facilitated the performance of queries that were carefully tailored to address the thesis' research questions.

### *Chapter 5.2: The sword as a 'living' object*

This section comprises a case-study of swords from inhumation burials dating to between about 500 and 800 from Kent in England, and from Uppland and Gotland in Sweden, Bornholm in Denmark and central and southern Norway in Scandinavia (following Nørgård Jørgensen 1999 and Jørgensen and Nørgård Jørgensen 1997, 86). The investigation focuses upon swords with surviving metal fittings (justified in Chapter 5.2a), and examines them for signs of wear, repair and modification over time. It is argued that swords which had circulated long enough to undergo such changes may be examples of 'living' swords, with chequered life-histories and visual identities. A discussion of loose sword fittings and their significance is also included.

### *Chapter 5.3: The sword-warrior relationship*

This section considers the placement of swords within graves, relative to the body and other war-gear. The data used is the same as that examined in Chapter 5.2. The discussion analyses and interprets trends relating to the side of the body on which swords are placed, followed by their physical proximity to the body. These results are compared with the placement of other war-gear in the same burials. The chapter

then examines the presence of swords, parts of swords and modified swords in female burials, and considers how far this affects the relationship between males and swords.

#### *Chapter 5.4: The 'living' sword in time*

This section undertakes similar investigations to those in Chapters 5.2 and 5.3 but uses data from later burials, dating to around 800 to 1100. The decline of weapon burial in Anglo-Saxon England during the seventh century means that adjustments must be made to the sample used: a series of ninth- to tenth-century furnished graves, mostly from Scandinavian-settled areas of England, provide a modest corpus of evidence (with the caveat that they may be subject to Scandinavian influence); but for Scandinavia the same geographical area is used since weapon burial continued here into the eleventh century. This later data is compared with the earlier material discussed in Chapters 5.2 and 5.3, and potential chronological changes are highlighted and interpreted.

#### *Chapter 5.5: The 'living' sword in space*

This section views the results of the preceding discussions from a cultural perspective, comparing more closely the Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian evidence. Parallels and distinctions are isolated for discussion.

#### c) Chapter 6: Texts

This chapter addresses the research questions via written evidence. Surviving early medieval texts do not overlap chronologically with pictorial and archaeological evidence to the same extent that the latter two sources do with each other.

Nonetheless, careful selection of texts can maximise the points of comparison enough to justify written evidence being treated independently in this thesis. Accordingly, the present study focuses upon Old English and Old Norse poetry – a substantial corpus of which survives from both England and Scandinavia. While Latin poetry and a large volume of prose literature also survive from England, the absence of a contemporary Scandinavian equivalent reinforces poetry as the best point of comparison. Moreover, poetry from both areas treats swords in similar ways, for instance by comparing them to other concepts, objects and phenomena in linguistic constructions called ‘kennings’, which can be analysed systematically. A full justification of the selected literature is provided in Chapter 6.1b.

The poetry is approached via thorough critical appraisal with strong contextual awareness. To facilitate this, a list of Old Norse and Old English poems which refer to swords was collected and stored in a custom-made database created using Microsoft Excel 2010 (Database 3b). These poems were then mined carefully, and ‘kennings’ for swords or referring to swords were collected and stored in a second custom-made database capable of finer-grained analysis, created using Microsoft Access 2010 (Database 3a). In order to contextualise swords, kennings for spears were also collected. A sample record from the database, an outline of the database’s structure and a full description of the fields used is supplied in Appendix 1. Analysis was undertaken by performing queries that were carefully tailored to address the thesis’ specific research questions.

### *Chapter 6.2: The sword as a ‘living’ object*

This section explores the characterisation and personification of swords in poetry. Evidence for animated swords is also interrogated, with a focus upon swords shown

acting and experiencing emotions. Comparisons are drawn with depictions of spears, in order to determine the extent to which these features were specific to swords.

### *Chapter 6.3: The sword-warrior relationship*

This section analyses the association between swords and warriors in poetry. An apparent ‘favouritism’ towards swords is examined, together with the role played by swords in warrior identity – perhaps mediating between groups of warriors based on their armament. Connections between women and swords are compared with the preceding discussion of the sword-warrior relationship.

### *Chapter 6.4: The ‘living’ sword in time*

Identifying chronological developments in the poetic treatment of swords is challenging, since most of the poems date to the latter part of the study period. However, limited observations can be made. The section includes a case-study of pre-Christian and Christian period Scandinavian poetry.

### *Chapter 6.5: The ‘living’ sword in space*

This section compares the results of the previous sections in order to identify similarities and differences between the Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian poetic treatment of swords. These include potentially finer-grained characterisation of swords in Scandinavian poetry, and sword animation featuring less often in Anglo-Saxon poems.

#### d) Chapter 7: Discussion

Chapter 7 combines the results of Chapters 4 to 6 and, using the method described above, attempts to identify genuine points of convergence and divergence between the pictorial, archaeological and written evidence. Like the preceding chapters, it is structured to address each research question in turn. The concluding section of the chapter offers explanations for why swords, more than any other early medieval weapon, may have been interpreted as ‘living’ objects, and uses research into the anthropology and psychology of violence and warfare as a tool to interpret its special status in early medieval warrior culture and society.

#### **5) Conclusion**

In closing, it is worth digressing to address the trepidation that can still attend interdisciplinary research. It has been argued that different types of evidence cannot be combined successfully because they are too chronologically or geographically dislocated; transmit messages and have meanings that are too disparate to reconcile; or relate too much to higher echelons of society (for further discussion see Andr en 1998, 4, 35, 145ff; Capper 2009; Halsall 1997, 823). While such concerns are valid, the varied perspectives that different sources provide need not be viewed negatively (Driscoll 1988, 186; Hadley 2006a, xv), nor need problems relating to biases within the evidence, which affect *individual* as well as groups of sources. As with single-discipline research, researchers must identify the limitations of the evidence with which they are working, and use appropriate analytical, critical, contextual and methodological tools in order to arrive at plausible interpretations.

A further concern is that interdisciplinary research is eroding specialist knowledge (Driscoll 1988, 162; Schroeder and Bray 2007, 13-14). So far this has not



proved to be the case: specialism is not only healthy but is also vital to interdisciplinarians, since it provides the apparatus for handling diverse sources effectively (Capper 2009, 12; Halsall 1997, 823-824; Hills 1989, 179). This latter point confronts a related anxiety concerning the challenges interdisciplinarians face in acquiring the specialist skills needed to comment authoritatively upon material from other disciplines – an uphill struggle that never seems to end (Capper 2009, 15; Lamb 2007, 40). Consequently, some argue that interdisciplinary projects cannot be as penetrating as specialist studies and are best conducted collaboratively rather than by individuals (Carver 2002, 491; Schroeder and Bray 2007, 14-15; cf. Capper 2009, 12-13, who argues to the contrary). Working with different types of evidence at the highest level is demanding, but the attendant problems can be reduced: first, by selecting topics of manageable scope and sources which are most amenable to assimilation; and second, by forging contacts with researchers from related disciplines (Capper 2009). In any case, as Lamb (2007, 40) has emphasised, the perspectives of non-specialists need not be seen as naive or unauthorised: they may prove fresh and impartial.

In sum, the conventional negatives associated with interdisciplinary research can be reinterpreted more positively. In fact, it could be argued that the gravest disadvantages attending this type of research relate less to academic quality and more to mundane practicalities such as the existence of a ‘funding gap’ into which many interdisciplinary projects fall, despite increasing promotion of this method (Schroeder and Bray 2007, 15-16). These problems should decline as the true value of interdisciplinary research emerges. It is hoped that the present thesis will contribute to this process.

## Images

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### 1) Introduction

Images play a fundamental role in the study of swords. At a basic level, they provide contemporary illustrations of these weapons, but more importantly they provide information regarding their social and cultural significance (Morgan 1988, 10-11). Hundreds of depictions of swords survive from Anglo-Saxon England and Scandinavia, but they can be difficult to interpret: to modern viewers they convey largely passive messages, but in the past they functioned more actively, communicating beliefs and values but also creating, shaping and maintaining them, even provoking physical or emotional reactions (Gell 1992 and 1998, 68-71; Harrison 2004, 3-5; Wells 2008). Modern viewers cannot fully translate these meanings, being so far removed from the physical, psychological and visual conditions in which the images were made, displayed and viewed. Moreover, each image or pictorial motif will have had multiple meanings depending on viewer, period and place (Alkemade 1991, 270; Christensen and Nockert 2006, 376; Koktvedgaard Zeiten 1997, 7). While contemporary audiences were better equipped to 'read' their images, certain facets of meaning can be recovered by studying visual culture in context and by measuring our own responses to it (Taylor 1987, 118; Wells 2008, 10-21).

#### a) Critical and contextual issues

Certain source-critical and contextual issues must be negotiated before pictorial analysis can take place. Survival rates of the media upon which sword imagery

appears vary considerably. Many images created on perishable materials have not survived: embroideries such as the Bayeux Tapestry from England and the Oseberg, Rolvsøy and Överhogdal fragments from Scandinavia, coupled with contemporary literary references to narrative textiles (Anglo-Saxon: Dodwell 1982, 134-137; Scandinavian: Näsström 1998, 267), imply that this medium was more common than survivals attest. Anglo-Saxon illuminated manuscripts survive in quantity but many more have been lost: dismembered for their precious cover-fittings or consumed by fire throughout the centuries – the 1731 blaze in the Cotton manuscript library, which destroyed a unique early medieval *Life* of King Alfred and damaged the only extant *Beowulf* manuscript, is a brutal example (Tite 1994, 38-39). Wood, ivory and antler carvings depicting weaponry, like the Anglo-Saxon Franks Casket and the Swedish Sigtuna mount, will have perished in quantity, while poetic descriptions of paintings like the ninth- to tenth-century *Ragnarsdrápa* and *Haustlöng* (Fuglesang 2006, 1-2; North 1997) reveal that certain media fail to survive at all. More positively, new material is being discovered: archaeological excavations and metal-detecting occasionally uncover artefacts bearing images of weapons (Helmbrecht 2007-2008, 37); fragments of illuminated manuscripts are sometimes found amongst other bindings; and stone carvings do emerge during excavations and building works.

A further problem when attempting to compare Anglo-Saxon England and Scandinavia is that depictions of swords survive unequally between the two areas, with more material from the former. Inter-regional variations compound the issue: more depictions, for instance, survive from Sweden than any other Scandinavian country. Additionally, images occur on different media at different times in different places. Stone sculpture was part of Anglo-Saxon material culture between the seventh and eleventh centuries, but in Scandinavia appeared only on the Swedish

island of Gotland before the tenth century (Graham-Campbell 1980, 140, 152); and furthermore, illuminated manuscripts were not produced in Scandinavia at all during the early medieval period (Nilsén 2003, 531). Such critical and contextual issues are significant, but awareness of the biases they create enables researchers to minimise the risk of drawing false conclusions from the evidence.

#### b) Approach

This chapter investigates visual representations of swords in Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian art, using an essentially iconographic approach. In her work on Bronze Age Aegean wall-paintings, Lyvia Morgan (1988, 10-16) defines iconography as the study of the content and meaning of representational, as opposed to ornamental, art. It is therefore ideal for studying depictions of artefacts. Morgan's approach is largely adopted here, with adaptations to serve the thesis' overarching interdisciplinary methodology, which seeks and interprets patterns in material collected from each source-type (see Chapter 3.3).

Morgan's (1988, 15) first step in iconographic analysis is to identify each separate 'iconographic element' (sword, plant, ship and so on) in the image, and broader characteristics such as locations and identities of figures present. As this chapter discusses images of swords, every artefact deriving from England and Scandinavia between c. 500 and 1100 which features or comprises a representation of war-gear was identified and collated, using published catalogues and corpora (Beckwith 1972; *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture* series; Lindqvist 1941 and 1942; Metcalf 1993; Ohlgren 1986; Roesdahl and Wilson 1992; Webster and Backhouse 1991), excavation reports (Arbman 1943; Arwidsson 1942, 1954, 1977; Bruce-Mitford 1978; Stolpe and Arne 1927), facsimiles (Christensen and Nockert

2006; *Early English Manuscripts in Facsimile* series; Wilson 2004), short reports (Biddle and Kjølbye Biddle 1985; Watt 1999; Koktvedgaard Zeiten 1997), online databases (Portable Antiquities Scheme; Sylloge of Coins of the British Isles) and digitised museum collections (British Museum, London; Historiska Museet, Stockholm). These artefacts, their provenance and date, were entered into a relational database created using Microsoft Access 2010 (Database 1, hereafter abbreviated as 'DB1'). Then, each separate war-gear motif (sword, spear, shield and so on) shown upon each artefact was identified and logged alongside associated information regarding:

1. Physical appearance and attributes;
2. Broader pictorial details (type of wielder and scene; orientation; manner of holding or wearing).

A full description of each database category appears in Appendix 1. Altogether, 369 artefacts were collected, containing 4712 individual war-gear motifs (DB1:Q1). Inevitably the collection cannot be exhaustive: relevant artefacts may be unrecorded or inaccessible, while others will be discovered and/or published. However, the corpus comprises a substantial number of records across a variety of media, dates and regions, and is therefore considered suitable for analysis. Each artefact referenced in the following text has a code – for instance, 'T2' refers to the Bayeux Tapestry and 'IM8' to the Old English Hexateuch manuscript – which can be cross-referenced with the catalogue of referenced artefacts in Appendix 2.

Morgan's (1988, 10-15) second step of iconographic analysis is to interpret the images' meanings using all obtainable evidence, including personal knowledge, archaeology, texts and comparative iconography alongside an appreciation of the artistic conventions within which the image was made. The interdisciplinary

framework of this thesis demands that different source materials are treated separately until the discussion in Chapter 7. This is not entirely at odds with an iconographic approach which, as its first stage, considers images in their own right; but it does mean that some meanings within the images cannot be apprehended at this stage – particularly where a broader knowledge of early medieval beliefs and values is required, demanding input from texts and archaeology. Source integration must be undertaken carefully according to the interdisciplinary principles outlined above, as not all ideas expressed by other source-types will be compatible with visual material. However, tentative interpretations can be offered in some cases and firmer ones where it is feasible to incorporate other forms of information, such as typology and comparative iconography, without compromising the overall interdisciplinary methodology. Thus, the visual material was interrogated using database queries, and significant correlations were noted and interpreted. To date, early medieval images of war-gear from these regions have not been systematically collected and analysed in this way.

#### c) A note on the collected data

Before embarking upon detailed analyses of the collected data, a general summary of its trends is helpful for context. Visual representations of war-gear appear on a variety of media throughout the early medieval period: metalwork, stone sculpture, carvings, illuminated manuscripts, textiles, coins and graffiti. They occur in both secular and religious contexts, Christian and pre-Christian. Aside from atypical weapons such as clubs, maces, whips and tridents, all war-gear used by northern European warriors of this period are depicted: spears, shields, helmets, mail-armor, axes, seaxes (Scandinavian ‘sax’), bows, arrows – and swords.

612 swords appear within the pictorial corpus, comprising 13% of all war-gear motifs (Chart 1; DB1:Q2). 73% of these derive from England (including those deemed to be ‘Anglo-Scandinavian’, mixing Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian elements), with 27% from Scandinavia (Chart 2; DB1:Q3). The motifs were split chronologically into three phases. 7% date to Phase I (c. 500-700), 83% of which derive from Scandinavia and just 17% from England; 20% date to Phase II (c. 700-900), of which 87% are Scandinavian, 12% Anglo-Saxon and 1% Anglo-Scandinavian; and 73% date to Phase III (c. 900-1100), the majority Anglo-Saxon at 89%, plus 7% Scandinavian and 4% Anglo-Scandinavian (Charts 3-6; DB1:Q4).

48% of all sword motifs appear in illuminated manuscripts; 22% appear upon textiles, with the majority from the Bayeux Tapestry; 20% on stone sculpture; 8% on metalwork; and 1% each on perishable carvings and coins, and less than 1% as graffiti (Chart 7; DB1:Q5). Illuminated manuscripts dominate the collected data because any one manuscript can contain a hundred or more folios, and thus dozens or even hundreds of individual sword motifs (the eleventh-century Old English *Hexateuch* alone contains 164). Conversely a piece of metalwork, stone sculpture, carving or a coin has limited space for decoration and might feature only one or two swords. It is important to remain sensitive to factors which can skew analytical results. Other instances are noted when they appear in the following text.

## **2) Research Question 1: The Sword as a ‘Living’ Object**

Identifying images which reveal perceptions of ‘living’ swords is challenging, since we do not know how far such concepts influenced early medieval artists. A useful starting point is to examine the sword’s *iconographic* personality: its visual

characteristics, what it is shown doing, and if any sense of biography or autonomous action can be apprehended. All of these ideas emerge in the collected sword imagery.

#### a) Visual character

Swords were composite items comprising a blade, hilt (pommel, guards, grip: Fig. 1), scabbard and probably a suspension device like a sword-belt or harness; but these components are unequally reflected in the collected images, suggesting that some parts were seen as more characteristic of swords than others. This apparent prioritisation of certain parts over others creates a distinct visual character for these weapons; but which were the most essential components of a sword's character, pictorially speaking?

Scabbards and suspension devices are depicted inconsistently throughout the period in both Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian art. Swords that are shown being worn on their wielders' bodies should be interpreted as sheathed, but often appear bare because scabbards or suspension devices are not characterised. Furthermore, individuals brandishing swords do not always wear the corresponding scabbard: Anglo-Saxon examples include the lid of the Franks Casket (CV1) and the Old English Hexateuch (folios 24v-25v); and Scandinavian examples are repoussé foils (*Pressbleche*) covering the helmet from Valsgärde grave 7 (M9; Fig. 2), the Stora Hammars I picture-stone (the upper-most scene or 'register': ST2), the Ramsund (ST26), Sparlösa (ST6) and Söderby (ST25) runestones, and fragmentary embroideries from the Oseberg ship burial (fragments 4, 16: T1). Sometimes swords are shown with and without and scabbards in the same image: on folio 32v of the Harley Psalter (Fig. 3: IM7) two men fight with swords but only one wears a scabbard, while on the Bayeux Tapestry an episode showing an infantry swordsman



with an empty scabbard at his left hip is quickly followed by another showing a mounted swordsman who does not wear a scabbard, even though his left hip, where the scabbard would have lain, is exposed by his raised shield (Scenes 52-54: Fig. 4). However, some extremely detailed depictions of scabbards and suspension devices exist. Scabbards shown on a helmet from grave XIV at Vendel, Sweden (M1) are fitted with chapes (a U-shaped fitting on the 'point' of the scabbard), lockets (a mount wrapped around the scabbard opening) and two 'buttons' (Fig. 5), resembling the gold and garnet pair on the sword from Sutton Hoo (which likely had connections with the region of southern Sweden where Vendel lay: Bruce-Mitford 1978, fig. 208). Similarly detailed is the sword-belt complete with buckle and strap-end worn by Harold on the Bayeux Tapestry, during his meeting with Guy of Ponthieu in Scene 8-9 (Fig. 6).

In most of the collected images, sword blades are fairly featureless, like elongated blank rectangles with rounded or pointed ends. Again however, some extraordinarily detailed representations have survived. Blades with fullers – a groove running down the centre of the blade – are depicted on the Swedish and (probably) Sutton Hoo helmet *Pressbleche* (Figs. 2 and 7; Valsgärde 8: Arwidsson 1954, Abb. 79; M2), *Pressblech* dies from Torslunda, Sweden (Bruce-Mitford 1978, figs. 143-145; M6), a gold foil from Sorte Muld, Denmark (M5; Fig. 8) and several Anglo-Saxon manuscripts (for example IM7, folios 5 and 21: Ohlgren 1992, pls. 2.9 and 2.37; and IM11, folio 93: Temple 1976, ill. 220.). An early twentieth-century drawing of Fragment 4 from the Oseberg embroideries (Fig. 9) shows a sword with a cable pattern on the blade, possibly representing the pattern-welding manufacturing technique that left intricate designs on the blade (Chapter 2.1b); however, this detail can no longer be verified on the deteriorated original (Christensen and Nockert 2006,

376). An eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon miscellany (IM12, folio 39) contains an illustration of a sword blade with an inscription that precisely resembles the formula of real blade inscriptions from the ninth century onwards (Chapter 2.1b), down to the cross motif prefixing the lettering (Figs. 10-11). Another blade inscription may appear on folio 93 of the eleventh-century Eadui Psalter, but it is less clear (Temple 1976, ill. 220; IM11).

While sword suspension devices are often omitted and blades are often sketchily characterised, hilt components are routinely depicted – often with impressive authenticity. Straight and curved guards are both illustrated, although in some instances curving the ‘wrong’ way towards rather than away from the hand (Bury Psalter, folio 88; Ohlgren 1992, pl. 3.33; IM9). Other representations seem to portray the ‘sandwich’ construction of early guards, which comprised a block of horn or wood sandwiched between two metal guard-plates (Ellis Davidson 1962, 53). Sword guards shown on the Sutton Hoo ‘dancing warriors’ *Pressblech* (Fig. 7; M10) and a *Pressblech* die from Torslunda, Sweden feature horizontal lines which resemble this construction, while a miniature sword from Eketorp, Sweden (M4) has a lower guard with a clear tripartite assembly. The same may be depicted on two Viking-period sword-shaped amulets from Bejsebakken and Kalmergården in Denmark (M11-12), but this is less likely since they significantly post-date the period during which sandwich-type guards were in use (unless they were crafted deliberately to resemble old types of sword: see Chapter 4.2b).

Archaeologically-attested types of pommel are widely represented in the pictorial corpus, including tri-lobed, ‘tea-cosy’ (hemispherical), ‘brazil-nut’ (elliptical) and disc (Lewis 2005a, 47; Figs. 12-14). The sword-shaped amulet from Bejsebakken, Denmark (M11) has a five-lobed pommel comparable to Petersen’s

Type K (Figs. 15-16; Oakeshott and Peirce 2005, 63-64), and ring-swords (Fig. 17) are denoted on the Vendel XIV helmet (Fig. 5), a Torslunda die (Fig. 18) and a repoussé gold foil (*guldgubbe*) from Sorte Muld (M5: Fig. 8) by the inclusion of a tiny circle on the pommel. Some hilts are portrayed in such detail that they can be assigned to genuine typological categories (Evison 1967b, 183; Lindqvist 1941, 74; Marjolein Stern pers. comm.). The depiction of different pommels in the same scene, as in illuminated manuscripts and on the Bayeux Tapestry, suggests awareness that this component was key to a sword's visual character, and was a means by which swords could be differentiated from each other – like the features of a face. This idea is developed further presently, and in Chapter 7.2b alongside similar themes from archaeological and written evidence.

Overall, the frequency with which different parts of swords are depicted, together with the contrasting level of detail afforded to each part, suggests that swords were widely perceived as 'blade-plus-hilt'. These were their most distinguishing visual characteristics to early medieval artists and casual viewers, in the same way that a representation of a human being must have a head and limbs in order to be recognised. The prominence of hilts and blades is not surprising, since they are the most visually immediate components of swords and determine their distinctive shape. Conversely, artists may have been less familiar with features like fullers, pattern-welding, inscriptions and scabbard fittings since they required intimate knowledge of what swords looked like up close: an opportunity not available to all. Other artists may have considered these details unessential, omissible without compromising the sword motif's authenticity. Alternatively, they may have avoided excessive detail through an aesthetic concern to avoid clutter in their images. Various motivations would have influenced the pictorial characterisation of swords,

but an overarching awareness that a sword's 'body' comprised a blade and a hilt permeates the imagery of swords from Anglo-Saxon England and Scandinavia alike.

Intriguingly, some of the most detailed representations of swords occur on artefacts which can be linked to warriors or individuals interested in warrior culture. It has been argued that images created for secular, potentially warrior, patrons would contain more detailed depictions of war-gear than images created for ecclesiastical patrons, due to these groups' respective interests and social sympathies (Hooper 1998, 95-96). The Swedish and Sutton Hoo helmet *Pressbleche* were presumably made for warriors (or those wishing to be seen as such) because they adorned military equipment – and though stylised, are amongst the most meticulous representations of swords known from the period (Helmbrecht 2007-2008, 46), incorporating tiny ring fittings, 'sandwich' guards, ridged grips, fullers, scabbard fittings and sword-belts. The small size of these objects should be emphasised, averaging around four-by-five centimetres (Alkemade 1991, 268, n. 3), their detail appreciable only by close scrutiny: from this, it could be argued that the careful depiction of war-gear was important to the helmet's owner, who had this level of access to the imagery. An Anglo-Saxon sword-shaped shield mount from Edix Hill (Barrington A), Cambridgeshire (M8; Fig. 19) was also probably owned by a warrior, and despite its tiny proportions, features a decorated scabbard, ridged locket and grip, straight guards and tri-partite pommel. The Old English Hexateuch is less clearly linkable with warrior culture, although its attention to war-gear has prompted Kiff (1984, 188) to suggest it was commissioned by a secular patron. While some of its swords appear hectically drawn – especially on the unfinished later folios – a number are carefully illustrated, particularly Abraham's sword on folio 38 (Fig. 20), the Pharaoh's sword on folio 59 (Fig. 21), and the kings' swords on folios 24v (Fig.

22) and 58v, whose lower guards feature point-like protrusions resembling Petersen's Type Z (although with straighter rather than curved guards), a sword type contemporary with the manuscript (Fig. 23). Conversely, the most likely patron of the martial-themed Bayeux Tapestry was an ecclesiastic – Bishop Odo of Bayeux (Wilson 2004, 202 with references) – although questions surrounding the degree to which early medieval ecclesiastics engaged in battle create further interpretive complexities (Hare 1998). This, combined with a general lack of surviving information about artistic patronage, ensures that any connection between warriors and detailed sword imagery remains conjectural. However, differing levels of detail may represent differing attitudes regarding the visual character of swords: for some artists it was simply 'blade-plus-hilt'; for others – including, but not confined to, those with warrior patrons – it was blade, hilt, scabbard, sword-belt and more.

Overall, swords are the most carefully rendered war-gear motif in the pictorial corpus. This is made clear when swords are compared with spear motifs (Wilson 2004, 224-225). In the collected material, spears are often rendered as a single-line shaft with a simple barbed, leaf- or lozenge-shaped blade: for instance, in Scandinavian art upon runestones, Gotlandic picture-stones and as coin graffiti (G2); and in Anglo-Saxon art in illuminated manuscripts and on the Bayeux Tapestry. Additional details such as blade midribs (a ridge running along the centre of the blade), sockets and ferrules (a metal fitting at the base of the shaft) are typically omitted. The simplicity of spear motifs prompted Swanton (1973, 4) to conclude that it is 'naive' to seek genuine spear-types in art, and despite efforts to do just that (Fuglesang 1980, 139; Mann 1965, 66-67), analysis of the collected material bears this out. However, not all spear motifs are crude: exceptions include Swedish helmets from Vendel (Stolpe and Arne 1927, pl. VI, figs. 1, 7 and pl. XLI, fig. 4) and

Valsgårde (Arwidsson 1954, Abb. 79 and 1977, Abb. 115), which show spears with robust shafts and spear-heads with midribs, sockets and bosses – although, as noted above, most equipment on these *Pressbleche* is represented in detail (73). Furthermore, database analysis demonstrates that even the simplest spear depictions, including a graffito on the back of a strap-end from Birka, Sweden (G1), include ‘lugs’ or ‘wings’: lateral bars of uncertain function fixed below certain types of spear-head (Fuglesang 1980, 136-140; Halsall 2003, 165; Lewis 2005b, 192-193 and n. 42). These are probably depicted as one or more short horizontal lines beneath spear-heads, some with elaborate curling terminals that may represent ornamental lugs known from surviving spears (Fuglesang 1980, 139). Ultimately however, the collected material shows that swords were rendered with more detail and effort than spears, across a broader spectrum of images. The contrasting portrayal of spear and sword motifs creates the impression that spears did not fascinate contemporary artists and viewers in the same way that swords did – or even that they were thought to have less character or visual personality.

#### b) Swords with life-histories

The manner in which swords are depicted in Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian art establishes their visual and physical characteristics, providing them with a pictorial ‘body’ of sorts. However, it is hard to know how far this treatment reflects perceptions of swords as ‘living’ or ‘person-like’ objects. A stronger sense of ‘person-like’ swords derives from the presence of outmoded sword-types – that is, swords with life-histories – in art. The depiction of antiquated objects has been attributed to the copying of older models or exemplars (Carver 1986, 117; Lewis 2005a, 16-17); but analysis of the collected material suggests that some artists

depicted old weapons intentionally. Out-dated war-gear appears in both Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian art (Alkemade 1991 and Story 2003, 271 on helmets; John Ljungkvist pers. comm. on spears on Swedish helmet *Pressbleche*). Watt (1999, 179) has argued that the ring-sword shown on the gold foil from Sorte Muld, Denmark (Fig. 8) may be archaic, but the image's sixth- to ninth-century dating is too broad to confirm this, since ring-swords were used during the sixth and seventh centuries. Stern (2010) has likened swords illustrated on the eleventh-century Skokloster and Sparlösa runestones to Petersen's Type D, dated to between 800 and 850. This is more likely for the Skokloster example, which features Type D's rounded pommel and stocky straight lower guard, but the images are not quite detailed enough to cement the parallel. However, the similarity between these two sword-bearing horsemen and two tenth-century silver figurines from grave 825 at Birka, Sweden (M13-14) raises the possibility that the stone-carver copied earlier models from a different medium, thereby perpetuating archaic sword-types artistically – whether intentionally or not (Marjolein Stern pers. comm.). Regrettably, Scandinavian evidence is too insubstantial to draw authoritative conclusions. However, Anglo-Saxon art provides a clearer example of an antiquated sword-type persisting pictorially long after it became 'obsolete' in reality (Carver 1986, 117-118).

The tri-lobed sword pommel, named for its three distinctive 'lobes' or protrusions, was fashionable between the early eighth and late tenth centuries (Jakobsson 1992, 72, *Tabell* 10). Depictions of the pommel dating to that period are roughly contemporary with the pommel, but by the eleventh century the type can be described as outmoded, and therefore only eleventh-century images are analysed here. The database contains ninety securely-identifiable depictions of tri-lobed pommels from eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon art: eighty-eight in illuminated

manuscripts, one on the Bayeux Tapestry, and one on a stone cross-shaft in All Saints Churchyard, Brailsford, Derbyshire (Collingwood 1923; DB1:Q6). The latter is weatherworn and covered with lichen, but the pommel depicted upon it appears lobed under close inspection and when a finger is run along its contours (Fig. 48).

Strikingly, 80% of the collected tri-lobed swords are wielded by figures possessing some form of ‘special’ status (Chart 8; DB1:Q7). These include royalty, such as a king in the Harley Psalter (folio 29: Ohlgren 1992, pl. 2.50), Saul in the Bury Psalter (folio 87v: Ohlgren 1992, pl. 3.32) and the Pharaoh in the Old English Hexateuch (folios 24v, 58v, 59, 68, 73, 73v, 76, 79v). Others in this manuscript are in royal service, including messengers (folios 76, 141), attendants (folios 60v, 68) and weapon-bearers (folios 34, 68v, 71, 79v, 84). There are major Biblical figures: Abraham (IM8, folios 38 and 95v), Moses (IM8, folio 75v), David (IM11, folio 93: Temple 1976, ill. 220; IM13, folio 8v: Temple 1976, ill. 307), Joshua (IM8, folio 95v) and Reuben (IM9, folio 109: Ohlgren 1992, pl. 3.43). In two manuscripts, God’s angels brandish tri-lobed swords (IM6, page 46: Ohlgren 1992, pl. 16.23; IM7, folio 8v: Ohlgren 1992, pl. 2.15), and in the Bury Psalter, Christ himself (folio 88: Ohlgren 1992, pl. 3.33). Warriors in the command of important figures, who might reasonably be interpreted as high-status retainers, also carry this weapon.

Since most of these scenes are set in the Biblical past, it has been argued that artists depicted old swords simply to reflect the antique subject matter (Carver 1986, 117; Lewis 2005a, 45-46). However, the database contains examples of *contemporary* elite figures carrying tri-lobed swords. The clearest is King Knútr in the Winchester *Liber Vitae* (IM10; Fig. 24), but the figure on the Brailsford cross-shaft may also be interpreted as elite, since he or his family were able to commemorate him with a stone monument. Also included is a Norman warrior on



the Bayeux Tapestry who wears a tri-lobed sword but fights with another (Fig. 25). These details have been dismissed as mistakes: the tri-lobed pommel as a poorly-executed hemispherical pommel; the second sword as an empty scabbard with an extra hilt added erroneously (Lewis 2005a, 51; Musset 2005, 49, 255); or as a reserve weapon (Kiff 1984, 192). Alternatively, it may have belonged to the Norman's opponent, snatched and used against him during the *mêlée*. These arguments can be challenged. First, the tri-lobed pommel seems genuine: upon close inspection, the pommel's orange outline clearly curves into the yellow field of the pommel, and out again, creating the distinctive lobed shape. Second, the care afforded to depictions of war-gear throughout the Tapestry suggests that the designer would not have made the elementary mistake of adding an extra hilt to a scabbard – particularly if the design was laid out upon the linen before stitching (Lewis 2007, 119; Wilson 2004, 10). Third, if the sword represents a convention of carrying reserve weapons, we might expect it to appear more frequently on the Tapestry than this once. Finally, so few figures without mail-armor carry swords in the battle scenes – the database returns just one other, in Scene 54 (Wilson 2004, pl. 66) – that it seems unlikely to have belonged to the doomed man, who lacks armor. The Norman warrior's iconographic context most strongly conveys the designer's desire to emphasise his significance. First, he appears between two horses moving in opposite directions, acting like a visual frame drawing the eye to him; second, he stands behind a Norman cavalryman carrying a conspicuous wyvern-emblazoned shield and helmet with embellished nasal-guard; and third, the very next scene depicts the death of Harold, the implication being that this part of the Tapestry portrays an elite section of the Norman army fighting an elite section of the Anglo-Saxon army, which contained the English king and his retainers. Wilson (2004, 195) and Owen-Crocker (2007, 155)

both suspect that this scene illustrates an ‘iconic’ moment at Hastings, known to the Tapestry’s audience but not transmitted to us, in which case the depicted warriors were probably of notable reputation. Indeed, the juxtaposition of this scene with the death of King Harold suggests that the two-sworded warrior was involved in a significant turning point during the battle. It may also be noteworthy that he *wears* the tri-lobed sword and fights with the other: if it was an antique, he would have been reluctant to use it in combat and may have worn it as a symbol instead.

One might argue that the strong correlation between tri-lobed swords and elite figures in eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon art suggests that it was not the tri-lobed sword in particular, but swords in general, that signified ‘special’ status. However, just 42% of other sword-types depicted in the same manuscripts are wielded by ‘special’ figures (Chart 9 and DB1:Q8; the Bayeux Tapestry is excluded on the grounds that its hundreds of sword motifs would swamp any patterns). It is therefore plausible that the artists of these artworks need not have been passively copying earlier models, but actively and meaningfully employed the tri-lobed pommel as an iconographic motif pertaining to elite status. Carver (1986, 129, 118) suggests that the tri-lobed pommel persisted in art because it was ‘artificially preserved or halted through prestige’: a popular design that became part of the ‘iconographic vocabulary’ for how swords were portrayed and how audiences expected to see them. This argument can be broadened by suggesting that the tri-lobed pommel motif became part of the iconographic language for how the swords of *elite men* were portrayed – at least, in one region of England. The majority of the analysed artworks are known or thought to have been made in Canterbury (IM6-9, IM11; T2), with the remainder from Winchester (IM10, IM12-13). This might be due to the generally high number of surviving Canterbury manuscripts (Dumville 2001,

appendix), or perhaps that Canterbury artists were copying the same model(s), causing iconographic patterns to emerge; but it is just possible that the tri-lobed pommel motif's association with high status wielders was a feature of eleventh-century art at Canterbury, and possibly further afield.

The significance of outmoded sword motifs is underlined by the 'updating' of other war-gear motifs in conjunction with contemporary fashions. Many artists 'moved with the times' by depicting modern war-gear, often alongside the archaic swords discussed above. Pointed or conical helmets appear in Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian art during the tenth century, simultaneously with their appearance on the battlefield (Lewis 2005b, 181-183; Tweddle 1992, 1129-1131). The database contains examples of its depiction on Anglo-Saxon coins of Edward the Confessor (C9), in illuminated manuscripts including the Tiberius Psalter (folios 8v and 9: Temple 1976, ill. 307-308) and frequently throughout the Old English Hexateuch, stone sculpture in northern England (ST15-17, ST19, ST21) and the Bayeux Tapestry; and in Scandinavian art, on an antler mount from Sigtuna (CV3), metal figurines from Rällinge and Lindby (M15-16), and a runestone from Ledberg (ST28) – all from Sweden – and coins of Knútr, Harðaknútr, Óláfr Haraldsson and Haraldr Hardraðr (C5-C8; Lewis 2005b, 181-183; Tweddle 1992, 1129-1131). The same is true of kite-shaped shields, which appear in the Harley Psalter, Bayeux Tapestry and a carved stone slab in St Nicholas' Church, Ipswich (ST31) contemporaneously with their use in real life. Even disc-shaped sword pommels, which emerged at the end of the period under discussion, occur in the Old English Hexateuch (folios 24v, 36v, 73, 76) and on a runestone from Lund, Skåne, Sweden (ST30), intriguingly worn by two shield-bearing wolves. The parallel depiction of old and new war-gear suggests that artists selected which motifs to depict where, rather than copying wholesale from

pictorial models, reinforcing the argument that archaic swords were meaningfully rather than accidentally depicted.

### c) Swords in action

‘Living’ swords can also be sought pictorially by examining the contexts in which they are shown: what they do, how they are used and how ‘active’ or ‘passive’ their role is. In the collected images, swords are used in various contexts (referred to as ‘context groups’ in the database). Some contexts seem ‘active’, with the weapon shown in clear action; others more ‘passive’, where it is simply held, worn or depicted on its own. The clearest active use is violence, with 59% of Anglo-Saxon and 39% of Scandinavian sword motifs pictured thus (Charts 10-11; DB1:Q9). This violence is typically ‘martial’, involving battle or fighting, with a tiny proportion involving hunting, suicide, sacrifice or execution – the latter group predominantly in Anglo-Saxon art. Sacrifice and execution have strong ritual or ceremonial connotations, but are categorised as violence on the grounds that they involve bloodshed (see below for more on ritual scenes, 86).

41% of Anglo-Saxon and 61% of Scandinavian sword motifs are not shown in violent action. These include swords held or worn, sometimes by enthroned authority figures; borne in non-violent ritual scenes; as solitary (‘unaccompanied’) motifs; or in other situations, such as treasure hoards or bonfires. Ostensibly, these swords seem to be functionally inactive when compared with those portrayed in violent action. This is a significant proportion, and a possible reading is that swords were indeed viewed as passive status symbols, as traditional interpretations maintain. However, the other key offensive weapon of the period – the spear – is also depicted both inside and outside of violence to a considerable extent (Chart 12; DB1:Q10),

implying that there is nothing particularly special about the sword's iconographic profile here.

However, a closer inspection of the way in which sword motifs are arranged suggests that some 'inactive' swords should be interpreted as engaged in some kind of active use. One way to determine this is to examine if the sword is bare or sheathed, signifying whether it should be seen as ready for action or not. Unfortunately, this is not always clear: some blades are clearly bare because fullers or inscriptions can be seen upon them, while others are obviously sheathed due to the presence of scabbard fittings or sword-belts; but as noted above, blades typically appear plain so it is difficult to discern whether the artist intended to depict a bare sword or not. A more useful method is to analyse the orientation of sword motifs – upright, reversed, horizontal – each of which provides a contrasting visual message.

In Anglo-Saxon art, 9% of sword motifs are held or worn by figures in images that project their authority (Chart 10), for instance enthroned rulers or their attendants (an uncommon scene in Scandinavian art: see below, 112). These swords could be interpreted as simple signifiers of elite status, given their pictorial context and physical passivity. However, around two thirds (67%) of these weapons are oriented upright (Chart 13; DB1:Q11), and their poised visual quality could be interpreted as actively embodying or enhancing the authority of the leaders with whom they appear. This seems especially true where sword-bearing rulers are shown asserting their command: the dramatic, frontally-arranged Pharaoh at his baker's execution in the Old English Hexateuch (folio 59: Fig. 21); Pilate dispensing with Christ in the Tiberius Psalter (folio 12v: Fig. 26); and Herod ordering the Massacre of the Innocents in the Bury Psalter (folio 87v: Fig. 27; Harris 1960, 204). By contrast, reversed sword motifs seem to weaken a figure's authority. Karkov (2004,

169-170) reads the juxtaposition of an upright and reversed sword motif on the Bayeux Tapestry as an indicator of legitimate and illegitimate rule. At his coronation (Scene 31: Fig. 28), Harold receives an upright sword: a symbol, argues Karkov, of legitimate kingship; but in the following scene a reversed sword is held by Harold's attendant (Scene 32: Fig. 29), who may or may not be taking the weapon from the king. Karkov proposes that the reversed sword motif, coupled with Harold's slumped posture and the absence of the Latin title *Rex*, 'king', above his head, demonstrates that his kingship is illegitimate, founded on a broken oath to William of Normandy and signalling his imminent downfall. This is a credible interpretation: no other enthronement scene in the Tapestry features a reversed sword held by a ruler or his attendant. A *horizontal* sword is held by William's companion in Scene 48, but this may have been arranged to avoid detracting from William's authority – exemplified by his own *upright* sword. Therefore it is possible, as Karkov suggests, that sword orientation functioned as a barometer of authority on the Tapestry. However, the use of reversed sword motifs to undermine an individual's authority seems not to have been iconographic convention in these types of scene. On several folios in the Old English Hexateuch (65, 68, 73v, 83v) and one in an eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon miscellany (IM12, folio 85v), enthroned figures hold reversed swords without any sense that their authority is questionable. The frequency of upright swords in enthronement scenes may signify widespread pictorial convention; but the contrasting orientation of Harold's sword in the Bayeux Tapestry may have been the innovation of its designer.

The use of swords in ritual settings is another potentially 'active' context of use, but such scenes are hard to identify. Some carry explanatory inscriptions or illustrate texts in which a ritual occurs: a king 'dubbing' a retainer with a sword in

the Harley Psalter (folio 65; Duffey 1977, 129-130, fig. 17); Spes presenting the Sword of Vengeance to Humilitas in the Prudentius manuscripts (IM3, folio 16: Stettiner 1905, Taf. 55-56:5; IM4, folio 16v: Ohlgren 1992, pl. 15.22; IM5, folio 15: Stettiner 1905, Taf. 55-56:11); God furnishing Christ with a sword in the Bury Psalter (folio 32: Harris 1960, 421 and fig. 30); and William presenting arms to Harold in the Bayeux Tapestry (Scene 21: Wilson 2004, pl. 24). Scenes of execution and sacrifice may also fall into this category. In this study they are categorised as violence on the grounds that they involve bloodshed, but arguably they also possess a symbolic or sacral nature and an interesting pattern emerges when they are analysed: swords are the most frequently depicted piece of war-gear in scenes of execution and sacrifice, accounting for 55% of war-gear appearing in sacrificial scenes and 85% in execution scenes (Chart 14; DB1:Q12). This could imply that swords were seen as the most appropriate tool to use in these contexts: a spear, by contrast, appears in just one apparently sacrificial scene collected by this database – on the Stora Hammars I picture-stone. However, interpretations must be made with caution. First, the four sacrificial scenes containing swords that were identified by this research are Anglo-Saxon, meaning that any ritual significance for swords in these acts may have been confined to this region: indeed, the sacrificial scene that features a spear, mentioned above, is Scandinavian. Second, the Anglo-Saxon sacrificial scenes all depict the same event – Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac, from the Book of *Genesis* (22.9-10) – suggesting simply that the established early medieval iconography for this scene involved a sword. Furthermore, three of the four images appear in late tenth- to eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon copies of Prudentius’ *Psychomachia* (IM3, folio 1: Stettiner 1905, Taf. 49-50:1; IM4, folio 4: Ohlgren 1992, pl.15.1; and IM5, folio 2: Stettiner 1905, Taf. 49-50:8), all of which were apparently copied from the same

model (Woodruff 1930, 20) which could explain the recurrence of swords in these scenes. Finally, the fourth image, which is in the eleventh-century Old English *Hexateuch* (folio 38; for this and subsequent illustrations, see Dodwell and Clemons 1974), may literally follow the *Hexateuch*'s text in which Abraham performs the sacrifice with a sword (*Genesis* 22:3-13: Crawford 1922, 141-142). Similarly, the image of St Paul's martyrdom in the *Benedictional of St Æthelwold* (IM2, folio 95v: Dushman 1985, fig. 31), from the second half of the tenth century, follows the tradition that he was beheaded with a sword (Ferguson 1955, 137-138). However, scenes illustrating the martyrdom of Saints Laurence, in the *Harley Psalter* (folio 19: Ohlgren 1992, pl. 2.34) and Peter, again in the *Benedictional of St Æthelwold* (folio 95v), may be more revealing. Tradition maintains that neither was executed by sword (although swords were used as execution weapons during the Roman period: Farmer 1978, 237-8, 320-322), and yet both are shown with executioners brandishing this weapon. The artist may have intended the swords to accentuate the violence of the scene, but perhaps also its special character: the saints were executed under powerful rulers (Laurence under Valerian, Peter under Nero: Farmer 1978, 237, 320-322), whose authority may have been signalled pictorially by the use of swords at their executions. Overall, the iconographic database reveals that the most common weapons present in 'ritual' scenes are swords and spears, with swords accounting for 42% and spears 30% (Chart 15; DB1:Q13). Interestingly, these are offensive items most intimately connected with spilling blood. By contrast, the most common piece of defensive equipment in 'ritual' scenes – the helmet – occurs approximately three times less at 13%, and could be reduced further: many of these 'helmets' are of the 'horned' type, which has been interpreted both as a helmet (Hawkes *et al* 1965, 18; Owen-Crocker *et al* 2004, 180; Price 2002, 385) and a head-dress (Bruce-Mitford



1978, 187; Hawkes *et al* 1965, 23; Helmbrecht 2007-2008; Roesdahl and Wilson 1992, nos.184-185). Its frequent pictorial association with war-gear implies that it may indeed be some form of helmet, possibly ceremonial rather than for combat (Tweddle 1992, 1125), but its identification remains mysterious. Thus, removing it from the equation strengthens the iconographic link between offensive weapons and ritual scenes; and within this, swords appear to be singled out for specific types of symbolically and ideologically-charged rituals or acts.

Other ritual scenes are harder to discern, particularly in Scandinavian art where contemporary written sources that can help decode obscure imagery are sparse. Nonetheless, some images have been identified as ritual scenes, notably those featuring ‘dancing’ or ‘processing’ figures (Arent 1969, 137-139; Steuer 1987, 203, 281). Several are shown wielding swords, such as those on the helmet from Valsgärde grave 7 (Fig. 2), *Pressblech* dies from Toroslunda, Sweden (Arent 1969, 133-145), and similar figures on the Sutton Hoo helmet (Fig. 7). The sword’s function in these scenes is ambiguous; but examining their orientation and identifying bare and sheathed blades is again helpful. Superficially, the upright unsheathed swords brandished by ‘dancing’ warriors on the Sutton Hoo and Valsgärde grave 7 helmets (Figs. 7 and 2) create a combative impression; however, the figures are arranged side-by-side rather than in opposition, and hold reversed spears which reduce the aggressive potential of the scene (a similar scene probably appeared on another *Pressblech* fragment from Gamla Uppsala, Sweden: M3). Upright swords also feature in potentially ritual scenes on the Stora Hammars I picture-stone from Lärbro, Gotland (Register 4), interpreted by Jesch (1991, 129) as depicting pre-battle rites, and on the Ardre VIII stone (ST1; Register 1), which Lindqvist (1942, 23) interprets as the ceremonial creation of a picture-stone. In the

Anglo-Saxon Prudentius manuscripts, the Sword of Vengeance is presented upright to Humilitas (IM3, folio 16: Stettiner 1905, Taf. 55-56:5; IM4, folio 16v: Ohlgren 1992, pl. 15.22; IM5, folio 15: Stettiner 1905, Taf. 55-56:11), as is the sword that God presents to an angel in the Harley Psalter (folio 19). The iconographic conspicuousness of these upright weapons seems to frame them as active participants alongside their human wielders.

It does not necessarily follow that reversed and sheathed swords in ritual scenes should be read as inactive. Indeed, they convey, embody and enforce important messages about the ritual concerned. First, they characterise it as non-violent rather than hostile: we have seen how reversed spears create this effect, but down-pointing swords imply the same, for instance on the Torslunda *Pressblech* dies (also sheathed and alongside spears: Bruce-Mitford 1978, fig. 156a) and the eighth-century Tängelgårda I picture-stone from Gotland (ST3; Fig. 30). The optical signal transmitted by a reversed weapon is strikingly different to that of an upright or forward-thrusting weapon (Harrison 2004, 106). Though it may still be raised, the overall effect is not aggressive, and the argument that these scenes depict rituals rather than hostilities is reasonable. The manner in which the reversed sword is held may also be important. Steuer (1987, 203-205, 226) reads the line of warriors bearing reversed ring-swords on the Vendel XIV helmet (Fig. 5) as a ritual of submission or homage made by elite retainers to their lord. His interpretation is supported by the observation that the swords are not only sheathed but held by the scabbard rather than the grip, from which position the weapon cannot easily be drawn, thus reinforcing the submissiveness of the gesture (Jeremy Tanner pers. comm.). A female figure on the Oseberg embroideries (Fragment 4: Fig. 9) repeats this posture in a scene that may depict a ritual, as she is juxtaposed above a tree with men

hanging from its branches, perhaps having been sacrificed to the Norse god Óðinn (Krafft 1956, 35; Christensen and Nockert 2006, 376-377). The embroideries' narrative, if one existed, is irrecoverable due to their fragmentary survival, but the sword motif's arrangement suggests subservience, possibly to the god in question, or perhaps a concession of military defeat if the scene links up with battle scenes shown on the other fragments. A poignant final example demonstrates how reversed sword motifs can embody the character of a ritual. The procession of three men on the Tängelgårda I picture-stone (Fig. 30) has been interpreted as a funeral (Lindqvist 1942, 93). It is tempting to speculate that the men's reversed swords were intended to personify the deceased man's state.

Swords which are held or worn in scenes outside of enthroned and ritual contexts are typically shown pointing downwards. 110 such swords were collected from Anglo-Saxon art, of which 70% are reversed; in Scandinavian art there are 64, with 84% reversed (Charts 16-17; DB1:Q14). In the absence of any other clear iconographic purpose – at least, one which can be recovered today – it could be concluded that these swords were intended to function pictorially as simple status markers (categorised in this study by the term 'passive'). In the Junius manuscript (page 57; c. 1000; Temple 1976, ill. 192), an enthroned Cain addresses a group of people, the foremost and rearmost carrying swords which may identify them as leaders or spokesmen; the foremost swordsman also extends his right hand towards Cain, as if in communication. A similar sense is conveyed on folio 73v of the Old English Hexateuch (Fig. 31), in which the Pharaoh is shown meeting a group of Hebrews headed by a swordsman, and also in the Harley Psalter (folio 13v: Fig. 32), where the 'King of Glory' is welcomed to a walled city by a figure differentiated from his companions by his sword. Sword motifs may also differentiate people on

three Gotlandic picture-stones. The Viking-period Änge I stone (ST14; Register 3) depicts a group of five departing from a seated figure, only two of whom appear to wear swords; the earlier Broa XVI stone (ST8; Register 3) portrays another seated figure flanked by two others, one of whom may wear a sword; and the Ardre VIII stone (Register 2: Fig. 33) depicts a six-crew ship, the central group of four headed by two swordsmen. Their foremost position, as if leading their swordless companions, may further exemplify their superiority. However, such small details demand careful interpretation: the picture-stones, originally erected as open-air monuments, have suffered centuries of weathering while their re-painting by Swedish archaeologist Sune Lindqvist during the twentieth century may not be perfectly accurate (Nylén and Lamm 1988, 17). Consequently, more or fewer swords may appear on the stones than can be seen today.

The iconographic significance of orientation in characterising sword motifs is reinforced when comparing them with spear motifs. Spears are used in the same contexts as swords, but their orientation shows a markedly different pattern: 86% of Anglo-Saxon and 75% of Scandinavian spear motifs are depicted upright or pointing forwards (Chart 18-19; DB1:Q15). This suggests that the default iconographic position for spears was upright, regardless of active or inactive function. Indeed, this orientation is so common that reversed or backwards spears like those on the Sutton Hoo and Valsgärde 7 *Pressbleche* and on the Bayeux Tapestry (Scenes 8, 55-56) are visually jarring, and invite deeper analysis in a future study.

In summary, Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian images depict swords performing actively – even in contexts in which they appear to be passive participants. Swords therefore possess a pictorial ‘life’ of sorts, bringing us closer to

notions of ‘living’ swords. However, other images in the database depict swords in apparently autonomous action, without the need of a wielder.

#### d) Animated swords

In certain images of swords in the corpus, a sense of animation is achieved using pictorial techniques like composition and disproportionate scale. To take the first of these, some artists’ arrangement of sword motifs create a dynamic visual impression which underlines the weapon’s functionality. The eighth-century Stora Hammars I picture-stone seems imbued with movement due to the repetitive juxtaposition of brandished swords: in Register 1 (Fig. 34) two figures attack a third, the right-hand swordsman with his weapon high and the left-hand swordsman chopping downwards so that the full sword-stroke is depicted between them, creating a sense of motion. In Registers 3-5, groups of opposing figures wield swords high over their heads; but particularly effective is Register 4 (Fig. 35), in which ship- and land-bound warriors face each other brandishing their blades in the same diagonal posture – a stylised but arresting realisation of violent action. Swords are similarly arranged on the late ninth-century Lindisfarne grave marker (ST12; Fig. 36) along with two battle-axes. Equally dramatic are images which show swords at disproportionately large sizes, dwarfing their wielders. The Old English Hexateuch’s outsize swords have been attributed to the artist’s favouritism towards this weapon or, unfairly, his lack of skill (Hooper 1998, 92-93; Kiff 1984, 190; Laking 1920, 12-13). In fact, not all swords in this manuscript are oversized, and the artist may have deliberately manipulated their scale to achieve certain effects. In conflict scenes their vastness creates a sense of kinetic violence, particularly upon folios 24v (Fig. 22), where huge swords dominate the midst of a battle, and 25 (Fig. 37), where four large blades arranged equally

across the page, all angled forwards in the same direction, construct an atmosphere of brutal onward momentum. Most striking is the sword on folio 38 (Fig. 20), with which Abraham prepares to sacrifice Isaac. This enormous weapon, larger than Abraham himself, hangs menacingly above the pair – thrusting even into the text on the page.

The effect of these methods of composition and scaling is that swords seem capable of movement and dominate the scene. However, in all the examples cited above, the swords are still under the control of their wielders: therefore, it does not follow that artists or viewers perceived these weapons as ‘animated’, with the sword acting autonomously rather than directed by a human. However, a small group of Scandinavian and Scandinavian-influenced images depict swords performing without a human intermediary (Figs. 38-40). These are a late ninth- to tenth-century stone grave marker from Kirby Hill, Kirkby-on-the-Moor, North Yorkshire (ST13); an eleventh-century sandstone slab from Tanberg, Norway (ST29); and beyond the geographical limits of this thesis, a decorated axe from Vladimir-Suzdal, Russian Federation. These motifs have been interpreted as an ‘abbreviated’ form of Scandinavian iconography relating to Sigurðr, a mythical Norse hero whose deeds are preserved in later texts. The lone sword is thought to represent the moment when Sigurðr slays the dragon Fáfnir with the famous sword Grámr (Bailey 2003, 17; Fuglesang 1980, 84 and 2006, 6). A man interpreted as Sigurðr himself is shown stabbing through Fáfnir’s rune-inscribed body on tenth- to eleventh-century Swedish runestones from Ramsund (ST26: Fig. 41), Gök (ST23: Fig. 42) and Drävle (ST32: Fig. 43; Stern 2009). It is possible that the wielderless sword was intended to ‘stand in’ for Sigurðr, or signify Fáfnir and therefore Sigurðic iconography (Ploss 1966, 64), but the motif’s uniqueness amongst other wielderless weapons in the corpus is

suggestive: the Oseberg embroideries contain scenes in which more shields or spears are depicted than bearers (Christensen and Nockert 2006, 377), meaning that the warriors' presence must be inferred from their equipment – a fairly straightforward 'abbreviation'. Christensen and Nockert (2006, 373, 377) comment that spears and arrows interspersed with warriors contribute to the embroideries' 'martial feel' – perhaps implying the presence of unseen armed men, an idea supported by the weapons' typically upright orientation. Fuglesang (2006, 7-8) argues that when the Scandinavian war-ship motif became unmanned in the eleventh century, the retention of a row of shields may have signified a warrior crew that was no longer physically portrayed. Examples include the Danish Bösarp and Tullstorp runestones (ST22, ST27), and the Ledberg stone from Östergötland, Sweden. These motifs all appear in martial or latently martial contexts – a battlefield, a war-ship – and therefore might reasonably be interpreted as 'abbreviated' warriors. Wielderless weapons which appear outside of this context are less easily reconciled with the abbreviated warrior concept: an arrow on a seventh-century Anglo-Saxon gold coin from the Crondall Hoard (C1); a bow-and-arrow on an early tenth-century Anglo-Saxon silver penny (C4); Viking-period weapon graffiti on foreign coins found in Scandinavia (G1-G2); and weapon-shaped amulets (see below, 101). Can these be read as projections of warrior identity, or the type of martial authority associated with warriorhood? Indeed, the 'Sword St Peter' coins issued by tenth-century Viking rulers of York, together with a rare derivation struck at Lincoln (C2-C3), feature a sword on the obverse in place of a royal bust (Grierson and Blackburn 1986, 323 with references) – literally 'standing in' for an authority figure (Fig. 44). Another interesting case is the Ryda runestone from Västergötland, Sweden (ST24), whose sword-shaped runic ribbon commemorates a man named Tøekr. It is interesting to consider whether the

sword motif was intended to represent his warrior status, and its reversed orientation his now-lifeless state.

But could a contemporary belief in animated swords, thought able to act under their own volition, underlie some of these images? This idea certainly seems to feature in contemporary literature (see Chapter 6.2c). It may be significant that only swords are shown performing violent action on their own (Marjolein Stern pers. comm. on Swedish figural runestones): while the Kirby Hill, Tanberg and Vladimir-Suzdal swords are shown thrusting through the serpent's body, the other lone weapon motifs described above are more ambiguous in their function. The Stora Hammars I picture-stone features a spear-like motif across the top left of Register 4, perhaps thrown by one of the warriors in the conflict below; but then, the motif may not be a spear at all (Fig. 35). More suggestive is the bow-and-arrow on the aforementioned Anglo-Saxon silver penny, its string drawn and arrow ready to fire. However, the 'action' of the weapon is ambiguous, and certainly not as clear as the sword penetrating the beast's body. May this therefore suggest that swords, more than any other weapons, were thought able to act on their own? It must be remembered that the stabbing sword motif is rare: only two were collected, with one more from a distant region – although more may have existed. It is difficult to base such a significant argument upon so little evidence, but the fact that no other weapon motifs in the collected material are presented in this way invites speculation.

### **3) Research Question 2: The Warrior-Sword Relationship**

In the collected images, a variety of military equipment accompanies figures identifiable as 'warriors': swords, spears, shields, helmets, body armour, axes, archery equipment, knives or seaxes, maces and clubs. However, identifying a



‘warrior’ is not straightforward. The concept that weapon burials contained warriors can no longer be taken at face value, since some individuals buried with war-gear have been found to be too young, old or disabled to fight (Härke 1990, 35-37 and 1992b, 150-153; see Chapter 2.2a for a fuller discussion of Härke’s studies). The caution now exercised when identifying individuals based on the artefacts which accompany them should also be applied to pictorial evidence. Some images, particularly memorials, may have functioned like furnished burials in that the arrangement of objects or attributes could be manipulated in order to construct messages regarding an individual’s status, which may or may not have reflected reality (Stern 2010; H. Williams 2006). The stone carvings of armed men which emerged in northern England during the tenth century have been widely interpreted as warriors, but this cannot be known for certain. Some, like the figure from Weston, West Yorkshire (ST18), carry only a sword, which may have communicated a range of meanings to contemporary viewers aside from ‘warrior’. However, it is imprudent to divorce war-gear motifs from warlike concepts altogether, and therefore three criteria were used to classify warriors in the collected images: first, associated texts or labels were used wherever possible; second, where these references were lacking, identification was based on the presence of specifically-martial war-gear: shields, helmets, armour and swords; and third, participation in actively violent contexts. This method, though not failsafe, is workable analytically.

#### a) Swords, warriors and warrior identities

The database reveals a strong correlation between sword motifs and warriors. In Scandinavian art, 73% of swords are wielded by figures interpretable as warriors, compared with 42% of swords in Anglo-Saxon art (Charts 20-21; DB1:Q16). Other

wielders, such as elite and Christian characters, could also be classified as warriors where they perform an analogous role; but adding these to the ordinary ‘warrior’ category would merely increase the already-substantial iconographic relationship between swords and warriors. These percentages suggest that swords were more likely to appear as the pictorial attribute of warriors in Scandinavian rather than Anglo-Saxon art: an issue explored further below (109).

While swords and warriors are closely associated in a general sense in the collected images, the picture becomes more complex with closer analyses. Quite apart from the broad ‘warrior’ and ‘non-warrior’ categories, elements of composition, juxtaposition and detail reveal that a plethora of warrior identities existed – and artists may have used sword motifs to differentiate grades of warrior. The first difference appears to have been between warriors who wielded swords and those who wielded other weapons. In Scandinavian art, the Ardre VIII picture-stone depicts a manned ship in which only the foremost men carry swords (Fig. 33), while several of the Oseberg embroidery fragments (1-2, 3A, 11A) show groups distinguished by their varying weaponry: some have spears, some have spears and swords, others have swords alone. In Anglo-Saxon art, Wilson (2004, 220 and pls. 66-67, 73) stresses how the Bayeux Tapestry designer’s use of war-gear motifs in Scenes 54 and 58 draws iconographic distinctions between ‘professional’ Norman troops equipped with swords, mail-armour and helmets, and levied Anglo-Saxon troops, who lack swords and mail-armour. Even more sophisticated distinctions can be found. In Scene 61 (Fig. 45) a group of Anglo-Saxon infantry struggles against Norman cavalry: the foremost two fighters are separated from the rest by a small gap; they also wear swords, which the others do not, and carry emblazoned shields that differ to the plain shields of their companions. As if to underline the distinction,

the principal warrior is also bearded. At his feet are two fallen swordsmen, perhaps also part of this leading group before their deaths. Here, the designer may use composition and pictorial attributes to differentiate combat leaders from those they lead, with the leaders emphasised by their possession of swords.

Warrior identity may have been even more complex than this. In two of the collected images, sword motifs are adapted in order to distinguish two different grades of swordsman. One of the Torslunda *Pressblech* dies (Fig. 18) depicts a pair of warriors, one of whom carries a different sword to his companion: a 'ring' motif is discernible on the hilt, identifying it as a ring-sword, while the other warrior's weapon, though damaged and worn, apparently lacks this detail (Steuer 1987, 205). The same differentiation appears on the Valsgärde 7 'rider' *Pressblech*, in which the horseman wears a ring-sword but his trampled foe does not (Fig. 46). Ring-swords have been associated with elite retainers, the ring symbolising an oath sworn to a lord (Steuer 1987, 203-205; Fischer 2007, 25): and thus, the creator of these images may have aimed to show two different types of sword-warrior – a lord's elite war-leader and a more ordinary warrior. However, the two warriors are otherwise identically armed, with boar-crested helmets and heavy spears. The difference between their swords is so subtle, visible only by scrutiny, that a deliberate attempt to differentiate the warriors cannot be confirmed; but the contrasting decoration on the hems of their garments may support the idea that they should be seen as different to each other. Moreover, the iconography of other Swedish helmet *Pressbleche* suggests a concern to distinguish different warriors: a foil on the Vendel XIV helmet depicts a line of similarly-armed men, but the foremost has boar's tusks protruding from his face or helmet (Stolpe and Arne 1927, pl. XLII, fig. 1). A ship's crew on a picture-stone from Smiss, Stenkyrka on Gotland (ST5) have alternately pointed and rounded

heads, above which is a scene showing two confronting armies, one on land and one in a small ship, also with alternating head-shapes. These may represent two different types of helmet (Lindqvist 1941, 76), or differentiate helmeted and bare-headed men. While interpretations are speculative, it is possible that the figures and their armament were meaningfully arranged to denote different grades of warrior, from better-equipped leaders to more modestly-armed men. Variation in the iconography of other war-gear supports the idea that variations in sword iconography were also intentional, conveying meaningful messages about the warriors depicted. The various sword-types depicted in Anglo-Saxon manuscripts may also distinguish classes of sword-wielder, as argued in the analysis of tri-lobed swords, above (Section 4.2b).

While Hadley (2006b, 277) warns that crude or stylised illustrations raise doubts about how much significance should be attached to pictorial ‘distinctions in military apparel’, she concludes that such differentiation can be meaningful. The collected material supports this, and promotes the idea that early medieval warrior identity was complex and plural – warrior *identities* rather than *identity* existed. Figures were not simply designated as ‘warrior’ or ‘non-warrior’, ‘sword-warrior’ and ‘non-sword warrior’ – the *grade* of warrior mattered, and artists purposefully manipulated the sword motif alongside other iconographic techniques to express and construct individual warrior identities.

#### b) Women and swords

The connection between swords and masculinity identified by scholars (Hadley 2004 and 2006b; Harrison 2004, 52) is confirmed by the collected images, which overwhelmingly associate swords with males. However, a small but fascinating group of images place swords in the hands of women. The Anglo-Saxon

*Psychomachia* manuscripts depict the warring Virtues and Vices as sword-brandishing women, but this merely mirrors the text, which does the same. From Scandinavia, the Oseberg embroideries contain images of women armed with swords (Fig. 47; Christensen and Nockert 2006, 35-36), and female sword-bearers may also appear on the Ardre VIII picture-stone from Gotland (Register 2). Interestingly, all of these women can be considered ‘extraordinary’: the women in the *Psychomachia* manuscripts are personifications of personality traits; the Ardre figures appear in scenes that have been linked to Norse mythology, and so may be mythological characters (Lindqvist 1942, 23-24; Wilson and Klindt-Jensen 1980, 80-82); and the Oseberg warriors have been interpreted as Amazons at the legendary battle of Bråvalla (Christensen and Nockert 2006, 117-118) – impossible to verify, but their beast-masks imply a mythological context. Any link between swords and femininity therefore seems confined to the imagined worlds of art and literature.

However, real women did ‘wield’ swords – albeit in miniature form. 91 weapon-shaped ‘amulets’ dating to the sixth to tenth centuries were collected, the majority of which were excavated from female graves in both England and Scandinavia (Meaney 1981, 148-159; Näsman 1975; Koktvedgaard Zeiten 1997, 2-5 and 15-18, who proposes a male context for some). 14% of these amulets represent swords, all of them from Scandinavia (Chart 22-23; DB1:Q17). We might reasonably expect women to favour defensive gear as apotropaic symbols, given its protective function (Harrison 2004, 105). Indeed, 41% of these amulets represent shields; but the popularity of offensive weapons, including swords, is clear. Indeed, Koktvedgaard Zeiten (1997, 36-27) has noted that numerous perishable amulets undoubtedly existed, meaning that the surviving ratio of offensive to defensive gear is not necessarily representative – many more examples of swords may have existed.

The collected images also contain two silver figurines of mounted swordsmen excavated from a female burial (grave 825) at Birka, Sweden – perhaps also amuletic in nature. The amulets' precise function is obscure; they may have been worn as pendants or suspended from belts for protective, cultic or decorative reasons (Fuglesang 1989; Meaney 1981, 148-159; Näsman 1975, 98-99; Koktvedgaard Zeiten 1997, 15-18, 39), but crucially they demonstrate that imagery of swords (and indeed, other war-gear) was not restricted males but was relevant to other social groups.

### c) Social groups and the mobilisation of sword motifs

Weapon-shaped amulets provoke a consideration of issues which lay beyond the contents of images towards the way in which sword motifs were mobilised and consumed. Such art-archaeological issues fall outside the scope of this study, but a few significant points relevant to the link between swords and warriors invite comment. The depiction of war-gear *upon* war-gear, such as the Swedish and Sutton Hoo helmets and a sword blade from Sarre, Kent (grave 250) inlaid with a sword motif (M7; Evison 1987, 25-26), demonstrate that the physical context of sword motifs could convey and construct notions of martial power and identity: as Alkemade (1991, 289-290) states, such artefacts embody 'the warriorship that played an emphatic role in the lifestyle of elites. This same warriorship is displayed in the armed and helmeted warriors and horsemen on the figurative *Pressbleche*'. A more immediate expression appears upon memorial stones. Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon stone carvings of armed men probably functioned as commemorative monuments, including the Gotland picture-stones, Viking period runestones and tenth-century carvings in northern England, some inscribed with text confirming the

stone's memorial function (Hadley 2004, 316 and n. 55; Hadley 2006b, 275-277; Fuglesang 2006, 7; Nylén and Lamm 1988, 9, 13). Armed warriors shown on memorials provide a strong statement about how the deceased man or his relatives wished him to be remembered – as a warrior, or at least connected with warrior status, martial power and heroic concepts (Hadley 2004, 316; Harrison 2004, 3, 53). Arguably, such a statement could only be achieved through the depiction of war-gear motifs, which were so closely aligned with these things.

Some memorials appear to invest swords with a special significance. Several of the aforementioned tenth-century 'warrior portrait' stones from northern England portray swords (ST17-20, ST33). The iconography of the stone from Weston, West Yorkshire (ST18) in which a sword-carrying man grasps the arm of a woman beside him, has caused debate as to whether it should be read as a hostile or protective scene. The sword's reversed orientation is consistent with a non-aggressive context, based on the analysis of orientation undertaken above, and Coatsworth (2008, 269 with references) is surely right to equate this stone with the other commemorative carvings of northern England. It is possible that the men honoured on these memorials were specifically shown with swords because they were, or wished to be depicted as, a particular type of warrior – a sword-wielder – therefore 'outclassing' those who only had the basic equipment of spear and shield. We must wonder whether this was a genuine reflection of the living warrior's armament, or whether the sword motif was purposefully used to construct an idealistic identity by tapping into notions of superiority, success and power that were connected with ownership of this weapon.

Elsewhere, the function of sword motifs is more socially ambiguous. Most enigmatic are the hundreds of motifs in illuminated manuscripts, which were created

in monastic settings by monks and illustrate texts that were probably used for Christian learning, teaching and devotion, personal or otherwise (Brown 2001). These artefacts were probably commissioned, owned and perused by both secular and ecclesiastical, warrior and non-warrior, groups (Magennis 2001, 84-85), and therefore the motifs they contained may have functioned differently depending on who viewed them. This is relevant to all images stored in the database: some were highly accessible, especially carved memorial stones and crosses which stood in the landscape or churchyards; and to a lesser degree large textiles like the Bayeux and Oseberg embroideries, which would have been seen by any who had access to the buildings they adorned. Other images had a more limited audience, such as ornamented war-gear or deluxe manuscripts which were restricted to their owner's sight. Overall, sword imagery will have had a range of consumers, all of whom may have interpreted and responded to it differently, depending on their social conditioning: a warrior may have felt a sense of masculine thrill at an image of sword combat, while others perhaps felt only terror.

#### **4) Research Question 3: The 'Living' Sword in Time**

In order to explore chronological developments in perceptions of 'living' swords and their relationship with warriors, the pictorial data was divided into three 'phases': Phase I covering c. 500-700, Phase II c. 700-900, and Phase III c. 900-1100. Several patterns emerged when comparing the images by phase. In Anglo-Saxon art, the frequency of sword motifs increases over time, peaking in Phase II, and with a concurrent increase in swords used violently and wielded by warriors. In Scandinavian art, sword motifs are distributed more evenly throughout the period with a peak also in Phase II, during which the link between swords, warriors and



violence appears particularly strong (Charts 24-28; DB1:Q4, 18 and 19). Some have linked the creation of violent imagery to particularly violent periods (Harrison 2004, 3) – although matters are unlikely to be as simple as this (Jeremy Tanner pers. comm.; see Chapter 2.2a for Härke’s problematic connection between frequency of violence and weapon burials). An increase in swords performing dynamically in image and reality raises the question of whether perceptions of swords as ‘living’, kinetic objects rather than static symbols or attributes also intensified. The fact that all recorded images of lone ‘stabbing’ swords collected for this study belong to Phase III (notwithstanding their small number) may support this idea; but overall it remains difficult to establish a certain connection between violence, violent imagery and its impact on perceptions of swords. The lack of reliable contemporary written records for the earliest Anglo-Saxon period, and for Scandinavia throughout, makes it virtually impossible to measure whether there was more, less or equivalent violence in comparison to the later period, when better records exist. However, it may be possible to connect the Phase II peak in Scandinavian weapon imagery with Viking activity, which was extensive at this time. The majority of Scandinavian Phase II sword motifs appear upon picture- and runestones which, as discussed above, often formed memorials to dead men, and it is not a great leap to imagine that some of these belonged to Vikings killed in action. Some Anglo-Saxon images have been linked with specific bouts of unrest: Hadley (2006b, 278) has noted that archery and sword motifs appeared on coins in York concurrently with new leaders taking charge during the tenth century. However, the appearance of individual war-gear motifs upon a coinage system that rarely featured them beforehand was unlikely to have been a passive reflection of violent times, and more likely an active proclamation by those commissioning the coins: perhaps a declaration of authority, intimidation,

victory, subjugation or something else, the significance of which was undoubtedly understood by those striking, viewing and using the coins (see below, 109).

Dividing the data into chronological phases reveals a further problem that is exemplified when the results are plotted on line charts (Charts 24-26): the sharp peak in Anglo-Saxon Phase III coincides with the Bayeux Tapestry and the corpus of illuminated manuscripts, which supply a vast 25% and 68% of all Anglo-Saxon sword motifs respectively, thereby distorting the Anglo-Saxon data (Chart 29; DB1:Q5). The frequency of manuscript motifs is less problematic, since they coincide with a general increase in book production; however, the Bayeux Tapestry is more of a 'freak' survival, a unique relic of an otherwise-lost medium that just happens to contain hundreds of weapon motifs, and accordingly will always create an imbalance in any statistical approach to early medieval iconography. While it is crucial to acknowledge the impact of this distortion on our ability to investigate the chronological development of sword imagery, cautious observations may be made if the motifs are examined in the light of what is known more broadly about the period.

The frequency of sword motifs and their link with violence and warriors may have been influenced by the relationship between art, religion and secular society. In Anglo-Saxon art, sword motifs are rare before Phase III: on stone sculpture, motifs are restricted to bows, arrows and spears in Christian images of archers or the Crucifixion (ST9-ST11, ST7) and in illuminated manuscripts mainly spears and knives (IM1, folio 124v: Alexander 1978, ill. 177). After 900, an increase in figural and secular imagery brought a corresponding increase in warrior depictions, and with these a new variety of war-gear motifs including helmets, shields, seaxes and, of course, swords, all of which rarely appeared upon earlier surviving stone sculpture according to the collected material. The same trend occurs in Anglo-Saxon

manuscripts (Lewis 2005a, 45): weapon motifs are uncommon before the tenth century, limited largely to representations of spears and knives – the latter appearing not in violent contexts, but as scribal tools used by saints writing their Gospels (see folio 124v of the Barberini Gospels: IM1, Alexander 1978, ill. 177). Later manuscripts, however, frequently depict well-armed men and a range of fighting equipment including hundreds of swords. The pattern of strongly-Christian images giving way to a greater variety of scenes, characters and equipment may have been a response to developments in artistic patronage. The appearance of warriors on northern Anglo-Saxon stone sculpture during the tenth century, mentioned previously, has been ascribed to a shift from monastic to secular sponsorship in the wake of Scandinavian settlement (Bailey 1980, 81-83; Hadley 2004, 318-320; Lang 2001, 34-36). A similar shift may have occurred in manuscript production; at least, secular patrons and the gifting of books between international rulers or church and state is better recorded after 800 (Brown 1991, 27-30). The carved stone warriors have been interpreted both passively, as reflections of a secular patron's interests, and actively, as projections or constructions of real or desired authority during moments of political insecurity (Bailey 2003, 16; Hadley 2006b, 277-278). The martial manuscript imagery might also reflect new secular tastes, but it should be remembered that many of these images illustrate Biblical texts in which conflict is a central theme. However, the influence of secular patronage may find confirmation in Scandinavian art. Due to Scandinavia's late conversion, art here was presumably fuelled by secular patrons throughout the period, and indeed images of war-gear, warriors and violence are represented more consistently across the three phases.

Preservation rates also influence the frequency of surviving imagery. Earlier stone sculpture and manuscripts are less likely to survive, and war-gear and warrior

imagery may have been more varied and abundant than it seems; after all, the eighth-century Repton Stone (ST4) depicts a figure bearing a multitude of war-gear (Bailey 1996, 85) including one of the few identifiable images of a seax to survive (Biddle and Kjølbye Biddle 1985, pl. VI). Ultimately, it remains uncertain whether these developments can be attributed to increasing secular patronage, political upheaval, both, or something else entirely. It is also difficult to state what these developments say about swords, as again the motif is part of a broader pictorial increase in martial imagery. However, the significance of the sword and its relationship with warriors becomes clearer when moving from chronological to cultural comparisons.

#### **5) Research Question 4: The ‘Living’ Sword in Space**

Dividing the collected images culturally reveals a number of interesting trends. The database contains more images of swords from England (73%) than from Scandinavia (27%: Chart 2; DB1:Q3). Furthermore, Anglo-Saxon sword motifs appear in more varied contexts of use (Chart 30; DB1:Q9), notably with figures in postures of authority. The Old English Hexateuch contains many illustrations of the enthroned Pharaoh, frequently attended by a sword-bearer (folios 22, 34, 48) but sometimes carrying the weapon himself (folios 58v, 59, 60v). The Bury Psalter depicts king Saul enthroned with a sword (folio 87v: Ohlgren 1992, pl. 3.32). In the Bayeux Tapestry, Guy of Ponthieu (Scenes 9-10; Wilson 2004, pls. 9-10) and William (Scenes 12, 14-15, 23 and 44; Wilson 2004, pls. 13, 16-17, 25 and 48) are seated with swords. Not only secular leadership is associated with this weapon: the Bury Psalter contains an image of a sword-wielding Christ (folio 88: Ohlgren 1992, pl. 3.33). In images where a figure’s authority is less overt, the sword motif signifies their importance. On the rear panel of the Franks Casket, which portrays the Roman

capture of Jerusalem under Titus in AD 70, the leading warrior in the upper left corner is distinguished from his spear-carrying comrades by his sword and helmet, supporting Beckwith's (1972, 117) interpretation of this figure as Titus himself. Interestingly, 'Titus' attacks another sword-wielding warrior who, on the basis of his weapon, may represent the leader of the Jewish forces.

Comparable scenes of authority featuring swords do not seem to appear in Scandinavian art. Instead, swords are chiefly associated with warfare and warriors, who wield 73% of Scandinavian sword motifs within the database (Chart 20; DB1:Q9). Swords appear at a roughly equal ratio with spears and shields in violent scenes (29%, 33% and 38% respectively: Chart 31; DB1:Q20), implying that they were perceived as typical warrior equipment in Scandinavia. In Anglo-Saxon art, by contrast, swords appear far less frequently than spears and shields in similar scenes (17%, 54% and 29% respectively: Chart 32). This strengthens arguments that swords were more accessible in Scandinavia (DeVries 1999, 195-197); indeed, their relative exclusivity in England may have influenced artists' selective deployment of sword motifs. It is even possible that the early tenth-century Scandinavian rulers of York pictorially exploited these contrasting perceptions. The aforementioned 'Sword St Peter' coin-type portrayed a sword instead of a ruler's bust on the obverse (Fig. 44). The sudden appearance of this exclusive weapon in the conventional location of authority seems dramatic: a statement of power and control which many Anglo-Saxons may have understood on account of the sword's elite associations in their culture. We cannot know whether the coin's designers intended this result – after all, another contemporary coin minted here features a bow-and-arrow, which was unlikely to have borne the same overtones – but the rarity of war-gear motifs on Anglo-Saxon coinage before this date means that their abrupt appearance marked a

significant break with the past, and in so doing demonstrated the power and influence of the new Scandinavian rulers.

Unaccompanied swords are more common in Scandinavian art: 11% of Scandinavian sword motifs fall into this category, compared with 1% of Anglo-Saxon (Charts 10-11). No clear examples of sword-shaped amulets equivalent to the miniature Scandinavian examples have yet been discovered in Anglo-Saxon England, although the seventh-century sword-shaped shield mount from Edix Hill and the sword motif upon the sword blade from Sarre, Kent grave 250 imply that wielderless swords did feature in Anglo-Saxon imagery. However, it is curious that only Scandinavian or Scandinavian-influenced images depict lone swords performing violent action. These statistics could hint at a greater willingness on the part of Scandinavian artists to 'abbreviate' warriors, or even a stronger belief in 'animated' swords: the issue certainly recurs in archaeological and written evidence, and is discussed fully in Chapter 7.5.

Various factors help to explain the higher frequency of swords, and greater variety of wielders and contexts of use, in Anglo-Saxon as opposed to Scandinavian art. This discrepancy could be partly illusory, caused by a lack of accessible Scandinavian records hindering the collection of more sword images; or it could be attributable to social and cultural factors relating to the significance of war-gear and its iconographic deployment. The collected material does not suggest that Scandinavian artists were disinclined to depict swords: representations appear from an early period and recur consistently into and beyond the eleventh century. Instead, the impact of Christianity upon visual culture should be investigated. Of the 425 Anglo-Saxon sword motifs held by the database, 68% appear in illuminated manuscripts (Chart 29; DB1:Q5). Books were central to Christian culture, and

conversion brought this new artistic medium to the Anglo-Saxons as early as the end of the sixth century. With the new faith came a host of new pictorial themes dictated by the demands of Christian and Classical texts, which concurrently provided varied opportunities for the deployment of sword imagery. Moreover, so many manuscripts survive today because Christian culture strove to preserve its books, exemplified by the Lindisfarne monks' conveyance of manuscripts (including the Lindisfarne Gospels) from the island in 875 in the wake of Viking raids (Brown 2003, 85). Scandinavia's late conversion denied artists this medium for much of the early medieval period, substantially limiting the amount of sword imagery that they were able to produce. Instead, they utilised the plastic arts of metalwork, sculpture and carving, and perishable media like wood, bone and textile that perhaps lacked the culture of preservation surrounding Christian books. Thus, while many more sword images undoubtedly existed, evidenced by quirks of survival like the Oseberg embroideries and carved wooden cart (CV2), many have perished.

The absence of Scandinavian scenes connecting swords with authority figures may also be explained by source-critical factors. The ambiguity of Scandinavian art can make it difficult to categorise wielders. While Anglo-Saxon images often have accompanying inscriptions that help identify weapon-wielding characters, Scandinavian art lacks these references and figures must be interpreted 'cold' based on their iconographic context, attributes and comparison across a whole corpus of similar images. A danger therefore exists that a non-warrior may be incorrectly classified as a warrior because he carries war-gear which, as we have seen, may not necessarily follow. Therefore, pictorial contexts and wielders which appear to be 'missing' from Scandinavian art may in fact exist, but modern viewers cannot identify them.

However, the scarcity of images showing Scandinavian rulers with swords may reveal conflicting cultural perceptions about this weapon's relationship with different social groups. The database returns just one clear portrait of a sword-bearing Scandinavian king: Knútr in the Winchester *Liber Vitae* (c. 1031; Fig. 24). Karkov (2004, 135-136, and nn. 76, 79) has argued that swords were rarely used in Anglo-Saxon royal iconography prior to this image, and analysis of the iconographic corpus supports her view: swords are pictured with Biblical kings and extraordinary characters like the Virtues and Vices – but not 'real life' monarchs. The sole potential candidate for an earlier sword-bearing Anglo-Saxon king – the figure on the eighth-century Repton Stone (Biddle and Kjølbye Biddle 1985, 263-264, 289-290) – is of conjectural identity and his sword so fragmentary that its presence is assumed rather than certain. Karkov (2004, 156, 160-163, 172) proposes that the Knútr portrait influenced the iconographies of *real* Anglo-Saxon rulers like Edward the Confessor, Harold and William I, who were portrayed with swords thereafter. Thus, while the sword was undoubtedly a powerful pictorial symbol in both cultures, its deployment may reflect culturally contrasting perceptions: in England, it was an exclusive iconographic symbol of elite power until late in the period; while in Scandinavia, it was consistently viewed as a weapon of war associated with fighting men, elite or otherwise. This may in turn suggest that there was little perceived difference between the two – elite men were warriors, and warriors were elite men. It may be significant that most Anglo-Saxon images of sword-bearing warriors date to the period of Scandinavian settlement, with virtually all stone-carved examples appearing in regions most subject to Scandinavian influence – primarily northern and western Yorkshire, but also Lincolnshire, Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire and Suffolk, all of which fell within the Scandinavian-controlled region known as the Danelaw.



Only after the Scandinavian arrival, and under the influence of the incomers' iconographic and cultural ideas, was this motif increasingly viewed as an appropriate attribute of real figures as opposed to the special characters of Biblical and Classical texts.

## **6) Conclusion**

Swords have a dynamic pictorial character in the visual culture of early medieval England and Scandinavia. Artists achieved this by illustrating them in active use, with violence a particular function, and by mobilising the motif in ways which contrasted with other weapon motifs. Notions of sword biography may underpin the depiction of archaic swords, while the varying detail applied to different sword parts raises questions regarding what exactly constituted a 'sword' – with the likelihood that different groups would supply different answers. The sword motif was capable of expressing and constructing warrior identities, both in a general and more complex sense, dividing sword- from non-sword warriors and even denoting various categories of sword-wielder. However, sword motifs were not only relevant to warriors: female and Christian groups also employed them. Moreover, the level of accuracy achieved by artists and craftsmen in their depictions of swords suggests that they not only knew what swords looked like, but in some cases may have depicted them from life rather than artistic models. The implication is that the social significance of swords was not restricted to those who used them for their practical function. Also apparent is the importance of examining images chronologically and by region, as significant developments and contrasts emerge amongst broader issues across time and space.

After analysing the material collected for this study, it is clear that plenty of scope remains for further research into the depiction not only of swords, but of war-gear more generally. A particularly valuable extension to this study would be to look beyond the motifs to the artefacts they adorn; and also to compare Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian art with that of the Continental mainland, Britain and Ireland. It is hoped that the work undertaken here will act as a platform for future study along these lines.

### 1) Introduction

The images discussed in Chapter 4 largely have a ‘missing link’ between the representation of swords and their real-world (as opposed to pictorial) wielders. With rare exceptions, such as the stone warrior memorials from northern England or the helmet *Pressbleche* from Sweden and Sutton Hoo, the number of sword images which were created or consumed by persons who actually owned swords is unknowable – although iconographic details provide ideas. By contrast, archaeology offers a more secure link between swords and their users (‘use’ being broadly defined and not limited to violence, as discussed below) because the swords themselves survive in archaeological contexts, or bear physical marks, that provide insights into this relationship. This chapter examines Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian perceptions of ‘living’ swords and their relationships with humans, through analysis of surviving swords and their find contexts.

#### a) Critical and contextual issues

Complete early medieval swords occur in a limited number of archaeological contexts. They are rare stray finds, although fittings such as pommels, guards, scabbard chapes, ring fittings and pyramidal mounts are not infrequently found as single finds and occasionally as part of hoards. In England and Scandinavia, early medieval swords are found either in watery locations such as bogs or rivers, or – more typically – in furnished burials. They were deposited in both inhumation and cremation graves, and are traditionally interpreted as indicating a person of

significant status on the basis of their material value and rarity by comparison with other weapons, such as spears.

The chronology and frequency of burials containing swords differs between England and Scandinavia, and also regionally within both. In Anglo-Saxon England the period of furnished burial ran from the fifth to early eighth centuries with a limited regional revival during the ninth-tenth centuries, probably in response to Scandinavian incursions. Sword burials are mostly located south and east of a line between the River Severn and the Wash, with a concentration in Kent (Cameron 2000, 34; Gilmour 2010, 59; Map 1). In Scandinavia furnished burial continued into the eleventh century, but with greater regional complexity as might be expected from a larger geographical area. In the pre-Viking period (c. 400-800) swords are found in areas notable for weapon burials: in parts of Sweden such as the south-easterly Mälars region and the Baltic island of Gotland; in Denmark mainly on the island of Bornholm, also in the Baltic; and in various parts of central and southern Norway (Nørgård Jørgensen 1997). The pattern is similar in the Viking Age (c. 800-1100) with Norway yielding the majority of swords but with many also from the island of Björkö in Lake Mälars, Sweden (Bodin 1987, 16-17; Map 2).

Several challenges present themselves when comparing the archaeology of swords in England and Scandinavia between c. 500 and 1100. The chronological mismatch in the period of sword burial, outlined above, is a minor problem as it provides the first point of contrast between the two regions (explored below, 108). More problematic is the differential survival of swords during the period in which furnished burial overlaps in both regions, c. 500-800: many more intact swords have been excavated from England than from Scandinavia, thereby hindering a direct comparison. A more general problem is the inconsistent quality of grave records

from both regions, particularly for excavations undertaken during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Many records comprise nothing more than a list of grave contents and little to no information about the distribution of grave goods within (Richardson 2005, 87-90, 96). The impact that these factors have on analytical results is accounted for in this study.

#### b) Approach

The first section of this chapter approaches perceptions of ‘living’ swords through a detailed examination of the weapons themselves. Surviving examples are selected from specific regions, periods and contexts, and certain aspects of these swords are studied closely. The second section discusses the relationship between sword and owner via a study of the distribution of weapons around the body in a series of inhumation burials. The third section re-addresses the same issues from a chronological perspective with the aim of identifying how perceptions of, and relationships with, swords changed during the early medieval period, while the fourth section compares and contrasts the Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian evidence. All analysis is based upon data collected within a purpose-built database, the details of which are outlined in each section, along with the specifics of the section case-studies.

#### **2) Research Question 1: The Sword as a ‘Living’ Object**

When investigating perceptions of ‘living’ swords archaeologically, one issue stands out: the presence of ‘old’ swords in the archaeological record. Such weapons had seemingly ‘lived’ long ‘lives’, presumably acquiring long, complex biographies and relationships, potentially with a range of individuals. Archaeologists have identified

swords in Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian graves which appear to have been ‘curated’ (purposefully preserved and / or kept in circulation), in a handful of cases for a century or more. It is tempting to link these weapons with numerous early medieval written references to heirloom swords passed down over generations (see Chapter 6.2b; also Ager 2006; Bone 1989, 63; Theuws and Alkemade 2000, 422-423; H. Williams 2006, 30, 40), and also to images of archaic swords discussed in Chapter 4.2b. In truth, the curation of swords during the early medieval period is a complex issue requiring careful methodological manoeuvring. Nonetheless, it opens fascinating lines of enquiry relating to sword biography, visual identity and characterisation which are highly relevant to the study at hand.

#### a) Method

The most straightforward method of identifying an old sword in a burial would be to compare the date of the sword with the date of the burial. Swords are usually dated typologically according to the form of their hilt fittings, particularly their pommels and guards, which developed in recognisable stages during the early medieval period (Petersen 1919; Wheeler 1927 and 1935; Behmer 1939; Menghin 1983; Geibig 1991). Blade typologies are less helpful for dating because blade forms did not develop so markedly: different types of blade can appear contemporaneously in the same cemeteries, and need not suggest a variance in date (McKinley 2003, 65; Nørgård Jørgensen 1999, 67; cf. Cameron 2000). Therefore, hilt typology appears to be the most reliable method for dating swords.

Immediately we encounter the first problem with this method. Hilt fittings tend not to survive on buried swords, having been removed before burial or perished if made from organic material like horn, bone or wood – mineralised traces preserved

upon sword tangs and rare survivals of complete organic fittings from England (York) and Scandinavia (Birka and Sigtuna) hint at what has been lost. With these factors in mind, therefore, an ideal set of conditions must be in place when seeking old swords in burials: an undisturbed, closely-dateable grave containing a sword with surviving metal fittings of a type that obviously predate the grave in which it is contained. Regrettably, precious few examples of extreme variance in sword- and grave-date have been found, and even these can be disproven or disputed. In England, three artefacts excavated during the nineteenth century from early Anglo-Saxon graves at Ash, Gilton in Kent were originally identified as Roman sword pommels but are more likely to be Renaissance-period door-knobs planted mischievously (Graves 23, 66 and 89: *Novum Inventorium Sepulchrale*). More promisingly, a sword from Castledyke South, Barton-on-Humber, has been posited as Iron Age due to its non-medieval form, but it could be a weaving sword because the occupant of the grave appears to have been female (Grave II: Drinkall and Foreman 1998, 248). In Scandinavia, Arne (1934, 74-75) argued that a peculiarly small pommel attached to the sword from Grave XIV at Tuna, Alsike, Sweden (SC1) resembled fifth-century pommels from Danish bog finds, although the grave itself is seventh century. Behmer (1939, 179), however, was happy to assign the same sword to c. 600-650 based on his own typology.

Comparing the date of sword and grave is further complicated by revisions to established chronologies. Individual burials or even whole cemeteries are subject to re-phasing, sometimes significantly. For example, scholars have re-dated the pre-Viking cemeteries at Vendel and Valsgårde in Uppland, Sweden repeatedly during the last half a century (Fig. 49). Sword typologies have also been revised, although

older versions are not yet fully superseded, possibly because typologies have become increasingly complex (see Eaves 1992 on Geibig 1991, and Chapter 2.1a).

The decisive blow against the method of comparing the dating of sword and grave is struck by the very nature of swords as objects. They are composite, formed from various parts which could be replaced as desired (Ager and Gilmour 1988, 19-20), meaning that any one sword could be a 'Frankenstein' type made from fittings of diverse date and type. The consequence is that the whole sword cannot be dated, but only its constituent parts (see below for further discussion, 136). Scholars are increasingly recognising the limitations of dating swords via typology (Fischer 2007, 26; Theuws and Alkemade 2000, 444). Similar problems attend dating based on the style of ornament found upon sword fittings, if these could be replaced (Sawyer 1971, 58-61); moreover some fittings may have been produced in a deliberately archaic style which create a false sense of age (Fischer 2007, 24; see below, 137).

These complexities exemplify the need for an alternative method when seeking curated swords in the archaeological record. For this purpose is it helpful to consider the term 'curation' more carefully. A curated object need not merely have been kept until it became old: it may also have been through a process of development, management and preservation which prolonged the period of time it was kept in circulation – in other words, its 'life'. This definition removes the notion that age is always measured in physical years: it is also recorded in the physical changes which an object undergoes during a passage of time, such as wear and tear, refurbishment and modification. For swords, these changes are most easily apprehended on metal fittings. While blades can be examined for proof of re-sharpening, polishing, damage and so on, their corroded state limits the investigative possibilities without using specialist techniques. Accordingly, this section comprises



a case-study of sword curation in Anglo-Saxon England and Scandinavia based upon signs of wear, repair and modification to metal fittings: the changes which can be observed with the naked eye, and which therefore may have been more influential in shaping ideas of swords with perceived biographies.

The chronological focus of this section is the fifth to eighth centuries, when swords were deposited in graves roughly concurrently in both regions, although Scandinavian burials continued beyond the eighth century (the ninth to eleventh centuries are treated in Section 5.4). Only inhumations are considered, since swords in cremation burials are often too fragmented for analysis (Bodin 1987, 5, 56-58; John Ljungkvist pers. comm.: a notable exception being the sword from Woodnesborough, Kent (ASK1): see below, 130). The regions selected for investigation are those richest in swords: for Anglo-Saxon England, the kingdom of Kent (Gilmour 2007, 99-101), but for Scandinavia a wider net is cast because fewer swords have been excavated from this period, as noted above: therefore, the area of study encompasses Uppland and Gotland in Sweden, Bornholm in Denmark and central and southern Norway (the study area advocated by Nørgård Jørgensen 1999; Jørgensen and Nørgård Jørgensen 1997, 86). Sword burials falling within this chronological and regional span were identified using published and unpublished excavation reports (Ager *et al* 2006; Evison 1987; Hawkes and Grainger 2006; Arne 1934; Arwidsson 1942, 1954 and 1977; Jørgensen and Nørgård Jørgensen 1997; Stolpe and Arne 1927), catalogues (Richardson 2005; Nerman 1975a and 1975b; Nørgård Jørgensen 1999), digitised museum collections (British Museum, London; Historiska Museet, Stockholm; Universitetsmuseene, Oslo), online archaeological databases (*Novum Inventorium Sepulchrale*; Harrington and Brookes 2008) and advice from scholars (Sue Harrington and Andrew Reynolds from the Institute of

Archaeology, UCL; Sonja Marzinzik and Barry Ager from the British Museum; Andrew Richardson from Canterbury Archaeological Trust; John Ljungkvist from the University of Uppsala; John Worley from Museum Gustavianum, Uppsala; Fedir Androshchuk from the University of Kiev). The graves were entered into a relational database created using Microsoft Access 2010, together with contextual information concerning the grave, its occupant(s) and contents. Specific and detailed information on the sword was also incorporated: crucially for this section the presence or absence of metal fittings, and whether these displayed signs of wear, repair or modification (a full description of the database's structure is provided in Appendix 1; other information collected to support the case-studies in Sections 5.3 to 5.5 is outlined in those sections).

The selected points of comparison are worthwhile but cannot be exact: the differential survival of swords and fittings, outlined above, prevents a statistical approach to determine the frequency of early medieval sword curation: for instance, of the 198 Kentish swords collected for this study, around 43 are recorded as having any surviving metal hilt fitting like a pommel or guard (DB2:Q1), while the collected Scandinavian swords number just 45 with around 22 recorded as having surviving metal hilt fittings (DB2:Q2). However, these small numbers facilitate a detailed examination of the relevant weapons where broader patterns and issues can be explored. Not all of the swords considered here were available for first-hand inspection, which is a relatively minor problem where thorough descriptive or photographic records exist but more serious where they do not. A substantial number of swords, however, were observed directly, including the remarkable weapons from the Valsgårde boat graves (Arwidsson 1942, 1954, 1977).

## b) Wear

Wear was the most frequently-encountered signal of potential curation on the collected sword fittings. It manifests in diverse ways: the smoothing of relief decoration; a loss of definition or crispness in recessed decoration (punches, incised motifs or lines); the flattening or merging of beaded and twisted wire; abrasion marks or the dulling of surfaces; and the loss of gilding, niello or inlaid stones. Hilt fittings were particularly susceptible to wear because this part of the sword was held in the hand, and was most liable to rub against clothing and be touched by the sword's owner when worn sheathed on the body, as demonstrated in early medieval images and the testimony of modern re-enactors (Figs. 3, 24-25, 33, 45-46, 50; Paul Mortimer pers. comm.).

Pommels display the clearest signs of wear in the sampled fittings. From Kent, the sixth-century silver-gilt ring-pommel from Patricbourne, Bifrons grave 39 (ASK2) has lost gilding from its surfaces, especially on the broad faces and ring fitting, which were the most accessible parts to the wielder's hands or clothing. Conversely, the pommel's terminals and the recessed central line on the ring bracket were less accessible and retain a good layer of gilding (Fig. 51). The pommel apex has traces of nielloed punches which were possibly eradicated through wear, but they are so faint that their original existence is uncertain (Fig. 52). Much clearer is the erosion of the incised zigzag and punched triangle ornament on the ring fitting, probably exacerbated by the ring's action through the bracket. The triangles punched onto the bracket are vague compared to those elsewhere on the pommel, their depth having been depleted as the metal surface has gradually worn down (Fig. 53). A comparable pattern appears on the mid-sixth-century ring-pommel from Dover Buckland grave C (ASK3). This silver-gilt pommel has a nielloed ring-and-dot motif

on the visible broad face (the other side could not be viewed as the sword is too fragile to turn over), but the incised ring around the uppermost dot is partially lost where the top of the pommel has worn down. The pommel apex shows signs of another motif, but it is virtually gone (Fig. 54; Evison 1987, 214-215). Similarly, the gilding on the faces of the pommel from Bradstow School, Broadstairs grave 71 (ASK4; Fig. 55) is patchy. Degraded punched and incised decoration is observable on pommels from Lower Shorne (ASK5; Fig. 56), Sarre graves 88 and 104 (ASK6-7; Figs. 57 and 58), Ozengell grave 105 (ASK8; Fig. 59), Ash, Gilton grave 56 (ASK9; Fig. 60), and from unnumbered graves at Ash (ASK10; Fig. 61) and King's Field, Faversham (ASK11; Fig. 62). Unpublished reports state that two swords from the cemetery at Saltwood display signs of wear (graves C1081 and C3944: ASK12-13; Ager 2006), but it has not been possible to confirm this observation first-hand.

The pommel from Sarre grave 104 is a particularly convincing case. The lower corners of this pyramidal fitting originally terminated in beast-heads, one of which has broken off but the other is so worn that it is practically featureless. Both broad faces are incised with an imitation nielloed cloisonné design, and one face is set with a circular garnet surrounded by a mock beaded wire collar. The top of this collar is noticeably worn, as are the mock cloisonné cells nearer the top of the pommel. On the opposite face the gilding and niello are mostly gone, and the surface is now dull with the incised cell-work fading towards to the top. This face probably rested against the wielder's clothing when the sword was sheathed, while the glitzy garnet-set face looked outwards where it could be appreciated, and consequently did not deteriorate so markedly (Figs. 63-65; asymmetrical patterns of wear are discussed below, 142). Interestingly, this pommel was deposited loose in the grave,

detached from its weapon before burial. The issue of loose fittings is explored further below (141).

Scandinavian pommels show similar patterns of wear. The gilt copper alloy pommel from the late sixth- to early seventh-century boat grave XII at Vendel, Uppland, Sweden (SC2: Fig. 66) has lost gilding along the upper edge of one face (the opposite face was unavailable for comparison because the weapon is on permanent display). The gilding may have flaked off with the corrosion of copper alloy beneath, but conversely the pommel's condition is good and the location of the lost gilding mirrors the Kentish pommels discussed above. Loss of gilding on the relief knotwork ornamenting the pommel apex on one of the two swords from boat grave 6 at Valsgärde, Uppland (SC3) is also diagnostic of wear. Tellingly the recesses surrounding the knot retain their gilding, probably because their lower location sheltered them from wear. The deterioration is especially visible when the pommel is viewed from above, revealing a contrast between the bright gold of the narrow upper faces and the duller pommel apex (Figs. 67-68). The presence of wear is verified under magnification: the relief interlace on the apex appears smooth and slightly flattened, while that on the narrow upper faces appears sharper and more angular. Arwidsson (1977, 40) observed that areas of punched decoration on the ring-sword from boat grave 7 at Valsgärde (SC4) had eroded away. This weapon is displayed in a complex display mount which could not be dismantled for viewing, but while the top of the pommel could not be studied, it was possible to observe a deteriorated double row of fine punches bordering the fixed ring-knob, the upper row being shallower and less distinct than the lower (Fig. 69). The sixth-century ring-sword from Vallstenarum, Gotland (SC5: see below, 136) has a gilt copper alloy ring-knob missing much of its gilt (Fig. 70). Again, it is difficult to determine how

much was lost through wear as opposed to copper alloy corrosion beneath, but there are other faint signals of the former: the gold beaded braid concealing the junction between the upper and lower 'rings' and the gold beaded wire sheathing the rivet-tubes at the opposite end of the pommel have areas where the beads have become flattened and worn smooth (Fig. 71).

More ambiguous is the sword from boat grave 8 at Valsgärde (SC6). Arwidsson (1954, 63) observed that its gilt copper alloy ring fitting was much worn with much gilding rubbed off, but this is difficult to verify as corrosion probably caused some loss of gilding. The gilded surface on the top and front of the ring-knob appears thick in comparison to the copper alloy around it, giving the impression that the gilding did not so much wear down to the metal beneath as flake off from it (Fig. 72); although corrosion may also have occurred since excavation rather than in antiquity. Interestingly, the pommel apex is virtually ungilded while the narrow upper faces are not, resembling the pattern on the sword from Valsgärde boat grave 6 described above. It is therefore feasible that the Valsgärde 8 pommel shows signs of wear, although its condition removes any certainty.

Several weapons in this case-study also show signs of wear upon their guards, albeit subtler and more challenging to identify. From Kent, the sword from Ozengell grave 105 has lost several inlaid white metal strips from its guards, but their poor condition precludes confirmation as wear and tear (Fig. 73). A radiograph of the weapon indicates that more strips may survive on the opposite face of the guard, but the sword was too delicate to turn for verification. It is plausible that one face might deteriorate more markedly if a sword was habitually sheathed with one guard facing inwards against the clothing and the other outwards, creating a similar wear pattern to the Sarre pommel discussed above. An alternative explanation is that the

deteriorated side was placed face-down in the grave (John Worley pers. comm.). The remains of the silver-gilt lower guard on the sword from Dover Buckland grave 94b (ASK14) reveal very subtle signs of wear. Originally this guard would have comprised an upper and lower metal plate riveted together with a block of organic material sandwiched between, but only the lower plate and rivets have survived. The front edge of the plate has lost much gilding and under close examination the evenness of the surface between the gilt and silver beneath suggests that this was caused by the gilt wearing down gradually. Subtler still is the flattening and merging of tiny beads on the wire collar surrounding one of the dome-headed rivets attached to the guard which, curiously, is not replicated on the other rivet (Fig. 74), perhaps indicating of how the weapon was worn on the body or even habitual touching of this fitting by the weapon's owner.

Clearer evidence was observed upon the Scandinavian sword guards. Those from the Upplandic boat graves are constructed in the tri-partite method just described, but crucially the central 'sandwiched' section was sheathed in metal and has survived for examination. Moreover, this part is wider than the upper and lower plates and therefore protrudes beyond their edges, rendering it more susceptible to wear. The ring-sword from the boat grave at Ultuna, Bondkyrko (SC7) is a clear example, where the central sections of both the upper and lower guards have lost their gilding, revealing the copper alloy beneath, except in the sheltered recesses of the incised decoration. In addition, the relief cable band running along the centre of these guards has a smoothed-down surface under magnification. These signs contrast starkly with the outer plates, which retain bright gilding and sharp interlace decoration (Fig. 75). A similar but less distinctive pattern appears on the sword from Valsgårde boat grave 6, but not as much gilding is lost and the lower guard is

damaged at one end (Fig. 76). The guards on the lavish sword from Valsgårde boat grave 5 (SC8) are also worn: but this intriguing weapon is treated in detail below (129).

Wear was also observed upon metal grip mounts, as might be expected since they adorn that part of the sword held which is in the hand. The entire grip on one of the swords from boat grave I at Vendel, Uppland (SC9) is sheathed in silver accentuated with gilding, and has three ridges to accommodate the wielder's fingers. The raised parts of the ridges are brightly gilded, while the recesses which held the fingers were left silver and engraved with a two-strand cable ornament which *was* gilded. The gilding in these recesses is much deteriorated by comparison with the raised ridges, and the decoration seems flatter with areas where the definition between the two cable strands has been obliterated – unquestionably caused by the holding of the grip over time (Fig. 77). The grip mounts on the second sword from Valsgårde boat grave 6 (SC10) are more curious. They comprise sub-rectangular copper alloy strips attached to both sides of the grip (only one is observable because the sword is too fragile to remove from its cradle), ornamented with a central interlace panel within a border of diamond-shaped punches. This decoration appears subtly worn at the end where the mount would have abutted the now-absent lower guard: under magnification, the interlace strands appear conspicuously flatter and less crisp to those on the rest of the mount, and the punch-marks may be slightly shallower too (Fig. 78). These signs are decidedly ambiguous, but if we are prepared to speculate, there may be an explanation for why this end of the mount may have deteriorated more than the rest. When the sword was held upright, the worn portion was located at the top of the grip below the lower guard; here the wielder's index finger and thumb would have met, and it is possible that the action of the two



together may have caused this part of the mount to wear more markedly than the lower part, which was touched by single fingers. This is extremely conjectural but not unimaginable; indeed it is unfortunate that the images of the opposite grip mount in Arwidsson's 1942 publication of Valsgärde 6 (Taf. 16, 208a-b) are not clear enough to draw a comparison.

It should be plain by now that it is not straightforward to identify signs of wear on sword fittings, and this seems to have been the case for previous scholars also. Sune Lindqvist (1932, 38-39) described the magnificent sword from the still-unpublished boat grave 5 at Valsgärde as an 'ancestral sword', already old when interred, because its gilding had worn off in several places. Behmer (1939, 171) challenged this by stating that the sword was not at all worn. This sword therefore required a fresh appraisal. Knowledge of wear-patterns on other swords in the collected sample informed where and what to look for, and a detailed examination revealed the reason why the Valsgärde 5 sword has been the subject of disagreement. This ornate weapon has gilt copper alloy fittings packed with decoration. Both pommel faces were originally inset with garnet cell-work, although the garnets on one face are now mostly lost. The grip mounts and guards feature interlacing beasts with cabochon garnet eyes, and the sandwiched sections of both guards are fitted with rectangular panels ornamented with tiny filigree annulets (Fig. 79). Certainly some gilding has been lost – more on the face with the surviving garnet inlay – but as ever it difficult to tell if this was caused by wear or from the corrosion of copper alloy beneath. The knotwork on the pommel apex, however, appears to have lost some relief as well as gilding, which may indicate wear (Fig. 80). The gold filigree knot design on the pommel face now lacking garnets, and the gold filigree border of annulets on the opposite face, have areas where the separate beads merge and destroy

the definition between them (Figs. 81-82). The same sign of wear appears on the rectangular panels of filigree annulets decorating the central sections of the upper and lower guards which, like the other Upplandic swords discussed above, protrudes beyond the guard plates and is thus more susceptible to wear (Fig. 83). Despite these deteriorations the hilt has retained much gilding and garnet-work, creating an overall impression of freshness which is only undermined by extremely close observation.

However, some sword fittings do seem to have been genuinely fresh when interred in graves. In England, the ring-sword from grave 204 at Northbourne, Finglesham (ASK15) has been described as being manufactured shortly before burial, based on the freshness of the gilding and niello on the pommel, with only the ring showing signs of wear (Hawkes and Grainger 2006, 151; Hawkes and Pollard 1981, 331; Fischer 2007, 68). Regrettably the weapon is now considered too frail for viewing, but it is possible that the sword was given a replacement pommel, to which an existing ring was mounted. A sword from an unnumbered grave at Ash, Gilton (ASK16) was also identified as unworn (*Novum Inventorium Sepulchrale*), and while it could not be removed from its complicated display mount for viewing, it was possible to observe that the silver surface of the pommel face is very shiny, and its punched triangle border crisp and thickly nielloed with little sign of deterioration towards the pommel apex, as observed on other similar Kentish silver pommels (such as Ash, Gilton grave 56). However, first impressions may deceive. A rare example of an intact sword from a cremation burial was excavated at Coombe, Woodnesborough in Kent, and although this case-study focuses upon inhumations this intriguing weapon cannot be omitted. Ellis Davidson and Webster (1967, 23-24) describe the sword's pommel as pristine. A fresh appraisal for this study found nothing to contradict this: the gilding and niello are thick, even in locations in 'hotspots' for

wear such as the pommel face, apex and shoulders (Figs. 84-85). Based on its condition, Ellis Davidson and Webster reached the conclusion that the pommel was buried soon after manufacture (also Evison 1967a, 77), and was perhaps a new addition to the sword. Indeed, further details of the sword's construction support this conclusion. The Perspex block currently mounted between the two metal plates forming the upper guard reveals how the pommel and guard fit together. One of the rivets fixing the pommel to the upper guard is bent in order to make the connection, whereas the other rivet is straight. Measurements taken of the pommel's position on the guard reveal that its placement is off-centre (Fig. 86). Thus, the pommel and upper guard may not have originally belonged together, and most likely the pommel is the new addition. As Ellis Davidson and Webster pronounced in 1967, pommels, being particularly prone to wear, might be frequently replaced – and consequently, an unblemished hilt fitting need not signify a young sword but merely a sword with a new fitting, and cannot be taken as proof that the sword in question had not been in circulation for some time. This issue is considered further below (136).

Before moving on, it is important to contextualise the evidence for wear on sword fittings. Certain types of metal and ornamentation deteriorate more easily than others, making signs of wear far easier to spot. Gold was the softest metal used for making sword fittings, and the purer the gold, the softer the metal and the faster the process of degradation. It is also comparatively simple to recognise signs of wear on gold fittings because they do not corrode, meaning that even the subtlest indications of erosion are recoverable without specialist equipment. Conversely, copper alloy, a harder metal, would take longer to wear down and since it *does* corrode, it is more difficult to determine wear if the surface is in poor condition. An example is a pommel from the Elms Estate, Croydon in the British Museum (1895,0313.10; Fig.

87). The punched decoration bordering the pommel face appears degraded near the top, as does the pommel apex. The related problem of determining wear on gilt copper alloy fittings has been discussed above.

The type of decoration most prone to wear – and simplest to recognise when worn – is relief ornament, notably twisted and beaded wire used in filigree decoration. With gold filigree, the combination of soft metal and delicate beading is particularly susceptible to wear, and the merging of individual beads is a classic and common indicator. Copper alloy wire decoration is more problematic: the twisted and beaded gilt copper alloy wires set into the top of the non-ring-sword from Valsgärde boat grave 7 (SC11) are in a typical ‘hotspot’ for wear, but the merging of beads is not as obvious as, for example, the gold filigree on the Valsgärde 5 hilt, and corrosion compounds the ambiguity (Fig. 88). Inlaid wire decoration, such as that on the guards of the two Valsgärde 7 swords, is perhaps the most challenging (Figs. 89-90). The wire is hammered into incisions in the host metal until the two have a similar surface level, and signs of wear may not become clear until the two have eroded to the degree that the inlay is completely obliterated (the wire inlay technique used to decorate later Viking period swords is discussed below, 137).

It is also important to consider if deterioration observed on sword fittings is truly ancient, or rather due to over-vigorous polishing undertaken in modern times, for instance by the finder of the piece or the museum that houses it, when conservation methods were perhaps less stringent than they are today (Fleur Shearman pers. comm.). Encouragingly however, comparable patterns of wear are plainly observable upon several of the Staffordshire Hoard pommels, which have been meticulously conserved. The gold filigree decoration on pommel K680, for

instance, is so worn that the individual beads upon the beaded wire have merged to the degree that they are extremely difficult to apprehend at all (Fig. 91).

An interesting side-issue arising from this discussion is that wear occurs on modest swords with relatively plain fittings through to the most ostentatious examples embellished with precious metals and gemstones. The implication is that the finest swords were not elite trinkets paraded only on rare occasions and statically displayed the rest of the time. On the contrary, they were functional objects in the sense that they were worn, touched and interacted with to such a degree that a permanent mark was left on their fittings.

This is not to say that the most elaborate weapons were ever used in battle, for which the evidence is ambiguous. The Valsgårde swords in particular have very thin tangs which appear incapable of withstanding the shock of combat-use, although careful tempering and a supportive grip may have compensated for this weak-point (John Worley pers. comm.). Nonetheless early medieval re-enactors' swords occasionally break at the tang, but the inevitable differences between ancient and modern smithing techniques prevents a true comparison. A number of swords in the sample have broken lower guard-plates, comprising cracks running between the edge of the plate and the hole for the tang. The lower guard was designed to protect the hand by blocking sliding blows in combat, but broken guards are unlikely to be proof of battle usage: of the many sword guards found in the Staffordshire Hoard, interpreted by some as battle spoils (discussed further below, 141), none demonstrate a convincingly analogous pattern of breakage to the sampled guards. The guard-plates in question are only a few millimetres thick, making the tang-holes a natural weak-point, particularly if the block of organic material sandwiched between the two plates forming the lower guard was removed or eroded. Therefore, the cracks may be

the result of deliberate or ritual breaking prior to burial, but more likely occurred after burial, as stress fractures caused by the pressure of earth or the expansion of the iron tang during corrosion (Sonja Marzinzik pers. comm.). Consequently, the issue of battle-damage must remain open for future investigation.

### c) Repair

Signs of repair are important to investigations of sword curation because they represent a conscious attempt to prolong a weapon's life. Few clear instances of repair were found within the sample, but this may be because they are difficult to identify. Moreover, some repairs are invisible because they comprised the wholesale replacement rather than mending of a fitting, and as such are categorised as modifications and treated below (136).

From Kent, the copper alloy scabbard locket on the sword from Saltwood grave C3826 (ASK17) may have been mended (Ager 2006), while Cameron (2000, 85) has argued that the locket on a sword from King's Field, Faversham (ASK18: Fig. 92) repaired split wooden scabbard boards beneath. From Scandinavia, Arwidsson (1954, 61-63) claimed that the bark and fabric wrapping around the top of the wooden scabbard enclosing the Valsgärde 8 ring-sword was a renovation (Fig. 93): a view challenged by Cameron (2006), who draws parallels with the late sixth- to early seventh-century trend in Anglo-Saxon England for binding scabbards with textile tape, possibly a practical feature relating to sword suspension. The corroded state of the Valsgärde 8 sword precludes confirmation or denial of Arwidsson's assertion without specialist techniques; but the popularity of textile scabbard bindings in England and its recurrence upon other Scandinavian swords in the sample (Elmelunde (SC13) and Melsted-Sandhuset grave 16 (SC14) on Bornholm,

Denmark; possibly Stora and Lille Ihre, Hellvi grave 481 (SC15) on Gotland, Sweden) implies a fashion rather than the same response to a repair job. Perhaps less ambiguous is the patching of the broken upper guard on the Valsgårde 6 sword with a copper alloy plate riveted to the inside (Arwidsson 1942, 46-47).

Aside from fittings and scabbards, the collected material contains fascinating instances of potentially repaired blades. While these are not as spectacular as the riveted Viking period sword-blade from Österfärnebo, Gästrikland, Sweden (beyond the selected study area: Stockholm, Historiska Museet 5237; Androschuck 2010), they are intriguing nonetheless. The average two-edged early Anglo-Saxon sword measured approximately 90cm from tip to pommel, but a sword excavated from grave 27 at Dover Buckland measures just under 66cm (ASK19; Fig. 94). Evison (1987, 222) concluded that the blade may have been broken and refashioned because the blade's pattern-welding continues all the way to the tip when a plain 'border' is generally expected, formed by cutting edges added to the patterned core of the blade. However, Gilmour has shown that blades could indeed be pattern-welded all the way to the edges, as seen on a stunningly complex blade from Saltwood, Kent grave C3944 (Fig. 95). Thus, while the Buckland sword looks oddly stunted alongside other swords from early Anglo-Saxon Kent, further research is needed to determine whether it is a reshaped long sword or deliberately made in this way. The suggestion that blades might be repaired in extreme ways provokes a host of interpretive possibilities concerning their conceptual significance: were these repairs a simple matter of economics, in that the sword's owner could not afford to replace the most expensive component of his weapon? Or was the owner keen to hang on to a specific blade for a particular reason? These questions are difficult to answer with certainty, but need not be mutually exclusive.

#### d) Modification

Another sign of potential curation, according to this study's definition of that term, is the modification of sword fittings: a sword is likely to have circulated for some time for modifications to be made, and indeed modifications may signify an owner's intention to refresh his weapon for future use. The sampled swords demonstrate that modification could comprise the addition or removal of fittings, the adaptation of existing ones and the ornamentation of previously undecorated surfaces (a process outlined evocatively by Fischer 2007, 26) – some of which are easier to recognise than others.

The substitution of old or damaged fittings for new ones is an obvious starting-point. The theory that unworn pommels represent upgrades to existing swords was explored above (130). Other swords with fittings of mismatching types, metals and decorative styles may signal successive alterations over time. From Scandinavia, the sword from Vallstenarum, Gotland, with its gilt copper alloy ring-knob attached to a gold and garnet cloisonné pommel, is illustrative. From Kent, the Woodnesborough sword has a silver pommel decorated with Style I or early Style II zoomorphic ornament inlaid with niello; but the grip mounts are gilt copper alloy decorated with non-zoomorphic interlace which the craftsman may have adapted to appear zoomorphic – implying that these were not original fittings (Ager 2006; Evison 1976, 308; cf. Ellis Davidson and Webster 1967, 32 who argue that the divergent styles suggest a date during the transition between Style I and II ornament). The silver-gilt pommel on a sword from Crundale Down (ASK20: Fig. 96) features seventh-century ornament while the upper guard evokes the eighth century (Evison



1976, 308) and may have replaced an earlier guard to which the old pommel was refitted.

The addition of new fittings could be explained as the upgrading of defunct or unfashionable equipment, or the tastes of the sword's owner; but more challenging to read are instances of old fittings added to swords. Evison (1967a, 73) argues that the late sixth-century pommel on a sword from King's Field, Faversham, Kent (ASK21: Fig. 97) was fitted with an old ring of early sixth-century type, based on its resemblance to a ring attached to the lower guard of a sword from grave 5 at Snartemo, Vest-Agder, Norway. The order in which the Faversham fittings were modified cannot be reconstructed precisely: was an early ring taken from an old sword and added to the newer Faversham sword? Or was the ring original to the Faversham sword and the *pommel* a replacement, in which case the modification is not an old ring but a new pommel like those categorised above? It is even possible that the Faversham sword hilt was not modified after all: Fischer (2007, 24) warns against dating swords by their ring-types because he suspects that some rings were manufactured in a deliberately archaic style and were therefore not old, but simply made to *look* old. If true, a desire to make swords appear older than they actually were may have existed.

The collected material demonstrates that ring-swords were especially prone to modification, with rings added and subtracted, sometimes more than once, during a sword's circulation. In addition to the modified ring-swords discussed above, a ring may have been added to the Dover Buckland grave C sword up to a generation after the pommel was made. Evison (1987, 22, 45) observed that the decorative style and niello composition differs between the two components, concluding that the pommel and ring were not made at the same place by the same craftsman at the same time.

Conversely, the pommel from Ash, Gilton, grave 56 displays the remains of a ring fitting but no surviving ring (Fig. 60). The silver-gilt pommel from Ash, Gilton with a runic expression has a hole piercing one of its shoulders (ASK10: Fig. 61), as does a gilt copper alloy pommel from Sarre grave 91 (ASK22: Fig. 98). These holes represent an adaptation for ring fittings which were subsequently removed (*Novum Inventorium Sepulchrale*). Indeed, the Sarre 91 pommel bears visible gouges at the pommel terminal, which were probably caused by the action of a free-running ring. Evison (1967a, 69-70) identified another pommel from Lower Shorne as an ex-ring-pommel. The signs are less conspicuous than the holes piercing the Ash and Sarre pommels, but close scrutiny confirms her assertions: first, a 'channel' was made between the two rivet-holders at one end of the pommel, causing their inner edges to appear boxy rather than rounded; and second, like the Sarre 91 pommel, there are scratch-marks on the pommel's surface between and above the rivet-holders, caused by the movement of a free-running ring (Fig. 99). Evison (1987, 307), Ellis Davidson and Webster (1967, 22-24) argue that the Woodnesborough sword once had a fixed ring fitting due to features in the upper guard's construction. A remarkable Scandinavian example of a modified ring-sword is the weapon from Vallstenarum, Gotland discussed above. During this weapon's existence (which may have been lengthy: Birger 1975, 45), one side of its gold and garnet pommel was obliterated to accommodate a large gilt copper alloy fixed ring-knob (Arrhenius 1985, 145 and 1970, 193-195). Sword-rings have been interpreted as representing oaths sworn by elite warriors to their lords, and the addition and removal of rings as occurring in step with the stages of a warrior's career (Steuer 1987, 203-205; Fischer 2007, 25; Bone 1989, 64-65; Evison 1967a, 63-64). Something else may have motivated the mutilation of the Vallstenarum hilt. While the pommel was probably a Continental

import to Sweden, the copper alloy ring-knob is Scandinavian in style and may imply that the owner wished to make his illustrious possession more culturally relevant by adapting its physical appearance (John Ljungkvist pers. comm.). Alternatively, he may simply have intended to make it glitzier than it was before, but the extreme and irreversible act of demolishing part of an aesthetically-attractive and unquestionably costly golden, gemstone-encrusted pommel to attach an ill-fitting gilt copper alloy ring-knob hints at a deeper meaning.

Other types of fittings were employed as modifications. The unusual curved garnet cloisonné grip mount on the Vallstenarum sword may have been a later addition, on account of the awkwardness with which it abuts the larger grip mount beneath (Fig. 100; John Ljungkvist pers. comm.). Of the Kentish weapons, the sword from Saltwood grave C3944 represents an interesting case. The preceding examples of modification have comprised fittings specifically made for swords, such as pommels, rings and grip mounts, but in this case three ornamented copper alloy horse-harness fittings and several silver rivets possibly from a shield-board were found in association with the sword-belt, and appear to have adorned it (Ager 2006). This indicates that swords could be embellished with fittings from completely different types of object.

Other swords in the sample show that modification need not comprise the interchange of precious metals. A runic inscription may have been added to the copper alloy pommel from Sarre, grave 91 (Fischer 2007, 117; Hawkes and Page 1967, 3), but the pommel's surface is poorly preserved and the inscription cannot be verified. The freshness of the single *æsc* ('ash') rune inscribed upon a better preserved silver-gilt pommel from King's Field, Faversham (ASK11) prompted Fischer (2007, 57-60) to infer that it was inscribed sometime after the pommel was

made. Close inspection supports his claim: the rest of the pommel is severely worn, particularly the top, one of the narrow upper faces and, crucially, the broad face which bears the rune (Fig. 101).

The distinctive wear pattern on this pommel deserves a short digression. The differential wear between the two shoulders is clear when the pommel is viewed from the top; furthermore, only one end of the incised border along the base of the front face is particularly abraded. However, these patches of wear appear in opposite locations on the pommel – one on the upper right, and the other on the lower left. The wear on the shoulder was probably caused by the owner holding the grip and resting his thumb upon the concave shoulder, which faced upwards when the sword was worn at his side (Paul Mortimer pers. comm.); but this would mean that the worn part of the broad face looked outwards rather than inwards against the body, which does not explain how it became worn. The incised rune may provide a clue. The (probably) late tenth century Old English rune poem gives the following definition of the *æsc* rune (Fischer 2007, 59):

‘The ash is extremely tall, precious to mankind,  
strong on its base: it holds its ground as it should,  
although many men attack it.’

(trans. M. Halsall 1981, 29 and 92-93)

The appropriateness of this rune’s meaning to a warrior could not be clearer. The poem is considerably later than our sword, but if the meaning of the *æsc* rune was similar in the earlier period, then the wear pattern and inscribed rune together point to a superstitious owner who habitually rubbed the same parts of his pommel

(shoulder with the thumb, broad face with the forefinger?) until its decoration wore away, sheathed his sword the same way every time meaning that the same surfaces were susceptible to wear from his hand or clothing, and at some point felt compelled to embellish it with a talismanic rune, perhaps all in an effort to preserve his life in combat. This is a conjectural scenario, but the marks on this sword invite speculation regarding the way in which this sword was treated and perceived by its owner.

#### e) Loose fittings and visual identity

Transposable fittings raise a final issue which is relevant to the concept of ‘living’ swords: detached or ‘loose’ fittings in the archaeological record. This matter found its most spectacular expression with the discovery of the Staffordshire Hoard in 2009 – a haul of sixth- to eighth-century Anglo-Saxon precious metals recovered from agricultural land in the British West Midlands, which was dominated by sword fittings: no less than ninety-seven pommels (some from seaxes), seventy-one guard plates, and several scabbard studs and pyramidal fittings (Carver 2011, 201; Leahy and Bland 2009; Webster *et al* 2011). Finds of loose Anglo-Saxon fittings were not unprecedented beforehand: indeed, in the selected study area individual pommels were found in Sarre graves 91 and 104, perhaps acting as shorthand for whole swords which were otherwise passed down (Hawkes and Page 1967, 2-3 and n.2), while numerous loose sword fittings are recorded on the Portable Antiquities Scheme database.

Loose sword fittings can be interpreted variously: as temporary removals earmarked for refitting on other swords; as attractive trinkets which could be converted into jewellery, like a pyramidal scabbard mount adapted into a pendant found in grave 58 at Northbourne, Finglesham (Hawkes and Grainger 2006, 63); as

keepsakes from a loved-one, such as the pommel kept in a woman's pouch in grave 360 at Dover Buckland (Ager in Parfitt and Anderson 2012, 49); or perhaps as bullion. The latter has become one interpretation of the Staffordshire Hoard, because some of the fittings were prised so brutally from their weapons that they could not have been refitted elsewhere (Webster 2010); others, however, seem to have been more carefully removed and feasibly could have been remounted with a simple straightening or replacement of their bent rivets (Sonja Marzinzik pers. comm.). However, other interpretations point towards perceptions of 'living' swords – and in particular, those with distinct visual identities.

As noted above, some sword fittings analysed for this study feature asymmetrical wear patterns – they are more worn on one side than the other. Many also have differing decoration on their two broad faces. For example, on one broad face of the pommel from Crundale Down, Kent, a border of oblique incised lines is more worn on one edge than the other, while the border is crisper overall on the opposite face (Fig. 102a-b). A clearer asymmetrical wear pattern is observable on the Lower Shorne pommel. Both faces have a border of punched triangles, but on one face it is very worn, with the triangles disappearing towards the pommel apex (Figs. 103a-b). More dramatic is the pommel from Sarre grave 104, as noted above (124), with its mock-cloisonné face noticeably more worn than the stone-set face (Figs. 64-65). Both the Lower Shorne and Sarre grave 104 pommels also have different designs on their broad faces, while Scandinavian asymmetrically-decorated pommel faces were fitted to the swords found at Ultuna, Bondkyrko, and Valsgårde boat graves 5, 6 and 7 (Figs. 104-107). Indeed, the faces of the guards on the Valsgårde 5 sword are differently decorated, with evenly-spaced cabochon garnets on one face and grouped garnets on the other (Fig. 108) More examples of asymmetrical wear

and decoration are likely to exist, but the corroded condition of sword blades dictates that swords cannot be turned over to examine both sides of their fittings. Asymmetrical wear and decoration reinforce the idea that swords had an ‘outward’, recognisable face which was always on show.

Additionally, the composite nature of swords which has been repeatedly referenced in this study enabled a sword’s owner (or owners over time) to construct unique visual identities for their weapons, which observers could come to recognise much like a human face. Indeed, anyone who studies early medieval swords quickly comes to know specific weapons via their distinctive fittings, and it seems likely that contemporary observers had similar experiences. Add to this the theory, also expressed above, that swords might be adapted in step with their owner’s careers – as with the interchange of ring fittings – and a picture emerges of swords with distinctive visual identities that were inextricably associated and entwined with their owners, functioning perhaps as an ‘extension of self’. With this in mind, an interpretation of the Staffordshire Hoard emerges. It is plausible to see it as a stockpile of battle spoils, given the history of seventh-century Mercia, the Anglo-Saxon kingdom in which the hoard was deposited, under the leadership of aggressive warrior-kings like Penda, whose exploits are recorded disapprovingly by Bede (*Historia Ecclesiastica* Book II). The destruction of swords represented by the hoard may signify an attempt to utterly annihilate an enemy: dismantling, dishonouring and disfiguring sword and owner alike, divesting the weapons of the trappings of their visual identity which equated them so closely with their human wielders (see Lange 1997, 167-168 for the connection between destroying an object which represents a person and destroying the person himself).

These ideas connect with discussions of the ‘ritual killing’ of swords, which normally focus upon bent blades such as that from Kyndby, Sjælland, Denmark (SC12), but could profitably be applied to loose sword fittings too. Ultimately, their significance would have varied according to time, place and observer: for example, if the Staffordshire fittings were initially brutalised to symbolise a destroyed foe, they may have found a secondary destiny as bullion if they had not been left in the ground. The investigations continue. Currently, there is no simple or single explanation for loose sword fittings in the archaeological record, but the connection between sword and wielder opens profitable future lines of enquiry for their interpretation.

#### f) Concluding remarks

While it has not been possible to quantify the frequency of sword curation in England and Scandinavia between the fifth and eighth centuries, the sample suggests that swords were often kept long enough for their metal fittings to become worn, but that the timescale of wear varied according to the type of metal and decoration. However, wear may not have been a significant factor in fuelling perceptions of swords with character, because it seems to have been fairly common and visually subtle, visible only to those who regularly viewed the weapon up close, such as owners who maintained, polished and cared for the fittings. Sword modification, however, seems to have been less common and more noticeable, and accordingly may have been more important in investing swords with personality. The interchangeability of sword fittings facilitated their customisation for various functions: to record social transactions like oath-swearing (or breaking); for cultural relevance; through simple necessity in cases of damage; or to follow fashion or



personal taste. Cherniss (1973, 245-246) intriguingly suggests that swords were honoured with treasures for good service in the same way that lords honoured their retainers. Modification invested swords with distinct visual identities that could be recognised, like human faces. To push the analogy further, it is possible that swords, like people, changed their ‘clothing’ for different occasions: ceremony, battle or even burial (John Worley pers. comm.; Perkins 1991, 152-153 and n.19). Perhaps, then, modified swords are most likely to have been perceived as ‘living’, being visibly unique, bearing clearly observable signals of their biography, and owned only by those whose career or personal circumstances enabled them to enhance what was already a costly possession.

### **3) Research Question 2: The Sword-Warrior Relationship**

The relationship between sword and wielder can be investigated further by turning from the weapons themselves to the burials in which they were placed. The distribution of artefacts around the body within graves has been likened to a tableau, meaningfully composed by mourners in order to create and transmit messages about the deceased person, which could be read and remembered by those attending the funeral (H. Williams 2006, esp. 30-39 and 118-119 with references). Thus, a study of the location of swords in relation to the body ought to provide insight into the connection between sword and wielder.

#### a) Critical and contextual issues

This section analyses the relative positioning of sword and body within Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian inhumation graves. The geographical and chronological span match those in Section 5.2 for the reasons given above (118), and the same relational

database is used, but with a focus on fields containing information about the positioning of the sword and other weapons relative to the body in each grave, including body side (left, right or not applicable, for instance if placed on top of the body), height (high, low, central) and physical relationship (touching, cradled, separated). A full description of the database's structure is provided in Appendix 1. Each sword referenced in the following text has a code: 'ASK' refers to a sword from Anglo-Saxon Kent, 'SC' a sword from pre-Viking Scandinavia, 'LAS' a sword from later Anglo-Saxon England and 'VIK' a sword from Viking period Scandinavia. A catalogue of referenced swords is supplied in Appendix 3.

Again, several critical and contextual problems must be acknowledged before commencing the discussion. First, there remains a discrepancy between the number of swords excavated from Kent and Scandinavia (198 and 45 respectively: Chart 33; DB2:Q3). Second, information regarding the location of artefacts within graves is not always available, particularly those excavated prior to the mid-twentieth century which tend to lack grave plans or at least a description of the grave's contents. Consequently, of the total 305 swords collected for this study (both cultures across the entire study period), only 145 have a record of which side of the body the sword was placed upon (DB2:Q4). Third, the decay of skeletal material in some instances demands that the positions of artefacts must be estimated using available clues and knowledge of other burial tableaux, but in the worst cases the relationship between sword and body is lost forever. Finally, a number of graves have been disturbed, for instance by human or animal intervention, a secondary burial or the collapse of the burial chamber, all of which affect the original position of the artefacts within. These concerns are flagged where they become significant. Again, a strict statistical

analysis cannot be undertaken, although broad trends can be tentatively identified. The following study refers to percentages only with strong caveats, where necessary.

#### b) Body side

A useful starting-point for analysing the sword's position in a grave is whether it was placed on the left or right of the body. Of the 80 Kentish swords with a recorded body side, 74% were placed on the left and just 17% on the right (with 9% elsewhere, such as above, below or on the body, or in a disturbed position: Chart 34; DB2:Q5). Few Scandinavian swords have a recorded body side position, but of those that do, 87% are on the left and 13% on the right (Chart 35; DB2:Q5). Although the pattern appears strong and agrees with the Kentish data, the sample is too small to attach much significance to. However, a closer look at the Scandinavian sample hints that the left-hand sword position may have been important. One of the right-positioned swords occurs in boat grave 7 at Valsgärde, Uppland, which contained two swords apparently placed to flank the half-seated deceased (John Worley pers. comm.; Arwidsson 1977, 16-18). The swords in the other contemporary Valsgärde boat graves with published grave-plans were placed on the left, including grave 6 which also contained two swords (Arwidsson 1942, Taf. 44; the other was in grave 8: Arwidsson 1954, Taf. 43). The same is observable in boat grave I at nearby Vendel, in which both swords appear on the left (although the positioning is an informed estimate due to the lack of skeletal material; the possibility of two individuals buried here cannot be excluded: Arwidsson 1983, 73). With this information in mind, the implication is that if just one sword had been interred at Valsgärde 7, it would probably have been placed on the left.

The frequency of the left-hand position may partially be explained by the likelihood that some swords were worn by the deceased in the grave, as has been suggested for several burials at Dover Buckland, Kent (Evison 1987, 21; Ellis Davidson 1962, 11-12). The pictorial evidence analysed in Chapter 4 contains copious examples of artists slavishly replicating the convention of wearing swords on the left: even when figures face to the right, swords are commonly shown on the left so that only the blade is visible poking out behind the wearer, when it would arguably have been simpler and clearer for the artist to place the sword on the right hip, where the viewer could see it (Fig. 109). However, while most swords in the sample were buried in their scabbards, evidenced by mineral preserved wood, leather or fur traces on blades, proof of suspension devices is sparser, meaning that not all left-positioned swords were worn in the grave. This is further supported by the central positioning of most swords relative to the body, with the hilt in the region of the shoulder rather than the hip, where it would be if worn. Therefore, swords were deliberately placed on the left side of the deceased. Perhaps it was through simple convention, repeated down the generations in successive burials. But from where did this convention derive? Perhaps the mourners who furnished the grave wished to preserve the side upon which the sword was worn in life, even if the weapon was not physically worn in the grave. If so, a message regarding handedness may emerge. Swords were conventionally worn on the left and carried in the right hand; so few of the sampled swords were placed on the right side that it is not unreasonable to speculate that these graves contained left-handed individuals who wore their swords on the right and carried them in their left hand. An exception may be the cemetery of Shepherdswell-w-Coldred I at Sibertswold, Kent (Richardson 2005, 335; *Novum Inventorium Sepulchrale*), where four of the five recorded swords were placed on the

right of the deceased, suggesting perhaps a local custom of sword placement – or a family of left-handers. In any case, it is possible that the living association between sword and hand was deliberately preserved in the burial tableau.

A link between sword placement and handedness is strengthened via analysis of two other pieces of hand-held war-gear within the sampled graves: spears and shields. Sadly, the Scandinavian data is sparser for these items than for swords, but the Kentish data is more promising. In this sample, neither spears nor shields display a comparably strong connection with one side of the body over the other. Of the 81 spears or angons with a recorded left or right position, 46% appear on both the left and the right (8% elsewhere), providing an equal split (Chart 36; DB2:Q6). The equality is reduced for shields but still more evenly spread than for swords, with 22% of shields appearing on the left and 32% on the right (the majority at 46% representing the common location of shields on the central axis in these graves, usually on, above or below the body: Chart 37; DB2:Q7). Consequently it is far less plausible that the placement of spears and shields reflects the handedness of the deceased. Instead, it appears that the side of the body on which the sword was placed was governed by far stronger funerary conventions than for spears or shields, and it is possible that this convention derived from handedness. If so, its careful reproduction in the grave suggests a strong psychological and physical link between sword and wielder that was less readily broken than for spears and shields, even in death.

### c) Physical proximity

This line of enquiry can be extended by analysing the physical proximity between swords and bodies within graves. Of the 97 Kentish swords for which proximity data

is available, only 3% can be described as separated from the body by a grave feature or another weapon (Chart 38; DB2:Q8), including graves 93 (ASK23) and 96b (ASK24) at Dover Buckland, in which the sword was placed outside of a seax and a spear respectively (Fig. 110), and Sarre, grave 275 (ASK25), in which the sword may have been placed on top of a coffin judging by its unusually high position in the soil above the body (Perkins 1991, 146). The rest can therefore be categorised as having some form of unmediated physical association with the deceased: 47% directly beside the body; 25% placed completely or partially on the body; 16% are touching or being touched by the body; 7% were seemingly cradled by the body; and 2% appear to have been tucked under part of the body. The Scandinavian sample is inevitably smaller, but a similar pattern is observable (Chart 39; DB2:Q9): of the 16 swords with proximity data, just two (12%) were separated from the body, and one of these (Valsgårde 6) was separated by another sword. Of the rest, 50% can be defined as beside the body; 13% as on it in some way; 13% as touching or being touched; 6% cradled; and 6% tucked beneath part of the body. These observations are less secure than for the larger Kentish sample, but important points must be noted: most of the Scandinavian graves are large boat burials in which the weapons could have been placed anywhere in a vast space, by comparison with the smaller Kentish graves in which the default location for weapons was, arguably, beside the body somewhere. Despite the greater availability of space, the Scandinavian swords were still placed close to the body, suggesting that this propinquity was deliberate and significant.

An illuminating contrast can again be drawn with other weapons in these graves. The large size of shields rendered them likely to touch the body somehow, especially if deposited flat, unless the grave was particularly large, and therefore

spears offer a better point of comparison with swords. Of the 78 Kentish spears and angons with detailed positioning information, 35% can be described as separated from the body by a grave feature or another weapon (Chart 40; DB2:Q10). Fascinatingly, 54% of these spears are placed outside of a sword, indicating that the proximity of swords to the body was considered of greater importance. Only five Scandinavian spears have detailed positioning data, but nonetheless it is interesting to note that four of them are separated from the body in some way. Analysis of the collected material generally suggests that the mourners furnishing these burials strove to create proximity between wielder and sword, implying a cognitive partnership between the two which was thought unbreakable after the wielder's life had ended. This inference is reinforced by several emotive grave arrangements in which the deceased cradles his sword or reaches to touch it (Figs. 111-112). There is something poignant about the image of a friend or family member purposefully enfolding a treasured sword within the crook of the dead man's arm.

#### d) Women and swords

The preceding analysis suggests a tangible personal bond existed between sword and wielder, as one might expect between a warrior and his valuable weapon. However, as discussed in Chapter 2.2a, the long-standing assumption that individuals buried with weapons in early medieval graves were 'warriors' (defined as an adult male who participated in armed violence) was seriously challenged in the later twentieth century and has never recovered. Consequently, it can no longer be presumed that those interred with swords ever used these weapons in anger – although it is difficult to conceive that most physically-able men buried with arms did not perform this function at some point during their lives. In any case, the precautions that now attend

the identification of individuals buried with weapons have added new dimensions of understanding for early medieval warriorhood and the symbolic function of war-gear. This limitation is critical because a handful of the sampled sword-graves contained women. This would seem to undermine any notion that swords were perceived as a warrior's particular attribute, but unconventional features in these graves may suggest otherwise.

Two or three burials containing complete swords (as opposed to loose sword fittings) at Dover Buckland in Kent may have contained women. Graves 33 (ASK26) and 93 both contain weapon-sets incorporating, respectively, sword and spearhead, and sword, shield, spear and seax; but the skeletal material was found to contain both male and female characteristics (Evison 1987, 125-126). While there is nothing unusual about the positioning of the sword in Grave 33 (directly adjacent to the body's left side), Grave 93 comprises one of the few examples in which the sword is separated from the deceased by another weapon: in this case, a seax (Fig. 110, left). More unusual is the double sword burial in Grave 96a-b at Dover Buckland, in which the individual on the left of the grave ('96a': ASK27) was designated as male, and the individual on the right ('96b') as female despite another full complement of weapons. Evison (1987, 126 and 129) identified the pair as homosexual males (challenged by Lucy 1997, 154-156 and 161), but did note that 96b was the only sword burial in the cemetery in which the individual had not been laid out straight, and moreover the individual's feet were unusually crossed (Fig. 113). Stoodley (1999, 30) proposed that the positioning of the weapons beside the female implied that they were intentionally associated with her and not the adjacent male. While he is probably correct, it is notable that the sword in 96b was placed outside of the spear, thus dividing it physically from the female's body, whereas the sword in 96a



was placed on top of the male's left side in a typical position. Harrington's (2008) work on weaving beaters may be helpful, in that the majority of sword-shaped beaters (some of which were converted from actual swords) seem to have been placed in order to deliberately contravene the usual position of weapon swords (Harrington 2008, 52ff and 73ff). In these feminine sword burials, subtle differences of position appear to disrupt the relationship between sword and deceased, perhaps implying that the proximity established in male graves was inappropriate in female graves. Instead, a close union may have been reserved for those who used, or were perceived as using, swords as weapons in life. We cannot be unequivocally certain that early medieval women never wore or wielded real weapon-swords, but equally, proof has yet to be found (Shepherd 1999).

#### **4) Research Question 3: The 'Living' Sword in Time**

The decline of furnished burial during the early medieval period is problematic for a chronologically-broad archaeological study of swords, because the majority of useable data, not to mention the weapons themselves, derive from grave contexts. This is less of a problem in Scandinavia where weapon burial continues into the eleventh century, but in Anglo-Saxon England it largely ends in the early eighth century, meaning that the eighth to eleventh centuries furnish limited material evidence by contrast with the earlier period. Nonetheless, the lines of enquiry undertaken in Sections 5.2 and 5.3 can be extended into the later period with some adjustments to the study sample.

For Scandinavia, the same geographical area can be used thanks largely to the survival and excavation of the vast cemetery at Birka in Uppland, Sweden, replete with Viking period furnished burials. For England, the net must be widened from

Kent. Weapon burials did not vanish forever from Anglo-Saxon England after the early eighth century: a series of ninth- to tenth-century sword graves have been excavated, mostly from Scandinavian-settled areas. These burials were originally attributed to immigrant pagan Scandinavians, both because of their Viking period dating and because they contain grave goods long after furnished burial had fallen out of use in England; but this attribution is now questioned, with some arguing that the graves are Anglo-Saxon, others that they are Scandinavian, and yet others that they are a mixture of the two, which seems the most plausible explanation based on the arguments (Halsall 2000, Hadley 2004 and Redmond 2007, each with references). Nevertheless, in the absence of other evidence, these burials provide a modest corpus of data with the caveat that they may be subject to Scandinavian influence. Accordingly, details of these later burials were collected within the same relational database described above, and their records isolated for analysis using the approaches undertaken in Sections 5.2 and 5.3.

#### a) Research Question 1: The Sword as a 'Living' Object

The method advocated in Section 5.2a for identifying potentially-curated swords facilitates study beyond burial contexts because it does not rely upon a comparison between the dating of grave and sword. Therefore it remains possible to seek worn, repaired and modified swords even after weapon graves disappear. However, a new problem emerges: after the eighth century, hilt fittings were increasingly made from iron (Bodin 1987, 27), which, in the archaeological conditions of northern Europe, tends to corrode so severely that subtler signs of curation are impossible to spot. Fortunately, a proportion of the sampled swords were also embellished with silver, copper or copper alloy ornament (gold fittings were by now rare), which survive in

better condition. The patchiness of the evidence again precludes statistical analysis, but general observations can be made.

Several swords within the eighth- to eleventh-century burial sample demonstrate the same signs of potential curation on their metal fittings as the earlier swords studied in Section 5.2: wear, repair and modification. In England, an early tenth-century burial at Wensley Churchyard in North Yorkshire yielded a sword (LAS1) with silver-inlaid iron fittings decorated with incised and nielloed leaf ornament which has worn down in several places: notably the middle lobe of the trilobed pommel and the lower edge of the grip mount beneath the pommel, where the incised lines are entirely obliterated (Fig. 114; Wilson 1965, 41). A thornier case concerns a male interred with a horse at Reading, Berkshire (LAS2), who was accompanied by a sword which seemed to contradict the burial's ninth-century dating (Fig. 115). East (1986, 6) dated the weapon to the late eighth century based on its typology and decoration, but this suggested that either the sword was at least half a century old when buried, or that Scandinavians had arrived further inland in England much earlier than previously thought. Uncomfortable with the former possibility, East chose the latter (see also Hinton 1990, 69-70). This confusion typifies the aforementioned problems inherent in comparing grave date with sword typology. In fact, East's more important observation about the Reading sword is that its silver-inlaid fittings seemed particularly worn, noticeably more on one face of the lower guard than the other (East 1986, 2). This wear pattern was encountered on the earlier swords in the sample (Section 5.2b), and indicates that the weapon's fittings had deteriorated as a result of rubbing against its owner's clothing when worn at his side. It is not unreasonable to suggest that this weapon, or at least its fittings, was of some age when buried.

Of the later Scandinavian swords, several from Birka appear to have worn fittings. The pommel and guards on a sword from grave 544 (VIK1) are decorated with complex inlaid designs in silver and copper wire, some of which are twisted together. In places, these twisted sections seem flattened and the distinction between the separate strands is lost, particularly the lower line of twisted wire separating the pommel from the upper guard (Arbman 1940, Taf. 5:1). The wire-inlaid fittings from grave 561a (VIK2) also seem worn, but a brief digression on this method of decoration is necessary before this can be confirmed.

Inlaying iron fittings with wire strips was a popular technique on Viking period swords, accomplished by cutting a thin channel into the iron and hammering in a piece of wire of contrasting colour, often silver or copper. The effect would be striped, checked, stepped or diamond patterns, or even the illusion of metal plating, depending on how closely the wire strips were aligned. It is important to know the intended effect because it has implications for identifying wear, but this is not always clear since the same area of wire-inlaid ornament can appear both striped and plated. So, has a plated surface become so gravely worn that the separate inlaid channels are revealed (Dunning and Evison 1961, 125), or has the slightly-protruding surface of individual wires worn flat until they merge with adjacent wires, thereby reducing a striped effect? It is helpful to look more closely at those areas where striped and plated effects appear together in the same motif, because whatever the intended effect of the decoration, the fact that the two appear together suggest that the fitting is worn. This is especially noticeable on the silver stepped motifs ornamenting the pommel and guards of the sword from Birka grave 561a (Fig. 116).

Firmer ground is found with the sword from Birka grave 942 (VIK3) which displays the most striking wear signals of all swords in the sample. Its fittings have

already been noted as exceptionally worn (Duczko 1985, 104-105) and the signs are obvious (Fig. 117): the thick silver beading flanking the pommel's central decorative field has worn utterly smooth in places, especially on the top where the deterioration is so marked that the beading resembles a flat band with scalloped edges rather than the relief decoration it once was. The edges of the beaded band separating the upper part of the pommel from the lower part adjoining the upper guard is also highly worn, particularly at both terminals where the beads have again merged together. Interestingly, this weapon may also be a rare example of a clear discrepancy between the date of the burial and that of the sword-type. The Birka graves are generally dated to the ninth and tenth centuries, but Duczko (1985, 104-105) categorises the grave 942 sword as Petersen *Særtyp* ('special type') 1 (also known as Mannheim type), dated to the late eighth to early ninth centuries. Moreover, he states that the filigree spiral ornament on the sword's fittings was extremely rare by the Viking Age and is most commonly found on sixth- to seventh-century artefacts. This is tantalising evidence that the sword in grave 942 at Birka was at least a generation, and perhaps even a century, old when buried. Inevitably, there are caveats: the sword's dating is eccentric, with Thålin-Bergman categorising it as a Petersen *Særtyp* in 1986 but in 2005 as Petersen Type D (c. 800-850), while the Historiska Museum in Stockholm, where the sword is held, describes it as a Petersen Type V (c. 900-950). Yet again, typological evidence is open to dispute, but the irrefutable signs of wear on this weapon demonstrate that its fittings, at the very least, had circulated for a considerable time.

Few of the later swords in the sample demonstrate signs of repair. From England, hilt fittings on the aforementioned sword from Wensley Churchyard, Yorkshire are set with rivets which Wilson (1965, 41) has interpreted as a

contemporary repair, while wire inlay on two swords from Steinvik (Universitetets Oldsaksamling, Oslo C20317: Oakeshott and Peirce 2005, 32, n.4) and Lier in Norway (Universitetets Oldsaksamling, Oslo C4397: Oakeshott and Peirce 2005, 92) may have been refurbished in antiquity. Despite the paucity of evidence, it is likely that repairs remain difficult to identify rather than had become less common in the later period.

There are few clear examples of modified swords in the later sample. For instance, a potentially-imported sword from a Viking period chamber grave at Långtora, Uppland, Sweden (VIK4) bears a silver hilt-mount which Arbman (1936, 90-92) argued had been inscribed with runes after its arrival in Sweden, although Wilson (1965, 38) interpreted the same marks as damage. Again, modified swords probably remain difficult to identify rather than that swords were less frequently modified in the later period; although by this time sword hilts were made of fewer components and often of durable iron rather than organic or softer metals like copper alloy or silver (Underwood 1999, 51) – perhaps meaning that repairs and modifications were less necessary or easy to undertake. One chronological development in sword adaptation may be significant. Ring-swords went out of use by the eighth century, meaning that one outlet for modification (and method for identifying modified swords) was no longer available in the later period.

In summary, the signals of potential sword curation continue into the later period with little alteration. Worn, repaired and modified swords still occur within the archaeological record, suggesting that swords remained in circulation long enough to acquire these physical changes, as they had in the early period. Indeed, in England they may have circulated longer than before due to the decline of weapon burial (discussed further below, 108). Chronological consistency in the treatment of

swords may indicate a chronological consistency in perceptions of them as characterful, ‘living’ objects, but the disappearance of ring fittings removed a conspicuous characteristic that earlier swords could acquire, and in turn their role as a visual record of their wielder’s career may have declined. The impact of this change should not be over-estimated, because not all earlier swords were ring-swords anyway, and the disappearance of this custom would have affected a small number of sword-wielders; but nonetheless, the possibilities for visually expressing a sword’s individuality narrowed with the loss of ring fittings. The ways in which this development affected perceptions of ‘living’ swords is difficult to estimate based on the archaeological evidence alone, and must await the Discussion in Chapter 7.

#### b) Research Question 2: The Sword-Warrior Relationship

The dearth of weapon burials in later Anglo-Saxon England becomes more serious when attempting to repeat the investigation undertaken in Section 5.3, into the positioning of swords in graves. The burials which emerged in the ninth- to tenth-centuries are usable, but little information survives since most were excavated in the nineteenth century. Fortunately some, such as Repton (LAS3) and Cumwhitton (LAS4-6), were excavated in the modern period and thus are better recorded. The Scandinavian material is unaffected on account of Birka, which not only contained many sword burials but was published in great detail by Holger Arbman in the 1940s.

The later sample suggests the side of the body on which the sword was placed in the grave underwent a change. During the earlier period discussed in Section 5.3b, swords were generally placed on the left both in England and Scandinavia; but in the eighth- to eleventh-century this switches to the right. For England, 64% of swords

with recorded positions appeared on the right (Chart 41; DB2:Q11), but the sample is prohibitively small at just eleven and it is unwise to assume too much: if even two more graves were discovered with a sword on the left of the deceased, the picture would change. The Scandinavian material is better: of the 32 swords with a recorded body-side position, 75% were placed on the right side (Chart 42; DB2:Q12). A number of these graves contain partially or wholly decayed skeletal material, but often the sword is placed so far towards one edge of the grave that it must have been placed on the right of the body. If this can be accepted as a genuine development from earlier practice, interpretation is required. Swords were still worn on the left just as they were in the earlier period, so the shift cannot reflect a change in this convention. Moreover, too many examples exist to suggest a preponderance of left-handers at Birka who all wore their weapons on the right, although for argument's sake this cannot be ruled out. It is possible that this right-hand position was convention at Birka, because most graves with recorded positioning data derive from there; but it also occurs in Viking period graves elsewhere in Uppland, at Vendel and Valsgärde. For the purposes of this study, it is appropriate to consider whether the change could reveal a shift in the sword-wielder relationship during the later period.

The notion that swords were most appropriately placed at the side on which they were worn may have been superseded by a new notion that they should be close to the hand that held them. Conceptually, this made the sword more accessible to the deceased, quicker to grasp or snatch up. Intriguingly, 63% of Scandinavian spears with a recorded body side were also placed on the right (Chart 43; DB2:Q13). Perhaps this positioning derived from a sense of preparedness connected with some social, spiritual or political concern. Alternatively the change in location between the sword's traditional sheathed position (on the left) to the side that wielded it in battle



(on the right) could represent a shift in perception from the sword as an elite attribute worn at rest to a lethal weapon wielded in anger. The possibility that perceptions of swords changed from the early to later periods recurs in other sources and is explored further in Chapter 7.4.

The later sample reveals little chronological alteration in the physical proximity of sword and deceased in the grave. In England, none of the swords with recorded positioning data were separated from the body by another weapon; although the sample is, again, admittedly small (DB2:Q14). Just 8% of Scandinavian swords with proximity data can be described as separated from the body, while 64% were placed beside it, 14% touching or being touched by the deceased, and 3% placed on it in some way (Chart 44; DB2:Q15). Therefore, there may have been some continuity in the notion that swords should be positioned close to the body. This was still at the expense of other weapons: in the Scandinavian material 46% of spears with available proximity data can be described as separated from the deceased by another weapon or grave feature (Chart 45; DB2:Q16), and for 58% of these, that weapon is a sword.

Finally, a small number of later burials within the later sample imply that a link between swords and women continued, although these examples are again disputable. In England, a grave at Santon Downham, Norfolk (LAS7) contained a sword and a pair of oval brooches, which are typical attributes of female Scandinavian dress during the Viking Age (Evison 1969). Although only one skeleton was found, the grave was interpreted as a double burial containing a male (for the sword) and a female (for the brooches). More recently it has been suggested that the 'sword' may actually be a weaving beater (Jesch 1991, 21), which would render the burial wholly female; but the object's tri-lobed pommel and curving guard

argues that it is, indeed, a weapon. At Birka in Sweden, double burials with swords were recorded in graves 644, 731, 735, 750, 823a and 834 (VIK5-10). Grave 823a was disturbed by a second burial and cannot tell us much, but in graves 644 and 750 the sword was placed on the male's side of the grave, thus appearing to strengthen his association with it while weakening that with the female occupant. This is conjectural for grave 750 because no skeletal material survived, but the burial tableau is suggestive. The occupants of graves 644 and 834 seem to have been interred in a seated position, with the female potentially sitting on the male's lap, meaning that the sword laid beside them cannot be attributed to one more than the other – particularly considering the tangled and decayed skeletal material respectively (Fig. 118; Arbman 1943, 221; Price 2002, 133-137 and Figures 3.8a-b). The sword's significance in the tableau is also unclear in grave 731, in which it was apparently placed horizontally above both occupants (their skeletons do not survive), and in grave 735 in which *all* weapons appear on the male's side of the grave. However, the general proximity between males and swords suggests that this weapon's key social association continued to be with men and rarely, if at all, with women.

#### **5) Research Question 4: The 'Living' Sword in Space**

With the stipulated caveats in mind, it seems reasonable to conclude from the preceding analysis that certain parallels in the perception and treatment of swords existed between England and Scandinavia. Weapons from both regions bear the hallmarks of substantial circulation before their disposal, such as patches of wear in specific locations on pommel and guards, together with repairs and modifications to the original fittings. These signs are observable in both regions throughout the study period c. 500-1100, and it is reasonable to conclude that social perceptions of

swords, based on their visual appearance, may also have been shared. In the first half of the period, further parallels can be apprehended in the positioning of swords in the grave: both Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian mourners appeared to favour the left side of the body, and a close physical proximity between weapon and deceased – although this assertion is necessarily tempered by uneven data.

The most significant cultural difference between Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian evidence relates to the decline of furnished burial in England during the seventh century, and its continuity in Scandinavia into the eleventh. This altered the way in which swords circulated in England, because alternative outlets for their disposal needed to be found now that graves were unavailable. Archaeologists have identified an increase in finds of swords (and other artefacts) from English rivers during the ninth and tenth centuries, possibly in response to Scandinavian influence during the period of Viking activity and settlement (summarised neatly by Lund 2010), while surviving later Anglo-Saxon wills record the bequest of swords by elite men (Whitelock 1930, nos. 1 and 18). While some Anglo-Saxon swords probably simply ended their lives in a river instead of a grave, others may have circulated for longer than they would have done during the period of furnished burial – and perhaps for longer than contemporary Scandinavian swords, which were still being buried in graves. The aforementioned Reading sword, which may be the longest-circulating sword deriving from England contained within the sample, supports this assertion; but problematically, it may have been owned by a Scandinavian, and in any case it is outdone by the remarkably-worn sword from grave 942 at Birka.

We might question what impact, if any, the longer circulation of swords had upon perceptions of them as ‘living’ objects. Strong arguments can be found both for a reduction or continuity in such notions. Taking the former first: the end of

furnished burial in Anglo-Saxon England fractured the eternal bond between sword and wielder which the grave provided. This in turn may have transformed swords into less personal artefacts, which were previously conceived as wedded only to specific people forever. The identities of sword and wielder need not be so enmeshed; and it is possible that the cognitive bond between the two may have been diluted, with the sword seeming more like a tool or a simple weapon, than an extension of self. Indeed, longer circulation may also have made swords more accessible and consequently less mysterious, because friends and family who may not have acquired swords during the period of furnished burial could now receive them as bequests. Alternatively, longer periods of circulation may have created continuity or even an increase in perceptions of swords as ‘living’ objects: their longer ‘lives’ would enable them to build more chequered biographies, memories, iterations of visual identity, and social networks of different owners, thus augmenting views of them as entities with histories and personalities. Perceptions may have remained more constant in Scandinavia, where the endurance of furnished burial preserved the death-bond between sword and wielder; or it may have altered in ways which are less readily apprehended from the archaeological evidence. These complex thoughts are disentangled further in Chapter 7, with the assistance of pictorial and written evidence.

## **6) Conclusion**

Archaeology provides ample material for exploring perceptions of swords and their relationship with warriors in the early medieval North, although the signs are frequently subtle and interpretations complex. The life-histories, or ‘biographies’, of early medieval swords left visible imprints which can still be read on the weapons

today. Fittings became worn through age or use; the sword's life was extended via repairs; and its form manipulated by modifications. These interactions between sword and owner helped to construct a recognisable identity for the weapon which perhaps fuelled perceptions of 'living' swords with personality, and modification may have been particularly important in this process as the most conspicuous change through which a sword could go. Propinquity in the grave between sword and deceased implies that the mourners who arranged burial tableaux were concerned with allying the dead man with *this* weapon over any other, implying a sense of indivisible partnership which was too strong to break in death, until external social and spiritual factors intervened. It seems that this partnership was restricted to men: while women had limited access to swords, the archaeological record hints that their relationship with this weapon was not quite the same.

The research undertaken for this chapter has revealed many more lines of enquiry which would benefit from further investigation. The issue of loose sword fittings exemplified by the Staffordshire Hoard should receive much-needed attention in the wake of this enormous discovery. Wear patterns could also be investigated further from an archaeo-metallurgical point of view, for instance using specialist equipment to examine less well-preserved fittings, and by determining the purity of metals and alloys in order to estimate how long it may have taken for them to become worn. An intensive hunt for battle damage would also be a welcome addition to discussions of sword biography. Finally the search for curated material could be extended to other weapons, because swords were not the only worn, repaired and modified items of war-gear to be deposited in early medieval graves (Norr 2008b). Despite the volume of research into weapon burials to date, much more remains to be learned.

**1) Introduction**

Written sources provide exceptionally rich evidence for the early medieval period, comprising histories, chronicles, sagas, poetry, inscriptions, letters, religious texts, and official documents like charters and wills, composed in Old English, Old Norse and Latin, and written in both the Roman and runic alphabets. Many contain information about swords, such as their use in battle, materials of manufacture, decoration, who made and owned them, how they circulated, and even their temperaments and names. Written evidence is superficially persuasive because it appears to reflect directly contemporary thoughts about swords, in a format requiring fewer specialist interpretative tools than pictorial or archaeological evidence – any person able to read can access texts. In truth, written evidence carries its own set of interpretive challenges, which must be fully comprehended before study.

**a) Critical and contextual issues**

Like the pictorial and archaeological evidence analysed in Chapters 4 and 5, texts were produced and survive unevenly between Anglo-Saxon England and Scandinavia. In the early medieval period, literacy was entwined with Christianity – a religion based upon a book – and conversion to this faith unlocked the potential to read, write and record information permanently, in written form. In England the conversion process began at the end of the sixth century, and consequently numerous Anglo-Saxon texts survive from the period. In Scandinavia Christianity did not make significant inroads until the second half of the tenth century, beginning in Denmark

and Norway, with Sweden following in the eleventh (Brink 2008, with references). Consequently, documents were not produced in a manner comparable with Anglo-Saxon England during the period under discussion (Sawyer and Sawyer 1993, 1), creating a challenge for comparative study.

Epigraphic evidence, however, was produced in both regions throughout the period, and initially seems to offer a better point of comparison than documents. Anglo-Saxon inscriptions in both the runic and Roman alphabets survive on coins, stone sculpture and portable artefacts (Page 1999, 16-21; Okasha 1971, 4-6). Scandinavian runic inscriptions also appear upon portable artefacts, but the main surviving corpus derives from commemorative stone monuments erected from the mid-tenth century onwards (chiefly in Sweden, lasting into the twelfth century: Jesch 2001, 7, 14; Spurkland 2005, 20ff, 86ff).

Unfortunately, inscriptions say little about perceptions of swords. Typically, they record the name of the maker, owner or inscriber of the artefact, proclaim a dedication, or pronounce a 'magical' formula that can no longer be fully deciphered while stone monuments usually name the person commemorated, the commissioner and/or the carver of the runes (Page 1999, 117, 138-157ff, 162ff; Okasha 1971, 7-9; Looijenga 2003, 20-21, 164ff, 273ff, 329ff). More substantial inscriptions have survived, for instance upon the eighth-century Anglo-Saxon Ruthwell Cross (Page 1999, 145-148), a seventh-century runestone from Eggja, Norway (Looijenga 2003, 341-343; Spurkland 2005, 54-72) and eighth- and ninth-century runestones from Sparlösa and Rök in Sweden (Jansson 1987, 31, 131-132; MacLeod and Mees 2006, 213ff with references), but swords are rarely or indistinctly mentioned (as with the Eggja and Sparlösa runestones: Looijenga 2003, 341-343; Spurkland 2005, 54-72; Nielsen 1969, especially 106-107).

More intriguing are inscriptions which make their objects ‘speak’, since these could be interpreted as reflecting a perception of objects as ‘living’ (Karkov 2011, 135ff; Okasha 1994, 76). ‘Speaking’ inscriptions appear upon (but are not limited to) swords: the inscription on the grip of a sword found in the River Frome at Wareham (‘[Æ]þe...] owns me’: Okasha 1983, no. 179, 100-101) compares with that upon the famous Alfred Jewel (‘Alfred ordered me to be made’: Hinton 2008). A thorough study of ‘speaking’ objects might reveal whether there is anything special about what they ‘say’, but this type of inscription is part of a broader custom of expression which was not specific to swords. Overall, the limited information which inscriptions provide about swords means that they fail to solve the imbalance between surviving Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian texts.

Later Scandinavian texts provide a potential, if problematic, lifeline. Icelandic sagas, written down in Iceland from the twelfth century onwards, survive in number and many are set in early medieval Scandinavia (Lönnroth 2008, 304). Warriors, warfare and weapons feature prominently in their subject matter, and some of the best-known tales of swords derive from Icelandic sagas, such as Sigurðr and his sword Grámr from *Völsunga saga*. The late date and Icelandic origin of these texts, together with questions about the extent of their oral or literary beginnings, have caused a prolonged dispute surrounding their use as evidence for earlier Scandinavia (Jesch 1991, 4; Lönnroth 2008, 305-306; Meulengracht-Sørensen 1993, 172-174). Some scholars have felt strongly enough to reject sagas completely (e.g. Christiansen 2001, 305, 309), but in recent decades others have argued sagas can and should be used in studies of earlier periods, provided that their complexities are acknowledged (Clunies Ross 2003; Jesch 1991, 4; Dumville 2003, 244). Some types of saga have been identified as ‘safer’ to use than others (for example



*Konungasögur*, ‘Kings’ Sagas’: Jesch 1991, 5; but not without their problems: Andersson 2005). A sensible proposal is that the appropriateness of using sagas depends upon the specific enquiry: they are probably unsuitable for historical facts and events, but *may* be appropriate for attitudes, ideologies and customs (Lönnroth 2008, 301-311; Meulengracht-Sørensen 1993 with references).

The sagas themselves are late, but they incorporate poetic verses which may be authentically early medieval in origin. ‘Skaldic’ poetry, named after the ‘skalds’ (poets) who composed it, is accepted as probably late tenth- to eleventh-century in date (Jesch 2008, 296), with a handful potentially older, such as Bragi inn gamli Boddason’s supposedly mid-ninth-century *Ragnarsdrápa* (cf. Jesch 2003b, 273 and Poole 1991, 18-19 on later skalds composing archaising verse that appears earlier in date). Skaldic poetry is so complex in form and metre that it is widely thought to have been transmitted uncorrupted from the Viking period until it was recorded in writing centuries later. The veracity of such material is supported further by the fact that many poems can be attributed to named, dateable skalds, and because they functioned as praise poems, composed and publicly recited in honour of a named figure’s deeds in response to a specific historical occasion (Abram 2011, 11-13; Hall 2007, 21; Jesch 2003b, 251; Jesch 2008, 295-296). This, together with its dense martial imagery, makes skaldic poetry an obvious source for early medieval Scandinavian attitudes towards swords.

Before moving on, a word should be said about Scandinavian ‘Eddic’ poetry, preserved in the thirteenth-century *Codex Regius* (or *Konungsbók*). Eddic verse is generally viewed as somewhat less trustworthy than skaldic as a source for earlier periods (although the division between the two types of poetry is increasingly challenged: Abram 2011, 11; Jesch 2008, 293). This is because the subject matter is

mythological and heroic rather than historical; the poets are anonymous; and the form and metre less complex, making it more susceptible to corruption over time. While certain scholars suspect that Eddic material pre-dates the *Codex Regius*, an early medieval origin is usually taken as less secure than for skaldic poetry (Jesch 2008, 295; Jesch 2003b, 251, 261, 263-264; Jesch 2001, 18; Christiansen 2001, 309).

#### b) Text selection

In light of these challenges, the decision was made to focus on vernacular poetry in this study, for three reasons.

First, an ample yet manageable body of material survives from both regions. While Latin poetry and extensive vernacular and Latin prose texts survive from England, the lack of a contemporary Scandinavian equivalent underlines vernacular poetry as the best choice for comparison. A summary of prose parallels is provided in the conclusion to this chapter, including limited discussion of Icelandic sagas. The latter have been excluded for pragmatic reasons. Interdisciplinary research offers particular challenges when integrating diverse sources, each with their own eccentricities and problems – taking on the sagas and their controversies could provide another project in itself. Furthermore, the pervasiveness of weapons in sagas and their role in narratives, for instance as characters and instruments of fate, requires specialist discussion in a more substantial venue than this individual chapter can provide.

Second, Old English and Old Norse poetry treat swords in similar ways, for instance in linguistic constructions called ‘kennings’ (see below, 173) which can be analysed and compared cross-culturally.

Finally, poetry probably contains some of the earliest written material to survive from the period – albeit not as early as the starting-point of this thesis (c. 500). Runic inscriptions are securely dateable to the earliest period, but as established above (167), are excluded due to their limited relevance to this particular study. The earliest Old Norse skaldic poetry is thought to be ninth or tenth century in origin (Birgisson 2008, 164). Old English poetry is preserved in a group of mid-tenth to eleventh century manuscripts (O’Donoghue 2010, 8-9), but is widely thought to feature older elements transmitted orally over generations: *The Dream of the Rood* adapts the poem inscribed in runes upon the eighth-century Ruthwell Cross (Bradley 1982, xiii); part of *Genesis* has been attributed to c. 700 (*Genesis A*: O’Donoghue 2010, 10); and scholars have promoted a seventh-century date of composition for *Beowulf*, which survives in a single copy of c. 1000 date (Bradley 1982, 407; cf. Frank 1981, 169-170). Poetry describing traditional or mythological episodes may preserve older material, but this is notoriously difficult to establish. Corruption, adaptation and reconstitution over time are inevitable, but the degree of each is unknown (Abram 2011, 11; Bradley 1982, xiii-xiv). Nonetheless, the poems remain early medieval products even if they cannot be placed any earlier than, for argument’s sake, the eighth century. For these reasons, this chapter faces greater challenges than Chapters 4 or 5 when addressing Research Question 3, relating to chronological developments in perceptions of swords between c. 500-1100 (Chapter 3.3b). This simply reflects the nature of the surviving sources and is not a reason to reject them: the value of their contribution overrides their pitfalls.

The poetic corpus selected for analysis is as follows. From Anglo-Saxon England, any poem containing relevant material and securely dateable to the period under discussion is considered. From Scandinavia, skaldic poetry was chosen, but its

associated challenges dictate that more criteria be involved in its selection. Following Jesch's (2001, 16ff with references) method, only poems composed by skalds mentioned in the *Konungasögur* are considered, on the basis that these poems are probably the most linkable to a person and date than poems quoted in other types of saga. Of these, only poems composed by named skalds of the ninth- to eleventh-centuries, according to the most recent dating information provided by the Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages Project's online database and publications (Gade 2009), are considered. Undated and anonymous poems are excluded, except where scholars have argued persuasively for a contemporary date, as with the anonymous poems *Liðsmannaflokkr* and *Darraðarljóð* (Poole 1991). Skaldic poetry was selected over Eddic for reasons already discussed (169), but also because its complexities have caused it to be overlooked by non-specialists regardless of the value it has for studies of early medieval war-gear (Jesch 2003b, 261; Jesch 2009, 72, 77; Jesch 2011). Skaldic poetry is certainly intimidating for those not availed of its conventions (Abram 2011, 13). It is also true that most skaldic poetry focuses on events in Norway and the western Scandinavian settlements, leaving Denmark and Sweden rather under-represented (Jesch 2009, 72). Again, this is simply the nature of the material, and must be accounted for in any analysis.

Overall, the Old English poetry analysed in this study equates to approximately 13,711 lines of verse contained within 25 poems, and the Scandinavian poetry approximately 4746 lines of verse contained within 79 poems and individual verses known as *lausavísur* (collected and counted in an Excel 2010 spreadsheet, Database 3b). Although the number of Old English lines substantially outnumbers the Old Norse, the frequency and density of sword imagery contained within skaldic poetry compensates for the numerical discrepancy.

### c) Approach

This chapter analyses two aspects of how swords are presented in the selected poetry. First, how they are depicted within the narrative of the poem or verse; and second, their presentation in ‘kennings’ for swords and other things, such as battles, warriors and other war-gear. Defining kennings is complicated in its own right, but in the most basic sense a kenning is a linguistic construction which replaces a simple noun: for instance, a kenning for ‘fire’ in a late eleventh century poem by Björn krepphendí is ‘harm of the forest’ (Old Norse *böl markar: Mag. §3*), alluding to fire’s ability to destroy, or harm, wood. Kennings are therefore somewhat metaphorical, although they are usually referred to as ‘periphrastic’ or ‘circumlocutory’ (Abram 2011, 13-15): that is, an indirect way of signifying something without using the common word for it.

Kennings are overwhelmingly associated with skaldic poetry, and can be exceptionally complex in terms of length or allusions to obscure myths and legends with which the audience must be familiar in order to ‘decode’ the kenning (Abram 2011, 15; Clunies Ross 2005, 107-109). Kennings have been identified in Old English poetry, but they are fewer and far simpler, often comprising simple compound (conjoined) nouns (Gardner 1969, 109-110; Harleman Stewart 1979, 117-118) like *billhete*, a compound of *bill* (‘sword’) and *hete* (‘hate’) to give ‘sword-hate’, a kenning for battle (*And.1.78*).

Scholars have disagreed over exactly what qualifies as a kenning, and some definitions are stricter than others (Gardner 1969; Harleman Stewart 1979; Teresi 2004, 164, n. 67). The approach taken here is broadly inclusive: any compound or linguistic construction which substitutes the noun ‘sword’ (Old English *beadoleoma*,

‘battle light’: *Bwf*.1.1523; Old Norse *róggeisli*, ‘battle beam’: *Bjkrépp.Mag.*§7), or something *other* than a sword but incorporating a reference to a sword (Old English *sweordgripe*, ‘seizing of swords’, denoting ‘battle’: *Jul*.1.488; Old Norse *Ullr branda*, ‘Ullr of swords’, denoting ‘warrior’: *Eskál.Vell.*§21) was analysed. The viewpoint adopted is that of Birgisson (2008, 164), who argues that metaphorical and allusive constructions can perform as ‘mirrors of mentality’, providing crucial insight into how people thought about swords (cf. Jesch 2001, 34).

Lists of Old Norse kennings have been published by Meissner (1921), Falk (1914) and the Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages Project’s scholarly online database; and Old English kennings by Marquardt (1938). While these are extremely useful resources, their de-contextualisation of kennings can lead to misinterpretations (see below, 194). Accordingly, the lists were used only as aids to select relevant poetry. The poems were then read in full, the kennings analysed in their original setting, and a new list collated into a Microsoft Access 2010 database (Database 3a). Information about the allusions made within the kenning, the date of the poem, and important contextual information, such as where a particular kenning is part of a longer kenning, was also collected. Kennings for or referring to spears were also collected for the purpose of comparison with swords. This resulted in a total of 297 kennings, 240 (81%) from Old Norse poetry and 57 (19%) from Old English poetry (DB3a:Q1; Chart 46). The mismatch in number prevents a strict statistical comparison, but certain trends can be identified and interpreted tentatively.

The first section of this chapter approaches perceptions of ‘living’ swords by examining how far swords are characterised, personified and even presented as animated entities in the poetry and kennings. The second section investigates how poetry and kennings depict the relationship between swords and warriors, by contrast

with other social groups. The third section explores how perceptions may have developed over time, although as noted previously, the poetry's problematic chronology affects this task. The fourth section compares and contrasts Old English and Old Norse poetry. The concluding section highlights areas for further study, and summarises significant parallels from selected prose sources.

#### d) A note on language, translation, spelling and referencing

From this point, 'Old Norse' is abbreviated to 'ON' and 'Old English' to 'OE'. All poetry is quoted in modern English translation. Where quotations are direct, the reference is also supplied in the original language, in the nominative grammatical case (that is, in dictionary form). Sources for modern English translations are listed in the Bibliography under 'Primary Sources', with occasional modifications. Regrettably, no modern translation can fully reproduce the subtleties of the original work – certain nuances will be lost and others remain ambiguous (Jesch 2009, 72). In the latter case, alternative interpretations are noted when relevant. Spellings are given in the original language but glossed where necessary. Poems are referenced by abbreviating the name of the poet (where known) and poem. A key to abbreviations is provided in the Bibliography. Conventionally, OE poetry is referenced by line number and ON by verse number, which can create confusion in a comparative study if only numbers are quoted for these. Accordingly, numbers are prefaced with 'l.' for lines and '§.' for verses (or 'stanzas'). ON *Lausavísur* (individual verses) are referred to by the number assigned to them by the Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages Project, for example *Laus.2*.

## 2) Research Question 1: The Sword as a ‘Living’ Object

Poetry provides ample evidence for notions of swords as ‘living’ artefacts. Description of their visual and physical properties, histories, associations and function invests them with character and even person-like qualities. However, it is helpful to differentiate between ‘characterisation’ and ‘personification’. Following standard dictionary definitions, ‘characterisation’ refers to the description of the features or traits of an object, while ‘personification’ describes the attribution of human qualities to inanimate objects. Therefore, characterisation does not necessarily carry connotations of an object being animated, but personification can. Both feature in the poetic portrayal of swords, although as the following discussion will show, the boundary between them can become blurred.

### a) Characterisation

In the collected poetry swords are characterised via references to their components, materials, manufacture, visual appearance and function. Different sword parts – blade, hilt, scabbard, harness and sword-belt – feature unequally, implying that certain parts were considered more distinctive or worthy of attention than others (also noted in Chapter 4.2a for pictorial evidence).

#### *i) Blade*

The frequency, diversity and creativity of blade descriptions in poems and kennings give them a prominent, multi-dimensional character that hints at their significance in early medieval perceptions of swords.

Blades are often characterised by their cutting edges. A common motif in ON poetry is the warrior reddening his sword’s edges in enemy blood (Arn.*Har.*§2;



Arn.*Mag.*§5; ÞjóðA.*Mag.*§18). Kennings include ‘tree of the sword’s two edges’, meaning ‘warrior’ (*heggr eggja tveggja mækis*: Glúmr.*Grá.*§10), and ‘trail of the edges of the sword’, meaning ‘wound’ (*spor eggja sverðs*: Tindr.*Hák.*§4). Edges are also referenced in OE poetry. *The Battle of Brunanburh* proclaims that the Anglo-Saxon victory over Scandinavian invaders in 937 was won ‘by the edges of swords’ (*sweorda ecgum*: *Brb.*1.4). In *Judith* and *Beowulf* swords have proven or famous edges (*Jud.*1.231; *Bwf.*1.1145), while Beowulf refuses to blame the edges of the sword Hrunting for failing to harm Grendel’s mother (*Bwf.*11.1807-1812). A vivid OE riddle depicts a shield complaining of being exhausted by sword edges (*Rid.*5.1.4).

Blade edges are such a common reference point that the noun ‘edge’ (OE *ecg*; ON *egg*) is often translated into modern English as ‘sword’ (Hatto 1957, 148). Swords, however, were not the only weapons with cutting edges. OE battle kennings incorporating the word ‘edge’ (‘edge hate’, *ecghete*: *Bwf.*1.84, 1738; *Sea.*1.70; ‘edge pressure’, *ecgþræce*: *Bwf.*1.596; ‘edge play’, *ecgplega*: *Jud.*1.246; ‘clash of edges’, *gelacu ecgum*: *Bwf.*1.1168) refer to a context in which various edged weapons were present, meaning that the less specific translation ‘weapon edges’ would work as well as ‘sword edges’. Both meanings may have been understood concurrently by contemporary audiences.

The shape of blades is also depicted. ON sword kennings which describe swords as rods or wands probably allude to the long, thin form of their blades. Examples include Hallfreðr Óttarsson’s ‘helmet-rods’ (*hjalmsprotar*: *EÓT.*§5) and ‘rod of mail-coat’ (*rá holbarkar*: *EÓT.*§6); Eyvindr Finnsson’s ‘wound wand’ (*benvöndr*: *Laus.*5); Sigvatr Þórðarson’s ‘wand of Gjöll’ (*vöndr Gjallar*: *EÓH.*§27); and Vígfúss Víga-Glúmsson’s ‘wands of Viðrir’ (*vendir Viðris*: *Laus.*§1). Einarr Helgason’s ‘war-lath’ (*folkskið*: *Vell.*§12) could be included. The width of blades is

suggested by the compound word ‘broad sword’ in the OE poem *Judith* (*bradswyrd*: l.317). Scholars have argued that nouns for swords which differ from the generic OE *sweord* and ON *sverð* denote different types, shapes or lengths of blade. These include OE *bill* and *mece*, and ON *mækir* and *hjörr* (Brady 1979, 79-82, 91-93; Hatto 1957, 145; Keller 1906, 157-158; Falk 1914, 14-16; Gade 2009, 287, n. 1-2). This issue would be better served by in a linguistic or philological study; but the variety of terms associated with swords, and the consistency with which they are applied to specific weapons (Brady 1979, 93), suggests that contemporary audiences understood distinctions between types of sword which are lost to modern readers. The implications for perceptions of swords are intriguing; but it should be emphasised that poets crafted verses according to metrical rules (particularly skaldic poetry in the notoriously complex *dróttkvætt* metre: Abram 2011, 13), and may by necessity have selected words to fit rather than enjoying a completely free choice. It is reasonable to suppose that a skilled poet might find a way to incorporate a specific term if he desired, but it is probably impossible to identify such instances.

References to materials, manufacture and maintenance also highlight the character of blades. In *Beowulf*, swords are denoted by the iron of their blade (*Bwf*.ll.674, 1809, 2050), while in the skaldic poem *Vikingavísur* (§14) Sigvatr Þórðarson describes a sword as a ‘mouth of metal’ (*munnr malms*). The description of ‘blue’ (*blár*) swords in a poem said to have been composed by Norwegian king Haraldr harðráði Sigurðarson (c. 1047-1066) likely refers to the blade’s hue (*Laus*.13). OE sword kennings ‘the leavings of’ hammers or files (*lafa hamora*: *Brb*.l.6; *Bwf*.l.2829; *Rid*.5.1.7; *laf fela*: *Bwf*.l.1032) may refer to the smith’s actions when producing a blade. A fragmentary OE riddle provides a similar image, in which an object construed as a sword describes itself surviving the cruelty of fire and file

(*Rid.*71.11.3-4). References to sharpening tools also signify blades, as in ON sword kennings ‘whetstone land’ (*heinland*: *Hallv.Knúts.*§5) and ‘hollow of whetstones’ (*laut heina*: *Glúmr.Grá.*§4), or the OE adjective ‘mill-sharpened’ (*mylenscearp*: *Brb.*1.24), perhaps alluding to a rotary grindstone (Walton 1995, 990-993). General references to sharpness emphasise the blade (*Jud.*11.87-91; *Rid.*5.1.8; *Þjóð.Har.*§3) and it is plausible that numerous kennings equating swords with light and ice allude to the bright and cold qualities of the metal blade.

Unusual terms in *Beowulf* may illustrate the intricate designs created by pattern-welding, a blade manufacturing technique involving the twisting, welding and hammering of bundles of iron rods. These include *wægsweord*, ‘wave-sword’ or ‘sword with a wavy pattern’ (l.1489); *hringmæl*, ‘coiling pattern’ or ‘with ring-like patterns’ (l.1521); *wundenmæl*, ‘twisted pattern’ (l. 1531); and *atertanum fah*, ‘gleaming with twigs of venom’ or ‘tiny serpents’ (l.1460; Brady 1979, 94, 101; Clark-Hall 1960 *s.v.* these terms). Alternatively, the terms may describe interlacing zoomorphic ornamentation on the sword hilt (Hatto 1957, 145ff), but as most of these terms are unique to *Beowulf* it is difficult to surmise too much from them (Brady 1979, 96).

## ii) Hilt

The prominence of blades in the characterisation of swords may seem unsurprising, since they are the largest single component, and define it as a weapon. However, the attention given to hilts suggests that they were also perceived as important parts of swords. Today the word ‘hilt’ is a collective term denoting pommel, grip and guards – all of the parts which are held in and protect the hand. In ON, the similar-sounding word *hjalt* can refer to any one of the separate hilt components (Cleasby and

Vigfusson 1957, *s.v. hjalt*). It appears in the sword kennings ‘hard limbs of hilts’ (*harðfœtr hjalta*: Eyv.Hák.§6) and ‘precious metals of hilts’ (*malmr mætra hjalta*: Glúmr.Grá.§7). In the shield kenning ‘skerry of hilts’ (*sker hjalta*: ÞKolb.Eir.§16), ‘hilts’ may denote an entire sword in the same way that ‘edge’ could, as discussed above (177).

Other words may signify specific hilt components. ON *meðalkafl*i could refer to the grip (Cleasby and Vigfusson 1957, *s.v. meðal-kafl*i), the tubular part between pommel and guards which the hand encloses. This seems probable in Sigvatr Þórðarson’s *Erfiðrápa Óláfs helgi*, a posthumous poem composed for Norwegian king Óláfr Haraldsson (c. 1015-1028), which depicts the king grasping the *meðalkafl*i before battle (§9). Some descriptions are even more detailed. ON sword kennings referring to nails and rivets may designate the rivets fixed upon hilts (‘nail-riveted one’, *naglfar*: Brag.Rag.§5; ‘sheath-covered masts of the rivet’, *slíðrdúkaðar siglur samnagla*: Þjóða.Frag.§3). ON *vétrim* / *vættrim* has been linked to both the fuller or groove along the centre of blades, or decorative (usually metal) grip-fittings (Fuglesang 1980, 157; Oakeshott and Peirce 2005, 43). The latter interpretation seems likelier based on the contexts in which it appears (Cleasby and Vigfusson 1957, *s.v. vætt-rim*; Ellis Davidson 1962, 179-180; Falk 1914; Gade 2009, 404; O’Donoghue 1991, 71). An example is the sword kenning ‘tongues of *vétrim*’ (*tungur véttrima*) in Björn kreppehendi’s poem *Magnússdrápa* (§10), which can be translated as ‘tongues of sword-grip mounts’. The imagery works because a blade can appear like a long ‘tongue’ poking out of a hilt. The alternative reading of *vétrim* as ‘fuller’ cannot work, as it creates the baffling image of a blade poking out of a groove in a blade.

In certain ON kennings, the word *hringr* appears to behave synonymously with ‘sword’ (Gade 2009, 14): for instance, in warrior kennings ‘tree of ring [sword]’ (*meiðr hrings: Sigv.EÓH.§24*) and ‘ring [sword] bearer’ (*hringberendr: Þhorn.Har.§1*), and the battle kenning ‘assembly of ring [sword]’ (*þing hrings: Hókr.Eirfl.§8*). In *Ragnarsdrápa*, Bragi Boddason calls the mythological character Hildir ‘ring-shaking Sif’ (*hristi-Sif hringa: §8*), with ‘ring’ translated as ‘sword’ by some scholars (Ashman Rowe 2002, 51). It has been asserted that such references denote ring-swords, like those discussed in Chapter 5.2d (Finlay 2004, 130). Given that ring-swords pre-date the period in which skaldic poetry was thought to have been composed, and that none have yet appeared in a contemporary archaeological context (Nerman 1982, 42ff), we should query how and why ‘ring’ may have come to denote ‘sword’, and therefore the degree to which it can be interpreted as a synonym for it.

First, the use of ‘ring’ for ‘sword’ could represent a cultural memory of ring-swords as significant artefacts from past generations (Nerman 1982, 41-44). Over the intervening period, ‘ring’ perhaps became a kind of shorthand for ring-swords, and eventually for swords more generally. While plausible, it should be noted that rings were not standard components of pre-Viking sword hilts: only certain types of sword were fitted with them, unlike pommels, guards and grips which we might expect more likely to become synonymous with ‘sword’.

Second, ‘ring’ could refer to a different item of war-gear: perhaps mail-armor, constructed from numerous tiny iron rings; or a shield, circular in shape (Chris Abram pers. comm.). The kennings quoted above in which *hringr* is translated as ‘sword’ still make sense if ‘mail-coat’ and/or ‘shield’ is used instead. It is quite possible that contemporary audiences interpreted these kennings in multiple ways.

Finally, ‘ring’ could simply mean ‘ring’ in some instances. Hildir, Bragi’s ‘ring-shaking Sif’, is also depicted carrying a *baugr*, another word for ‘ring’, representing a neck-ring that is a famous element of her tale. Consequently, the ‘ring’ she shakes in Bragi’s kenning may signify this neck-ring rather than a sword (Stavnem 2004, 178). As discussed in Chapter 5.2d, rings were symbolically significant in early medieval warrior culture, and therefore references to ‘ring’ might not signify a sword, but rather what the ring attached to it represented, including fealty to one’s lord. Indeed, swords and rings function similarly in the poetry, as rewards given by elite men to their followers. As such, both may have signified favour, fealty and status, and these social correspondences may have helped them to become synonymous in poetry. Certainly, by the time Snorri Sturluson composed *Skáldskaparmál* (‘Language of Poetry’) in thirteenth-century Iceland, *hringr* was a substitute for ‘sword’ and appears in his catalogue of terms (*pulur*) for this weapon (SnSt.*Skálds*.v.457; on *pulur* see Gurevich 1992).

The vividness and detail of some hilt descriptions create a tangible visual identity for swords. Arguably the most renowned is the *Beowulf* poet’s lingering report of the sword from Grendel’s mere (*Bwf*.ll.1677-1698), which is ‘twisted’ (*wreopenhilt*: an ambiguous reference perhaps to ornamentation), gold-fitted, adorned with images and inscribed with runes recording the name of its commissioner. The weapon is further described as ‘ornamented with serpents’ (*wyrmfah*: *Bwf*.l.1698), describing interlace ornament on the hilt rather than a pattern-welded blade in this case (see above, 179), because the blade had already dissolved in Grendel’s mother’s blood. Both OE and ON poetry describe hilts fitted with precious metals (Glúmr.*Grá*.§7), occasionally silver (Þhorn.*Har*.§19) but usually gold (*MxmI*.ll.125; *Bwf*.ll.1677, 1900, 2191; *Mld*.l.166; Eyv.*Laus*.1.§5). The

sword-grip clasped by Óláfr Haraldsson in Sigvatr Þórðarson's *Erfidrápa Óláfs helgi*, mentioned above, is wrapped in gold (§9). Interestingly, another sword used by Óláfr later in the poem is also gold-ornamented (§16), implying that the poet is describing the same weapon.

### *iii) Scabbards, harnesses and sword-belts*

The emphasis and detail afforded to blades and hilts supports the notion that these parts were considered the most characteristic of swords. By contrast, explicit references to scabbards, harnesses or sword-belts are rarer. Often they appear only in conjunction with blades, for instance when swords are drawn from their scabbards (*Gen.1.1993; Jud.11.77-81*), or in kennings which allude to blades, such as 'sharp scabbard-tongues' (*snarpar slíðrtungur: Glúm.r.Grá.§3*), 'scabbard-covered masts [blades] of rivet [hilt]' (*slíðrdúkaðar siglur samnagla: ÞjóðA.Frag.§3*), 'ice of sword-belt' (*íss sikulgarðar: Hallv.Knúts.§2*), 'sword-belt stabber' (*fetilstingr: Arn.Mag.§6; ÞjóðA.Laus.§3*) and 'ice of sword-belts' (*svell fetla: Eyv.Laus.§7*). In the latter kennings, the word *fetill* also carries the more general connotation of 'strap', but if the context suggests this should be inferred as 'sword-strap' (Cleasby and Vigfusson 1957, *s.v. fetill*), then a reference to a scabbard or sword-belt is probable. Overall, the scarcity of references to scabbards and sword-belts suggests that they were not deemed as essential to the characterisation of swords as blades and hilts.

### b) Personification

We have explored how poetry invests swords with physical and visual character. They can also seem personified, with human attributes such as life histories,

recognisable features (like ‘faces’ or personality traits), zoomorphic and anthropomorphic qualities, names, and relationships with their owners. Most extreme are suggestions of ‘animation’, in which swords appear capable of physical action or emotional experiences (see Chapter 3.2a).

*i) Naming*

A celebrated aspect of sword personification in poetry is naming. A sword called Mimming features in the fragmentary OE poem *Waldere*, and Hrunting and Nægling in *Beowulf*. Another named sword may appear in *Beowulf*: scholars disagree over whether the name ‘Hunlafing’, mentioned during the tale of Hnæf, Hengest and Finn (*Bwf*.1.1143), belongs to a person or a sword (Fulk *et al* 2008, 190; Nicholson 1975, especially 52-53; Brady 1979, 96-101). It has been suggested that the compound word *hildeleoma*, ‘battle light’ may be the name of the sword described in this passage (Fulk *et al* 2008, 190), but this is uncertain since it and similar terms appear elsewhere as sword kennings (*Bwf*.ll.2583; *beadoleoma* applied to Hrunting: *Bwf*.1.1523). In any case, ‘Hunlafing’'s ambiguous identity is itself revealing regarding the personification of swords, because both interpretations – man or sword – are admissible.

Unlike OE poems, the collected ON poems do not name swords outright. However, they contain rare and unique words for swords which could be interpreted as names, and some indeed appear as sword names in later Icelandic sagas. But did later sources turn these words into sword names, or are they genuine early medieval examples? And if the latter, do the terms refer to mythological swords whose names had become synonymous for any sword, or real swords owned by the figures in the poems? It is difficult to know, but clues exist. The use of a potential sword name in a



general way could reflect a widely-known name that became a sword synonym – for instance, in battle kennings ‘bickering of leg-biters’ (*senna leggbita*: Hókr.*Eirfl.* §4) and ‘strife of the Sága [Valkyrie] of rib-tearers’ (and *bágr Ságu rifjunga*: Glúmr.*Grá.* §6). The same may be true where the potential sword name recurs in different poems by different poets describing different episodes, as with the warrior kenning ‘tree of Laufi’ (*lundr Laufa*: Bjkrepp.*Mag.* §11) and battle kenning ‘storm of Laufi’ (*veðr Laufa*: Eskál.*Vell.* §10). Conversely, the use of potential names to describe weapons belonging to particular figures at particular moments could record genuine named swords, owned by the men praised in the poems. Arnórr Þórðarson’s *Haraldsdrápa* depicts Haraldr harðráði Sigurðarson reddening the edges of *týrfingr*, possibly ‘finger of Týr’ (trans. Whaley 2009, 260). A sword called Týrfingr, however, appears in the mythological Eddic poem *Hervararkviða* and later sagas, making it difficult to determine which came first. Arnórr’s *Porfinnsdrápa*, composed posthumously for jarl Þorfinnr Sigurðarson of Orkney after 1064/5 (Gade 2009, 229), portrays the jarl reddening *skelkingr*, possibly ‘fearful one’ (Gade 2009, 236, n. 2; §5) – a name also recorded in later saga, but applied to a troll rather than a sword (*Ketils saga hængs* 5). Perhaps the most convincing case appears in Arnórr’s *Magnússdrápa*. In this poem, King Magnús inn góði (‘the Good’: c. 1035-1047) wields *hneitir* – a word related to the ON verb *hneita*, ‘to cut’ – in battle (§13). According to the twelfth century poet Einarr Skúlason (*Geisli* §43) and Snorri Sturluson, writing in the thirteenth century (*Óláfs saga Helga* 213), *Hneitir* was the sword owned by Magnús’ father Óláfr Haraldsson. If we can trust this information, it is reasonable to conclude that Magnús inherited his father’s sword, making the *hneitir* of Arnórr’s poem a genuine sword name. Troublingly, Einarr and Snorri record that the sword ended up in the possession of a warrior in Byzantium after

Óláfr's death, rather than passing to his son. Nonetheless, the known connection between the two men, coupled with the relatively early date of Einarr Skúlason's poem around a century after the events in question, mean that it is not so outlandish to extrapolate that 'Hneitir' represents an authentic named sword from the Viking Age. Interestingly, these more promising cases of sword names all appear in poems composed by Arnórr Þórðarson, raising the possibility that he may have had a liking for obscure sword vocabulary. Nevertheless, the colourful nature of his terms – 'Cutter', 'Fearful One', 'Finger of Týr' – still contribute to the personification of swords in these poems.

*ii) Personality and reputation*

In some poems, swords have personality traits, physical features or reputations that make them famous. This features particularly in OE poetry, and namely *Beowulf*. Hroðgar rewards Beowulf with the sword of King Healfdene, a 'renowned treasure-sword' (*maere maðþumsweord*) which was undoubtedly well-known to the people, judging by the way they watch as it is conveyed across Hroðgar's hall (*Bwf*.ll.1019-1024). In a similar episode later in the poem, Hygelac gives Beowulf the sword of Hreðel, the best-known treasure sword amongst the Geats (*Bwf*.ll.2191-2194). During the tale of Hnæf, Hengest and Finn, the weapon which may be called 'Hunlafing' is noted as the 'best sword' (*billa selest*) with notorious edges (*Bwf*.ll.1143-1145). The reputation of Unferð's weapon Hrunting is described in terms that echo a human warrior: hardened in battle, it has never failed in a fight and its mission to Grendel's mere with Beowulf will not be its first trip into danger (*Bwf*.ll.1457-1464). Later, the elderly Beowulf boasts of his own sword Nægling's reputation, a faultless servant since he was young, and he will fight as long as that

sword lasts (*Bwf*.ll.2498-2509). A lengthy digression recounting the history of Wiglaf's sword may have been warranted by its fame (*Bwf*.ll.2610ff). Examples are not completely limited to *Beowulf*, however: in *Waldere*, the eponymous hero's companion Hildegyð remarks that the sword Mimming, crafted by the smith-god Weland, has cut a swathe through countless men and will not fail anyone able to wield it (*Wld*.1.1.2-5).

While these episodes provide vivid insights into early medieval perceptions of swords, they also function as dramatic devices serving the poem. Unferð's statement about Hrunting's reliability foreshadows its failure against Grendel's mother, whereupon Beowulf flings it away (*Bwf*.1.1532), perhaps frustrated that its reputation has proved false. Similarly, Beowulf's boast that he will fight as long as Nægling lasts proves true, when it snaps during his fatal encounter with the dragon. Finally, the digression about Wiglaf's sword may function as a comment on allegiance and retainership. Wiglaf's father Weohstan received the sword as a reward for loyalty to his lord, and in turn Wiglaf, who inherited the weapon, is the only one of Beowulf's men to stand with him against the dragon (*Bwf*.1.2866; Hill 2000, 25-26; Kaske 1960). Even so, swords could only function successfully as dramatic devices if the audience recognised and understood the implications behind it – a proven sword malfunctioning, a retainer repaying (or failing to repay) his lord's generosity. Thus, these episodes remain valuable as evidence for perceptions of person-like swords.

### *iii) History and associations*

A theme of the collected poetry is that a sword's age, history and associations were notable components of its personality. In the OE poem *The Battle of Maldon*, the

ealdorman Byrhtnoð offers his enemies a tribute of ‘ancient swords’ (*ealde swurd: Mld.ll.45-47*), while in *Exodus* swords wielded by Abraham and the Christian God are similarly described (*Ex.ll.408, 495*). Beowulf’s retainers pledge to protect him with ‘ancient heirlooms’ (*ealde lafe*), qualified as ‘war-swords’ (*guðbilla*) when Grendel attacks (*Bwf.ll.794-805*). Other old swords in this poem include Hrunting, the sword which Beowulf gives to his boat-guard, the weapons worn by Danes in the tale of the Heaðobards, and the sword from Grendel’s mere (*Bwf.ll.1488-1489, 1900-1904, 2036, 1558*).

ON poetry contains fewer explicit references to old swords. A *Lausavísa* composed by Eyvindr Finnsson exclaims ‘let us wield ancient weapons at once’ (*fôum til fornara vápna fljótt: Eyv.Laus.1*), perhaps referencing swords but also reminding that swords were not necessarily the only piece of war-gear that lasted a long time. Óttar svarti’s eleventh-century *Höfuðlausn* (in praise of Óláfr Haraldsson: Grove 2009, 327-329) relates how *éarnhringar* were destroyed during a battle – a term variously interpreted as ‘iron swords’, ‘old iron swords’ or even ‘far-famed swords’ (respectively Hagland and Watson 2005, 331; Nordal 2001, 28; Hollander 1995, 253).

Other potential allusions to old swords require speculation. Brady (1979, 90-92) argues that OE *mece* and *bill* refer to sword-types dating back to the third century, and that poets used these terms to denote ancient swords. If so, the ON equivalent *mækir* may carry similar connotations – although a thorough linguistic study would determine more. References to ring-swords, discussed above (181), may signify old weapons, as this type went out of use after the seventh century. Solid gold sword fittings were also rare by the Viking period (c. 750-1100), creating the possibility that swords described as ‘gold-fitted’ refer to older models (Williams

2008, 105-106) – although they may equally refer to gilded fittings, which were in use when the poems were composed. These issues are examined further in Chapter 7 alongside the archaeological and pictorial evidence. However, it is intriguing that ‘heirloom’ swords in *Beowulf* are often referred to as *mece* or *bill* (*Bwf*.ll.794-805, 1520, 2036-2037), and Byrhtnoð’s ‘ancient sword’ in *The Battle of Maldon* is a *bill* with a ‘yellow’ hilt (*fealohilte: Mld*.ll.162, 166).

The evidence suggests that old swords were not considered defunct, but were valuable and worth specific mention. Perhaps an attitude existed that ‘age equals experience’ and, by extension, reliability – an outlook that prevails to some degree today. This sense is contained within the OE term *ærgod*, meaning something like ‘time-proved’ (Heaney 2000’s translation) or ‘good from old times’ (Clark-Hall 1960, *s.v. ærgod*), which is applied to swords including Nægling in *Beowulf* (ll.989, 2586). The circulation of swords as gifts, heirlooms or booty, and their participation in conflicts and other events, invested them with biographies that could transform them into powerful symbols (Liuzza 2005, 98). A striking example occurs in *Beowulf* (ll.2036-2066), in which the appearance of and remembrances provoked by a sword, taken as battle-booty and then worn by the looter to a feast, are used to goad the dead man’s son into revenge (discussed further below, 209). The prestige surrounding ancient swords evokes themes explored in Chapters 4.2b and 5.2. The evidence will be compared in the next chapter.

### c) Animation

While swords with names, reputations and life-histories can appear person-like, it is debatable how far such ‘personification’ crosses into ‘animation’: namely, the sword being capable of autonomous action. Poetry contains hints of the latter, which appear

to divide into two categories: first, swords likened to living things or natural forces, and second, swords acting independently of their wielders.

*i) Living things and natural forces*

Sword blades are depicted as tongues (Bersi.*Flokk.*§2; Bjkrepp.*Mag.*§10; Bölv.*Dráp.*§1; Glúmr.*Grá.*§3), limbs (Eyv.*Hák.*§6) or mouths (Hfr.*EÓT.*§6; Sigv.*Vik.*§14). References to swords biting could be included, if this can be interpreted as an allusion to teeth or mouths (Arn.*Þorf.*§16; Eyv.*Hák.*§5; Hfr.*EÓT.*§15, §24; Mgóð.*Laus.*3; Sigv.*EÓH.*§16; Sigv.*Vik.*§6; ÞjóðA.*Mag.*§8). OE poems also refer to biting swords (*Bwf.*ll.1521-1522; *Rid.*5.1.9), but do not liken swords or blades to mouths, teeth or tongues. These references could be interpreted dually, as evidence for person-like swords or as characterisation (see Section 2a): tongues and limbs denote swords' long, thin shape and mouths or biting their sharpness and cutting action.

Another anthropomorphic quality attributed to swords is a voice. Several OE riddles present swords 'speaking' in the first person – but this should not be over-emphasised since Anglo-Saxon riddles generally follow this format (Niles 1998, 197; Cherniss 1973). More promisingly, in *Hákonardrápa* the skald Guthormr sindri describes battle as 'voice of swords' (*rödd hjörvar:* §8). Similarly, the battle kenning 'singing of swords' (*söngr sverða*) appears in the anonymous *Liðsmannaflokk* (§4) and Einarr Helgason's *Vellekla* (§18) – although the noun *söngr* could also denote 'music' rather than a human voice (Cleasby and Vigfusson 1957, *s.v.* *söngr*). Arnórr Þórðarson (*Þor.*§9; *Har.*§3) and Bersi Skáld-Torfuson (*Flokk.*§2) both characterise battles as places where swords 'sang' (*sungu*). Björn krepphendí deftly combines the imagery of swords as tongues with the sound of their wailing in battle ('the tongues

of hilt fittings wailed’, *tungur vétrima umðu: Mag. §10*), creating a vivid picture of person-like swords in action. Similarly, in *Beowulf* Hrunting sings ‘a greedy war-song’ (*agol / graedig guðleoð: ll.1521-1522*) during the fight against Grendel’s mother; while the sword which Abraham wields to sacrifice Isaac in *Exodus* ‘roared’ when he drew it (*Ex.1.408*). The OE verb used is *grymetan*, which usually describes sounds made by animals (Lucas 1994, 127, n. 408b).

Again, a dual meaning is possible. Sword-‘voices’ could simply refer to the sounds swords made on account of their physical properties: in Abraham’s case, the rasping sound when drawing the blade from its scabbard (indeed, Bradley 1982 translates *grymetan* as ‘rasped’), and in the other cases the clashing of swords in combat. In the latter case, these references equate with numerous kennings and descriptions characterising battle as a din or clamour of weapons (OE: *Bwf.1.1168*; ON: *Liðs. §4*; *Arn.Mag. §10, §14*; *Eskál.Vell. §7, 9, 28*; *EValg.Laus.*; *Hharð.Laus.14*; *Sigv.EÓH. §27*; *Sigv.Nes. §4, 5*; *Tindr.Hák. §1*; *ÞSjár. Þór. §1*; *Þfagr.Flokk.*). Notably, other weapons also sing or shout, as spears do in the OE poem *Widsið* (l.128) and the ON poems *Vellekla* (§35) and Skúli Þorsteinsson’s poem about the Battle of Svöldr (§2). While swords are more often ‘voiced’ than spears in the collected poetry, it poses the question whether swords in particular, or weapons more generally, could be perceived as animated.

ON poetry often invests swords with zoomorphic qualities, occasionally even portraying them as animals. Several sword kennings liken swords to serpents, including ‘serpent of wounds’ (*linnr sára Bersi.Flokk. §3*; *Eskál.Laus.2a*), and ‘serpent of the storms of Yggr [battle]’ (*linnr éla Yggs: Ótt.Höf. §8*). Others liken swords to fish, such as ‘wound-salmon’ (*bensíkr: Gsind.Hák. §7*) and ‘corpse-sea-trout’ (*hræbirtingr: Tindr.Hák. §6*); or to dogs, as with ‘helmet dog’ (*hjalmgagarr:*

*Darr*.§3) and ‘dog of shield’ (*gagarr seilar*: *Tindr.Hák*.§4). Clearly these creatures are suitable matches for swords in kennings. Like swords, snakes are long, shiny, weave around, slide into holes, bite and even shed their skin as a sword sheds its scabbard (Chris Abram pers. comm.). Fish too are long, sometimes silvery, dart about and may bite. Dogs are less readily comparable, but can bite and inspire fear in the same way that swords presumably could. Once again, these references can be interpreted as describing properties rather than animated swords, but the one meaning does not negate the other. Perhaps the finest correspondence between a sword and animal appears in an Anglo-Saxon riddle: so ambiguous is its imagery that scholars are undecided whether the riddle’s solution should be ‘sword’ or ‘hawk’ (Ellis Davidson 1962, 152-154 with references).

Swords are also likened to living plants, notably leeks and reeds, and primarily in ON poetry (*Liðs*.§9; *Arn.Hryn*.§14; *Eskál.Vell*.§8; *Eyv.Laus*.8; *Glúmr.Laus*.1; *Hókr.Eirfl*.§3; *Jór.Send*.§3; *Skúli.Svö*.§2) with one instance in OE (*And*.1.1353). Leeks seem to have been particularly important in Norse culture and mythology, referenced in runic inscriptions from an early date and coveted for special properties or connections with virility (MacLeod and Mees 2006, 102ff). Consequently any poetic association between swords and leeks might be associated with these issues rather than a sense of animation, although it still provides interesting information about the symbolic resonance of swords.

The poetic depiction of swords as elemental forces can also conjure a sense of animation. ON sword kennings often describe swords as the ‘fire of’ gods or mythological figures (*Eskál.Vell*.§7, 19, 28; *Gsind.Hák*.§2; *Ótt.Höf*.§19; *Skúli.Svö*.§4; *Tindr.Hák*.§1); of defensive war-gear including mail-armour (*Glúmr.Grá*.§8), helmets (*Eskál.Vell*.§32, 33) or shields (*Eskál.Vell*.§30, 32;



Edáð.*Band.* §1); of battle or killing (Edáð.*Band.* §7; Glúmr.*Grá.* §2; Gsind.*Hák.* §6, 8); or of wounds (Eskál.*Laus.* 3a; Eyv.*Hák.* §7) and death (Skúli.*Svö.* §5). ON and OE kennings portray swords as light, lightning, sun, beam, gleam or flash, usually of battle (Bjkrépp.*Mag.* §7; Hallv.*Knúts.* §3; Hókr.*Eirfl.* §1, 4; ÞjóðA.*Sex.* §3; OE: *Bwf.* ll. 1143, 1523, 2583) and again of defensive war-gear (Eyv.*Laus.* §4; Hharð.*Laus.* 7). The OE *Finnsburh* fragment contains a dramatic image of a hall ablaze with ‘sword-light’ (*swurdleoma*: *Fnb.* l. 35) during a battle. The presentation of swords as flickering flames, emitters of light, or fire could denote the brightness of their blades and fittings, or the searing pain of a sword-wound; but it also creates the impression that they are animated.

At the opposite end of the temperature scale are kennings (in ON poetry only) which liken swords to ice (*Liðs.* §8; Gsind.*Hák.* §5; Eyv.*Laus.* 7; Hallv.*Knúts.* §2; Hharð.*Laus.* 14; Vígf.*Hák.*). References to ice could simply signify the coldness of iron blades, and certainly the static nature of ice carries less immediate connotations of animation, unless one considers its transformative state from water to ice and back. However, ice is also a force that is not controlled by humans (Stavnem 2004, 181) and therefore could be interpreted as a reference to animated swords.

Swords feature prominently in ON kennings depicting battles as dynamic meteorological events. A common image is of a ‘snow-storm’, ‘blizzard’ or ‘snow-drift of swords’ (ON *él*, *drif*: Arn.*Rög.* §1 and *Þorf.* §20; Glúmr.*Grá.* §11; ÞjóðA.*Frag.* §2). Also found is ‘storm of sword(s)’ (ON *hríð* or *hregg*: Eskál.*Vell.* §10; Jór.*Send.* §5), ‘wind of swords’ (ON *vindr*: Hfr.*EÓT.* §24) and the more general ‘weather of swords’ (ON *veðr*: Eskál.*Vell.* §10, §12; Vígf.*Laus.*). The similar OE battle kenning ‘sword storm’ (*sweordræs*) appears in *Fates of the Apostles* (l. 59) – although the key word *ræs* can also signify an attack or onrush

rather than anything meteorological (Clark-Hall 1960, s.v. *ræs*). To these may be added Bragi's battle kenning 'eddy of swords' (*flaumr sverða: Rag. §3*) and Eyvindr Finnsson's 'tide of swords' (*straumr mækis: Hák. §8*). This type of kenning portrays battles as swirling masses of swords rather than of warriors carrying swords: but does the sense of animation that ensues belong to the swords or the battle overall? From the point of view of a participant or spectator, battles might resemble a conglomeration of weapons interacting, contributing to perceptions of battle as a living force. Moreover, swords are not the only weapons to appear in these battle kennings, implying that the storm, and not the weapons within it, is key.

The likening of swords to humans, animals or forces of nature supports the idea that contemporary audiences may have perceived these weapons as animated. However, two issues challenge this interpretation. First, swords are not the only weapons likened to living things or natural forces. Meissner (1921, 145) commented on the challenge of differentiating sword and spear kennings due to similarities in their depiction. In the OE poem *Elene*, spears are twice referred to as 'serpents of battle' (*hildenædran: ll.119, 141*), and in *Judith* (l.222) arrows are denoted by the same term which, as shown above, was also a way of referring to swords. Similarly, Arnórr Þórðarson employs the battle kenning 'blizzard of arrows' (*hríðir örvar: Hryn. §14*), and Bragi the similar 'weather of bows' (*veðr boga: Rag. §8*). However, the majority of references in this category relate to swords, and therefore the possibility that swords were perceived as more capable of animation than other war-gear remains plausible.

Second, of the sword kennings in this category which allude to 'living' swords, more than half are actually being wielded by warriors in the broader context of the poem (Chart 47; DB3a:Q2). The examples are too numerous to cite in full, but

two examples are fairly typical. First, Bersi's sword kenning 'serpent of wounds' (*linnr sára: Flokk. §3*) may imply a sense of animation because the sword is portrayed as a living creature. In fact, it forms one element in the warrior kenning 'swayer of the serpent of wounds' (*sveigir linns sára*), which conjures a different image in which the warrior is animated and the sword under his control. Second, the sword depicted in Glúmr Geirason's kenning 'keen sheath tongues' (*snarpar slíðrtungur: Grá. §3*) is being made to sing (*lét syngva*) by its wielder, again implying that the warrior controls the weapon rather than the weapon 'singing' by itself. This seems to undermine the evidence for swords being perceived as animated objects, but again does not rule it out: although under the control of a third party, the sword itself is still presented as a living or moving being, and as such should perhaps be interpreted as working with its wielder almost like a comrade. Nonetheless, these issues underline the importance of examining swords in the broader context of the poem, discussed above (174).

*ii) Independent physical action*

Perhaps the most compelling evidence for swords as animated objects appears where swords are shown performing independent physical action. Scholars have long noted that ON and OE poetry portrays battle as a conflict between weapons rather than warriors *with* weapons (Bode 1886, 52; Goeres 2010; but see below, 197). Swords are conspicuous in this imagery. In OE *Andreas*, shields are 'ground down by swords' (*billum forgrundum: ll.412-414*), and in *Judith* they are 'hacked by swords' (*sweorde geheawen: 1.294*). In *The Battle of Brunanburh* five enemy kings are destroyed 'by swords' (*sweordum: ll.28-30*), and by the end of the battle the greatest number of men in memory had been slain by sword edges (1.68). Beowulf's lord

Hygelac is killed ‘by sword drinks’ (*hiorodryncum*: 1.2358-2359), evocatively translated by Heaney (2000) as the sword ‘slaking its thirst’ on his blood (cf. Fulk *et al* 2008, 243). At the poem’s climax the dragon is twice described as felled not by Beowulf and Wiglaf, but by their weapons’ edges (*hynne ecg fornam*: ll.2772, 2828: although Beowulf uses a single-edged *seax* rather than a two-edged sword). The eleventh-century skald Steinn Herdísarson describes how ‘the blade shed red blood’ (*brandr hrauð af sér rauðu blóði*: *Niz.*§4) at the Battle of Nissan in 1062, in which he may have fought. Finally, in OE *Waldere* (1.ll.2-5), Hildegýð’s claim that all men wounded by Mimming will die attributes the deed to the sword rather than its wielder. Various kennings present swords engaged in some form of action, including biting (see above, 190), stabbing (*Arn.Mag.*§6; *Jór.Send.*§2; *ÞjóðA.Laus.*3), harming other war-gear (*Liðs.*§3, §9) and helping their wielders (*Bwf.*ll.1455, 1835).

Occasionally, poems portray swords engaged in human behaviour. ON poetry repeatedly refers to battles as meetings or assemblies of swords (*Hókr.Eirfl.*§8; *Hfr.EÓT.*§26a; *Eskál.Vell.*§30; *Edáð.Band.*§5; *Sigv.Vik.*§7; *Tindr.Hák.*§2), and less often as the quarrelling (*Hókr.Eirfl.*§4; *Þjsk.Hák.*§2) or mating of swords (*Brb.*1.40).

Again however, swords are not the only weapons shown performing autonomously. In *The Battle of Brunanburh* Northmen and Scots are ‘destroyed by spears’ (*garum agieted*: ll. 17-18). Moreover, several poems present battles as interactions of weapons more broadly. Especially vivid accounts occur in OE *Genesis* (ll.2060ff) and Arnórr Þórðarson’s *Þórfinnsdrápa* (§7), which characterises battle as the noise of bows and shafts, the flight and thud of missiles, the crashing of shields, and the shivering and biting of swords. The kennings provide a slightly different story. If the presentation of swords is compared with spears, the most common offensive weapon in early medieval England and Scandinavia, the latter do

not to engage in as broad a range of activities as swords. While battle kennings like ‘assembly of spears’ appear in later ON poetry omitted from this study, spears are less common in these types of kenning than swords in the collected poetry (Chart 48; DB3a:Q3). The implication may be that swords were more appropriate referents than spears in kennings describing weapons ‘doing things’. Again the evidence is largely Scandinavian, as will be discussed further below (218).

Before inferring too much from this, the influence of metrical rules must be considered. It may have been more economical for poets to refer to weapons acting alone rather than warriors acting with weapons – a bit of a mouthful that poetic structures may not have permitted. Alternatively, references to war-gear may have performed as synonyms or abbreviations for warriors, meaning that a simple reference to a sword actually denoted a warrior and his sword together (recalling issues discussed in Chapter 4.2d relating to lone sword motifs in images). This has fascinating implications for the role played by weapons in the construction of warrior identity, and is explored in more detail below (207).

### *iii) Feelings and emotions*

So far, the discussion of animated swords has focused upon swords performing physical feats; but another type of imagery appears to show swords experiencing human emotions. In the OE battle kenning ‘sword hate’ (*ecghete* or *billhete*: *And*.1.78; *Bwf*.11.84, 1738; *Sea*.1.70) are the swords doing the ‘hating’, stalking the battlefield in a dangerous temper? Or is the hate experienced by warriors facing the swords, poets observing the battle, or loved ones left behind? In other words, the kenning could signify hate *by*, *of* or *inspired by* swords. Comparable ambiguities attend the battle kennings ‘terror of swords’ (*brogan billa*: *Bwf*.1.583) and ‘edge

pressure' (*ecgþræce: Bwf.1.596*). The skald Einarr Helgason uses the battle kenning 'incitement of the sorrow of the fence of battle' (*hvöt sorgar byrgis böðvar: Vell.§4*): the 'fence of battle' being a shield, and the 'sorrow' of the shield a sword, enabling the whole kenning to be simplified to 'incitement of the sword'. This creates an image of swords being impelled to battle, like a warrior.

Importantly, the same kenning also demonstrates that human feelings are not limited to swords – the shield is said to feel sorrow. Haraldr Sigurðarson's sword kenning 'distress of the linden shield' (*váði lindar: Laus.2a*) expresses a similar idea. OE kennings of this type also feature other weapons, like the battle kennings 'spear pressure' (*garþracu: Ele.1.1185; æscþracu: Gen.1.2154*), 'weapon hate' (*wæpenhete: Fat.Ap.1.80*), 'spear strife or hatred' (*sperenið: Gen.1.2059*) and 'spear rage' (*gartorn: Sol.Sat.1.145*). The abiding image provoked by these kennings is the interaction of weapons in battle, and subsequently the notion that the battle, not the individual weapons within it, was perceived as a living entity.

The OE poem *Maxims II* provides more compelling evidence for swords capable of sensation. Its declaration that 'the sword must experience battle, blade opposing helmet' (*ecg sceal wið hellme / hilde gebidan: ll.16-17*) is an apparently clear depiction of a sword as a feeling, animated artefact. More fascinating still is how differently other weapons are portrayed in the poem. The spear is said to belong in the hand, and the shield boss on the shield to protect its wielder's fingers (*MxmII.ll.21-22, 37-38*) – in other words, they are the possessions and / or servants of their human owners, and are not shown capable of feeling or acting in the same way as swords (cf. Cavill 1999, 165).

#### d) Conclusion

Overall, the issue of ‘living’ swords in early medieval poetry is complex. Swords are clearly characterised and perhaps even personified, but issues of ‘animation’ are perplexing. Evidence citable in support can be partially undermined when a broader view is taken, such as a comparison with other weapons or within the context of the entire verse or poem. It is, however, unlikely that one reading should be inferred. Different audience members would have different views depending on their life experience: some may have perceived swords as living artefacts from the material in the poems, but others may not. Might a person who had wielded a sword in battle or owned one for many years have a different view than a person who had not? These issues are explored in the next part of this chapter.

### **3) Research Question 2: The Warrior-Sword Relationship**

Poetry provides much information about the relationship between warriors and swords, their role in the construction of warrior identity, and their relevance to non-warrior groups. Poems also imply that an emotional connection existed between person and object, suggesting that swords were valued for more than just their considerable economic cost.

#### a) Warrior weapons

Historically, swords have been associated with higher status warriors because of their material value. Spears were cheaper to make and therefore more readily accessible to warriors of any class, and consequently they are often seen as the definitive early medieval offensive weapon (DeVries 1999, 218; Pedersen 2008, 204-206; Underwood 2000, 77). However, OE and ON warrior kennings which pair warriors

with weapons refer to swords more frequently than spears (Chart 49; DB3a:Q4a-b), implying that swords were considered more definitive of warriors in a broader sense than previously thought. Poetic context may help to explain this finding. The majority of warrior kennings referring to swords appear in skaldic poetry which, as outlined above, honoured the deeds of exceptionally high-ranking individuals. We might expect, therefore, that they would be depicted wielding swords more than other weapons.

Closer analysis of the kennings partially bears this out: most refer to the honoured individual rather than a group of warriors. This supports the theory that swords defined *elite* warriors rather than ‘warriors’ in a general sense. However, the same is true of the (admittedly fewer) warrior kennings featuring spears, so the argument is not entirely secure. If the examination is extended to battle kennings, which describe groups of warriors rather than elite individuals, swords outnumber spears again (especially in ON poetry: Chart 50; DB3a:Q5a-b). The honorific nature of skaldic poetry may have an influence: battles fought by the lord commemorated in the poem might be glorified as full of swords rather than any other weapon. Extending the comparison from swords and spears to *all* weapons in warrior and battle kennings would be an obvious avenue for further research, but the evidence explored here may support an argument that swords were considered a definitive attribute of all warriors, regardless of social standing – in Scandinavian texts especially.

The collected poetry depicts swords functioning as weapons more than in any other capacity, for example as status symbols (paralleled in pictorial evidence: Chapter 4.2c). This is partly attributable to the poems’ generally martial subject matter, but also strengthens the association between swords and warrior culture that



is apparent in warrior and battle kennings, discussed above. Swords do appear in non-combat situations, albeit infrequently, and usually in the context of gift-giving. Most transactions appear in *Beowulf* and involve the eponymous hero: he receives a sword for ridding Heorot of Grendel (l.1023), which he later gives it to his lord Hygelac (l.2154); when Unferð loans him Hrunting, Beowulf promises his own sword in return if he is killed; Beowulf gives Hroðgar the elaborate hilt from the mere (ll.1659ff); Beowulf rewards his boat-guard with a fine sword (l.1901); Hygelac honours Beowulf with a sword from the armoury (ll.2191-2194); the gifting of Wiglaf's sword is recounted (ll.2611ff); Wiglaf reminisces about receiving his sword and armour from Beowulf (l.2637); and then laments that no more swords will be given now that Beowulf is dead (l.2886).

Gifts of swords occur in other poems too. The OE heroine Judith receives the sword, helmet and mail-coat of the Assyrian tyrant Holofernes after she slays him (*Jud.*ll.334-339). *Waldere* appears to discuss Theoderic's gift of a sword and other treasures to Widia, son of Weland, as a reward for military service (*Wld.*2.ll.1-10). In ON poetry, Brynjólfur úlfaldi's *Lausavísa* records how a king (possibly Óláfr Haraldsson: *Óláfs saga Helga* 62) 'gave me a sword and Vettaland' (*gaf mér brand ok Vettaland*). Interestingly, the poet prioritises the sword above the land grant, echoing an episode in *Beowulf* in which the hero does the same (discussed in Chapter 2.2a). Þorbjörn hornklofi recalls the Norwegian king Haraldr hárfagri ('Fine-hair', c. 872-930) giving his skalds silver-bound swords with gilded sword-straps (*Har.*§19), while Bersi Skáld-Torfuson (possibly: Poole 1991, 95) states that he would accept a fine sword if his king (probably Óláfr Haraldsson) wished to give him one (*Laus.*1). A famous verse by Hallfreðr Óttarson, discussed in more detail below (205), may

also record a gift which, Hallfreðr claims, made him ‘sword-rich’ (*sverðauðigr: Laus.11*).

These episodes suggest that swords had a broader relevance than as warrior weapons. However, they also strengthen the link between warriors, warfare and swords because virtually all of these sword-gifts are made in anticipation or recognition of martial service. While swords given to skalds may represent rewards for poetic compositions rather than military escapades, skalds were often warriors too (*Sigy.Nes.§1; Þfisk.Laus.1*), and therefore these gifts may also have had war-like connotations. Overall, the image presented is that swords were intimately involved in the structure of warrior relationships, and played an important part in their interactions and behaviour.

#### b) ‘Favouritism’

The collected poems imply that warriors admired swords over any other weapon. In *The Battle of Maldon*, the Anglo-Saxon warrior Offa characterises his sword as ‘tough’ and ‘good’ (*heard; god*), but his spear merely as ‘spear’ (*gar: 1.236-237*). Beowulf applies the adjectives *deore* and *leoflic* (‘dear’, ‘beloved’) to his sword and Hrunting respectively (ll. 561, 1528, 1805), words which may carry connotations of material costliness but which also reveal their preciousness to him. An Anglo-Saxon riddle thought to refer to a sword (see above, 192) calls the weapon ‘dear to my lord’ (*leof frean minum: Rid.20.1.2*), while *Solomon and Saturn* warns that warriors should not draw their swords arbitrarily even though they find its appearance pleasing (ll.161-169).

In some poems, the relationship between sword and warrior is akin to comradeship (see Cherniss 1973, discussed in Chapter 2.2d, for swords as

‘retainers’). Beowulf describes Hrunting as *guðwine*, ‘friend in war’ (l.1810) which, as Brady (1979, 103-104) has remarked, is the only known example of the word *wine*, ‘friend’, being applied to an inanimate object. *Guðwine* recurs later in plural form (l.2735) when the mortally-injured Beowulf recollects how his neighbours never dared meet him with ‘friends in war’ (*guðwinum*). Tellingly, ‘warriors’ or ‘swords’ would both be suitable translations in this context. The OE sword kenning ‘mighty help’ (*mægenfultum*: *Bwf*.1.1455) and *Waldere*’s portrayal of Mimming as a ‘comforter in battle’ (*hildefrofor*: *Wld*.2.1.12) carry comparable connotations.

Ideas of comradeship between sword and warrior are less explicit in ON poetry. Perhaps imagery of warriors relying upon or sharing glory with their weapons was inappropriate in the honorific context of skaldic verse, but a couple of references are more promising. A *Lausavísa* composed by Eyvindr Finnsson provides a kinetic, highly visual depiction of a king (probably Hákon inn góði) and his sword slicing through the enemy (*Laus*.5). The verse’s vividness is created by the sword’s characterisation (sharp, wand-like, golden-hilted), the way the king holds it (two-handed), and the damage they wreak together (trans. Finlay 2004, 47):

I know that the sharp wound-wand [= sword],	<i>Veitk, at beit enn bitri</i>
wielded by the king two-handed,	<i>byggving meðaldyggvan</i>
cut the dubiously doughty	<i>bulka skíðs ór bôðum</i>
dweller on the ski of cargo [= sefarer];	<i>benvöndr konungs höndum;</i>
the branch of boar-of-Óli’s	<i>ófælinn klauf Ála</i>
bad weather [= warrior], Danes’ harmer,	<i>éldraugs skarar hauga</i>
through hair-barrows [= head] drove down	<i>gollhjöltuðum galtar</i>
dauntless, his sword gold-hilted.	<i>grönduðr Dana brandi.</i>

The effect is one of unison between man and sword, achieved by the first part of the verse focusing upon the sword's action, and the second the king's action *with* the sword. Perhaps the poem records a famous relationship between a king and a sword known to the contemporary audience. Another evocative relationship emerges in Sigvatr Þórðarson's *Erfidrápa Óláfs helgi* in which Óláfr Haraldsson, outnumbered on the brink of battle, is shown clutching the gold-bound grip of his sword (§9). Whether Óláfr's gripping was motivated by determination, fear or for comfort in battle like the wielders of *Mimming* or *Hrunting*, the episode demonstrates a warrior's physical connection with his sword at the very moment of combat.

The fondness which warriors felt for their swords may be paralleled in a perceived hierarchy of war-gear, which placed swords at the top. Swords are often presented as having mastery over other war-gear, for instance shattering and splitting shield boards (*Sigv.Nes.*§8; *Brb.*1.5), and piercing armour (*Darr.*§3) or helmets (*Bwf.*1.1526). ON sword kennings which describe swords as the 'fire' of shields, helmets or mail-coats (*Eskál.Vell.*§30, §32-33; *Edáð.Band.*§1; *Glúmr.Grá.*§8; *Skúli.Svö.*§4; *Þloft.Tøg.*§8) summon the image of swords burning through them. Arnórr's sword kenning 'file of shields' (*þél grafninga: Röðg.*§1) provides an analogous picture of swords filing down wooden shield boards, while swords depicted as 'dogs' of shields or helmets (*Darr.*§3; *Tindr.Hák.*§4) convey the impression that they harry and bite these objects. Similar undertones attend kennings describing swords as the 'harm' (ON *skóð*) of shields and helmets (*Liðs.*§3, §9; *Þjsk.Hák.*), and the 'distress' or 'sorrow' of other war-gear, discussed above (198). To these may be added Eyvindr Finnsson's shield kenning 'headland of swords' (*nes sverða: Hák.*§7), implying that swords crash against shields as waves crash against a

headland. An OE riddle paints a particularly graphic and pitiful portrait of a shield bemoaning how it has been wounded, scarred, exhausted, buffeted and bit by ‘the products of hammers, the hard-edged blade, bloodily sharp, the handiwork of the smiths’ (*homera lafe, / heardecg heoroscearp, hondweorc smiþa: Rid.5.11.1-9*).

Partiality towards swords (Himes 2009, 104-106) may also underlie the detail and creativity lavished upon their descriptions and kennings (explored in Section 1 of this chapter). An extreme expression of this is Hallfreðr Óttarsson’s celebrated *Lausavísa* 11, preserved in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*:

A single sword of swords it is	<i>Eitt es sverð þats sverða</i>
which made me sword rich.	<i>sverðauðgan mik gerði.</i>
Before sweeping Njörðrs of swords [= warriors]	<i>fyr svip-Njörðum sverða</i>
it will be thick with swords.	<i>sverðótt mun nú verða.</i>
There will be no lack of swords;	<i>muna vansverðat verða,</i>
I am worth three swords	<i>(verðr emk þriggja sverða)</i>
if there might be a painted	<i>jarðar hljótr, at yrði</i>
scabbard for this sword.	<i>umbgerð at því sverði.</i>

(trans. O’Donoghue 2005, 59)

The saga records that the poem was composed when the Norwegian king Óláfr Tryggvason (c. 995-1000) requested a verse containing the word ‘sword’ in every line: no mean feat considering the strictures of skaldic *dróttkvætt* metre, but Hallfreðr achieved it and was duly rewarded with the gift of a sword (*Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* 83). While questions may surround the true circumstances of composition, the verse does appear to demonstrate the inspiration that swords could provoke. Even if the verse post-dates the period under discussion, its celebration of this weapon recalls a

favouritism towards swords observable elsewhere in ON poetry, suggesting a continuity in attitudes or, at least, the poet's attempt to reproduce the esteem which his predecessors afforded to swords.

The special nature of swords is further highlighted by their use in episodes of great import or symbolic power (recalling themes observed in pictorial evidence, explored in Chapter 4.2c). The majority of examples come from OE poetry. In *Beowulf*, the sworn peace between Hengest and Finn is ceremonially broken by the act of laying a sword across Hengest's lap (ll.1142-1143; Fulk *et al* 2008, 190). The poet has already foreshadowed this by warning that the feud would be revived by sword's edge (ll.1104-1106), and the episode closes with the pair fighting with swords (l.1147). According to *Beowulf*, Cain slew Abel with a sword (l.1262); in *Christ III* God swings the 'sword of victory' (*sigemece*: l.1530) on the Day of Judgement; while in *Exodus* God brings down the parted Red Sea with a strike from his sword (l.495). Swords are the weapon of choice in executions (*Bwf*.l.1939; see also Reynolds 2009, 27-28, 169) and sacrifice, although in the cases of Abraham's abandoned sacrifice of Isaac in *Genesis* (ll.2857-2858) and Juliana's martyrdom in the poem about her life (*Jul*.l.679), the poets simply follow Biblical tradition. Compound words in *Beowulf* such as 'sword-blood' (*heorudreor*: ll. 487, 849) and 'sword-drink' (*heorudrync*: ll.2354-2359) imply that blood shed by swords was somehow noteworthy, although Teresi's (2004, especially 133-134, 140) analysis of the OE sword-word *heoru* challenges this view. The use of swords in 'special' contexts is not confined to mythological or Biblical settings: in *The Battle of Maldon*, which details an historical event in 991, spears and shields are the main items of war-gear referenced during the fighting while swords tend to appear only at key moments: Byrhtnoð's nephew Wulfmær is slain by swords (l.114); Eadweard

avenges Wulfmær with his sword (l.119); Byrhtnoð is attacked by a Viking coveting his decorated sword (l.161), Byrhtnoð drops his sword in his final moments (ll.162-166); and Offa incites a final stand with blades and swords (ll.236-237). This potentially selective referencing may reflect the deliberate manipulation of sword imagery in order to emphasise the significance of these events.

### c) Warrior identity

The idea that swords were perceived as more special or desirable than other weapons intersects with a theme explored in previous chapters: the significance of swords in the construction of warrior identity, and in particular a difference between warriors who wielded swords and those who did (or should) not. A trope in the collected ON poetry is warriors as ‘reddeners’ of swords (*Liðs.* §3; *Arn.Har.* §2; *Arn.Mag.* §1-2, §9; *Arn.Porf.* §5, 8; *Bjkræpp.Mag.* §2; *Glúmr.Grá.* §5; *Mgóð.Laus.* 2; *ÞjóðA.Mag.* §19). By contrast, they are rarely described as spear-reddeners (*Steinn.Ól.* §13; *Pfagr.Flokk.* §3), implying that the use of swords was something worthy of mention. Kennings may also reflect the special status of sword-wielders: the only god to be linked with swords in the collected sword kennings is Óðinn – the highest and most powerful of all (*Eskál.Vell.* §11, 19, 28; *Ótt.Höf.* §8; *Tindr.Hák.* §1; *ÞjóðA.Sex.* §32).

The substantial length of *Beowulf* enables us to observe and compare interactions and associations between swords and characters across the poem. Three episodes in which swords feature prominently have generated much discussion: Unferð and Beowulf’s verbal duel; Unferð’s loan of Hrunting and its subsequent failure in Beowulf’s hand; and Wiglaf’s rebuke of Beowulf’s retainers after his death. The diverse readings of these episodes are too numerous to recount here (Orchard 2003, 242-243, 247-256 with references; Enright 1998, with references),

but they may also be relevant to the role of swords in creating warrior identity. In all three passages, two groups of men – one courageous, one not – are compared, and their prowess with or worthiness to wield swords forms the difference between them.

In the first episode, Unferð questions the veracity of Beowulf's sea-duel with Breca, to which the hero responds by narrating his exploits in detail, repeatedly specifying that he achieved them with a sword. As a result, the passage becomes dense with imagery of Beowulf and his sword working in unison. The hero closes by exclaiming that Unferð has never performed such feats with a sword (ll.539-586). The contrast implies that Unferð is incapable or unworthy of wielding one (Clover 1980, 143 notes that Beowulf differs from Unferð because he is a 'sword-wielder'). Unferð's unworthiness as a sword-wielder may recur in the second episode: the failure of his sword, Hrunting, when Beowulf fights Grendel's mother. This incident has been widely interpreted as reflecting the close connection between warriors and their swords, and how the former's strengths and flaws are replicated in his sword's performance (Enright 1998, 315ff with references; Hughes 1977, 394; Mullally 2005, 228ff; Orchard 2003, 76, 198-199). This idea is supported by the final episode, in which Wiglaf – the only loyal member of Beowulf's troop – wields his sword effectively against the dragon (l.2880). The fact that Wiglaf's sword does not fail at the crucial moment, unlike Unferð's sword Hrunting, has been seen as a comment upon the loyalty and worthiness of these swords' owners (Enright 1998, 315ff). Wiglaf's subsequent reprimand of his comrades warning that they and their kin will never again benefit from good things including the gift of swords (ll.2884-2888), implies that they are no longer worthy of receiving this particular weapon.

Incidentally, the change Beowulf's retainers' armament over the course of the poem correlates with the idea that warriors had to be worthy to wield swords. When



defending Beowulf against Grendel, they are shown fighting with swords (ll.794-797); but when they return after abandoning him to the dragon, they are said to carry spears instead (ll.2845-2852). Perhaps the poet thought that at this, their most cowardly moment, it was inappropriate to equip them with the swords they had wielded during their most heroic moment, defending their lord as they were obliged to do.

Why might warriors who wielded swords have been perceived as superior to those who did not? An obvious answer is social status – swords were available only to those who had the means to acquire them, which would naturally set them above certain of their comrades. However, a final episode from *Beowulf* provides an alternative explanation. Upon returning home, Beowulf predicts the doom of Heorot when the fragile peace between the Danes and Heaðobards collapses (Orchard 2003, 242-244; Patterson 2000, 141-142; Gwara 2009, 142-144 with references). He speculates that an elderly warrior will goad a young comrade to break the peace by drawing attention to a sword once owned by the youth's father, and now worn in front of him by his father's killer. The sword's exploits are recalled, its rightful place in the hands of the son invoked, and sure enough the son is provoked to vengeance (ll.2036-2066). The success of the provocation hinges upon the connection between warriors and swords: the memories of shared exploits, the ability to recognise the weapon by its physical appearance, the breaking of the designated chain of social relationships destined for it, and the potent emotional attachment felt towards it. The sword is referred to as 'dear' or 'costly iron' (*dyre iren*: l.2050), but the context suggests the former interpretation is more fitting. While the material worth of swords was undoubtedly a factor in heightening their prestige, it should not exclude other

reasons for their singularity – many of which relate to their relationship with warriors, as exemplified by these poems.

#### d) Women and swords

Swords are overwhelmingly associated with men in poetry, but they are occasionally linked with women. However, in a theme echoing pictorial and archaeological evidence (Chapters 4.3b and 5.3d), these women are usually extraordinary.

One is a Biblical heroine: Judith, who defends her people against invading Assyrians with a sword, decapitating their leader Holofernes (*Jud.11.77ff*). Bradley (1982, 496) suggests that this poem's unusual application of heroic diction to a female protagonist heightens her 'extraordinary stature', reminding us that this sword-wielding woman may not reflect reality. In ON poetry, women associated with swords are usually Valkyries (ON *valkyrjar*): the mythological 'choosers of the slain' who select dead warriors from battlefields to join Óðinn in Valhöll. *Darraðarljóð*, traditionally thought to describe the Battle of Clontarf in 1014 but now associated with a tenth-century battle in Ireland (Poole 1991, 120ff), strikingly depicts a group of Valkyries weaving a 'web of victory' (*sigrvefr*: §1) from human entrails using swords (§3), before carrying their swords away on horseback (§11; for the connection between warfare and weaving, see Poole 1991, 136-137, Näsström 1998 and Owen 1981, 14-15). A number of sword kennings may name or allude to Valkyries, such as 'ice of Hlökk' (*iss Hlakkar*: *Hharð.Laus.14*), 'Gunnr-ice' (*gunníss*: *Sigv.Laus.5*), 'thin ice of Gunnr' (*þunníss Gunnar*: *Vígf.Hák.*), 'Gunnr-beacon' (*Gunnviti*: *Þloft.Tøg.§8*), 'fires of Göndul' (*eldar Göndlar*: *Ótt.Höf.§19*), and 'glowing ember of the bow-maid' (*eisa almdrósar*: *Gsind.Hák.§2*). Kennings for Valkyries themselves also refer to swords, as in 'sword maiden' (*sverðman*:

Hallv.*Knúts*.§3) and ‘Sága of swords’ (*Sága rifjunga: Glúmr.Grá*.§6). However, even this connection between women and swords is insecure. *Gunnr*, a name attributed to a Valkyrie in later sources, is also a fairly common simple noun meaning ‘battle’, making it difficult to be certain that kennings pairing *Gunnr* with swords signify a Valkyrie at all – after all, ‘*Gunnr-ice*’ or ‘*battle-ice*’ would both make suitable sword kennings (Chris Abram pers. comm.).

Another ON link between women and swords is Bragi Boddason’s *Hildir*: the ‘ring-shaking *Sif*’ (*Rag*.§8) discussed above, in which ‘ring’ may signify a sword. She too is extraordinary. Later sources depict *Hildir* raising the dead using magic, while *Sif* – the woman to whom *Hildir* is likened in the kenning – is remembered as a goddess, the wife of *Þórr* (O’Donoghue 2004, 78).

Ultimately, a ‘real-world’ connection between women and swords is absent from the collected poems. Prose sources appear to reinforce this separation. Of the 39 Anglo-Saxon wills collected by Dorothy Whitelock (1930), just one records a woman bequeathing a sword, and it is given jointly with her husband (Whitelock 1930, no. 11: Will of Brihtric and *Ælfswið*; 973-987). Individual women bequeath other war-gear, such as spears and shields (Whitelock 1930, no. 8: Will of *Ælfgifu*; 966-975), but not swords. This might be significant, but only a small proportion of Anglo-Saxon wills survive (Whitelock 1930, xli), providing a partial view of sword-ownership. There is, however, one more association between women and swords. While the gender of the largely anonymous Anglo-Saxon poets is unknown, some ON skalds are known to have been women. *Jórunn skáldmær*, a Norwegian, composed poetry at the court of *Haraldr hárfagri* during the first half of the tenth century (Straubhaar 2002), and her surviving poem *Sendibítr* contains swords and sword kennings. This, however, is simply a consequence of *Jórunn* composing a

skaldic praise poem rather than evidence for a true association between women and swords in early medieval Scandinavia.

#### **4) Research Question 3: The ‘Living’ Sword in Time**

The problems inherent in dating poetry, discussed above (171), pose challenges when exploring how perceptions of swords changed over time: without a reliable date, poems cannot be organised into a secure chronological sequence that can be examined for signs of development. OE poetry is worse affected, since much of it survives in manuscripts dating to c. 1000, very late in the period under discussion. By this time Anglo-Saxon England had been Christian for centuries, meaning that any effect that conversion had upon perceptions of swords is difficult to apprehend. While some poems may be earlier compositions or preserve earlier attitudes, these are hard to tease out (Bradley 1982, xii, xvii; O’Donoghue 2010, 10). It is clear, for instance, that *Beowulf* looks back to pre-Christian tales but hard to know how far the poem was adapted by Christian poets for Christian audiences. ON poetry is less affected in this respect. Skaldic poems span the pre-Christian and Christian periods, from Bragi Boddason in the first half of the ninth century, to Björn krepphendí around 1100 (O’Donoghue 2004, 73; Gade 2009, 395). Despite these challenges, cautious observations can be made.

OE portrayals of swords being admired and honoured by owners, lingered over by poets, invested with names and personalities seem not to have been inappropriate in a Christian context. This might reflect continuity of attitudes between the pre-Christian and Christian eras or perhaps, as Bradley (1982, xvii) has suggested, a conscious appropriation of heroic themes by those promoting Christian concepts such as the notion of spiritual warfare. For instance, in *Waldere* Hildegyð

promises that God will protect Waldere in his exploits and encourages him to destroy the evil Guðhere by entrusting his life to the sword Mimming – which, as we have seen, is deadly (*Wld.*1.11.23-26). Cherniss (1973, 249-250) draws parallels between the shape, ornamentation and protective symbolism of crosses and swords in Anglo-Saxon England, which may explain why swords continued to be prestigious artefacts into the Christian period. However, we might expect to find more poetic comparisons between crosses and swords if such a concordance was a powerful concept in Anglo-Saxon thought. Instead, as discussed above, the emphasis is upon swords' properties, manufacture and relationship with warriors.

It is possible to compare ON poems from pre-Christian and Christian contexts. Scholars have observed changes in skaldic diction and imagery following the conversion of Scandinavia, from the later tenth century. Jesch (2001, 7) dates the greatest changes to after c.1100, beyond the scope of this thesis, but Edwards (1982) and Birgisson (2008) have both argued that pre-Christian references in poetry decline during the eleventh century. This is observable to some extent in the portrayal of swords. While Valkyries appear in kennings during the transition period c. 1000-1050, they are absent from the latest sword kennings of Arnórr Þórðarson, Þjóðólfr Arnórsson and Björn kreppendi, dating to the mid- to late eleventh century. The same pattern appears in sword kennings which refer to other mythological figures (Hildir: *Hallv.Knúts.*§3; Reifnir: *Skúli.Svö.*§4) and plants with potentially cultic significance (leeks, reeds: *Hókr.Eirfl.*§3; *Liðs.*§9; *Skúli.Svö.*§2; *ÞKolb.Eir.*§15): all but one (*reyr randa*, 'reed of shields': *Arn.Hryn.*14) are confined to the earlier eleventh century (Chart 51; DB3a: Q6). Edwards (1982, 34) has shown that one of the Valkyrie sword kennings – Sigvatr Þórðarson's 'wand of Gjöll' (*vöndr Gjallar: EÓH.*§27) – appears in a context in which a sword is abandoned for a pilgrim's staff,

symbolising the move from old to new religions. The other examples, however, are more typical in their imagery (defining a warrior; a warrior reddening his sword) without implying discomfort with Valkyries (Ótt.*Höf.* §19; Þloft.*Tøg.* §8; Hharð.*Laus.* §14). Indeed, one of these examples was composed by Sigvatr Þórðarson himself (*Laus.* 5), prompting two questions. First, does the rejection of the ‘wand of Gjöll’ reflect an attitude that pre-Christian imagery had become inappropriate for characterising swords – even that swords were considered instruments of pre-Christian lifestyles? Second, was Sigvatr tailoring imagery for the Christian king Óláfr Haraldsson, whom the poem commemorates? It is difficult to know, but the predispositions of poets and their patrons or subjects may well have influenced the imagery deployed in skaldic poetry.

Christian influence may be responsible for another change in sword kenning imagery, this time relating to light and fire. Light was an important motif in medieval Christian literature, associated with the holiest figures and the faith itself – including in Scandinavia (Chase 2005, 21ff). In a twelfth-century poem composed by Einarr Skúlason, the Norwegian saint Óláfr Haraldsson is likened to a beam of sunshine, illuminating the world with miraculous acts (Chase 2005, 28). The poem’s very title, *Geisli*, means ‘sunbeam’. The importance of light imagery in Christian-period skaldic poetry (Nordal 2001, 293, with references) may have affected sword kennings. Between the tenth and eleventh centuries, references to light increase markedly while references to fire decline (Chart 52; DB3a:Q7a-b). Perhaps light, with its Christian associations, became a more popular or appropriate way of referring to shining sword-blades in these kennings. Fire arguably carries greater connotations of movement and ‘life’ than ordinary light, which could be static: might

the implication be that perceptions of 'living' swords waned in Christian Scandinavia?

Not necessarily. Sword kennings which hint at animation (discussed in Section 2c above) via references to human body parts, plants and trees, weather, or actions like harming, stabbing and biting, recur throughout the tenth and eleventh centuries, with some even increasing over time (Chart 53; DB3a:Q8). References to swords with voices or making sounds decline, but this is probably of minor significance since such references are rare generally. More notable is a decline in kennings likening swords to animals, but given the prominence of animals in pre-Christian belief (Jennbert 2006 and 2011, with references), this trend may reflect the inappropriateness of such kennings in a Christian setting rather than discomfort with 'living' artefacts. Overall, OE and ON poetry suggest continuity in perceptions of 'living' swords. Christianity did not reduce these to any great extent, although the new religion prompted changes in the imagery applied to these weapons. It may have been the case that in a period so marked by the experience of violence and warfare, the idea that swords were special, characterful objects remained constant irrespective of religious beliefs. Such an ingrained cultural concept may have been difficult to dismantle.

#### **5) Research Question 4: The 'Living' Sword in Space**

Comparing Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian depictions of swords is not straightforward. OE and ON poetry differ in two significant respects: OE poetry largely focuses upon (to us) legendary and Biblical tales, with only the two battle poems *Brunanburh* and *Maldon* explicitly narrating contemporary events. Conversely, ON poetry mostly relates current events with a minority, such as Bragi's

*Ragnarsdrápa*, delving into myth and legend. The pervading eulogistic character of skaldic verse does not feature strongly in OE poetry, although certain poems have honorific elements, such as *Brunanburh* and perhaps *Maldon* (Jesch 2003b, 258). Despite these variances it remains possible to observe parallels and distinctions between the two sets of poetry, if one remains aware of the potential influence caused by poetic context.

Both OE and ON poetry characterise swords by referencing their properties, materials, ornamentation and components. ON poetry refers to more sword parts (hilt parts, scabbard, sword-belt or harness etc.: Chart 54; DB3a:Q9), providing a more comprehensive image of what comprised a sword. This may be because skalds required a greater range of terms than OE poets, in order to serve the intricate metrical rules of skaldic verse, meaning that a reference to any single sword component could function like a synonym for sword (Chris Abram pers. comm.). Alternatively, it could signify that Scandinavian perceptions of swords were finer in their appreciation of detail than Anglo-Saxon ones: swords were not thought of as merely ‘blade plus hilt’, but all parts were understood. This may reflect the situation that many skalds, their patrons and audiences were warriors who knew and wished to hear about swords in greater detail than other social groups might. The simpler characterisation of swords in OE poetry might also relate to its production context. It was potentially composed and probably written down in monasteries by monks who may not have been as intimately acquainted with swords and their components. This may have led them to characterise swords by their most obvious (blade) or visually alluring (hilt fittings) parts. The implication is that perceptions of swords differed between warriors, whom we presume used and owned swords, and other social groups, whom we presume did not.



This is not to say that weapons were absent from the ecclesiastical sphere. Detailed representations of swords in Anglo-Saxon illuminated manuscripts demonstrate that monastic artists were far from ignorant of these weapons (see Chapter 4.2a, 4.3c). Documentary evidence records the presence of clerics on Anglo-Saxon battlefields, but it is not clear how far they participated in actual fighting (Hare 1998). It is also unclear whether clerics owned weapons in the same way that warriors did. Certainly they bequeathed war-gear in their wills, but probably as a consequence of their role as landholders, who were obliged to provide troops for their lord's army, and military equipment to him upon their deaths (*heriot*) – just as secular landholders did (which may also explain why women bequeathed weapons: Hare 1998, 8-12). Therefore, other social groups would have been familiar with swords but probably lacked the intimate knowledge and experience of them that warriors possessed. This difference may be reflected in the poetic treatment of swords.

Depictions of person-like or animated swords differ between OE and ON poetry. OE and possibly ON poems record named swords (discussed previously, 184), but the former contains many more examples of swords with personalities and biographies. Hints of famed swords in ON poetry, including obscure sword 'names' like *Skelkingr* and Óláfr Haraldsson's gold-bound sword in Sigvatr Þórðarson's *Erfidrápa Óláfs helga*, demand more speculation than OE examples. The nature of the poetry itself might be responsible. OE poems have a linear, narrative structure in which the tale unfolds continuously, different characters come and go and swords are shown in both war and peace. ON skaldic poetry is more episodic, recounting different deeds in different stanzas with a focus on the military exploits of individuals celebrated in the poems. Consequently, OE poetry offered greater

opportunities for broader descriptions of swords which were probably extraneous for skaldic verse.

ON and OE sword kennings also differ quite markedly. ON kennings are more diverse in their referencing, ranging from tools to gods with many things in between (Chart 55; DB3a:Q10a-b). Could this simply be because ON poetry made more use of kennings, which consequently survive in greater frequency and variety? Or does this reflect differences between Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian thoughts about swords? The latter is plausible if we look more closely at the evidence.

Kennings alluding to sword animation differ between the two cultures. Those likening swords to living things or natural forces are common in ON but rare in OE poetry. No surviving OE sword kennings refer to animals or human body parts. The only reference to a plant is the battle kenning ‘sedge or reed-play’ (*secgplega*) in *Andreas* (l.1353), and to a natural element in the term ‘battle icicle’ (*hildegicel*) in *Beowulf* (l.1606: identified as a kenning by Frank 1987, 342-343, cf. Brodeur 1971, 22). OE poetry also contains fewer references to swords with voices (see above, 190). The implication may be that notions of animated swords were more Scandinavian than Anglo-Saxon in nature. This is supported by research arguing for Scandinavian influence upon Anglo-Saxon poetry (Frank 2002; Frank 1987, especially 348 for Abraham’s ‘roaring’ sword in *Exodus*, l. 408). For instance, the term used to describe the light emitting from swords in *Finnsburh* (*swurdleoma*: l.35) has been interpreted as an Old Norse-ism (Watson 2002, 498-499), raising the possibility that similar sword kennings in *Beowulf* (*hildeleoma*: ll.1143, 2583; *beadoleoma*: l.1523) might be too. The extent of Scandinavian influence upon OE poetry remains a matter for speculation (Chris Abram pers. comm.), but even without this, the scantier OE evidence for animated swords seems to indicate a cultural

difference in the perception of these weapons: while OE swords are presented as person-like, only Scandinavian swords really become animated (echoed pictorially: Chapter 4.5).

Both ON and OE poetry depict a strong connection between male warriors and swords, while the only women associated with them are atypical. However, the OE portrayal of the sword-warrior relationship seems far more sentimental in character, exemplified by Beowulf's and Unferð's reflections on their respective swords; the son prompted to vengeance by memories of his father's sword; swords as friends and comforters in *Beowulf* and *Waldere*; and so on. There is little sign of equivalent affection in skaldic poetry, wherein warriors are more likely to redden their swords than ruminate on their relationship with them. The effect is that swords were perceived more as a battle tool than a personal attribute in Scandinavian thought. Again, this may be due to differences in poetic style and function. Scholars have remarked upon the dissimilarities between OE and ON depictions of violence, with OE poetry painting a more tragic, suffering picture and ON emphasising heroic, glorious aspects in colder tones (Niles 1987, 363; Jesch 2003b, 274).

Finally, one Anglo-Saxon poem hints that swords played a role in cultural identity. *Exodus*, based on the Old Testament book, narrates the conflict between the Egyptians, led by the Pharaoh, and the Israelites, led by Moses – but only the former are depicted wielding swords. They are described as 'sword-wolves' (*heorowulfas*: l.181: cf. Teresi 2004 on *heoru*) and 'sword-warriors' (*sweordwigendas*: l.260), who slay the Israelites with swords (*bill*: l.199), while Moses' men claim to be unafraid of 'bloody sword wounds' (*blodige bilswaðu*: l.329), presumably inflicted by Pharaoh's troops. Moses' men, by contrast, bear generic 'arms' (*gearwe*: l.59), shields (ll.113, 125, 236, 239, 301) and spears (ll. 231, 240, 246, 251) – but not swords. The

distinction between the two sides does not seem to be based on social status, as both groups wear helmets and mail-armour – traditionally construed as elite markers, like swords (Gannon 2003, 62-63; Härke 1990, 26). Could it therefore be based on cultural identity? *Exodus* may have been composed under Scandinavian influence (Frank 1987; cf. Jesch 2003b, 258) during the period of Scandinavian settlement in England. Perhaps the poet drew upon his knowledge of differing armament between Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian forces to characterise the opposing sides in his poem. If so, the sword-bearing Egyptians may represent the Scandinavian side, since both represent the ‘enemy’ encountered in the worlds of the poem and the poet. We could speculate further by proposing that Scandinavian warriors were more typically armed with swords than Anglo-Saxons – an issue touched upon in Chapter 5 and revisited shortly in Chapter 7.

## **6) Conclusion**

OE and ON poetry supply such bountiful material for the study of weapons and warfare that there are, inevitably, many additional lines of enquiry to pursue. One of the most enticing, alluded to above, is the theme of battle as a living entity. Battles resembled a fluctuating mass inside and out, moving with its own momentum. Individuals would be difficult to pick out, and perhaps the most noticeable element would be the interaction of weaponry. A linguistic study of the various terms used for swords, expanding upon Teresi’s (2004) study of OE *heoru*, might also yield valuable information. Finally, the themes explored in this chapter could be widened to encompass other war-gear and cultures, for instance the Celtic-speaking peoples of north and west Britain and Ireland, for which parallels have already been mooted (Enright 1998).

Overall, poetry provides intriguing insights into perceptions of ‘living’ swords. While its contemporary audiences would apprehend different meanings and messages in its imagery, the vivid, creative and tangible depictions of swords in poetry suggest a contemporary fascination with swords above all other weapons. The detail afforded to their descriptions – length, shape, sharpness, colours, materials, and how they were made, down to the rivets fixing hilt parts together and the intricate patterns on fittings or blades – betray a deep knowledge of swords, and even a desire to replicate their form authentically. This preference for swords is echoed in depictions of sword-warrior relationships, in which swords are admired, beloved, relied upon, and reserved for special functions. The degree to which those who wielded swords were thought to hold special status, not solely due to economic wealth, is also evident. Many of these themes have already been apprehended in the pictorial and archaeological evidence discussed in previous chapters. A number also recur in prose records, chronicles, histories and, of course, Icelandic sagas. These cannot be discussed in detail here, but selected examples follow from Anglo-Saxon laws and wills and the Icelandic *Konungasögur*.

Swords with character and quotable biographies are recorded in surviving Anglo-Saxon wills. The most notable is that of Æðelstan, son of king Æðelræd Unræd, who died in 1015 (Whitelock 1930, no.20 with the original OE text). He bequeaths no fewer than ten swords, each of which is characterised according to who made it, owned it and / or its visual features: ‘the sword with the silver hilt which Wulfric made’ is left to Winchester Old Minster; ‘the silver-hilted sword which belonged to Ulfketel’ to his father; ‘the sword which belonged to King Offa’ and another ‘with the pitted hilt’ to his brother Eadmund; another ‘silver-hilted sword’ to his brother Eadwig; ‘the inlaid sword which belonged to Wiðar’ to his chaplain

Ælfwine; ‘the notched sword’ to his seneschal Ælfmær; ‘the sword on which the hand is marked’ to one Eadric; and ‘the notched inlaid sword’ to his sword-polisher Ælfnoð. It is striking, first of all, that Æðelræd has so many swords to give – by far the most recorded in any surviving Anglo-Saxon will – but for our purposes it is more remarkable that he knows precisely the differences between them, and thought it important to ensure that the right sword went to the right person by providing detailed instructions. More fascinatingly he gives one more sword, designated only as ‘a sword’: perhaps it had yet to acquire any biography or meaning that distinguished it in Æðelræd’s mind.

The Icelandic *Konungasögur* contain many descriptions of swords’ visual identities and associations, which create a sense of character. In *Óláfs saga helga* (69), Óláfr Haraldsson sends his man Björn on an errand to Sweden with a ring and decorated sword, previously given to him by Swedish jarl Rögnvaldr. Björn will meet Rögnvaldr who, when he recognises the sword, will assist Björn in getting a message to the Swedish king. The personification of swords via naming also features. Certain named swords can be traced through multiple sagas, like Kvernbitr, owned by king Hákon inn góði (*Haralds saga hins hárfagra* 40; *Saga Hákonar góða* 28); Hneitir, Óláfr Haraldsson’s sword (*Óláfs saga helga* 213; *Hákonar saga Herðibreiðs* 20); and Leggbiti, wielded by Magnús berfættr (*Saga Magnús konungs berfætts* 25).

References to weaponry in Anglo-Saxon laws have long been mined by those seeking to reconstruct social and military ranks. This has contributed to the interpretation of swords as high status objects, as they are usually associated with higher social classes. However, laws also contain information about the relationship between sword and wielder. A law of King Alfred (c. 871-899: Whitelock 1979,

no.33, law 19.3) states that sword-polishers must return their customers' weapons 'unstained' – that is, not used in a criminal act (Whitelock 1979, 376, n.4). One might question why he would want to use a sword in this way, when presumably any weapon would suffice if he wished to threaten, rob or kill someone. Might a sword make a more intimidating side-arm, heighten his reputation, make him likelier to succeed? Or were swords so recognisable and associable with specific owners that a person could don a disguise and use another man's sword to commit a crime, thereby implicating the sword's owner if his victims recognised the weapon? Alternatively, this law may simply have been created in response to a well-known case and may not reveal much information about swords, but it is still interesting to ponder the reason for its creation.

The *Konungasögur* also portray well-known relationships between swords and their owners: in *Haralds saga hins Hárfagra* (40) Hákon inn góði receives the golden-hilted sword Kvernbitr from his foster-father, the Anglo-Saxon king Æðelstan, with which he famously cut through a mill-stone (hence its name 'Quernbiter'). Snorri Sturluson remarks that Hákon wore the weapon until his dying day.

These examples demonstrate that prose literature, like poetry, provides valuable insights into the notion of 'living' swords in early medieval England and Scandinavia. While not forgetting the late date of saga evidence, they suggest quite strongly that the feelings and ideas expressed by poets about swords were a genuine ingredient of contemporary attitudes, and not just poetic conceit. In the chapter that follows, evidence from the preceding discussions is examined concurrently in order to determine just how prominent these perceptions were in early medieval society.

## Discussion

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### 1) Introduction

With the three source-based studies complete, a broader overview of their findings can be taken in order to identify how far they can or cannot be integrated. Clear inter-source parallels which are not undermined by source-critical and contextual issues may provide genuine insights into early medieval perceptions of ‘living’ swords. However, it became apparent during the course of this study that certain source-types integrate more readily than others. Chapter 3 predicted that strong parallels would emerge between pictorial and archaeological evidence, but in reality stronger correspondences were found between pictorial and written sources as categories of evidence. The integrative process becomes more complex when attempting to assimilate trends and themes *within* categories of evidence. For example, while certain themes feature strongly in two out of three sources, others seem to emerge across all three but with one source requiring further interpretation or speculation if it is to align with the findings of the other two sources. In some cases the speculation can be supported by evidence from beyond the scope of this thesis; but in others the integration is too tenuous to be authoritative. This process is illustrated in the discussion that follows.

### 2) Research Question 1: The Sword as a ‘Living’ Object

Evidence for perceptions of ‘living’ swords was found to transcend the boundaries between pictorial, archaeological and written evidence. The most prominent issues across the sources include swords as ‘active’ social objects, capable of transmitting



and constructing messages and identities; swords with character, personality and long life-histories; and even ‘animated’ swords which could act independently of their wielders. Other issues do not recur beyond the confines of individual sources: sometimes perhaps significantly, but elsewhere attributable to contextual or source-critical factors.

#### a) Swords as active objects

Each source presents swords performing an ‘active’ role in early medieval society, be it practically, economically or symbolically. This is clearest where swords are shown in their primary function: as weapons. Violence is the most typical context for swords in Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian images (Chapter 4.2c; Charts 10-11) and also in the analysed poetry (Chapter 6.3a), most notably in Scandinavian skaldic verse (albeit partly attributable to its strongly martial character). The archaeological evidence is harder to integrate here, since it is usually impossible to know if a surviving sword was ever used in anger. While a sword’s shape, weight and balance provide clues about its martial effectiveness, this only demonstrates that it *could* have been used in battle, and not that it actually *was*. Physical signs of violent usage can be equivocal: In Chapter 5.2b, broken lower guards on Kentish and Scandinavian swords were rejected as evidence for battle damage; and while a sword-blade from grave 27 at Dover Buckland, Kent may have been reshaped after a breakage (Evison 1987, 222), its cause – battle or otherwise – is unknowable. The corroded condition of blades, particularly those from burial contexts, precludes the identification of battle damage, although scientific investigation could discover evidence of re-sharpening or metal loss that might contribute to the discussion (Astrid Daxböck pers. comm.). However, it is reasonable to speculate that a proportion of surviving

swords were used for fighting: they were, after all, functional objects with cutting edges. While we cannot be certain that the occupants of Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian weapon burials were warriors (see below, 241), it can be assumed that swords interred with able-bodied males of fighting age had seen action (Hadley forthcoming and Chapter 2.3). The Staffordshire Hoard further supports this assumption, if it can be interpreted – as seems plausible – as the spoil of battles involving swords which were subsequently dismantled to make up the hoard’s contents (for interpretations, see Webster *et al* 2011). If these speculations about the violent use of swords can be accepted, it becomes possible to correlate the archaeological evidence with the pictorial and written sources outlined above.

A more cohesive cross-source parallel is the active nature of apparently ‘passive’ swords: in other words, swords perform active social roles even when they are not being used in a fight. They transmitted messages about status and identity: not all individuals in pictorial, archaeological and written sources possess a sword, and therefore association with this weapon in an image, grave or textual account immediately identifies that person with a more exclusive social group. Furthermore, swords could be actively manipulated to *construct* this desirable identity. In all three sources, swords are ‘given’ to an individual by a third party: artists chose to depict a sword with a certain figure; mourners chose to place a sword in a certain grave; and poets chose to provide specific characters with swords. These acts categorised those individuals as sword-owners, regardless of whether they were sword-owners in real life. The role of swords in constructing identities was finer-grained still: while a broad difference existed in early medieval society between those who did and did not own swords, this study found evidence across the sources that swords were

responsible for mediating between different types of *warrior* identity. This is explored more fully below (243ff).

Images, archaeology and texts also reveal an active ritual function for swords. Their deposition in funerary contexts can be interpreted as a ritual act, and is demonstrated archaeologically in burials, and textually in poetry which describes war-gear on funeral pyres (*Bwf.*ll.38-40) and gleaming over graves (*Sol.Sat.*II, ll. 45-46). Pictorial evidence for swords in funerary contexts is less forthcoming: tenth-century stone carvings of warriors at Middleton in northern England (ST15-17) have been interpreted as representing furnished burials with weapons distributed around the body (Graham-Campbell 1980, 160 with references), but comparison with the few contemporary burials of this period suggests otherwise: the most complete image, Middleton 2, shows the sword placed very high on the left of the body, whereas the majority of contemporary weapon burials for which records are available featured swords placed more centrally on the right side. However, the small number of both images and graves makes it difficult to draw an authoritative conclusion. The (most probably) ritual deposition of swords in water evidenced archaeologically may also be traceable in texts: perhaps the sword which Beowulf finds in Grendel's mere recalls this act, while Lund (2010, 52ff) has suggested that Scandinavian poetic references to rivers flowing with weapons reflect it too. Pictorial evidence does not correlate well with these. It is tempting to cite images of Pudicitia placing her sword in the River Jordan in the Anglo-Saxon Prudentius manuscripts (IM3, Fol. 8; IM4, Fol. 9v), but the text informs that she is washing rather than depositing it. Nonetheless, the cross-source evidence for the involvement of swords in ritual acts remains compelling.

Overall, the substantial crossover between pictorial, archaeological and written evidence in these issues demonstrates that swords participated actively in early medieval society, both inside and outside of their primary role as weapons. Their multi-functional, socially involved aspect may have helped to fuel perceptions of them as ‘living’ objects.

#### b) ‘Person-like’ swords

Another theme which can be traced across multiple sources is the notion that swords could acquire ‘person-like’ attributes, including character, personality, visual identity, life-stories and even a name, as well as being part of social networks, linking people via gifts, rewards, loans and bequests. Not all of these attributes occurred in every source, as discussed in detail here.

#### *i) What is a sword?*

An issue which recurred in each source was the basic question of ‘*what is a sword?*’: what distinguishes it as an artefact? The composite nature of swords features prominently pictorially, archaeologically and textually. Their various parts are well-represented in each source, and moreover to differing degrees, hinting that certain parts were considered more definitive of swords than others. Strong inter-source evidence suggests that blades were the most definitive part of a sword. Of the 612 sword motifs collected for this study, virtually all are shown with blades. A tri-lobed object with a curved base forming part of a treasure hoard in the Tiberius Psalter (IM13, Fol. 10v) resembles a detached pommel, but its outsize scale compared to the artefacts around it makes this unlikely. The only other images of detached sword parts occur in battle scenes in Anglo-Saxon manuscripts and on the Bayeux Tapestry,

in which defeated warriors wear empty scabbards, having presumably lost their weapons. Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian poetry emphasise blades through repeated references to their materials and qualities; while in the archaeological record an emphasis upon blades occurs naturally by virtue of the fact that very few burials analysed in this study contained sword parts which were not attached to or associated with a blade. Exceptions include grave 104 at Sarre, Kent which contained an exceptionally worn detached pommel (Chapter 5.2b), and grave 58 at Northbourne, Finglesham, Kent in which a pyramidal scabbard mount was interred with a female. However, more hilt fittings were made of wood, antler or bone than of metal; scabbards were made of wood, leather and fur; and sword-belts or harnesses were of leather, except for their metal buckles which are occasionally found. Therefore, it is possible that detached organic sword parts were placed in burials, but perished before recovery. That said, blades are likely to loom large in the sources because they are the largest and most immediate component to the eye, and are essential to a sword's primary function. On balance, it seems sensible to trust that blades were interpreted as the most characteristic parts of early medieval swords.

Hilts have a significant presence across the three sources. Chapter 6.2a discussed the striking descriptive detail lavished upon hilts in certain Old English and Old Norse poems, referring to their ornamentation and component pieces. Chapter 4.2a commented upon numerous detailed images of hilts, ranging from the authentically-reproduced sandwich-like construction of early sword guards on the Sutton Hoo and Swedish helmet *Pressbleche* to the careful representation of pommels which enable viewers to recognise genuine sword-types. Archaeological evidence is the trickiest to integrate, unless we are prepared to speculate. For instance, exceptionally decorative Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian hilt pieces could

suggest that owners liked to lavish attention upon this part of their swords above all others. Fine metal hilts survive well, but organic fittings were probably also distinctive and aesthetically impressive, as testified by rare survivals from York in England and Birka and Sigtuna in Sweden (Figs. 119-121). As discussed in Chapter 5.2 and below (231f), archaeological evidence analysed in this study has suggested that hilts were key in the creation of a sword's unique visual identity, which as a result may have motivated sword owners to focus their decorative attentions here. The archaeological hints for a focus upon hilts could therefore be tentatively integrated with the written and pictorial evidence, to demonstrate that hilts were important in characterising swords during the early medieval period.

Images, archaeology and texts are less united over the significance of scabbards and suspension devices like sword-belts and harnesses. All have a low profile in poetry and in images too to some degree – although scabbards commonly appear with swords in Anglo-Saxon illuminated manuscripts and on the Bayeux Tapestry, while several detailed Scandinavian scabbard representations survive (Chapter 4.2a). Conversely, archaeological evidence points to scabbards as being fundamental parts of swords. Of the 304 swords analysed for Chapter 5, 161 were probably deposited in their scabbards (DB2:Q17), illustrated by mineralised wood and leather upon their blades or metal scabbard fittings still in situ. A pragmatic explanation is that scabbards were not especially recyclable: early medieval blades were not uniform in shape or size, meaning that scabbards might just as well be disposed of along with their blades since they may not fit another blade well. However, the consistent inclusion of scabbards in burials might reveal that they were considered as essential accessories for swords. After all, scabbards enabled their owners to wear their swords, store them securely and preserve them in good

condition. Therefore, those depositing swords in graves may have thought it inappropriate to divide the weapon from its scabbard – the two made an inseparable pair. This mundane facet of day-to-day sword-ownership would be unlikely to feature in texts and images, and this may help to explain discrepancies in the prominence of scabbards between the three sources.

*ii) Visual identity*

A ‘person-like’ attribute which emerges strongly in multiple sources is distinctive visual identity: that is, features upon a sword which enabled viewers to recognise specific ‘individuals’ by sight, much as one recognises a human face. This time the greatest alignment is between written and archaeological evidence, with pictorial evidence more difficult (but not impossible) to integrate.

Poetry and material survivals suggest that hilts and their ornamentation were fundamental to a sword’s visual identity. This is illustrated in *Beowulf* by the detailed description of the hilt from Grendel’s mere, the Heaðobard warrior provoked by the sight of his father’s sword, and in other Old English and Old Norse poems which describe swords as gold- or silver-hilted (Chapter 6.2a). As mentioned above, archaeological survivals demonstrate that sword-owners could make their weapons unique via the combination and ornamentation of hilt-pieces. Furthermore, Chapter 5 found that asymmetrically decorated and worn pommels show that owners may have worn their swords with the same face outwards, so that onlookers might recognise it.

Pictorial evidence occasionally hints at distinctively ornamented or configured hilts (such as Goliath’s sword in the Tiberius Psalter, fol. 9: IM13; Fig. 122), but overall the collected images contain scant examples of this: indeed, many swords look so similar that it is almost as if the artist replicated them from a model or

template. Again, however, a deeper consideration of context provides opportunities to link images with texts and archaeology. Many depictions of hilts are very small, meaning that artists would not have been able to include complex decorative ornament. Importantly, authentic types of hilt *are* depicted, and accurately enough to recognise them. From this it could be argued that the representation of different sword-types in the same artwork – for instance, ring-swords and non-ring-swords on Swedish helmet *Pressbleche*, and tri-lobed and hemispherical pommels in Anglo-Saxon illuminated manuscripts – reveals that artists were aware that swords looked different from each other on the basis of their hilts. This would then accord with archaeological and written sources regarding the central role of hilts in distinguishing swords from each other.

While the customisability of hilts facilitated the creation of distinctive identities for swords, a word should also be said about blades. The corroded condition of early medieval pattern-welded blades makes it difficult to imagine how they looked in their prime; but radiography and more recently computed tomography (CT) has provided crucial insights into their construction and original appearance. Gilmour's recent study (2010) of eleven swords from the early Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Saltwood in Kent revealed that patterns could be exceedingly idiosyncratic, incorporating not just patterns but colour contrasts (Gilmour 2010, 68). Nonetheless, assuming that swords spent the majority of their time in scabbards, blades could not have possessed the same potent visual identity as hilt fittings – only those who regularly viewed the sword unsheathed would have recognised its ornamentation, whereas hilt fittings were visible to all onlookers, whether the sword was sheathed or not. This may help to explain why so many blades in images are depicted as blank and featureless: many artists may simply not have known what



blades looked like up-close. What they *could* see was the hilt, and accordingly recreated authentic types in their images.

*iii) Body and face?*

An interesting question emerges from these investigations into the physical and visual characteristics of swords: were they perceived by some as having bodies and faces? The ‘body’ comprised the blade: the largest, most fundamental and functional part of the sword, without which it could not perform its tasks; and the home of the sword’s history and personality – inner elements known only by those with which it has the closest relationships: those, for want of a better analogy, who knew what was ‘inside the scabbard’ both literally and metaphorically. The ‘face’ comprised the hilt: the part that could be recognised on sight; which was altered and embellished to create a different identity; and which eventually demonstrated signs of age. While speculative, it is an intriguing way to think about just how far swords were perceived as person-like in early medieval society.

*iv) Reputation*

A ‘person-like’ attribute upon which texts and archaeology appear to agree is reputation. Reputations are based upon behaviour, associations and history, and as Chapter 6 demonstrated, these elements certainly apply to swords in poetry. Their fame and peerless past performances are lauded (*Bwf*.ll.1143-1145, 1457-1464, 2498-2509; *Wld*.1.ll.2-5), and the role played by quotable associations in the creation of a sword’s reputation is exemplified: in *Beowulf*, the ‘renowned’ sword of Healfdene and the ‘best-known’ sword of Hreðel; in *Waldere* the fact that Mimming was made by Weland; but also in contemporary documents like the wills of Æðelstan

(Chapter 6.6) and Ælfgar, a mid-tenth-century ealdorman who bequeaths a sword received from his son-in-law King Eadmund (Whitelock 1930, no. 2, 6-9), and a letter preserved by William of Malmesbury which recalls King Æðelstan's receipt of Constantine's sword (*WM.Gest.Reg.Angl.*2.6; Dodwell 1982, 74). Superficially, recovering a sword's 'reputation' from the material record seems challenging, but while the perceived 'behaviour' of a given sword is lost, the importance ascribed to preserving information about who owned or made a sword does recur in the archaeological record – since this was occasionally recorded upon the weapon itself. The Anglo-Saxon sixth-century sword from Ash, Gilton with a runic-inscribed pommel naming 'Sigi' or 'Sigimer' may reference the sword's owner (MacLeod and Mees 2006, 35); but further points of integration emerge beyond the analytical scope of this thesis. Owners' names appear on a tenth-century sword-grip from the River Frome at Wareham, Dorset (Okasha and Hinton 1977); and the late fifth- to sixth-century scabbard locket from Chessell Down, Isle of Wight, which may contain the personal name 'Acca' or 'Acco' (see Chapter 2.2d). A series of blades inlaid with personal names dating to between the ninth and eleventh centuries are traditionally interpreted as recording the maker or workshop in which they were made. The best-known name is ULFBERHT, traditionally assigned a Rhineland provenance (cf. A. Williams 2009) and considered of very high quality. Swords inscribed with this name therefore may have projected a desirable reputation that was widely coveted. Indeed, recent research has shown that the ULFBERHT name was probably misappropriated, inscribed upon counterfeit poor-quality blades – perhaps in an attempt to hijack a proven sign of good reputation in order to make a profit (A. Williams 2012, 120-122). On this occasion, pictorial evidence fails to integrate well; but as noted above, this may be because images of swords were too small to include inscriptions of

maker's or owner's names, or because artists were unfamiliar with these details. A fine exception is the attempt at an ULFBERHT inscription on the sword wielded by Orion in an eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon illuminated miscellany (IM12, fol. 39). It is difficult to know how else an image could convey a sword's reputation, so it is unsurprising that pictorial evidence cannot be allied with the other sources. In general, enough points of correspondence occur between texts and archaeology to infer that swords could acquire reputations, particularly on account of their associations with specific individuals.

### c) Old swords and sword biographies

The importance of past associations to a sword's reputation raises the issue of age, and the prestige associated with old swords: a theme which emerges strongly across all three sources. Poetry lauds swords with long, quotable histories; swords which have passed through multiple hands as gifts and heirlooms; and swords explicitly denoted as 'ancient'. Less explicit written references to archaic swords include possible skaldic allusions to ring-swords via the word *hringr*, and the Old English sword-words *mece* and *bill*, which may signify outmoded types (Chapter 6.2b). Chapter 4.2b argued that pictorial representations of outmoded sword-types in eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon illuminated manuscripts, a scene on the Bayeux Tapestry and perhaps a stone cross-shaft at Brailsford in Derbyshire, often appear with individuals of notable status, supporting the notion that old swords were themselves 'special' (the potential illustration of ninth-century sword types on eleventh-century Scandinavian runestones at Skokloster and Sparlösa may also be significant, although they are too stylised for their typology to be certain: see Chapter 4.2b). Chapter 5.2 argued that surviving swords with worn or modified metal fittings

and visible repairs may have been curated, as they were likely to have been in circulation for some time in order for these changes to occur. What is harder to determine archaeologically is the degree to which old swords were considered ‘special’. Most surviving swords derive from contexts which represent the end of their ‘functional’ lives, namely deposition in burials or watery contexts. Thus, they could be interpreted either as special honorific offerings or the convenient discard of outdated equipment – the former suggesting that old swords were valued, the latter probably not. Nonetheless, the fact that sword fittings were permitted to become noticeably worn, and were modified or repaired to enhance them or prolong their lives, may imply that owners kept and valued their swords well into the weapon’s dotage.

A link between archaic swords and elite status also appears to cross-cut the different sources. As noted above, the images analysed for this study associate old sword-types with special figures (Chapter 4.2b), while in the collected poetry archaic swords are often owned or given by high-status men – the most expressive example being the rise in standing experienced by Beowulf’s boat-guard when he receives an old sword as a gift (*Bwf*.1.1901). The archaeological evidence appears to integrate well: according to the method followed in this study, old swords are identified by the condition of their metal fittings, and since swords with metal fittings were probably restricted to wealthier individuals, the impression follows that old swords were associated with individuals of higher status. Clearly, this is an illusion: as already noted, most swords were more modestly fitted with organic hilt-pieces and presumably belonged to owners of more modest social standing. Any number of these swords could have been old at deposition, but they cannot be identified since their perishable fittings do not survive for examination in the same way that metal

fittings do. Consequently, it is more difficult to establish a confident archaeological link between archaic swords and elite status, which would correlate with the written and pictorial evidence espoused above. However, it should also be noted that ownership of any sword, whether fitted with metal or organic hilt-pieces, probably denotes a certain degree of social standing.

Although the evidence from all three sources cannot be integrated perfectly, the significance of archaic swords appears to be a valid observation based upon the weight of evidence examined here. But why were swords with long life-histories particularly valued in early medieval society? The preservation and quotation of the histories of swords – who had made or owned them, and sometimes the events in which they had participated – implies that these memories were at least partly responsible for augmenting a weapon's prestige. Broader archaeological and anthropological research into object biography, heirlooms and the mnemonic power of artefacts supports this idea. Howard Williams (2006, especially 20ff) has explored this idea in detail with relation to early medieval burial practices; but further afield both chronologically and culturally, Gosden and Marshall (1999, 170-171) have observed the increasing value afforded in Fijian culture to whales' teeth as they age, with the darkest (and hence oldest) teeth worth the most in exchange. Also pertinent is Lillios' (1999) work on heirlooms, which argues that the repeated passing-down of objects over generations transformed them into powerful reminders of an ancestral past, even enabling them to function as legitimations of inherited social position.

The prestige associated with ancient swords may also connect with their 'person-like' attributes: perhaps there existed a notion, comparable to ideas still current today, that age equalled experience, and elders commanded respect. While one should avoid projecting modern attitudes into the early medieval past, it is

illuminating to speculate in this vein. Perhaps an older sword was interpreted as more distinguished, proven and dependable than a brand new weapon with no track record. If we consider that a person's life relied upon the trustworthiness of his sword, it is easy to envisage why an older sword with known credentials may have been so desirable, both as personal property but also as a gift or bequest. This idea intersects well with the discussion of reputation outlined above.

For the sake of context, it is important to recognise that such views were not necessarily specific to swords. Other archaic artefacts appear within the collected images, archaeology and texts. Pictorially, out-dated helmet-types have been identified on Swedish helmet *Pressbleche* (Alkemade 1991, 291-292), Scandinavian runestones (Norr 2008b, 90) and in Anglo-Saxon manuscripts (Story 2003, 269-271). Archaeologically, some equipment deposited in the boat graves at Vendel and Valsgärde in Sweden was already old (Arwidsson 1942, 129; Ellis Davidson 1962, 13; John Ljungkvist pers. comm.; Lindqvist 1932, 39; Norr 2008b, 104-106), and Roman dress accessories have been recovered from numerous Anglo-Saxon burials (White 1991). Textually, references to ancient shields (*Ótt.Höf.*§8), spears (*Sigv.Vik.*§14), weapons (*Eyv.Laus.*1), helmets (*Bwf.*ll.1448-1455; *Eyv.Hák.*§3 with Norr 2008b), mail- armour (*Bwf.*ll.453-454; *Wld.*2.ll.18-24) and treasures (*Bwf.*ll.471-472; *Ex.*ll.586-587) feature on multiple occasions in Old English and Old Norse poetry. All in all, the importance attached to archaic swords was perhaps not artefact-specific, but part of a broader notion of prestige surrounding ancientness in early medieval thought. Further research into this phenomenon may contextualise the specific role of swords therein, but for now it is safest to claim that swords were one of a group of artefacts which were kept over extended periods of time, thereby acquiring age, associations and life-histories which enhanced their significance.

#### d) Animation

The theme which proves the most challenging when integrating different sources is also one of the most intriguing: perceptions of animated swords, capable of autonomous action. Images and texts both appear to depict swords acting on their own: namely, in Sigurðic iconography on carved stones from northern England and Scandinavia (Chapter 4.2d), and in poetic descriptions of swords singing and fighting with other weapons (Chapter 6.2c). These phenomena are difficult to interpret. Perhaps they signify a belief in animated swords, or that simply that a textual or pictorial reference to a sword could act as an abbreviation for a warrior. Certainly, the latter would have been a useful tool for artists working with limited space or poets with strict metrical rules. However, these readings need not be mutually exclusive: both may have been apprehended by different members of the audience consuming these images or poems. Moreover, both still provide insight into perceptions of ‘living’ swords: while a sword thought capable of independent action is a dramatic notion, the idea that it could ‘stand in’ for a person is also pertinent. This approaches the idea of swords behaving as ‘extensions of self’, which is discussed further below (261f).

The integrative problem concerns archaeological evidence. While rates of skeletal preservation vary between the graves analysed in this study, it is unlikely that any contained a sword without a body. Even where there was little to no skeletal trace, as with the boat-burials at Valsgärde in Sweden, swords were positioned as if a body had been there, indicating that one had probably been interred originally (or at least was perceived to have been there by those furnishing the burial). In this respect, none of the collected swords can be interpreted as truly ‘wielderless’ in the same way

as the pictorial and literary examples above. Beyond the parameters of this study, swords recovered as stray finds or from wetland contexts could be ‘wielderless’ candidates. Reynolds and Semple (2011) have argued that the negative characteristics of a sword’s owner could infuse his weapon, dictating that it be disposed of after his death in an out-of-the-way location, such as a river. In this reading, swords are interpreted as representations of their wielders, similar to the ‘abbreviations’ of warriors in images and poems.

In common with evidence for old swords, a contextual perspective must be applied here, since other weapons also appear to act autonomously across the sources. Depictions of lone spears and shields feature upon the Oseberg tapestry, while a drawn and loaded bow appears on a Viking coin of York; in the archaeological record, spear- and axe-heads have also been recovered from river contexts (with spear-heads significantly outnumbering swords: Watson 1995, Figs. 12-14); and poetry often depicts battles as fights between various types of weapons. However, in images and texts at least, a crucial distinction separates swords from other potentially ‘animated’ weapons. Of the 4712 war-gear motifs analysed for this study, only swords are shown in clear action – unambiguously stabbing a serpent in the iconography associated with Sigurðr. No other lone war-gear motif performs in the same way (Chapter 4.2d). Similarly, the collected poetry (especially in Scandinavian verse) depicts swords in far a greater range of independent action than spears, suggesting that swords were more appropriately depicted in this manner (Chapter 6.2c). It can therefore be inferred that swords, more than any other weapon in the early medieval period, were thought capable of ‘coming to life’.

Other hints of sword ‘animation’, such as the possession of animal or human qualities and comparison to natural forces, are difficult to trace outside of written



evidence. There seems no obvious pictorial parallel, while zoomorphic and anthropomorphic motifs which adorn real sword fittings appear on so many other types of artefact that there seems to be little that is special about swords in this respect. This is an example of an important theme failing to integrate across different sources, but it also reflects the differing nature of those sources: allusions to animals and humans in literary works simply cannot be replicated in the same way in images or upon the artefacts themselves. In summary, it is generally more difficult to integrate pictorial, archaeological and written evidence for perceptions of ‘animated’ as opposed to ‘living’ swords – particularly since it may have been the case that swords themselves were not considered ‘alive’, but rather acted as ciphers for the warriors who wielded them. Here we glimpse the significance of the warrior-sword relationship to perceptions of ‘living’ swords. It is now time to examine that relationship more closely.

### **3) Research Question 2: The Warrior-Sword Relationship**

Encouraging parallels exist between pictorial, archaeological and literary evidence regarding the relationship between warriors and their swords; but again, certain source-types appear to correspond more closely than others. Often a broader viewpoint is required to determine genuine points of integration.

#### a) Identifying ‘warriors’

To explore the relationship between swords and warriors, one must first identify ‘warriors’ in the sources; but as discussed in the preceding chapters of this study, not all who owned weapons in the early medieval period were necessarily ‘warriors’ as we might understand it today. Individuals whom we would consider too young, old

or physically incapable of fighting were buried with weapons (Härke 1990), suggesting either that weapons were not the preserved attributes of warriors, or that the early medieval definition of ‘warrior’ differed to our own. This problem was found to affect pictorial and archaeological evidence in similar ways. The association between an individual and a sword in an image or grave is no guarantee of warriorhood: those pictured fighting with swords may be interpreted as warriors, but not every figure shown with a sword is seen fighting. While we cannot know how many of those interred with swords in early medieval burials were once fighting men, it seems reasonable to infer that those of prime age and physical ability would have been. This problem of identification did not impinge upon texts to the same degree. The portrayal of characters using weapons in fighting contexts confirms their warrior status, and therefore enables us to trace their interaction with swords. As argued in Chapter 6.3a, swords are presented as the definitive ‘warrior’ weapon in Old English and Old Norse poetry; and even when they are depicted outside of combat, they retain their martial aspects – for instance, as gifts for military service or reminders of past conflicts. In this way, swords comprise an integral component of early medieval warrior identity (explored further in the next sub-section). It might therefore be tempting to use the strength of the literary connection between warriors and swords as support in identifying figures with swords in images and graves as warriors; but this risks falling into the traditional interdisciplinary traps outlined in Chapter 3. Written evidence is available only for the later part of the period under discussion, and in addition the overwhelmingly martial subject matter of the analysed texts may skew the image they provide of the relationship between warriors and swords. Consequently, it is wise to be cautious in our identifications; but also to avoid over-cautiousness. Irrespective of any additional social functions they

possessed, swords were designed as weapons: they lacked the dual functionality of spears (which could be used for hunting) and axes (certain types of which could be used as tools). Fighting was therefore fundamental to what a sword represented, regardless of whether it was ever used in anger. These ideas are elaborated below, but for now it can be argued that the provision of a sword in an image, grave or literary description invested that person with the identity of a warrior. Whether that person qualifies as a warrior according to modern definitions is moot: what matters is the early medieval definition which, though its subtleties may now be lost, appears to have been broader than our own. Certainly, all three sources examined in this study demonstrate that swords were manipulated in order to construct and mediate between different types of warrior identity.

## b) Warrior identities

### *i) Sword-wielders*

A theme which cuts across the pictorial, archaeological and written evidence is that not all warriors owned swords. This is not new information, as swords have traditionally been interpreted as restricted to the upper echelons of society. However, the results of this study reveal that sword ownership had more complex implications than this. Certain images and poetic episodes convey a sense that those who wielded swords were braver, worthier or more heroic than those who did not: for instance, the contrast drawn between Beowulf and Unferð, and between Wiglaf and Beowulf's retainers in *Beowulf* (Chapter 6.3c); and the front-ranking position of swordsmen in scenes on Gotlandic picture-stones and the Bayeux Tapestry (Chapter 4.3a). The archaeological evidence is more challenging to integrate: while swords were not deposited with all individuals interred with weapons, which itself implies a

difference between sword-owners and the rest, the nature of this difference is mysterious. It may have been a simple matter of social status, but other interpretations are possible. Swords were or had the potential to become heirlooms, and therefore ownership provided access to the rich interconnections and memories that accompanied that status. Possessing such a powerful embodiment of the past might have elevated sword-owners above those who did not carry these weapons. Alternatively, special status may have attended sword-wielders because swords were, as noted above, quintessential weapons of war. Hinton (2005, 29-31) has argued that swords in Anglo-Saxon burials represent those of prime fighting age and capability, whose loss was a severe blow to the local community. Burying them with a sword – a symbol of warfare and also a valuable commodity to sacrifice – was therefore an appropriate gift for their graves. Moreover, swords also identified their owners with a particular type of combat which differed to that practised with other weapons: fighting at close quarters (see also below, 262f). In Ancient Greece, warriors who fought in the front ranks, known as *promachoi* or ‘foremost fighters’, were especially lauded (Lazenby 1991, 93); and despite the separation of time and space between Ancient Greece and early medieval northern Europe, it might be worth considering if sword-ownership conferred similar prestige upon early medieval warriors. It is likely that various issues combined to make the identity of sword-wielder particularly prestigious, and the selectivity with which swords are provisioned in pictorial, archaeological and literary contexts suggests that swords could be used to construct this desirable standing.

ii) *Grades of sword-wielder*

Another theme upon which images, archaeology and texts agree is that early medieval warrior identity was subtler than the difference between warriors with swords and those without: there were also different grades of *sword* warrior. The type of sword which one possessed appears to have been important, with ring-swords a case in point. Pictorially, this is implied upon the *Pressblech* die from Torslunda, Sweden (Chapter 4.3a) which shows two figures with swords but only one (the foremost) fitted with a ring. Archaeologically, ring-swords were interred only with selected individuals while evidence for the addition and removal of ring fittings over time (Chapter 5.2d) suggests that this identity could be gained and lost. Poetic evidence contains echoes of similar ideas, albeit more challenging to interpret. First, while pictorial and archaeological sources are contemporary with the use of ring-swords, the poetry post-dates them by some centuries. During this time perceptions of ring-swords may have altered considerably, meaning that textual portrayals of ring-swords may carry different connotations to pictorial and archaeological evidence. Second, and perhaps more problematically, most written references to ring-swords are ambiguous, and may denote anything from mail-armour to neck-rings (see Chapter 6.2a). Without the ability to securely identify ring-swords in the poems, it is difficult to conclude anything about their wielders. A specialist philological analysis of the words for ‘ring’ and their deployment in poetry may advance this discussion in the future.

Ultimately, evidence from at least two sources suggests that ring-swords were associated only with certain individuals, who may well have been the oath-bound retainers of kings or war-leaders, as several scholars have argued (see Chapters 4.3a and 6.2a). Ownership of such a sword would therefore have transmitted powerful

messages about that individual's identity: their loyalty, trustworthiness and martial prowess had earned the bestowal of an exclusive token to adorn what was already a rather exclusive piece of war-gear.

Pictorial and written evidence appear to agree that possession of an old sword could differentiate sword-owners from each other. In Chapter 4.2b, the case study of tri-lobed sword pommels in eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon art suggested that artists may have used the type, which was out-of-date by then, to denote figures of special status. In Chapter 6.2b, the prestige surrounding ancient swords in Anglo-Saxon texts was highlighted: their elite associations are exemplified by their function as diplomatic gifts or heirlooms between those of the highest status. On the surface, archaeological evidence tallies with this picture: a number of fine swords from well-equipped Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian graves may have been of some age when buried, based upon signs of wear, repair or modification to their metal fittings. However, any number of more modest swords (if indeed any sword can be described as 'modest') may have been old, but are unidentifiable because they lack metal fittings. A further problem on the Anglo-Saxon side is the chronological mismatch between burials and much later texts: while old swords may have been prestigious possessions in the tenth and eleventh centuries, an old sword in a sixth-century burial may have meant something quite different – for example, it could simply represent a convenient method of disposing of an obsolete weapon. Despite these problems of integration, it seems reasonable to conclude that not all sword-owners were considered equal: many different types of sword existed, and the type of sword an individual owned, whether a ring-sword, an old sword, a sword with plain organic or jewelled metal fittings, determined his 'grade'. The interchangeability of sword fittings and their ability to remain in circulation for long periods may have made

them particularly suitable vehicles in the expression and construction of more complex warrior identities.

### c) Swords and other social groups

In every source examined for this thesis, warriors are not the only members of society to be associated with swords. When images, archaeology and texts are viewed in parallel, the relationship between swords and two specific social groups is especially interesting.

#### *i) Swords and women*

Images, archaeology and texts integrate extremely well regarding the relationship between women and swords. All three strongly suggest that it differed markedly to that between swords and warriors (or men more broadly). This difference has two aspects. First, women who *are* associated with swords may be considered irregular or even extraordinary: in images, the personified Virtues and Vices of the Anglo-Saxon Prudentius manuscripts, and the strange mythological figures on the Oseberg Tapestry (Chapter 4.3b); in archaeology, the Anglo-Saxon woman with crossed feet separated from 'her' sword at Dover Buckland (Chapter 5.3d); and in texts, Valkyries, mythological characters like Sif, and Biblical heroines like Judith. Second, when swords are associated with ordinary women, a degree of separation or non-equivalent function is always present. Chapter 4.3b showed that women might wear swords, but only in miniature as amulets; Chapter 5.3d discussed how weapon-swords were found in female graves, but in an adapted form as weaving beaters and placed differently to how weapon-swords were placed alongside males (Harrington 2008, 53-54). The archaeological analysis undertaken in this study further found that

women and unadapted weapon-swords only appear together in double burials with a male; and the sword is usually more closely aligned with the latter (Chapter 5.3d and 5.4b). An intriguing parallel can be drawn with surviving Anglo-Saxon documents, in that women only ever bequeath swords in joint wills with their husbands, and not in their own right (Chapter 6.3d).

The correspondences between the different sources strongly suggest that swords were only available to real early medieval women in symbolic or adapted guises: in miniature form as amulets, or as weaving beaters, gifts or bequests. There is little hard evidence to suggest that average women wielded real, full-size swords as weapons or wore them as symbols or attributes, as men did. Consequently, the relationship between women and swords could never be equivalent to that between warriors and swords: it lacked the regular physical interaction with the weapon, both in terms of wearing it against the body and using it to protect one's self and kill one's enemy.

#### *ii) Swords and ecclesiastical groups*

A connection between swords and ecclesiastical groups is not immediately apparent across the three sources. So far as can be told, churchmen, bishops or monks are not depicted with swords, buried with swords in the archaeological record, or described wielding swords in poetry. A relationship only emerges when one takes a broader contextual view of the sources. As noted in Chapter 4, many of the Anglo-Saxon images of swords collected for this study appear in illuminated manuscripts which were created in monasteries, and the extraordinary detail of some depictions are enough to convince that artists were familiar with the appearance of real swords. Similarly, it is likely that much of the Anglo-Saxon poetry analysed here was



committed to parchment by monks. We might also speculate that swords, as valuable objects, may have been kept in church or monastic treasuries, or given to these institutions as gifts by secular patrons. Certainly, this might help to explain how monks became familiar with the appearance of swords, enabling them to create authentic representations in image and word. All in all, swords were not irrelevant to ecclesiastical groups but, as with women, their familiarity with and understanding of swords was not quite the same as that acquired by using them in a fight (which by all accounts churchmen probably did not do: Chapter 6.5). Therefore, ecclesiastical groups could not experience the same type of relationship with swords that warriors did.

It should be noted that all of the above relates only to Anglo-Saxon England. Scandinavia's late conversion means that any connection between swords and ecclesiastical groups is hard to trace in the sources: they do not feature much, if at all, in the images, archaeology and poetry analysed in this study. Subsequently, it appears that the predominant social relationship for swords in early medieval Scandinavia was with males, and probably warriors. This may have had some influence on how they were perceived, including the degree to which they may have been interpreted as 'living' artefacts. These ideas are explored further below, in Section 5.

#### **4) Research Question 3: The 'Living' Sword in Time**

The preceding chapters highlighted the chronological mismatch between images, archaeology and texts, both within the individual sources and across the three when viewed in parallel. For instance, in the former case there are far fewer earlier than later images; far more early than late sword-graves in Anglo-Saxon England but vice

versa in Scandinavia; and no poetry at all from either region until the eighth century at least (Chapter 6.1b). In the latter case, archaeology and (to a lesser degree) images span much of the selected study period of c. 500-1100, but texts, as just noted, do not. As predicted in Chapters 3 and 6.1, identifying genuine points of convergence between the sources is challenging but speculative observations can be made with caution.

#### a) 'Living' swords

Chapter 5.4a found a degree of chronological continuity in the archaeological record relating to 'living' swords. The presence of swords with worn, repaired and modified fittings and asymmetrically-degraded and decorated pommels throughout the early medieval period suggests that swords continued to acquire biographies and possess distinctive visual identities which may have contributed to their 'living' aspect. Similar themes appear in pictorial and written sources (see above, 231f), but as they are confined largely to the later period, their chronological span is far shorter, making it more difficult to identify any temporal continuity or change which can then be compared with the archaeological evidence. Nonetheless, it is possible to make progress if one approaches the issue through the lens of Christian conversion – one of the most significant changes to occur during the early medieval period, affecting both regions under discussion at different times.

Evidence that the concept of 'living' swords was not inappropriate in a Christian context is detectable across the sources. As noted above, swords with biographies have been recovered archaeologically from pre-Christian and Christian periods, while the theme is conspicuous in Old English and Old Norse poetry, which in both cases was either composed or preserved in Christian contexts. The impact of

transitioning beliefs is particularly observable in Old Norse poetry, which survives from either side of the conversion period. While the most overt pre-Christian motifs diminish, the imagery used is merely modified – perhaps to make use of Christian motifs (Chapter 6.4). Hints of Christian ease with ‘living’ swords also emerge pictorially. The carved stones from Kirby Hill, England and Tandberg, Norway, featuring Sigurðr’s independently-stabbing sword (Chapter 4.2d) are of Christian date (ninth-tenth century and eleventh century respectively) and probably mark Christian graves, although their iconography revisits traditional tales. From this, it seems reasonable to conclude that the Christian world was not uncomfortable with the notion that swords could be perceived as having ‘lives’, characters, personalities or even the ability to become animated. Therefore, something other than religious beliefs probably helped to fuel such perceptions: something that did not diminish following Christian conversion. As suggested in Chapter 6.4, this may have been the link between swords and violence, an endemic component of early medieval society throughout the period (explored further below, 262). If so, there are grounds to suspect that perceptions of ‘living’ swords did have long continuity – as warfare itself did. If texts and images had survived in greater quantity from the earlier period, it is tantalising to wonder whether the theme would also have been reflected there.

An increase in the pictorial depiction of swords in ‘active’ situations, namely violence, over time (Chapter 4.4) could be interpreted as revealing an increase in perceptions of ‘living’ swords; but again archaeology and texts do not fully correlate with this finding. Later texts frequently describe swords in violent situations, but we lack the earlier material which could demonstrate whether this was an upward trend. In archaeology, it is difficult to determine whether swords were ever used for fighting (as discussed previously, 225); but taking a broader perspective,

archaeological research has shown that improvements in the construction of blades and hilts made later swords more effective as weapons (Wilson 1965, 48-49; Tylecote and Gilmour 1986, 247, 249; Underwood 2000, 50-51). These changes may have enabled swords to be used more frequently as weapons than was previously the case: when their effectiveness was poorer, sword-owners may have worn their swords as attributes but relied upon other weapons, such as spears, in battle. The shift in the placement of swords in Scandinavian burials from left (where swords were worn) to right (where swords were held) may also be relevant, if it relates to a temporal change in perceptions of swords from symbols to weapons (Chapter 5.4b). The archaeological and pictorial evidence both therefore indicate that swords were used more frequently and effectively as weapons as the period progressed, supporting the trend visible in later images and texts which present swords primarily as weapons.

It might be expected that an increased practical as opposed to symbolic function for swords may have diminished any sense of mystique surrounding them, making them appear less like exotic, 'living' objects. However, seeing and using swords more frequently in kinetic physical situations may have amplified perceptions of these weapons as 'living' (or even animated) objects. While earlier swords could have 'faces', changing components, acquire long lives, and perform as gifts or symbols of status, later swords had these too, plus more frequent opportunities to 'come to life', given their greater effectiveness as weapons. In this way, later swords may have had a more equal role both inside and outside of violent contexts. A speculative conclusion would be that swords were always perceived as somehow 'living', but these perceptions may have intensified as swords became more physically active in society, echoed in the potency of their depiction as weapons in

texts and images, and developments in their martial capabilities revealed by archaeological analyses.

#### b) Warriors and swords

Integrating pictorial, archaeological and written evidence for the relationship between warriors and swords over time is hindered by the chronological mismatch between sources. A close association between warriors and swords appears throughout the period in images, and certainly in texts from the later period (although again, comparison with earlier times is thwarted by the lack of earlier texts). In archaeology, swords are interred with men throughout the period in Scandinavia, and are always placed in close proximity to the body in both regions (Chapter 5.3c); but in England this relationship ruptures with the decline of furnished burial during the seventh century. Chapter 5.5 queried whether this change led to a diminished bond between swords and warriors in England: we might expect to find evidence of a more distant relationship, now that perpetual affiliation between the two in the grave had effectively ended. In fact, when the sources are combined, the opposite is suggested. Poems like *Beowulf* and *Waldere*, which post-date the period of furnished burial in England, paint vivid images of the intimate bond between warriors and their swords; and while they may be earlier compositions and are certainly set in an earlier time, the attitudes towards swords portrayed in them would need to have been relevant to their audiences, or the poets would not have been able to exploit swords as motifs serving their narratives.

Speculating further, if later swords were better weapons, they may have had a longer ‘shelf-life’ than earlier swords, enabling them to be passed on over a longer timeframe when previously they may have been placed in a grave at a ‘younger’ age.

Longer-lived swords could forge denser networks of relationships with a greater number of people over time, and this must have impacted upon their biographies – feeding into the idea explored above, regarding intensifying perceptions of swords as ‘living’ objects.

In conclusion, it is likely that swords were closely allied with warriors throughout the period under discussion. After all, swords were designed as weapons for fighting and lacked the dual functionality of spears (for hunting) or axes (as tools), notwithstanding any other social or symbolic functions they may have performed. In common with perceptions of ‘living’ swords, the improving martial effectiveness of these weapons may have led to an intensification of the relationship between warrior and sword.

#### **5) Research Question 4: The ‘Living’ Sword in Space**

This study has noted several potential parallels and distinctions between Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian views of swords. Encouragingly, several appear to cross the divide between sources, giving confidence that they are genuine contemporary themes. However, they also create a rather complex picture that requires careful negotiation.

##### a) ‘Living’ swords

Parallels in pictorial, archaeological and written sources suggest that Anglo-Saxon England and Scandinavia shared certain perceptions of ‘living’ swords. The most prominent point of comparison is the significance attached to old swords, with the Anglo-Saxon evidence being less ambiguous than the Scandinavian. Representations of outdated sword-types appear in Anglo-Saxon illuminated manuscripts, the Bayeux

Tapestry and upon a stone cross-shaft (see above, 235); and in Scandinavian art, perhaps on a gold foil from Sorte Muld, Denmark and a runestone from Skokloster, Sweden (with caveats: Chapter 4.2b). Archaeologists have recovered worn, repaired and modified swords from Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian burials and rivers (Chapter 5.2 and 5.4). The prestige attached to ancient swords is clear in Anglo-Saxon poetry and hinted at in Scandinavian skaldic verse – a theme which certainly resounds in later Icelandic saga, implying continuity of attitudes over time (see Chapter 6.1a on the use of saga evidence). Overall, the Anglo-Saxon evidence is less ambiguous: while archaeological evidence correlates between the two regions, Scandinavian images and texts require more conjecture to find references to archaic swords.

This cultural divergence might be partly attributable to the differing nature of the sources in each region. For instance, the more narrative character of Old English poetry provides greater scope for ruminations upon a sword's past history, and additional opportunities to weave this into the unfolding plot. By contrast, the episodic and more metrically-restricted Scandinavian skaldic poetry afforded little room for this sort of thing (Chapter 6.2). Similarly, Anglo-Saxon art provided extra outlets for expression in terms of media. Unlike England, Scandinavia did not have a tradition of manuscript illumination during the early middle ages. This flexible freehand medium may have made it easier for Anglo-Saxon artists to achieve complex shapes and details, including recognisably archaic sword-types, that were less easily achieved in the stone sculpture, metalwork, carving or embroidery practised by Scandinavian craftsmen. Therefore, ancient swords may have had a comparatively low profile in Scandinavian art and texts because the details which would enable us to recognise them were difficult to express in the available media.

Certainly, archaeological evidence confirms that swords were curated in contemporary Scandinavian society – indeed, the most spectacular example of wear on any sword analysed in this study derives from Scandinavia (Birka, grave 942: Chapter 5.4a).

Sources from both regions also hint that perceptions of ‘person-like’ swords with character, personality, visual identity, relationship networks and perhaps even names, were shared culturally. Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian art both characterise swords as ‘blade plus hilt’ (Chapter 4.2a), suggesting that these components were widely perceived as the most distinctive. Modified swords from Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian archaeological contexts reveal efforts to construct visually unique identities for weapons; furthermore, swords from both areas feature asymmetric decoration and wear patterns on pommel faces and guards, demonstrating that swords may have had ‘public’ faces which were habitually displayed (Chapter 5.2e) – although signs of differential wear patterns are subtler on Scandinavian than Anglo-Saxon weapons. Old English poems features swords with names, reputations, partnerships and quotable histories; and there are hints of similar in Old Norse skaldic poetry, albeit more obscure – although again, these themes are represented strongly in later Icelandic saga. Thus, evidence for ‘person-like’ swords emerges more clearly across Anglo-Saxon than Scandinavian sources. However, this may not suggest that ‘person-like’ swords were more of an Anglo-Saxon phenomenon: source-critical factors may again be responsible for the cultural difference. Uneven wear patterns which suggest swords with ‘faces’ may be simply more difficult to spot on the collected Scandinavian sword fittings because they are typically made from copper alloy and iron, both of which survive in poorer condition and show wear less readily than the more-numerous silver Anglo-Saxon fittings. Regarding poetry, it has



already been noted that the nature of skaldic verse provided little option for the type of elaboration and description possible in Old English poems, which is able to create vivid portraits of person-like swords. Therefore, perceptions of person-like swords may well have been shared between Anglo-Saxon England and Scandinavia, but it cannot be traced equally across the sources.

A less ambiguous cultural split concerns the issue of sword ‘animation’: the notion that swords could behave autonomously. When the different sources are viewed in parallel, this phenomenon is more strongly allied with Scandinavian or Scandinavian-influenced evidence. Only Scandinavian images depict lone swords in action (Chapter 4.5), and while the motif’s rarity warns against drawing too many conclusions from it, textual echoes of the same idea provide support. The skaldic provision of voices for swords, and the likening of them to living things (human, animal and plant) and natural phenomena is essentially unmatched in Old English verse except particular poems which some have interpreted as subject to Scandinavian influence (Chapter 6.5). The point of departure appears to be that while Anglo-Saxon swords could be ‘person-like’, only Scandinavian swords could become truly animated. A possible explanation concerns the relationship between swords and warriors, which is addressed now.

#### b) Warriors and swords

Evidence for a close relationship between warriors and swords in both Anglo-Saxon England and Scandinavia is detectable in all three sources. As already discussed, swords were important warrior attributes in art and poetry, and were placed in close proximity to males in inhumation graves; but the warrior-sword connection seems slightly more marked in Scandinavian sources. Pictorially, around three-quarters of

figures depicted with swords in Scandinavian art can be interpreted as warriors, compared with less than half in Anglo-Saxon – although source-critical factors may be partly responsible for this trend (discussed in detail in Chapter 4.5). Nevertheless, skaldic poetry presents swords as the weapon of general warriors, compared with the more elite attributions which appear in Anglo-Saxon poetry (Chapter 6.3). The potential to integrate archaeological evidence again suffers from the difficulties involved in identifying ‘warriors’ in graves; however, many scholars have remarked upon the greater number of surviving swords from Scandinavia as opposed to Anglo-Saxon England, and it could be extrapolated that if more swords were in circulation in Scandinavia, they may have been more accessible to general warriors than they were in England, where only the highest status individuals were able to acquire them (although these individuals, it should be noted, would probably have been warriors too). The symbolic messages expressed by swords may therefore have differed culturally: in Scandinavia, a sword could signify ‘warrior’, and in Anglo-Saxon England ‘elite’ (or ‘elite warrior’). If swords were more familiar as warrior attributes in Scandinavia, their primary function would have been violent action rather than as status symbols worn in their scabbards (which may have been the predominant view in England). Consequently, Scandinavian culture may have been more likely to interpret and depict swords as ‘animated’ objects.

### c) Swords as cultural markers?

The greater visibility and accessibility of swords in Scandinavia may have caused this weapon to behave as a cultural marker, differentiating Scandinavians (who were known to possess many swords) from Anglo-Saxons (who possessed fewer). This could help to explain certain observations in the preceding chapters: for instance,

why the poet of the Old English *Exodus* seemingly uses swords to differentiate Egyptian and Israelite forces (Chapter 6.5), and why sword motifs suddenly appear upon coins minted in Viking-controlled York, along with other culturally-resonant symbols like Thor's hammers (and possibly Óðinn's raven, although this motif may also represent St John's eagle: G. Williams 2007, 198).

The currency of swords as Scandinavian cultural markers may alternatively illuminate an issue discussed in Chapter 4.5: the absence of swords as royal attributes in Anglo-Saxon art prior to the depiction of a sword-wearing Knútr in the New Minster *Liber Vitae* of c. 1031. The mobilisation of a sword motif in this image could be read in two different (not mutually exclusive) ways. First, it may tap into an Anglo-Saxon perception of swords as elite attributes, perhaps deriving from Knútr's desire to have himself depicted as an elite Anglo-Saxon to his Anglo-Saxon subjects (cf. Karkov 2004, 125, 131ff; Bolton 2009, 97 with references). Second, it may have been deployed as a Scandinavian cultural symbol, pictorially unifying Knútr's Scandinavian (sword-wielder) with his Anglo-Saxon (church patron) sides in an effort to demonstrate his legitimacy as king of all England's inhabitants, Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon alike. The latter reading may explain why swords subsequently became kingly motifs in Anglo-Saxon imagery (Chapter 4.5): Knútr was a king with unparalleled powers, as far as the Anglo-Saxons were concerned – he presided over an empire that encompassed England, Denmark, Norway and parts of Sweden. Therefore, his Anglo-Saxon successors may have adopted his iconography of sword-wearing in order to associate themselves with his level of power. This is complex, but even if this reading is incorrect, it seems plausible that swords offered some point of difference between Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian culture during the early medieval period.

## **6) Conclusion**

Pictorial, archaeological and written sources provide compelling evidence that swords could be perceived as ‘living’ objects in Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian thought. It seems likely, however, that the extent of those perceptions differed culturally: while ‘living’ swords could be found in both areas, animated swords were more of a Scandinavian phenomenon. Despite the traditional scholarly emphasis upon swords as elite attributes, a strong association between swords and warriors (elite or otherwise) is evident: swords differentiated certain types of warriors from others, and it is reasonable to conclude that swords were more often interpreted as weapons than elite markers in the early medieval period, in Scandinavia at least. Comparisons with spears demonstrate repeatedly that swords were deemed as singular amongst other war-gear in their ability to become ‘living’ objects. But what fuelled such perceptions? A number of factors may have contributed. These divide into the physical characteristics of swords, and their particular role in bloodshed.

### a) The physical characteristics of swords

First, from a practical perspective, swords could remain in circulation over extended periods of time. Spear- and axe- shafts might break or crack and their war-heads be lost in combat; shield-boards might splinter and be discarded; but swords were durable. Damaged blades could be ground, re-polished, re-forged or even riveted back together (Androshchuk 2010), while damaged or undesirable fittings could be substituted. The sword’s reparability enabled the same weapon to last for generations, acquiring a dense ‘life-story’ and network of relationships, much like a human being over the course of his or her life (Gosden and Marshall 1999, 170). Its

long history would also enable it to provoke powerful memories of the past in those who owned or viewed it: a socially active role which may have caused people to perceive such swords as living artefacts (H. Williams 2006, 40ff).

Second, the composite nature of swords provided their owners with endless opportunities for customisation. For those with the means to add or amend sword fittings, it was relatively straightforward to create a unique visual identity for a sword, which was not only recognisable on sight but evolved (and aged) over the years, like a human face. Furthermore, the possibility that a sword's visual identity changed in step with the phases of its owner's life, for instance with the adding of a ring or a fresh fitting (Chapter 5.4a), further heightens their 'person-like' aspect, embodying the life of their owners and causing them to become like an 'extension of self'. This customisable quality was not equalled by other early medieval offensive weapons. Spears and axes comprised two parts only – head and wooden shaft – thus offering few prospects for 'tailoring'. Some wooden shafts may have been painted, although evidence for this is sparse (Stephenson 2007, 107; Underwood 1999, 44); and while distinctively-decorated, metal-inlaid or encrusted spear-and axe-heads have survived, these designs were not customisable in the same way as detachable sword fittings.

Third, swords could be comfortably worn on the body in a harness or belt and scabbard for extended periods of time. Consequently, some viewers and owners may have interpreted them as like an additional limb – almost literally an 'extension of self'. Conversely, spears and axes were carried in the hand, and while mail-armor, helmets and perhaps shields (via carrying-straps, although evidence is sparse: Dickinson and Härke 1992, 60; Stephenson 2002, 52-54) could be worn on the person, they would not have been as comfortable to wear for long stretches, reducing

the likelihood that they could be interpreted in quite the same way as extra ‘appendages’ of their owners.

In these three respects, then, swords were highly distinctive amongst other war-gear. However, their unique role in bloodshed may have played an important role in fuelling perceptions of ‘living’ swords.

#### b) The sword’s role in bloodshed

From about the mid-twentieth century onwards, scholars in the fields of Anthropology and Psychology have increasingly investigated violence and the human experience of it (Carman 1997a, 12). They have described the extreme physiological and emotional responses triggered within warriors by the experience of combat, comprising a profound fluctuation of emotions, physical and mental exhaustion, shock, irrational thought, and vision and hearing problems (Grossman and Siddle 2010, 443-446; also Carman 1997b; Carver 2010, 4; Keegan 1976, 327). Much of this research concerns modern warfare, but early medieval warriors are likely to have endured similar feelings to their modern-day counterparts when fighting: while the prospect of experiencing battle was more probable then, alarm and anxiety would still have attended it (Keegan 1976, 116).

Research has further shown that the experience of violence becomes more intense and difficult to manage the closer a warrior is to his enemy. Facing deadly aggression from, or showing it to, another human being is one of the most horrifying aspects of combat, and the most damaging to combatants’ psychological state (Grossman and Siddle 2010, 444-446; Grossman 2010, fig. 1 and 190 with references). Indeed, Keegan’s influential study of martial violence, *The Face of Battle* (first published in 1976), argued that a lack of fatal bayonet wounds at

Waterloo (1815) during the Napoleonic Wars and at the Somme (1916) during the First World War demonstrated that it could be ‘virtually impossible to stab an opponent’ (Grossman 2010, 190 with references to Keegan 1976). This situation would have been compounded in early medieval conflicts, which were more localised and involved smaller forces (especially in the early period), increasing the likelihood that the combatants might even know each other – but could certainly see each other’s faces, look into each other’s eyes and hear each other’s voices (Keegan 1976, 320-321).

On the early medieval battlefield, the closest-range combat was likely to have been provided by the two-edged sword. With axes and more markedly with spears, killing took place at a range of between approximately 0.5 and 2.5 (or more) metres from the warrior’s hand, depending on the length of the shaft – more if the weapon was thrown, as types of both could be in combat (Stephenson 2007, 106; Stephenson 2012, 59ff). Sword blades, used for slashing and chopping rather than thrusting until later in the period (Cameron 2000, 76; Tylecote and Gilmour 1986, 247, 249), could maim an opponent very close to the wielder’s hand, resulting in him being doused in his victim’s blood. This may have made sword-fighting the most powerful and traumatic experience available in early medieval warfare. This again finds corroboration in recent combat psychology, which has discovered that the greatest opposition to killing attends shorter, bladed weapons like knives and bayonets rather than guns (Grossman 2010, 190); but also perhaps in the early medieval material examined in this study, which has repeatedly found a division between those who wield swords and those who do not, with the former perhaps being the more authoritative or respected group.

The appalling and terrifying enterprise of close combat may have acted as a crucible in which a unique bond was forged between sword and wielder, of a type which could not be matched by any other weapon. Anthropological studies have suggested that stressful ordeals can provoke human beings to ‘seize upon objects which resonate with personal meanings’ (Hallam and Hockey 2001, 42). Swords certainly fit into that category: as this thesis has demonstrated, they were precious heirlooms passed down over generations, encapsulating beloved, illustrious or victorious past memories; and they had visual identities that could perhaps offer comfort similar to that of a reliable human face in the terrors of the fight. It is possible to follow this line further: discussions of combat experiences have repeatedly discussed how warriors can feel that only those who have endured the same situations can understand it, and each other (Grossman and Siddle 2010, 444 with references). The relationship between warriors and their ‘person-like’ swords may thus have been analogous to comradeship, involving the type of reliance and mutual understanding that exists between two human warriors. Such an interpretation makes a number of issues explored in this thesis seem especially poignant: the close association between swords and warriors in images; worn sword fittings hinting at habitual touching and resting of the hand; the cradling of swords in burials; Beowulf’s lauding of his sword’s long service at his side; the motivation behind Óláfr Tryggvason’s commission of a poem with swords mentioned in every line; and perhaps most affectingly, the carving of an *æsc* rune into the pommel of an Anglo-Saxon sword from Faversham, and its appeal to standing firm in a maelstrom. A modern analogy for the strength of this connection between sword and warrior is the so-called Rifleman’s Creed, learned by every US Marine Corps recruit, and encapsulated best in this extract:



‘This is my rifle. There are many like it, but this one is mine.

My rifle is my best friend. It is my life. I must master it as I master my life...

My rifle is human, even as I, because it is my life. Thus, I will learn it as a brother. I will learn its weaknesses, its strengths, its parts, its accessories... We will become part of each other.’

(cited by Rose 2008, 316-317)

Overall, swords – more than any other early medieval weapon – were perceived as ‘living’ in both Anglo-Saxon England and Scandinavia due to two factors: first, the ‘person-like’ nature they could acquire via their life-history, composite nature and physical changes over time, and second, their special role in combat, which helped to create an intense and unique relationship between sword and warrior.

## Conclusion

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By integrating evidence from images, archaeology and texts, this study has gained fresh insights into perceptions of swords in early medieval northern Europe. Its results strongly suggest that these weapons were interpreted as ‘living’ artefacts, fuelled by their composite nature, distinctive visual identities, and especially their life-histories – with ancient swords holding special significance in both Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian thought. The relationship between swords and warriors was particularly close. Swords did not only function as high status symbols as traditional interpretations maintain: they also performed as mediators between grades of warrior and, more subtly, between grades of *sword-warrior*. Moreover, the identities of sword and owner could become interwoven, with swords behaving as an ‘extension of self’, further augmenting their ‘person-like’ qualities. Perceptions of swords as ‘living’ objects and their close social partnership with warriors continued throughout the period, and perhaps grew more intense over time. Major developments such as the arrival of Christianity did not have a significant impact upon these ideas. In general, perceptions of ‘living’ swords were probably shared between Anglo-Saxon England and Scandinavia. However, the idea that swords could become ‘animated’ was more Scandinavian in outlook and feature only in Anglo-Saxon contexts where Scandinavian influence is present. It is interesting to consider whether notions of animated swords correlate with aspects of Scandinavian pre-Christian beliefs such as shape-shifting, which has received increasing scholarly attention in recent years (Hedeager 2011, Chapter 4 especially at 81ff; Price 2002, 101ff). Such studies tend to consider the transformation of humans into animals, but it would be worthwhile to

explore the transformation of inanimate objects into animated things in a future study.

Alongside insights into perceptions of ‘living’ swords and the sword-warrior relationship, another theme emerged particularly strongly. As discussed in Chapter 2, swords have long been interpreted as having special status during the early medieval period, chiefly because their material value enabled them to perform as elite symbols. The evidence examined in this study demonstrates a more complex picture. Swords were precious objects not only because of their economic cost, but also because their distinctive visual identities and long life-histories transformed them into familiar, beloved companions and valuable heirlooms invested with generations of meaningful connections and memories. Their role in combat was also a key factor. Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian images, archaeology and texts reveal that the ‘weapon’ aspect of swords was at the forefront of contemporary thought. While it is irrefutable that swords could function as status symbols in early medieval society, the use for which they were originally designed – fighting – should be considered more deeply if we are to apprehend their full social significance (Hedenstierna-Jonson 2006; Carman 1997a, 19). After all, swords differed from all other war-gear used regularly by early medieval warriors: spears and arrows could double outside of combat as hunting weapons (Vankilde 2006, 484-485), while axes are conceptually related to tools. As far as we can tell, swords bore no such additional function: they were unambiguous weapons of war, created for the purpose of killing other humans. Anthropological research has emphasised the link between violence and the acquisition of power: violence enables one side to master and humiliate the other, thereby providing a dramatic means of forging or altering the balance of social relationships (Abbink 2000, xi-xii; Aijmer 2000, 1). Consequently, artefacts which

are intimately associated with violence might acquire a special social resonance – irrespective of their material worth. Viewing swords in this context opens alternative avenues for understanding their symbolic resonance in early medieval society, transcending established discussions of their economic cost and elite associations. In doing this, we arrive at a fuller understanding of these dynamic ‘living’ objects, which occupied a prominent place in Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian thought and culture throughout the early medieval period.

## Epilogue

### Assessment of the interdisciplinary method

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The interdisciplinary method utilised in this thesis (outlined in Chapter 3.3) proved largely successful, revealing genuine points of convergence and divergence between disparate types of evidence, and thereby providing insights into the topic at hand. As noted in Chapter 7.1, certain sources integrated more easily than others, for instance due to their nature or patterns of survival; but the method's chief drawbacks relate to practicalities of execution. Two issues are prominent.

First, the mosaic of evidence created when three types of source (images, archaeology and texts) are combined across a long chronological span (c. 500-1100) and two cultures (Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian) is inevitably patchy. Choosing such a vast base of evidence, even with a narrow topic like the 'living' aspects of swords, maximises the chances of gaps and mismatches between sources. Some areas were more complete than others, but elsewhere the situation was more problematic. The most serious case concerned Research Question 3 in Chapter 6, due to the complete absence of written evidence for at least the first two centuries of the study period (discussed at length in Chapter 6.1). As a result, forming authoritative conclusions about chronological continuity and change within texts was incredibly difficult, by contrast with the pictorial and archaeological evidence, which was distributed more evenly across the period.

Second, while mobilising three different sources across the entire early medieval period and two cultures proved just about manageable in a study of this size, the intensity of the workload involved in gathering data, acquiring specialist critical skills for the three source-types, and gaining the deep contextual knowledge

required to analyse and interpret different datasets accurately was a lot to bear for a solitary researcher – even with the intellectual support of peers and scholars.

Consequently, two key lessons were learned during the undertaking of this thesis, which form recommendations for future interdisciplinary projects. The first might be termed ‘smart selection’: that is, choosing a topic, chronological framework and / or regional study area for which multiple sources overlap substantially enough to facilitate analysis and interpretation, without the necessity for substantial speculation. This would yield a greater density of results with solid foundations. An example from this thesis would be a study of ‘living’ swords in Anglo-Saxon England alone during the period c. 800-1100, using texts, images and perhaps also archaeology, if swords from all archaeological contexts – not just burials – are included.

The second lesson is that substantial interdisciplinary research projects are best executed as collaborations between experts from different disciplines, rather than by researchers working alone. An interesting theme to emerge whilst undertaking this thesis was the fundamental significance of specialist knowledge not only to the analysis and interpretation of data, but also to the integration of different types of source. Awareness of all the nuances, subtleties and source-critical issues is vital if this process is to succeed. For example, the sparse descriptions of swords in Scandinavian skaldic poetry may be read as reflecting a disinterest in the weapon, which is greatly at odds with the archaeological and pictorial evidence. One can only understand this apparent dichotomy if one is familiar with the strictures of skaldic metre, and its honorific focus upon people rather than things (Chapter 6.2a and 6.3b). Failing to engage with such issues could lead to misinterpretations when comparing and contrasting different sources. Acquiring this knowledge is arduous and time-

consuming, and the temporal and financial constraints of modern research projects might not always allow for it – making a collaborative approach more manageable, efficient and effective. It is hoped that this study confirms the value of such approaches to our understanding of the early medieval period, and that interdisciplinarity should continue to form an essential component of future research in this area.

# Appendix 1

## Database Descriptions

Four separate databases were constructed for the purposes of this thesis. This appendix provides a sample record from each database, an outline of its structure and a full description of the fields used. In the thesis text, database queries are referenced by the code ‘DB#:Q#’, denoting the number of the database (1, 2, 3a or 3b) and the number of the Query used to supply the data. The four databases are supplied on the accompanying CD-ROM.

### Database 1 (DB1): Images

Database type: Relational

Software: Microsoft Access 2010

Sample record:

War-Gear	Context	Wielder	Description 1	Description 2	Description 3
Spear	V	W	ThS	LB	N/A
Spear	V	W	ThS	LB	N/A
Spear	V	W	ThS	LB	N/A
Body Armour	V	W	N/A	N/A	N/A
Helmet	V	EI (A?)	Ger	Nas	N/A
Sword	V	EI (A?)	N/V	N/V	SG

The fields which were created to store the data fall into two broad groups: those providing information about the artefact bearing the representation of war-gear



(‘Artwork Details’), and those providing information about the war-gear itself (‘Image Details’).

### 1: Artwork Details

Artwork	Title, name or description of the artwork or artefact bearing the image, including its current location in a museum, library etc.
Medium	Carving Coin Graffito Illuminated Manuscript Metalwork Stone Sculpture Textile
Culture	The culture responsible for creating the artwork or artefact: Anglo-Saxon Scandinavian Anglo-Scandinavian
Sub-Culture	A finer-grained division of cultures, enabling subtler analyses where appropriate: Anglo-Saxon Scandinavian – Pre-Viking Scandinavian – Viking Anglo-Scandinavian
Period	Date of the artefact

Phase	<p>The broad range of dates for the artefacts raised problems when seeking broad chronological patterns within the data. To ease this problem, each ‘Period’ was assigned to one of three chronological ‘Phases’:</p> <p>Phase I: 500-700    Phase II: 700-900    Phase III: 900-1100</p> <p>For instance, an artefact dated 600-650 was assigned to Phase I, and an artefact dated 1000-1100 to Phase III. Those dating to periods spanning two phases were assigned to the phase in which the majority of their dating fell: thus, an artwork dated 800-1100 (the period typically ascribed to the Viking Age) was assigned to Phase III. Queries arising from patterns in the phasing were double-checked against the more precise ‘Period’ category.</p>
Provenance	Where the artefact was found and / or where it was made, if known e.g. especially for illuminated manuscripts
Select Bibliography	Key publications which discuss the artefact

## 2: Image Details

Image Location	Location of the image on the artefact, e.g. front, back, lid, folio
War-Gear	Item of war-gear depicted:
	Arrow
	Axe
	Body Armour
	Bow
	Club

Helmet

Knife

Mace

Seax

Shield

Sling

Spear

Sword

Trident

Context Group      The general context in which the item of war-gear is depicted  
e.g. a violent context:

Authority

Passive

Ritual

Unaccompanied

Violence

Other

See below for definitions.

Context              Smaller sub-categories of context, which provide finer detail in  
analyses e.g. different types of violence (battle, sacrifice,  
suicide) which carry different connotations. The following  
contexts were devised using all available information: texts or  
inscriptions accompanying the image, scholarly interpretations,  
comparison with other images and any other relevant material.  
Shorthand codes used:

D	Deliberately destroyed or broken
Em	Embassy or formal audience with an authority figure
Enth	Enthroned ruler (war-gear associated with the enthroned person or borne by an associated weapon-bearer); including Christ or God in Majesty and ruler portraits on coins
P	Passive i.e. without any other discernible function, and which cannot be ascribed to any other context
P (C)	Passive – Carried e.g. by a ship or wagon as on the Bayeux Tapestry
P (H)	Passive – Held i.e. in the hand
P (W)	Passive – Worn, e.g. in a scabbard at the hip
R	Ritual or ceremony, e.g. ‘weapon-dancing’, coronation, oath-swearing, presentation of arms etc. (excluding violent rituals e.g. sacrifice, which is classified separately)
T	Tool / domestic, e.g. chopping wood, sharpening a stylus
Tr	Treasure e.g. part of a hoard
Un	Unaccompanied i.e. depicted without any wielder. Excludes war-gear shown embedded in persons, shields etc. dropped by their wielders in battle, which are categorised as ‘Violence’

	V	Violence (general martial)
	V (Ex)	Violence – Execution
	V (H)	Violence – Hunting
	V (Sac)	Violence – Sacrifice (human or animal)
	V (St)	Violence – Stripped i.e. from a corpse on the battlefield
	V (Su)	Violence – Suicide
Wielder Group		The general type of wielder associated with the item of war-gear, e.g. holding or wearing it.
		Christian
		Elite
		Extraordinary
		Female
		Man
		None
		Ship
		Warrior
		Worker
		See below for definitions.
Wielder		Smaller sub-categories of wielder, which provide finer detail in analyses. The following wielders were devised using all available information: texts or inscriptions accompanying the image, scholarly interpretations, comparison with other images and any other relevant material. Different categories of wielder occasionally overlap e.g. elite retainers can also be interpreted as

warriors. In such cases, the most precise identity which could be determined using available evidence was assigned. These problems are discussed in the thesis text where they may have influenced results.

Shorthand codes used:

El (A)	Elite – Figure of authority, e.g. war-leader (excludes royal figures, which are separately classified)
El (H)	Elite – Hunter
El (Ret)	Elite – Retainer i.e. a person in the service of a high-ranking individual e.g. a royal soldier or lord’s warrior
El (R)	Elite – Royalty, e.g. king or prince
El (WB)	Elite – Weapon-bearer i.e. person juxtaposed with an enthroned authority or royal figure, most often raising a sword but occasionally with a shield and/or helmet
Fem (A?)	Female – Authority?
F (W)	Female – Warrior
Man	Man, i.e. male person who cannot be more precisely identified as belonging to any other wielder group
None	No visible wielder e.g. in the case of unaccompanied weapons

Sh	Ship, e.g. shields attached to the side or spears propped up in the stern
W	Warrior, i.e. an armed male whose identity could not be more precisely determined. Three criteria were used to classify warriors: first, associated texts or labels were used where possible; second, where these references were lacking, identification was based on the presence of specifically-martial war-gear (shields, helmets, armour and swords); and third, participation in actively violent contexts
Wk	Worker i.e. a person performing tasks or employment of some kind
Wk (Ex)	Worker – Executioner
Wk (G)	Worker – Guard
Wk (M)	Worker – Messenger
Wk (S)	Worker – Servant
XO (An)	Extraordinary – Animal; excludes characters with both human and animal attributes, which are assigned to ‘XO (My)’
XO (G?)	Extraordinary – God? i.e. pre-Christian gods such as Þórr (Thor) or Óðinn. Identification is contentious due to a lack of explanatory texts and inscriptions, hence the question mark.

XO (My)	Extraordinary – Mythological or legendary, e.g. heroes like Sigurðr, figures like Valkyries, creatures like Centaurs etc.
XO (P)	Extraordinary – Personification, e.g. of abstract concepts or natural phenomena such as Zodiac signs, constellations, rivers
Xtn	Wielders of a Christian nature
Xtn (A)	Christian – Angel
Xtn (BF)	Christian – Biblical Figure i.e. key named figures who cannot be categorised under the other ‘Xtn’ sub-categories e.g. Abraham, David, Moses and Job
Xtn (Chr)	Christian – Christ
Xtn (D)	Christian – Demon
Xtn (G)	Christian – God
Xtn (St)	Christian – Saint

Description 1-4 Physical description of the item of war-gear, divided into four descriptive elements. These vary between different war-gear types, but for swords are:

Description 1 Pommel type, e.g. tri-lobed, triangular

Description 2 Lower guard shape, e.g. straight or curved

Description 3 Upper guard shape, as above

Description 4 Fuller present or absent

Held 1-2 Only applicable to war-gear that is held e.g. swords, spears, axes, shields.



Held 1	The hand used to hold the weapon:
L	Left
R	Right
Bth	Both
Held 2	Weapon's orientation:
Up	Upright i.e. the point or head of the weapon is above the hand which holds it
Rev	Reversed i.e. the point or head of the weapon is below the hand which holds it
Hzt	Horizontally held
HFwd	Horizontally held with the point or head of the weapon oriented forwards, ahead of the wielder
HRev	Horizontally held with the point or head of the weapon oriented backwards, behind the wielder
Vtl	Vertically held, e.g. where spear-heads are not visible to determine orientation
N/F	Not found i.e. the image could not be observed to verify orientation
N/V	The point or head of the weapon is not visible, meaning that the weapon's orientation cannot be defined

N/A Not applicable, e.g. artefacts such as coins or weapon amulets where the intended orientation cannot be defined

Where weapons are held at an angle, the ultimate orientation of the point or head takes precedence according to the principles outlined above. Thus, a sword brandished over the head at a forty-five degree angle was categorised as ‘upright’ because its point remains above the hand. Delimiting categories of orientation in this way enabled the identification of patterns which may have been obscured if various diagonal angles were added to the classifications.

Special Comment Special notes about war-gear depicted, e.g. sword is disproportionate in size; particularly unusual or authentic details etc.

## Database 2 (DB2): Archaeology

Database type: Relational

Software: Microsoft Access 2010

Sample record:

Sword Details	Date	Pommel Type	Guard Type	Blade Type	Length (cm)	Width
Sword 1	580-630	CH	SG	Not PW	94.5	4.8
Sword 2	U	N/A	N/A	PW	90	5.5

The fields which were created to store the data fall into three broad groups: those providing information about the grave containing the sword ('Grave Details'); the sword itself ('Sword Details'); and the position of all weapons within the grave ('Weapon Positioning Details').

### 1: Grave Details

Culture	The culture with which the grave is associated:
	Anglo-Saxon – Early
	Anglo-Saxon – Late
	Scandinavian – Pre-Viking
	Scandinavian – Viking
Cemetery	Cemetery name
Grave	Grave number (if relevant)
Grave date	Date of grave
Grave type	Type of grave construction. Shorthand codes used:
	Inh            Inhumation
	BG Inh        Boat grave with inhumation
	Bier Inh       Inhumation with bier
	Ch Cof Inh    Chamber inhumation with coffin
	Ch Inh        Chamber inhumation
	Cof Inh       Coffin inhumation
	D Inh         Ditch inhumation
	M Cof Inh     Mound inhumation with coffin
	M Crem       Mound cremation

	M Inh	Mound inhumation
	(M) Inh	Inhumation, mound ploughed away, eroded etc.
	U	Unknown / unclassified
Skeletal remains	Y	Yes
	N	No
	U	Unknown / unrecorded
Gender	Gender of grave occupant:	
	Male	
	Female	
	Unknown / unrecorded	
Age	Age of grave occupant in years, if recorded	
Grave goods	Other grave goods within the grave. Shorthand codes used:	
	2Bur	Second burial
	AnB	Animal bone
	Ang	Angon
	Ar	Arrowhead
	A-R	Arm-ring
	Ax	Axe
	Bag	Bag
	Bal	Balance
	Bd	Bead
	Bel	Bell
	Bkt	Bucket
	Br	Brooch
	Brd	Braid

Bte	Bracteate
Buc	Buckle
But	Button
Bwl	Bowl
Bx	Box
C	Coin
Cau	Cauldron
Ch	Chainwork
Chis	Chisel
Clsp	Clasp
Cmb	Comb
Cr	Cross
Dog	Equipment associated with dogs
DrH	Drinking-horn
Dsh	Dish
Fl	Flint
FS	Firestone / fire-steel
GB	Gaming board
Gl	Glass
GP	Gaming-piece
H	Helmet
Hnt	Hunting equipment
Hors	Horse equipment
J	Jewellery item
K	Knife

Ket	Kettle
Key	Key
Lea	Leather
Ly	Lyre
M	Mail-armour
Mir	Mirror
Misc	Miscellaneous fragments
N	Nail
Ndl	Needle
Peb	Pebble
Pin	Pin
PMt	Purse-mount
Pot	Pottery
PotH	Pot-hanger
Rng	Ring
Rvt	Rivet
Sh	Shield-boss
Shl	Shell
Shr	Shears / scissors
SkI	Sickle
SMt	Strap-mount / strap-end
SpH	Spear-head
St	Stud
Sx	Seax / sax
T	Tool

TBx	Tool-box
ThH	Thor's Hammer
TS	Touchstone
Tvt	Trivet
Tw	Tweezers
Txt	Textile
U	Unknown / unrecorded
Ut	Utensil
Ves	Vessel
Wh	Whetstone
Wt	Weight

## 2: Sword Details

Sword	1 or 2 in burial, where more than one sword is in the same grave	
Date	Approximate date of sword	
Pommel type	Bar	Bar
	But	Button
	CH	Cocked Hat
	(CH)	Cocked Hat, lost
	CH Rng	Cocked Hat with ring fitting
	CH (Rng)	Cocked Hat with lost ring fitting
	N/A	No pommel survives
	Low Convx	Low Convex shape
	New Gen CH	'New generation' Cocked Hat
	SC	Semi-circular

	TLP	Tri-lobed pommel
	(TLP)	Tri-lobed pommel, lost
	Tri	Triangular
	(Tri)	Triangular, lost
	U	Unknown / unrecorded
Guard type	SG	Straight guards
	CG	Curved guards
	N/A	No surviving guards
	U	Unknown / unrecorded
Blade type	PW	Pattern-welded
	PW1-5	Pattern-welded with number of bars in core
	PW Inl	Pattern-welded with inlay e.g. inscription
	PsPW	Pseudo-pattern-welded (perhaps a poorly-developed attempt at pattern-welding: Gilmour 2010, 67)
	Not PW	Not pattern-welded
	Inl	Inlay, e.g. inscription
	N/A	Not applicable e.g. pommel only
	U	Unknown / unrecorded
Length	In centimetres	
Width	In centimetres	
Scabbard	Surviving scabbard?:	
	Y	Yes
	N	No
	U	Unknown / unrecorded



Suspension	Surviving suspension device?:
	Y            Yes
	N            No
	U            Unknown / unrecorded
Material	Materials of sword fittings. Shorthand codes used:
	Ag           Silver
	Au           Gold
	Br           Brass
	Cu           Copper
	CuA          Copper alloy
	Fe           Iron
	G            Garnet
	Glt          Gilt
	Iv           Ivory
	N            Niello
	T            Tin
	U            Unclassified
	WM          White metal (unclassified type)
Wear	Signs of wear present?:
	Y            Yes
	N            No
	U            Unknown / unrecorded
Modification	Signs of modification present?:
	Y            Yes
	N            No

	U	Unknown / unrecorded
Repair	Signs of repair present?:	
	Y	Yes
	N	No
	U	Unknown / unrecorded
Curation?	May the sword have been curated?:	
	Y	Yes
	N	No
	U	Unknown / unrecorded

### 3: Weapon Positioning Details

Weapon side	Side of the body upon which the weapon was placed:	
	L	Left
	R	Right
	N/A	Not applicable
	U	Unknown / unrecorded
Relation to body	Placement of war-gear relative to the body. Question marks express uncertainty, e.g. where skeletal remains are absent or fragmentary:	
	Ab	Above
	Beh	Behind
	Bel	Below
	Bes	Beside
	Cr	Cradled
	InFr	In front

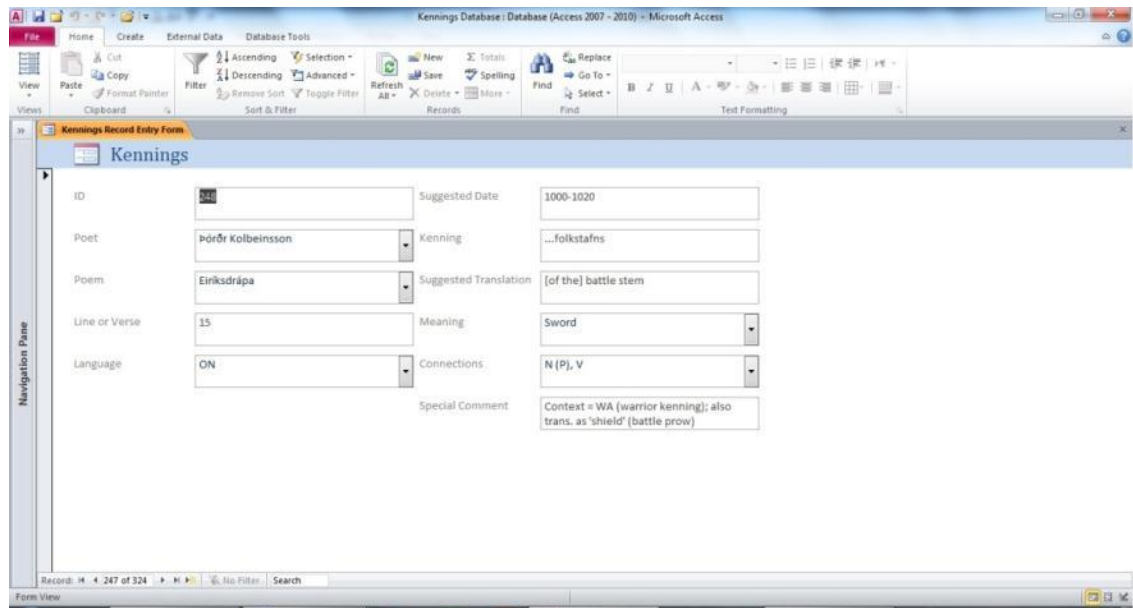
	On	On
	Sep	Separated e.g. by another weapon
	T	Touching
	TucA	Tucked under arm
	TucL	Tucked under leg
	U	Unknown / unrecorded
Height	Height of war-gear in the grave, relative to the body:	
	Hi	High
	Lo	Low
	C	Central
	U	Unknown / unrecorded
Weapon Orientation	Orientation of war-gear in the grave, relative to the body:	
	Up	Point upright
	Rev	Point reversed
	Hzt	Horizontal
	Fl	Flat (for shield-bosses)
	Vtl	Vertical (for shield-bosses)
	N/A	Not applicable
	U	Unknown / unrecorded
Special Comment	Special notes about the grave or sword	

**Database 3a (DB3a): Texts (Kennings)**

Database type: Basic single-table database

Software: Microsoft Access 2010

Sample record:



The fields created to store the data were as follows:

Poet	Name of poet
Poem	Title of poem
Line or Verse	Line number or verse number
Language	Language of the poem:
	OE      Old English
	ON      Old Norse
Suggested Date	Suggested date of composition
Kenning	Kenning in the original language, nominative form
Suggested Translation	Translation into Modern English
Meaning	What the kenning signifies, e.g. 'sword', 'battle', 'warrior'
Imagery	The imagery expressed in the kenning. Shorthand codes used:
	Age      Age, i.e. reference to the sword's ancientness

An	Animal, e.g. serpent, wolf, dog
Anm	Animation, i.e. sense that the weapon behaves autonomously
Anthr	Anthropomorphic, i.e. part of the human body
Con	Construction, manufacture of the weapon
Fem	Female
G	God, e.g. Óðinn
Gen	Generic reference to weapon, e.g. 'sword'
HB	Human behaviour, e.g. assembly, mating
Mo	Motion
My	Mythological, e.g. Wayland, Valkyries
N (Aq)	Nature – water
N (F)	Nature – fire
N (L)	Nature – light
N (P)	Nature – plant or tree
N (W)	Nature – weather
P	Physical properties, e.g. long, sharp
R	Relationship with wielder
S	Sound, noise
S (V)	Sound – voice
Sen	Sensory e.g. hate, terror
SP (B)	Sword part – blade
SP (H)	Sword part – hilt
SP (Sc)	Sword part – Scabbard
SP (Ha)	Sword part – Harness

SP (U)	Sword part – Unspecified / unknown
T	Tool, implement e.g. hammer, file
V	Violence, bloodshed
WA	Warrior as agent, i.e. controlling the weapon
WC	Warrior connection e.g. ‘sword wolf’
WH	War-gear hierarchy, i.e. a sense that one weapon has mastery or superiority over another

Special Comment      Additional comments on the kenning

### Database 3b (DB3b): Analysed Poetry

Database type: Spreadsheet

Software: Microsoft Excel 2010

Sample worksheet:

Author	Title	No. of lines
Þjóðólfr Arnórsson	Stanzas about Magnús Ólafsson in <i>Danaveldi</i>	108
Þjóðólfr Arnórsson	<i>Sexstefja</i>	202
Þjóðólfr Arnórsson	<i>Fragment 2</i>	4
Þjóðólfr Arnórsson	<i>Fragment 3</i>	4
Þjóðólfr Arnórsson	<i>Lausavisa 3</i>	8
Þjóðólfr ór Hvini	<i>Ynglingatal</i>	368
Þjóðólfr ór Hvini	<i>Poem about Haraldr</i>	40
Þórarinn loftunga	<i>Tegdrápa</i>	60
Þorbjörn hornklofi	<i>Haraldskvæði (Hrafnsmál)</i>	161
Þórðr Kolbeinsson	<i>Eiríksdrápa</i>	136
Þórðr Særeksson	<i>Þórólfs drápa Skólmssonar</i>	28
Þórðr Særeksson	<i>Fragment 2</i>	2
Þorleifr jarlsskald Rauðfeldarson	<i>Poem about Hákon</i>	12
Þorleikr fagri	<i>Flokkur about Sveinn Úlfsson</i>	80
Þorgíls fiskimaðr	<i>Lausavisa 1</i>	8
Þorgíls fiskimaðr	<i>Lausavisa 2</i>	8
Þorvaldr Hjaltason	<i>Lausavisa 1</i>	8
	<b>Total number of lines</b>	<b>4754</b>

## Appendix 2

### Catalogue of Referenced Images

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This catalogue lists the images and artefacts referenced in Chapter 4. It does not list the entire contents of the pictorial database (Database 1), which is provided on the accompanying CD-ROM.

#### **Illuminated Manuscript (IM)**

IM1. Rome, Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica MS Barberini Lat. 570: Barberini

Gospels

*Date:* Eighth century (second half)

*Culture:* Anglo-Saxon

*Current Location:* Biblioteca Apostolica, Vatican City, Rome, Italy

*Select Bibliography:* Alexander 1978, no. 36 with references; Ohlgren 1986, no. 36

IM2. London, British Library MS Additional 49598: Benedictional of St. Æthelwold

*Date:* Tenth century (second half)

*Culture:* Anglo-Saxon

*Current Location:* The British Library, London

*Select Bibliography:* Deshman 1985; Ohlgren 1986, no. 111 with references;  
Temple 1976, no. 23

IM3. Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 23, pt. 1: Prudentius, *Psychomachia*,  
etc.

*Date:* Late tenth century

*Culture:* Anglo-Saxon

*Current Location:* Corpus Christi College, University of Cambridge, Cambridge

*Select Bibliography:* Ohlgren 1986, no. 153 with references; Stettiner 1905; Temple  
1976, no. 48

IM4. London, British Library MS Cotton Cleopatra C.VIII: Prudentius,

*Psychomachia*

*Date:* Tenth-eleventh century

*Culture:* Anglo-Saxon

*Current Location:* The British Library, London

*Select Bibliography:* Ohlgren 1992, no. 15 with references; Stettiner 1905; Temple  
1976, no. 49

IM5. London, British Library MS Additional 24199, fols. 2-38: Prudentius,

*Psychomachia*

*Date:* Late tenth century with early eleventh century additions

*Culture:* Anglo-Saxon

*Current Location:* The British Library, London

*Select Bibliography:* Ohlgren 1986, no. 156 with references; Stettiner 1905; Temple  
1976, no. 51

IM6. Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Junius 11 (S.C. 5123): Cædmon or Junius

Manuscript

*Date:* c. 1000

*Culture:* Anglo-Saxon



*Current Location:* The Bodleian Library, Oxford

*Select Bibliography:* Ohlgren 1992, no. 16 with references; Temple 1976, no. 58

IM7. London, British Library MS Harley 603: Harley Psalter

*Date:* Eleventh century, with additions into twelfth century (first half)

*Culture:* Anglo-Saxon

*Current Location:* The British Library, London

*Select Bibliography:* Noel 1995; Ohlgren 1992, no. 2; Temple 1976, no. 64

IM8. London, British Library MS Cotton Claudius B.IV: Ælfric, Old English Hexateuch etc.

*Date:* Eleventh century (first half)

*Culture:* Anglo-Saxon

*Current Location:* The British Library, London

*Select Bibliography:* Dodwell and Clemoes 1974; Ohlgren 1986, no. 191 with references; Temple 1976, no. 86; Withers 2007

IM9. Rome, Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica, Vaticana MS Reg.Lat.12: Bury Psalter

*Date:* Eleventh century (first half)

*Culture:* Anglo-Saxon

*Current Location:* Biblioteca Apostolica, Vatican City, Rome, Italy

*Select Bibliography:* Harris 1960; Ohlgren 1992, no. 3 with references

IM10. London, British Library MS Stowe 944: New Minster Register (*Liber Vitae*)

*Date:* Eleventh century (first half)

*Culture:* Anglo-Saxon

*Current Location:* The British Library, London

*Select Bibliography:* Ohlgren 1986, no. 183; Temple 1976, no. 78 with references

IM11. London, British Library MS Arundel 155, fols. 1-135, 171-191: Eadui or Arundel Psalter

*Date:* Eleventh century (first half)

*Culture:* Anglo-Saxon

*Current Location:* The British Library, London

*Select Bibliography:* Ohlgren 1986, no. 171; Temple 1976, no. 66 with references

IM12. London, British Library MS Cotton Tiberius B.V, fols. 2-73, 77-88: Calendar, Cicero Aratea, *Marvels of the East*

*Date:* Eleventh century (first half)

*Culture:* Anglo-Saxon

*Current Location:* The British Library, London

*Select Bibliography:* McGurk *et al* 1983; Ohlgren 1986, no. 192; Temple 1976, no. 87 with references

IM13. London, British Library MS Cotton Tiberius C.VI: Tiberius Psalter

*Date:* Mid eleventh century

*Culture:* Anglo-Saxon

*Current Location:* The British Library, London

*Select Bibliography:* Ohlgren 1986, no. 203; Temple 1976, no. 98 with references;  
Wormald 1962

### **Metalwork (M)**

#### M1. Helmet, Vendel XIV, Uppland, Sweden

*Date:* Sixth century

*Culture:* Scandinavian (Pre-Viking)

*Current Location:* Historiska Museum, Stockholm, Sweden, 9785:XIV

*Select Bibliography:* Stolpe and Arne 1927, 53-55, Pl. XLI, Fig. 3-4, Pl. XLII, Fig. 1

#### M2. Helmet, Valsgärde 8, Uppland, Sweden

*Date:* Sixth century (second half)

*Culture:* Scandinavian (Pre-Viking)

*Current Location:* Museum Gustavianum, Uppsala, Sweden

*Select Bibliography:* Arwidsson 1954, 22-24, 101, 128-129, Abb. 78-79

#### M3. Helmet *Pressblech* fragment, East Mound, Gamla Uppsala, Uppland, Sweden

*Date:* Sixth-seventh century

*Culture:* Scandinavian (Pre-Viking)

*Current Location:* Gamla Uppsala Museum, Uppsala, Sweden

*Select Bibliography:* Arrhenius and Freij 1992; Lindqvist 1932

#### M4. Miniature copper alloy sword, Eketorp, Öland, Sweden

*Date:* Sixth-seventh century

*Culture:* Scandinavian (Pre-Viking)

*Current Location:* Undetermined

*Select Bibliography:* Meaney 1981, 158, Fig. VI; Näsman 1975, Fig. 3

M5. Gold foil (*guldgubbe*), Sorte Muld, Bornholm, Denmark

*Date:* Sixth-ninth century

*Culture:* Scandinavian (Pre-Viking – Viking)

*Current Location:* Bornholms Museum, Denmark

*Select Bibliography:* Watt 1999, Fig. 3b

M6. Four helmet *Pressblech* dies, Björnhovda, Torslunda, Öland, Sweden

*Date:* Seventh century

*Culture:* Scandinavian (Pre-Viking)

*Current Location:* Historiska Museum, Stockholm, Sweden 4325:a-d

*Select Bibliography:* Bruce-Mitford 1978, 214ff

M7. Sword, grave 250, Sarre, Kent

*Date:* Seventh century

*Culture:* Anglo-Saxon

*Current Location:* Maidstone Museum, Kent

*Select Bibliography:* Evison 1987, 25-26

M8. Gilt copper alloy shield appliqué, Edix Hill (Barrington A), Cambridgeshire

*Date:* Seventh century?

*Culture:* Anglo-Saxon

*Current Location:* Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge

*Select Bibliography:* Malim and Hines 1998, 93, 221, Fig. 329

M9. Helmet, Valsgårde 7, Uppland, Sweden

*Date:* Seventh century (first half)

*Culture:* Scandinavian (Pre-Viking)

*Current Location:* Museum Gustavianum, Uppsala, Sweden

*Select Bibliography:* Arwidsson 1977, 21-33, Abb. 133, 138

M10. Helmet, Mound 1, Sutton Hoo, Suffolk

*Date:* Seventh century (first half)

*Culture:* Anglo-Saxon

*Current Location:* The British Museum, London, 1939,1010.93

*Select Bibliography:* Bruce-Mitford 1978, 138-231, Figs. 140-145; Marzinzik 2007

M11. Miniature copper alloy sword, Bejsebakken, Denmark

*Date:* Ninth-tenth century

*Culture:* Scandinavian (Viking)

*Current Location:* Private Collection

*Select Bibliography:* Kockvedgaard Zeiten 1997, no. 38, Fig. 19

M12. Miniature copper alloy sword, Kalmergården, Denmark

*Date:* Ninth century

*Culture:* Scandinavian (Viking)

*Current Location:* Nationalmuseet, Copenhagen C 32167

*Select Bibliography:* Kockvedgaard Zeiten 1997, no. 37

M13. Silver figurine, grave 825, Birka, Uppland, Sweden

*Date:* Tenth century

*Culture:* Scandinavian (Viking)

*Current Location:* Historiska Museum, Stockholm, Sweden, Bj. 825

*Select Bibliography:* Arbman 1943, 298-300; Roesdahl and Wilson 1992, no. 186

M14. Silver figurine, Grave 825, Birka, Uppland, Sweden

*Date:* Tenth century

*Culture:* Scandinavian (Viking)

*Current Location:* Historiska Museum, Stockholm, Sweden, Bj. 825

*Select Bibliography:* Arbman 1943, 299

M15. Copper alloy figurine, Rällinge, Södermanland, Sweden

*Date:* Eleventh century?

*Culture:* Scandinavian (Viking)

*Current Location:* Historiska Museum, Stockholm, Sweden, 14232

*Select Bibliography:* Graham-Campbell 1980, no. 513

M16. Copper alloy figurine, Lindby, Svenstorp, Skåne, Sweden

*Date:* Eleventh century?

*Culture:* Scandinavian (Viking)

*Current Location:* Historiska Museum, Stockholm, Sweden, 13701

*Select Bibliography:* Graham-Campbell 1980, no. 515

### **Stone Sculpture (ST)**

#### ST1. Picture-stone, 'Ardre VIII', Ardre Church, Gotland, Sweden

*Date:* Eighth century

*Culture:* Scandinavian (Pre-Viking – Viking)

*Current Location:* Historiska Museum, Stockholm, Sweden, 11118:VIII

*Select Bibliography:* Lindqvist 1941, Figs. 139-140, 22c; Lindqvist 1942, 22-24, Fig. 311; Nylén and Lamm 1988, no. 16

#### ST2. Picture-stone, 'Stora Hammars I', Lärbro, Gotland, Sweden

*Date:* Eighth century

*Culture:* Scandinavian (Pre-Viking – Viking)

*Current Location:* Bungemuseet, Gotland / Historiska Museum, Stockholm, Sweden, 29974:1

*Select Bibliography:* Lindqvist 1941, 86-87, Figs. 81, 82; Lindqvist 1942, Figs. 429, 434, 436-440; Nylén and Lamm 1988, no. 184

#### ST3. Picture-stone, 'Tängelgårda I', Lärbro, Gotland, Sweden

*Date:* Eighth century

*Culture:* Scandinavian (Pre-Viking – Viking)

*Current Location:* Historiska Museum, Stockholm, Sweden, 4373

*Select Bibliography:* Lindqvist 1941, Figs. 86-88; Lindqvist 1942, 92-93, Figs. 448, 450; Nylén and Lamm 1988, no. 189

ST4. Stone cross fragment, Repton, Derbyshire

*Date:* Eighth century

*Culture:* Anglo-Saxon

*Current Location:* Derby Museum, Derbyshire

*Select Bibliography:* Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle 1985

ST5. Picture-stone, 'Smis I', Stenkyrka, Gotland, Sweden

*Date:* Eighth-ninth century

*Culture:* Scandinavian (Viking)

*Current Location:* Gotlands Fornsalen, Gotland, Sweden, 3428

*Select Bibliography:* Lindqvist 1941, Figs. 97-102; Lindqvist 1942, 128-129, Figs.

521-523; Nylén and Lamm 1988, no. 295

ST6. Runestone, Sparlösa, Västergötland, Sweden

*Date:* Eighth-early ninth century

*Culture:* Scandinavian (Pre-Viking – Viking)

*Current Location:* Sparlösa Church, Sparlösa, Västergötland, Sweden

*Select Bibliography:* Jansson 1987, 15, pl. 5; Nielsen 1969

ST7. Part of cross-shaft, 'Hexham 2', Hexham, Northumberland

*Date:* Mid eighth century

*Culture:* Anglo-Saxon

*Current Location:* South transept of abbey, Hexham, Northumberland

*Select Bibliography:* Cramp 1984, 'Hexham 2', 176-177 with references



ST8. Picture-stone, 'Broa XVI', Halla, Gotland, Sweden

*Date:* Mid eighth-ninth century

*Culture:* Scandinavian (Pre-Viking – Viking)

*Current Location:* Historiska Museum, Stockholm, Sweden, 16239

*Select Bibliography:* Lindqvist 1942, 65-66, Figs. 394-396; Nylén and Lamm 1988,  
no. 116

ST9. Part of cross-shaft, Bradbourne, Derbyshire

*Date:* Late eighth-early ninth century

*Culture:* Anglo-Saxon

*Current Location:* Churchyard, All Saints Church, Bradbourne, Derbyshire

*Select Bibliography:* Moreland 1999, Fig. 1; Rollason 1996, 18-27, Pls. 12-13

ST10. Stone panel depicting the Crucifixion, 'Romsey 2', Romsey, Hampshire

*Date:* Ninth century

*Culture:* Anglo-Saxon

*Current Location:* Chapel of St Anne, Romsey Abbey, Hampshire

*Select Bibliography:* Tweddle *et al* 1995, 261-263 with references, Ills. 453, 455

ST11. Cross-shaft and part of cross-head, Bakewell, Derbyshire

*Date:* Ninth century

*Culture:* Anglo-Saxon

*Current Location:* Churchyard, All Saints Church, Bakewell, Derbyshire

*Select Bibliography:* Rollason 1996, 10-17, Pls. 5, 10

ST12. Stone grave marker?, 'Lindisfarne 37', Lindisfarne, Northumberland

*Date:* Late ninth century

*Culture:* Anglo-Saxon

*Current Location:* Priory Museum, Lindisfarne, Northumberland

*Select Bibliography:* Cramp 1984, 206-207 with references, pl. 201:1132-1134;  
Webster and Backhouse 1991, no. 117

ST13. Part of grave marker, 'Kirby Hill 9', All Saints' Church, Kirkby-on-the-Moor,  
North Yorkshire

*Date:* Late ninth-mid tenth century

*Culture:* Anglo-Scandinavian

*Current Location:* Lost since 1974

*Select Bibliography:* Lang 2001, 133 with references, Ills. 358-359, Fig. 15

ST14. Picture-stone, 'Änge I', Buttle, Gotland, Sweden

*Date:* Ninth-tenth century

*Culture:* Scandinavian (Viking)

*Current Location:* *In situ*

*Select Bibliography:* Lindqvist 1942, 36-39, Figs. 333-334; Nylén and Lamm 1988,  
no. 43

ST15. Part of cross-head and shaft, 'Middleton 2', North Riding, Yorkshire

*Date:* Tenth century

*Culture:* Anglo-Scandinavian

*Current Location:* St Andrew's Church, Middleton, North Riding, Yorkshire

*Select Bibliography:* Lang 1991, 182-184 with references, Ills. 676-681

ST16. Part of cross-head and shaft, 'Middleton 4', North Riding, Yorkshire

*Date:* Tenth century

*Culture:* Anglo-Scandinavian

*Current Location:* St Andrew's Church, Middleton, North Riding, Yorkshire

*Select Bibliography:* Lang 1991, 185 with references, Ills. 686-687

ST17. Part of cross-shaft, 'Middleton 5', North Riding, Yorkshire

*Date:* Tenth century

*Culture:* Anglo-Scandinavian

*Current Location:* St Andrew's Church, Middleton, North Riding, Yorkshire

*Select Bibliography:* Lang 1991, 185-186 with references, Ills. 688-689

ST18. Grave marker or part of cross-head, 'Weston 1', Weston, West Yorkshire

*Date:* Tenth century

*Culture:* Anglo-Scandinavian

*Current Location:* Yorkshire Museum, York

*Select Bibliography:* Coatsworth 2008, 268-269 with references, Ills. 777-783

ST19. Part of cross-shaft, 'Kirklevington 2', North Yorkshire

*Date:* Tenth century (first half)

*Culture:* Anglo-Saxon / Anglo-Scandinavian?

*Current Location:* Nave, St Martin's Church, Kirklevington, North Yorkshire

*Select Bibliography:* Lang 2001, 142-143 with references, Ills. 404-407

ST20. Cross-shaft, 'Norbury Cross 1', Norbury, Derbyshire

*Date:* Mid tenth century

*Culture:* Anglo-Saxon

*Current Location:* St Mary's Church, Norbury, Derbyshire

*Select Bibliography:* Routh 1937

ST21. Part of cross-shaft, 'Sockburn 7', County Durham

*Date:* Tenth century (third quarter)

*Culture:* Anglo-Scandinavian

*Current Location:* Conyers Chapel, All Saints' Church, Sockburn, County Durham

*Select Bibliography:* Cramp 1984, 138 with references, Pl. 134:726

ST22. Runestone, Bösarp, Skåne, Denmark

*Date:* Tenth-eleventh century

*Culture:* Scandinavian (Viking)

*Current Location:* Lunds Universitets Historiska Museum, Sweden, 1906-14

*Select Bibliography:* Moltke 1985, 256, 264, no. 2

ST23. Runestone, Gök, Näsbyholm, Södermanland, Sweden

*Date:* Tenth-eleventh century

*Culture:* Scandinavian (Viking)

*Current Location:* *In situ*

*Select Bibliography:* Fuglesang 1980, no. 81 with references, Pl. 46B

ST24. Runestone, Ryda churchyard, Ryda, Västergötland, Sweden

*Date:* Tenth-eleventh century

*Culture:* Scandinavian (Viking)

*Current Location:* *In situ*

*Select Bibliography:* Projektet Samnordisk runtextdatabas Vg 124,  
<http://www.nordiska.uu.se/forskn/samnord.htm>; Stern 2010

ST25. Runestone, Söderby, Uppland, Sweden

*Date:* Tenth-eleventh century

*Culture:* Scandinavian (Viking)

*Current Location:* *In situ*, Söderby, Arnö sn, Trögds Härad

*Select Bibliography:* Jansson 1987, 15, pl. 5; Nielsen 1969

ST26. Runestone, Ramsund, Jäder, Södermanland, Sweden

*Date:* c. 1000

*Culture:* Scandinavian (Viking)

*Current Location:* *In situ*

*Select Bibliography:* Fuglesang 1980, no. 80 with references, Pl. 46A

ST27. Runestone, Tullstorp, Skåne, Sweden

*Date:* c. 1000

*Culture:* Scandinavian (Viking)

*Current Location:* *In situ*

*Select Bibliography:* Fuglesang 1980, no. 83 with references, Pl. 48

ST28. Runestone, Ledberg Churchyard, Ledberg, Östergötland, Sweden

*Date:* Eleventh century

*Culture:* Scandinavian (Viking)

*Current Location:* *In situ*

*Select Bibliography:* Moltke 1985, 245-248

ST29. Sandstone slab, Tanberg, Buskerud, Norway

*Date:* Eleventh century

*Culture:* Scandinavian (Viking)

*Current Location:* Historisk Museum, Oslo, Norway, C.17877

*Select Bibliography:* Fuglesang 1980, no. 61 with references, Pl. 38

ST30. Runestone, 'Lund 1', Allhelgonakyrkan, Lund, Skåne, Sweden

*Date:* Eleventh century

*Culture:* Scandinavian (Viking)

*Current Location:* Library, University of Lund

*Select Bibliography:* Moltke 1985, 255, 259, no. 3

ST31. Stone slab, St Nicholas Parish Church, Ipswich, Suffolk

*Date:* Eleventh century

*Culture:* Anglo-Saxon

*Current Location:* North Aisle, St Nicholas Parish Church, Ipswich, Suffolk

*Select Bibliography:* Okasha 1971, no. 58

ST32. Runestone, Drävle, Altuna, Uppland, Sweden

*Date:* Eleventh century (first half)

*Culture:* Scandinavian (Viking)

*Current Location:* Göksbo, Enköping, Sweden

*Select Bibliography:* Fuglesang 1980, no. 70 with references, Pl. 43B

ST33. Fragment of cross-shaft, Brailsford, Derbyshire

*Date:* Mid eleventh century

*Culture:* Anglo-Saxon

*Current Location:* Churchyard, All Saints Church, Brailsford, Derbyshire

*Select Bibliography:* Kendrick 1949, 70-71, pls. XLVI.2, XLVII.2

**Textile (T)**

T1. Embroidery fragments, Oseberg, Vestfold, Norway

*Date:* Ninth century

*Culture:* Scandinavian (Viking)

*Current Location:* Vikingskipshuset, Oslo, Norway

*Select Bibliography:* Christensen and Nockert 2006 with references; Krafft 1956

T2. The Bayeux Tapestry

*Date:* Eleventh century (second half)

*Culture:* Anglo-Saxon

*Current Location:* Musée de la Tapisserie de Bayeux, Bayeux, Normandy, France

*Select Bibliography:* Lewis 2005a with references; Musset 2005; Wilson 2004

## **Coin (C)**

C1. Gold *thrymsa*, 'Bust/LOND' type, Crondall Hoard, Hampshire

*Date:* c. 600-750

*Culture:* Anglo-Saxon

*Current Location:* The Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

*Select Bibliography:* Metcalf 1993, no. 71, Pl. 3:71

C2. Silver penny, 'Sword St Peter' type, York

*Date:* c. 910-925

*Culture:* Anglo-Scandinavian

*Current Location:* Various, including The British Museum, London 1935,1117.369

*Select Bibliography:* Backhouse *et al* 1984, no. 245; Graham-Campbell 1980, nos.  
365-367

C3. Silver penny, 'St Martin of Lincoln' type

*Date:* c. 915

*Culture:* Anglo-Scandinavian

*Current Location:* The British Museum, London, CM 698

*Select Bibliography:* Graham-Campbell 1980, no. 368 with references

C4. Silver penny, 'Regnald' type, York

*Date:* c. 920

*Culture:* Anglo-Scandinavian

*Current Location:* Various

*Select Bibliography:* Graham-Campbell 1980, no. 371



C5. Silver penny of Knútr with helmet, various mints

*Date:* c. 1014/18-1035

*Culture:* Scandinavian (Viking) / Anglo-Scandinavian

*Current Location:* Various

*Select Bibliography:* Backhouse *et al* 1984, no. 214 (minted in England); Hauberg 1900, 191-197, Tabs. III

C6. Silver penny of Óláfr Haraldsson, 'Type III / Pointed Helmet' type, minted

Norway

*Date:* c. 1023-1028

*Culture:* Scandinavian (Viking)

*Current Location:* Various

*Select Bibliography:* Skaare 1976, nos. 4-5, Pl. 11: 4a and 5a

C7. Silver penny of Harðaknútr with helmet, various mints

*Date:* c. 1035-1042

*Culture:* Scandinavian (Viking)

*Current Location:* Various

*Select Bibliography:* Hauberg 1900, 199-206, Tabs. IV-VI

C8. Silver penny of Haraldr Hardraðr, 'Type I / Helmeted bust' type, minted in

Norway

*Date:* c. 1047-1055

*Culture:* Scandinavian (Viking)

*Current Location:* Various

*Select Bibliography:* Skaare 1976, no. 6, Pl. 11:6

C9. Silver penny of Edward the Confessor, 'Pointed Helmet' type

*Date:* c. 1053-1056

*Culture:* Anglo-Saxon

*Current Location:* Various, including The British Museum, London 1867,0812.208

*Select Bibliography:* Backhouse *et al* 1984, no. 229

**Carving (CV)**

CV1. The Franks Casket, ?Northumbria

*Date:* Eighth century (first half)

*Culture:* Anglo-Saxon

*Current Location:* The British Museum, London, 1867,0120.1 and Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence, Italy

*Select Bibliography:* Beckwith 1972, no. 1; Webster and Backhouse 1991, no. 70 with references; Webster 2012

CV2. Wooden cart, Oseberg, Vestfold, Norway

*Date:* Ninth century (first half)

*Culture:* Scandinavian (Viking)

*Current Location:* Vikingskipshuset, Oslo, Norway

*Select Bibliography:* Roesdahl and Wilson 1992, 207, Fig. 4; Sjøvold 1966

CV3. Antler mount, Sigtuna, Uppland, Sweden

*Date:* Eleventh century?

*Culture:* Scandinavian (Viking)

*Current Location:* Historiska Museum, Stockholm, Sweden, 22044

*Select Bibliography:* Roesdahl and Wilson 1992, no. 80; Graham-Campbell 1980,  
no. 482

**Graffiti (G)**

G1. Spear graffito on Carolingian silver strap-end, grave 750, Birka, Uppland,  
Sweden

*Date:* Ninth century

*Culture:* Scandinavian (Viking)

*Current Location:* Historiska Museum, Stockholm, Sweden, 34000: Bj 750

*Select Bibliography:* Arbman 1943, 270, Abb. 219

G2. Spear graffito on Islamic coin, Östjädra, Dingtuna, Västmanland, Sweden

*Date:* Tenth century (first half)

*Culture:* Scandinavian (Viking)

*Current Location:* Kungliga Myntkabinett, Stockholm, Sweden

*Select Bibliography:* Hammarberg and Rispling 1985, fyndnummer 28, ill. 104

## Appendix 3

### Catalogue of Referenced Swords

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This catalogue lists the specific swords which are referenced in Chapter 5. It does not list the entire contents of the archaeological database (Database 2), which is provided on the accompanying CD-ROM.

#### **Anglo-Saxon Kent (ASK)**

Cemetery names follow the format given in Richardson 2005.

#### ASK1: Cremation grave, Woodnesborough II, Coombe

*Date:* Mid-late sixth century

*Current Location:* Saffron Walden Museum, Essex

*Select Bibliography:* Ellis Davidson and Webster 1967; Fischer 2007, No. 4

#### ASK2: Grave 39, Patrixbourne I, Bifrons

*Date:* Mid sixth century

*Current Location:* Maidstone Museum, Kent 39

*Select Bibliography:* Behmer 1939, 164, Taf. XXXVIII:I; Fischer 2007, No. 1, Figs. 10-11; Hawkes 2000, 24-25

#### ASK3: Grave C, Dover II, Buckland

*Date:* Mid sixth century

*Current Location:* British Museum, London 1963,1108.751

*Select Bibliography:* Evison 1987, 214-215; Fischer 2007, No. 5, 55-56

ASK4: Grave 71, Broadstairs I, Bradstow School

*Date:* Mid-late sixth century

*Current Location:* British Museum, London, unregistered

*Select Bibliography:* Cameron 2000, no. 33

ASK5: Lower Shorne, Higham (Hoo Junction)

*Date:* Early-mid sixth century

*Current Location:* Maidstone Museum, Kent 4682

*Select Bibliography:* Fischer 2007, No. 20, 95-96, Fig. 52

ASK6: Grave 88, Sarre I

*Date:* Mid-late sixth century

*Current Location:* Maidstone Museum, Kent KAS 838

*Select Bibliography:* Brent 1866, 172; Cameron 2000, no. 280; Fischer 2007, No. 25; *Novum Inventorium Sepulchrale*

ASK7: Grave 104, Sarre I

*Date:* Sixth century

*Current Location:* Maidstone Museum, Kent

*Select Bibliography:* Brent 1866, 175; *Novum Inventorium Sepulchrale*

ASK8: Grave 105, Ramsgate IV, Ozengell

*Date:* Seventh century?

*Current Location:* English Heritage, Fort Cumberland, Portsmouth, Hampshire

*Select Bibliography:* Cameron 2000, no. 79

ASK9: Grave 56, Ash I, Gilton

*Date:* Mid-late sixth century

*Current Location:* World Museum, Liverpool M.6061

*Select Bibliography:* Faussett 1856, 20-21; Fischer 2007, No. 14, 83-84; *Novum*

*Inventorium Sepulchrale*

ASK10: Unnumbered grave, Ash I, Gilton

*Date:* Mid sixth century

*Current Location:* World Museum, Liverpool M.6402

*Select Bibliography:* Behmer 1939, 163, Taf. XXXVII:4; *Novum Inventorium*

*Sepulchrale*

ASK11: Unnumbered grave, Faversham II, King's Field

*Date:* Mid sixth century

*Current Location:* British Museum, London 952.'70

*Select Bibliography:* Behmer 1939, 162, Taf. XXXVI:4; Cameron 2000, no. 55;

Fischer 2007, No. 6, 57-60

ASK12: Grave C1081, Saltwood I, Stone Farm Broadway

*Date:* Late sixth-mid seventh century

*Current Location:* To be acquired by a museum

*Select Bibliography:* Ager 2006; Cameron 2006; Gilmour 2010

ASK13: Grave C3944, Saltwood I, Stone Farm Broadway

*Date:* Mid-late sixth century

*Current Location:* To be acquired by a museum

*Select Bibliography:* Ager 2006; Cameron 2006; Gilmour 2010, Figs. 1a:1, 2

ASK14: Grave 94b, Dover II, Buckland

*Date:* Sixth century

*Current Location:* British Museum, London 1963,1108.493.a-b

*Select Bibliography:* Cameron 2000, no. 94; Evison 1987, 238-239, Figs. 44, 77

ASK15: Grave 204, Northbourne I, Finglesham

*Date:* Early fifth century

*Current Location:* Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

*Select Bibliography:* Cameron 2000, no. 289; Fischer 2007, No. 10; Hawkes and Grainger 2006, 147-152, Figs. 2.59, 2.145-148; Hawkes and Pollard 1981, 331

ASK16: Unnumbered grave, Ash I, Gilton

*Date:* Mid-late sixth century

*Current Location:* World Museum, Liverpool M.6650

*Select Bibliography:* Behmer 1939, 164, Taf. XXXVIII: 3; *Novum Inventorium Sepulchrale*

ASK17: Grave C3826, Saltwood I, Stone Farm Bridleway

*Date:* Sixth-mid seventh century

*Current Location:* To be acquired by a museum

*Select Bibliography:* Ager 2006, Fig. 91; Cameron 2006; Riddler and Trevarthen  
2006, 63-64; Gilmour 2010

ASK18: Unnumbered grave, Faversham II, King's Field

*Date:* Sixth century

*Current Location:* British Museum, London 1883,1213.645

*Select Bibliography:* Cameron 2000, no. 37

ASK19: Grave 27, Dover II, Buckland

*Date:* Early seventh century

*Current Location:* British Museum, London 1963,1108.128

*Select Bibliography:* Evison 1987, 222, Figs. 15, 69; Cameron 2000, no. 89

ASK20: Grave 1, Crundale II, Crundale Down

*Date:* Seventh-eighth century?

*Current Location:* British Museum, London 1894,1103.1

*Select Bibliography:* Behmer 1939, 170, Taf. XLV:1

ASK21: Unnumbered grave, Faversham II, King's Field

*Date:* Mid-late sixth century

*Current Location:* British Museum, London 954.'70

*Select Bibliography:* Behmer 1939, 164, Taf. XXXVIII:2; Cameron 2000, no. 62;  
Fischer 2007, No. 7, 60-62



ASK22: Grave 91, Sarre I

*Date:* Fifth-sixth century?

*Current Location:* Maidstone Museum, Kent KAS 838

*Select Bibliography:* Brent 1866, 173; Fischer 2007, No. 26; Hawkes and Page  
1967, 2-3

ASK23: Grave 93, Dover II, Buckland

*Date:* Sixth century

*Current Location:* The British Museum, London 1963,1108.483

*Select Bibliography:* Cameron 2000, no. 93; Evison 1987, 238, Figs. 43, 76, Text  
Fig. 5, pl. 4b

ASK24: Grave 96b, Dover II, Buckland

*Date:* Early seventh century

*Current Location:* British Museum, London 1963,1108.509

*Select Bibliography:* Cameron 2000, no. 91; Evison 1987, 239, Figs. 46, 77, pl. 4a

ASK25: Grave 275, Sarre I

*Date:* Sixth-seventh century

*Current Location:* Maidstone Museum, Kent

*Select Bibliography:* Cameron 2000, no. 7; Perkins 1991, 146, 152-153, Fig. 4

ASK26: Grave 33, Dover II, Buckland

*Date:* Sixth-seventh century

*Current Location:* British Museum, London 1963,1108.174

*Select Bibliography:* Evison 1987, 225-226, Figs. 20, 70

ASK27: Grave 96a, Dover II, Buckland

*Date:* Sixth-mid seventh century

*Current Location:* British Museum, London 1963,1108.502

*Select Bibliography:* Cameron 2000, no. 101; Evison 1987, 239, Figs. 45, 77, pl. 4a

**Pre-Viking Scandinavia (SC)**

SC1: Grave XIV, Tuna, Alsike, Uppland, Sweden

*Date:* Late fifth-mid seventh century?

*Current Location:* Historiska Museum, Stockholm, Sweden, 20061:XIV

*Select Bibliography:* Arne 1934, 47-49, 74-75, Taf. XXI, XXXII, Fig. 13; Behmer  
1939, 179, Taf. LVI:6

SC2: Sword 1, Grave XII, Vendel, Uppland, Sweden

*Date:* Late sixth-early seventh century

*Current Location:* Historiska Museum, Stockholm, Sweden, 9785:XII

*Select Bibliography:* Stolpe and Arne 1927, 45-51, Pl. XXXIV

SC3: Sword 1, Grave 6, Valsgärde, Uppland, Sweden

*Date:* Mid seventh-eighth century

*Current Location:* Museum Gustavianum, Uppsala, Sweden

*Select Bibliography:* Arwidsson 1942, 'Schwert I', 44-47, Taf. 12, 14-16, Abb. 37,  
39-40, 43, No. 207

SC4: Sword 1 (ring-sword), Grave 7, Valsgärde, Uppland, Sweden

*Date:* Late sixth-seventh century

*Current Location:* Museum Gustavianum, Uppsala, Sweden

*Select Bibliography:* Arwidsson 1977, 39-42, Abb. 50-52, 54, 56-61, 63, No. 962

SC5: Unnumbered grave, Vallstenarum, Vallstena, Gotland, Sweden

*Date:* Sixth century

*Current Location:* Historiska Museum, Stockholm, Sweden, 6295

*Select Bibliography:* Nerman 1975a, No. 160; Nørgård Jørgensen 1999, no. 333;  
Arrhenius 1970; Behmer 1939, 129ff

SC6: Grave 8, Valsgärde, Uppland, Sweden

*Date:* Sixth-early seventh century

*Current Location:* Museum Gustavianum, Uppsala, Sweden

*Select Bibliography:* Arwidsson 1954, 61-63, Taf. 19-21, Abb. 44, 48-49;  
Ljungkvist 2008, 21

SC7: Ultuna, Bondkyrko, Uppland, Sweden

*Date:* Late sixth-early seventh century

*Current Location:* Historiska Museum, Stockholm, Sweden, 2194

*Select Bibliography:* Behmer 1939, 133, 171, Taf. XLIX:I; Hildebrand 1884-91, 47-  
50

SC8: Grave 5, Valsgärde, Uppland, Sweden

*Date:* Late seventh century

*Current Location:* Museum Gustavianum, Uppsala, Sweden

*Select Bibliography:* Behmer 1939, 171; Lindqvist 1932, 38-39

SC9: Sword 1, Grave I, Vendel, Uppland, Sweden

*Date:* Late sixth-early seventh century

*Current Location:* Historiska Museum, Stockholm, Sweden, 7250:1

*Select Bibliography:* Behmer 1939, 170-171, Taf. XLVII; Stolpe and Arne 1927, 10-11, Pl. 1

SC10: Sword 2, Grave 6, Valsgårde, Uppland, Sweden

*Date:* Seventh-eighth century

*Current Location:* Museum Gustavianum, Uppsala, Sweden

*Select Bibliography:* Arwidsson 1942, 'Schwert II', 47-48, Taf. 12, 16, Abb. 38, 41-43, No. 208

SC11: Sword 2, grave 7, Valsgårde, Uppland, Sweden

*Date:* Late sixth-early seventh century

*Current Location:* Museum Gustavianum, Uppsala, Sweden

*Select Bibliography:* Arwidsson 1977, 42-44, Abb. 50-52, 54, 56-61, 63

SC12: Grave II, Kyndby, Sjælland, Bornholm, Denmark

*Date:* Seventh-eighth century

*Current Location:* Nationalmuseet, Copenhagen C 26782-822

*Select Bibliography:* Nørgård Jørgensen 1999, no. 117; Ørsnes Christensen 1956, figs. 17-33; Ørsnes Christensen 1980, no. 36

SC13: Grave II, Elmelunde, Møn, Bornholm, Denmark

*Date:* Sixth century

*Current Location:* Nationalmuseet, Copenhagen C 12294-12300

*Select Bibliography:* Nørgård Jørgensen 1999, no. 119, Taf. 60.1; Nørgård Jørgensen 1989

SC14: Grave 16, Melsted-Sandhuset, Bornholm, Denmark

*Date:* Seventh century

*Current Location:* Bornholms Museum, Denmark

*Select Bibliography:* Nørgård Jørgensen 1999, no. 188, Taf. 80.1 with references

SC15: Grave 481, Stora and Lille Ihre, Hellvi, Gotland, Sweden

*Date:* Seventh century

*Current Location:* Gotlands Fornsalen, Gotland, Sweden, C 10222:481

*Select Bibliography:* Nørgård Jørgensen 1999, no. 262; Nerman 1975a, No. 416

**Late Anglo-Saxon England (LAS)**

LAS1: Wensley Churchyard, North Yorkshire

*Date:* Early tenth century

*Current Location:* British Museum, London 1965,0703.1

*Select Bibliography:* Redmond 2007, 110, Fig. A6.24; Wilson 1965, 42

LAS2: Reading, Berkshire

*Date:* Late eighth-early ninth?

*Current Location:* Private collection

*Select Bibliography:* East 1986

LAS3: Grave 511, Repton, Derbyshire

*Date:* Ninth-tenth century

*Current Location:* Derby Museum, Derbyshire

*Select Bibliography:* Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle 2001, 60-65; Redmond 2007, 110-

111

LAS4: Grave 24, Cumwhitton, Cumbria

*Date:* Tenth century

*Current Location:* Post-excavation at a facility in Lancashire

*Select Bibliography:* Pers. comm. Adam Parsons, Oxford Archaeology

LAS5: Grave 25, Cumwhitton, Cumbria

*Date:* Mid ninth-tenth century

*Current Location:* Post-excavation at a facility in Lancashire

*Select Bibliography:* Pers. comm. Adam Parsons, Oxford Archaeology

LAS6: Grave 36, Cumwhitton, Cumbria

*Date:* Tenth century

*Current Location:* Post-excavation at a facility in Lancashire

*Select Bibliography:* Pers. comm. Adam Parsons, Oxford Archaeology

LAS7: Santon Downham, Norfolk

*Date:* Mid ninth-tenth century

*Current Location:* The British Museum, London 1883,0726.1

*Select Bibliography:* Evison 1969

**Viking Scandinavia (VIK)**

VIK1: Grave 544, Birka, Norr om Borg, Uppland, Sweden

*Date:* Ninth-tenth century?

*Current Location:* Historiska Museum, Stockholm, Sweden, 34000:Bj.544

*Select Bibliography:* Arbman 1940, Taf. 5:1; Arbman 1943, 170-171; Thålin-Bergman 1986

VIK2: Grave 561a, Birka, Norr om Borg, Uppland, Sweden

*Date:* Ninth-tenth century

*Current Location:* Historiska Museum, Stockholm, Sweden, 34000:Bj.561

*Select Bibliography:* Arbman 1940, Taf. 1:2; Arbman 1943, 180-181; Thålin-Bergman 1986

VIK3: Grave 942, Birka, Hemlanden, Uppland, Sweden

*Date:* Late eighth-mid ninth century

*Current Location:* Historiska Museum, Stockholm, Sweden, 34000:Bj.942

*Select Bibliography:* Arbman 1940, Taf. 1:1; Arbman 1943, 364-366, Abb. 315; Duczko 1985, 104-105; Thålin-Bergman and Arrhenius 2005

VIK4: Långtora, Uppland, Sweden

*Date:* Mid ninth-tenth century

*Current Location:* Historiska Museum, Stockholm, Sweden, 20348

*Select Bibliography:* Arbman 1936

VIK5: Grave 644, Birka, Norr om Borg, Uppland, Sweden

*Date:* Ninth-mid tenth century

*Current Location:* Historiska Museum, Stockholm, Sweden, 34000: Bj.644

*Select Bibliography:* Arbman 1943, 221-226, Abb. 182, 183:17

VIK6: Grave 731, Birka, Hemlanden, Uppland, Sweden

*Date:* Tenth century?

*Current Location:* Historiska Museum, Stockholm, Sweden, 34000: Bj.731

*Select Bibliography:* Arbman 1943, 253-255, Abb. 206:1

VIK7: Grave 735, Birka, Hemlanden, Uppland, Sweden

*Date:* Tenth-eleventh century

*Current Location:* Historiska Museum, Stockholm, Sweden, 34000: Bj.735

*Select Bibliography:* Arbman 1943, 256-259, Abb. 208:9

VIK8: Grave 750, Birka, Hemlanden, Uppland, Sweden

*Date:* Ninth-mid tenth century

*Current Location:* Historiska Museum, Stockholm, Sweden, 34000: Bj.750

*Select Bibliography:* Arbman 1943, 267-272, Abb. 217:40



VIK9: Grave 823a, Birka, Hemlanden, Uppland, Sweden

*Date:* Early-mid tenth century

*Current Location:* Historiska Museum, Stockholm, Sweden, 34000: Bj.823

*Select Bibliography:* Arbman 1940, Taf. 4:2; Arbman 1943, 296-297, Abb. 245

VIK10: Grave 834, Birka, Hemlanden, Uppland, Sweden

*Date:* Mid ninth-eleventh century

*Current Location:* Historiska Museum, Stockholm, Sweden, 34000: Bj.834

*Select Bibliography:* Arbman 1943, 304-308, Abb. 252:1; Thålin-Bergman 1986

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### Abbreviations

#### General

OE	Old English
ON	Old Norse
l.	Line reference
§.	Stanza (verse) reference
<i>Laus.</i>	Old Norse <i>Lausavísa</i> (plural <i>Lausavísur</i> )

#### Primary Texts

The alphabetical order follows standard Old English (OE) and Old Norse (ON) dictionaries. Old Norse skalds' names follow the abbreviations given on the *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages Project* online database:

<i>Ælf.Ead.</i>	<i>Ælfric, Life of St Eadmund</i> (OE)
<i>And.</i>	<i>Andreas</i> (OE)
<i>Arn.</i>	Arnórr jarlaskáld Þórðarson (ON)
<i>Har.</i>	<i>Haraldsdrápa</i>
<i>Hryn.</i>	<i>Hrynhenda, Magnússdrápa</i>
<i>Mag.</i>	<i>Magnússdrápa</i>
<i>Rög.</i>	<i>Rögvaldsdrápa</i>
<i>Porf.</i>	<i>Porfinnsdrápa</i>
<i>Bersi.</i>	Bersi Skáld-Torfuson (ON)
<i>Flokk.</i>	<i>Flokkur about Óláfr helgi</i>
<i>Bjkrepp.</i>	Björn krepphendur (ON)

<i>Mag.</i>	<i>Magnússdrápa</i>
Brag.	Bragi inn gamli Boddason (ON)
<i>Rag.</i>	<i>Ragnarsdrápa</i>
<i>Brb.</i>	<i>The Battle of Brunanburh</i> (OE)
<i>Bwf.</i>	<i>Beowulf</i> (OE)
Bölv.	Bölverkr Arnórsson (ON)
<i>Dráp.</i>	<i>Drápa about Haraldr harðráði</i>
<i>Darr.</i>	<i>Darraðarljóð</i> (ON)
<i>Ele.</i>	<i>Elene</i> (OE)
Eskál.	Einarr skálaglamm Helgason (ON)
<i>Vell.</i>	<i>Vellekla</i>
Edáð.	Eyjólfr dáðaskáld (ON)
<i>Band.</i>	<i>Bandadrápa</i>
EValg.	Eyjólfr Valgerðarson (ON)
<i>Ex.</i>	<i>Exodus</i> (OE)
<i>Ex.Brit.</i>	<i>Gildas, De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae</i>
Eyv.	Eyvindr skáldaspillir Finnsson (ON)
<i>Hák.</i>	<i>Hákonarmál</i>
<i>Fat.Ap.</i>	<i>Fates of the Apostles</i> (OE)
<i>Fnb.</i>	<i>Finnsburh fragment</i> (OE)
<i>Gen.</i>	<i>Genesis</i> (OE)
Glúmr.	Glúmr Geirason (ON)
<i>Grá.</i>	<i>Gráfeldardrápa</i>
Gsind.	Guthormr sindri (ON)
<i>Hák.</i>	<i>Hákonarmál</i>

Hallv.	Hallvarðr háreksblesi (ON)
<i>Knúts.</i>	<i>Knútsdrápa</i>
Hfr.	Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld Óttarsson (ON)
<i>EÓT.</i>	<i>Erfidrápa Óláfs Tryggvasonar</i>
Hókr.	Halldórr ókristni (ON)
<i>Eirfl.</i>	<i>Eiríksflokkur</i>
Hharð.	Haraldr harðráði Sigurðarson (ON)
Jór.	Jórunn skáldmær (ON)
<i>Send.</i>	<i>Sendibítr</i>
<i>Jud.</i>	<i>Judith</i> (OE)
<i>Jul.</i>	<i>Juliana</i> (OE)
<i>Liðs.</i>	<i>Liðsmannaflokkur</i> (ON)
Mgóð.	Magnús inn góði Ólafsson (ON)
<i>Mld.</i>	<i>The Battle of Maldon</i> (OE)
<i>MxmI.</i>	<i>Maxims I</i> (OE)
<i>MxmII.</i>	<i>Maxims II</i> (OE)
Ótt.	Óttar svartí (ON)
<i>Höf.</i>	<i>Höfuðlausn</i>
<i>Rid.</i>	<i>Riddle</i> (OE)
<i>Sea.</i>	<i>The Seafarer</i> (OE)
Sigv.	Sigvatr Þórðarson (ON)
<i>EÓH.</i>	<i>Erfidrápa Óláfs helga</i>
<i>Nes.</i>	<i>Nesjavísur</i>
<i>Vik.</i>	<i>Vikingarvísur</i>
Skúli.	Skúli Þorsteinsson (ON)

<i>Svö.</i>	<i>Poem about Svöldr</i>
SnSt. <i>Skálds.</i>	Snorri Sturluson, <i>Skáldskaparmál</i> (ON)
<i>Sol.Sat.</i>	<i>Solomon and Saturn</i> (OE)
Steinn.	Steinn Herdísarson (ON)
<i>Niz.</i>	<i>Nizarvísur</i>
<i>Ól.</i>	<i>Óláfsdrápa</i>
Tindr.	Tindr Hallkelsson (ON)
<i>Hák.</i>	<i>Hákonardrápa</i>
Vígf.	Vígfúss Víga-Glúmsson (ON)
<i>Hák.</i>	<i>Poem about Hákon jarl?</i>
<i>Wld.</i>	<i>Waldere</i> (OE)
WM. <i>Gest.Reg.Angl.</i>	William of Malmesbury, <i>Gesta Regum Anglorum</i>
ÞjóðA.	Þjóðólfr Arnórsson (ON)
<i>Frag.</i>	<i>Fragment</i>
<i>Mag.</i>	<i>Magnússflokkur</i>
<i>Sex.</i>	<i>Sexstefja</i>
Þjóð.	Þjóðólfr ór Hvini (ON)
<i>Har.</i>	<i>Poem about Haraldr hárfagri</i>
Þfagr.	Þorleikr fagri (ON)
<i>Flokk.</i>	<i>Flokkur about Sveinn Úlfsson</i>
Þfisk.	Þorgils fiskimaðr (ON)
Þhorn.	Þorbjörn hornklofi (ON)
<i>Har.</i>	<i>Haraldskvæði (Hrafnsmál)</i>
Þjsk.	Þorleifr jarlsskáld Rauðfeldarson (ON)
<i>Hák.</i>	<i>Poem about Hákon</i>

ÞKolb. Þórðr Kolbeinsson (ON)

*Eir.* *Eiríksdrápa*

Þloft. Þórarinn loftunga (ON)

*Tøg.* *Tøgdrápa*

ÞSjár. Þórðr Særeksson (ON)

*Þór.* *Þórálfs drápa Skólmssonar*

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