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The Raven's Eye. Stylistic references to sight and vision as symbols of knowledge and power

ANNE NØRGÅRD JØRGENSEN AND SOFIE LAURINE ALBRIS

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In many cultures throughout history, eye symbolism has a special function in connection with religion, mythology, and superstition. In some mythologies, eyes are linked to birds and their ability to be omnipresent and gather information. In Old Norse written sources, strong, piercing eyes can symbolise power, masculinity, and royal descent, and there is a special eye symbolism associated with the knowledge and esoteric insight that surrounds the one-eyedness of the main god Odin. In this paper, decorative rivets on high-status metal objects from the 5th to 8th centuries AD are interpreted as a stylistic imitation of the characteristic eyes of ravens. The paper takes a closer look at the use of these rivets in relation to eye symbolism in the Scandinavian archaeological material and iconography from the period ca. 200 to 700 AD, drawing further on personal names referring to eyes and ravens and the relations to Old Norse mythology. We suggest that the raven-eye rivets can be seen as representations of Odin's all-seeing eye and thus his quasi-physical presence, as a way of animating objects, or as symbols of esoteric knowledge. They are therefore interpreted as stylistic traits that were a part of a power symbolism of the elite.

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Key words: animal style, eye symbolism, iconography, military elite, Odin cult, Old Norse mythology, power symbolism, raven, Style II, personal names

Introduction

Ornamentation with zoomorphic imagery on high-status metal objects from the 5th to 8th centuries AD includes a very special decoration adorning splendid weapons and jewellery. These are the hemispherical rivets with a fluted rim along their edge that seem disproportionally large and functionally almost inexplicable (Figure 1c). This feature – being both a decorative and, we believe, a symbolic element – is interpreted here as a stylistic imitation of the characteristic eye of corvid birds, i.e. a hemispherical shape with a fluted rim along the edge (Figure 1a–b). These rivets shaped like raven eyes are found especially on objects of the military elite, such as lances, shields, swords, and belt equipment of the period 200–700 AD, as well as button-on-bow fibulae; their high point is seen in the period 520/30–680 AD, coinciding with a time when the military elite became particularly significant in northern Europe (i.e. parts of modern-day England, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Germany, and other parts of the northern Continent), and we find them in the richly equipped weapon graves and other contemporary contexts (Nørgård Jørgensen 1999, 90–95).

One of the earliest examples are eye-like inlays of round and domed blue glass designed with fluted metal edges. The blue glass has a particularly strong meaning, which may also have been relevant in the Iron Age (Sode 1996, 62–63). One remarkable specimen is the belt set from the largest deposit (phase 2) of the weapon offering site at Ejsbøl Mose near Haderslev in south Jutland, Denmark, that was dated to around 300 AD and belonged to the absolute top military elite (Figure 2a) (Nørgård Jørgensen and Andersen 2014, 154–61). Patrix dies for raven-eye rivets appear in Late Iron-age and Viking-age localities such as Hedeby (Schleswig-Holstein, Germany)

as well as Lejre, Tissø, Melbygård, and Kærby (all Zealand, Denmark). An example found at the magnate's farm at Tissø dates from the early part of the Late Germanic Iron Age (Figure 2d).

Lance heads as raven imitations

The most striking and thought-provoking use of raven-eye rivets is when they are placed on the socket of a lance head, transforming it into the imitation of a bird (Figure 2b): the blade is its beak, the socket is the head, and the raven-eye rivets are of course the eyes (Nørgård Jørgensen 1999, 90). This creates a brilliant construction where weapon merges with bird, which could represent the idea of the weapon embodying a raven attacking the enemy. This in turn opens the possibility that these lances were regarded as animated objects – something that has also been discussed in relation to Iron-age inscribed lance heads (Sundqvist 2009, 309, see also Lund 2017 and Pearce 2013, 60). A mid-3rd-century example from a weapon grave at Mos Gård, Stenkyrka parish, Gotland in Sweden, even features eye-like decorations along with the inscription (Snædal 2017, 9–15).

The raven-eye rivets are attached to lances of early Late Germanic Iron-age types (Nørgård Jørgensen 1991/1999 Type L1 and L3d, from Phases I–II, i.e. 520/30–610/20 AD). A good example is the lance from Kobbeå grave 1, Østerherred on Bornholm, Denmark (Figure 2b) (Nørgård Jørgensen 1991, 213). The burial belongs to the top-rank military elite. This lance type is also found in both Norway and Sweden, and there is among others an example from Niederstotzingen (grave 9) in southern Germany (Paulsen 1967, Taf. 17).

The latest find known to us of a raven-eye lance head was unearthed in 2021 at Sorte Muld, near Svaneke in eastern Bornholm, in an area with animal bones and weapon deposits (Field 8) just below the central part of the huge settlement and cult complex (Figure 2c) (Lund Hansen et al. forthcoming). Sorte Muld includes more than 20 different settlements, and several raven-eye rivets have been found in the area by metal detectorists. All in all, 70 lances have been found at this site over time and all in the central cult area (Iversen 2009, 77). However, this is the first one found with attached raven-eye rivets; it is of Type L1, which belongs to the period 520/30–560/70 AD (Nørgård Jørgensen 1999, 88–90). The lance was intentionally rendered useless – like most weapon sacrifice finds both at Sorte Muld and elsewhere. Interestingly, during the destruction, the point of the lance was rolled up, so that the blade now creates the effect of a curled beak, a characteristic usually associated in iconography with the eagle. Such a transformation reminds us how eagles and ravens are closely connected to each other in Old Norse literature and visual art (Oehrl 2020, 33–35; Pesch 2015, 382–88).

The ravens as Odin's extended eyes in Old Norse mythology

In many religions, connections can be found between birds as messengers and the all-seeing eyes or vision of deities (e.g., Gardella and Krute 2024; Warburton 2018).

Figure 1. a. Raven (Corvus corax), length 65–70cm, wingspan 120–150cm; black plumage, black feet, strong bill. b. The characteristic raven eye. c. Sutton Hoo belt buckle with three distinctive 'raven-eye symbols'; two of them surrounded by Style II bird's heads. Photos: a–b. Nature Guide, Denmark. c. British Museum.

In Old Norse mythology, Odin, the king of the gods, is described as omniscient and always on a quest for knowledge (Schjødt 2020, 1150–55). Odin had an intricate relationship with his two ravens Huginn and Muninn, which is described in several texts, such as the Eddic poem *Grímnismál* as well as in Snorri Sturluson's *Gylfaginning and Heimskringla* (Mitchell 2018). Snorri informs us that the ravens sat on Odin's shoulders and that they were sent out at early dawn to gather information from all over the world and bring it back to him. Some of Odin's by-names refer to this relationship, such as "Hrafnaguð" or "Hrafnáss", both meaning "raven god" (Nordberg 2004, 140; Sundqvist 2009, 304).

Although it is a debated issue, scholarship generally relates the names Huginn and Muninn to *hugr*, "thought", and *muna*, "to remember" (Mitchell 2018, 455; Nordberg 2004, 141). If this is correct, the ravens represent two different aspects of the mind: active thinking and memory, respectively. They might thus be interpreted as extensions of Odin's own consciousness. In *Grímnismál*, Odin states that he worries for Huginn's return, but that he fears even more for Muninn, which indicates that the capacity to remember and thus to contextualise information is seen as the most crucial mental capability (Mitchell 2018, 455; Nordberg 2004, 141).

The Old Norse myths are known from texts written down between the 12th and 14th centuries and told through a Medieval Christian lens. Therefore, we need to be careful if we use the texts as an interpretative framework for phenomena that are centuries older, which means that often, our suggestions for interpretations can mainly be hypothetical (Hedeager 2011, 22–24; Sundqvist 2009, 302). Bearing this in mind, we suggest that the "raven lances" could be seen as an embodiment of the idea of Odin's presence in the shape of a raven. A similar notion has been suggested for the very common 7th/8th-century bird/

Figure 2. a. Belt fitting from Ejsbøl II, ca. 300 AD, with blue glass in the 'raven eye'. b. Lance head with raven-eye rivets from the rich weapon grave Kobbeå 1, Østre Herred, Bornholm, ca. 550–600 AD. c. Lance head with raven-eyes from Sorte Muld, Østre Herred, Bornholm, Field 8-2021. d. Patrix for raven-eyes found in the older part of the Tissø site, ca. 600 AD. Photos and drawings: a. Haderslev Museum. b. Anne Nørgård Jørgensen. c. Bornholm Museum. d. Josefine F. Bican.

raven brooches that often feature a mask motif on their backs. It is important, however, to note that the placement of staring eyes in such a manner may be interpreted in multiple ways and is also related to general preferences in iconography for depicting stylised human-animal transformations (Figure 5c) (cf. Helmbrecht 2013, 12–14).

The connection between Odin and the ravens is related to his need for knowledge and information, but equally to his association with death and battle. Often seen on or near battlefields, eating the corpses of dead warriors, ravens, along with wolves and eagles, formed a triad of "beasts of battle" that are linked to Odin in Old Norse and Anglo-Saxon literature (Jesch 2002). Furthermore, a 13th-century Icelandic text called the *Third Grammatical Treatise* relates how Huginn flew to the hanged while Muninn flew to the corpses (see Mitchell 2018, 456–58, for further references), which reminds us of Odin's self-hanging sacrifice and possible connection with real-life hanging sacrifices. The ravens were thus part of Odin's strategies to gather knowledge and information, which also included talking to the embalmed head of the wise Mímir, waking up the dead, and sitting under hanged men. The character of the insight sought by Odin was therefore a level of esoteric knowledge from other worlds or from a liminal area between the realms of the dead and the living. If we consider the raven-eye rivets placed on weapons in this context, the eyes do not only observe what goes on in battle and politics, they also gaze into the world of the dead.

The purpose of the raven-eye rivets may be understood in many ways. They can be seen as a way of allowing the deity to monitor the doings of warriors and to impact the course of a battle. Such an understanding can be related to beliefs in Odin selecting warriors from the battlefield for an afterlife in his hall, or about his granting success and victory in battle (Nordberg 2004, 139). While acting as "spy cams" or messengers between the god, humans, and other worlds, the appearance of ravens on the battlefield could also be regarded as representing the god's real presence among humans. Certain other objects also seem to have been endowed with this notion. Another example of raven-related props believed to embody the god's presence on the battlefield is found in accounts about Viking-age raven-banners. These flags would become animated, waving their ravens' wings as a sign of Odin's support, presaging good fortune and victory (Nordberg 2004, 139). In connection with the "raven lance", it may be relevant that in many sagas, Odin appears on the battlefield and uses his lance as an implement to select which of the fighting men will fall.

However, the perceived transformation of the lance into a raven may hold further implications that could be connected to ideas about the slain enemy warriors as a sacrifice to Odin: firstly, Odin is generally associated with lances and lance-related rituals, and there seems to have been a tradition for dedicating the enemy warriors to Odin by the war leader flinging a lance over the opponent's army at the beginning of a battle (Nordberg 2004, 108–12). The "lance raven" would then be a twofold symbolic embodiment of the god, both bird and weapon, flying over the enemy army. Secondly, in Old Norse poetry, there is a recurring motif of the successful warrior as provider of carrion for the beasts of battle, and battle kennings (poetical metaphors) would use the motif of feeding the wolves, ravens, and/or eagles as a paraphrase for "killing men in battle" (Jesch 2002, 262–65; Oehrl 2020, 34). According to Nordberg, feeding the ravens, eagles, and wolves – all of which were associated with Odin – could be seen as a way of sacrificing the enemy warriors to the god (Nordberg 2004, 142–43); when the ravens ate the fallen on the battlefield, it was a sign of Odin accepting the sacrifice. Thus, killing a warrior with a "raven lance" might be regarded as enforcing this sacrificial mechanism, as the "lance raven" devoured the enemy.

Eye symbolism and material culture

While the "raven lances" can be considered in the context of the connection between ravens, battlefields, lances, and Odin, the raven-eye rivets are also found on many other types of objects, though here, they should probably be understood in a wider context. Eyes and ocular effects play a prominent role in Scandinavian iconography and animal art, where eyes are often enlarged and emphasised by the choice of certain materials or colourings. Several scholars, such as Howard Williams (2011), Ing-Marie Back Danielsson (2007), and Elisabeth Arwill-Nordbladh (2012, 2014) have noted that exaggerated eyes are a general trait of Germanic animal art in depictions of both anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figures as well as of monstrous creatures.

Siv Kristoffersen's research has shown that transforming images revolve around eyes in the creation of animal and mask motifs as early as in Style I (Kristoffersen 2017). Back Danielsson and Williams both note that enlarged eyes are something we see in the images of both gold foil figures and gold bracteates (Back Danielsson 2007, 78, 102; Williams 2011, 103). Willams also underlined how the theme of sight and vision plays a key role in the object assembly from the 7th-century burial at Sutton Hoo (Suffolk, England) and suggests that "ocular qualities" were particularly emphasised in burials and other ritual

Figure 3. a. Shield boss with large raven-eye rivets from Vendel grave XII, Uppland, Sweden. b. Sword hilt from Bildsø, West Zealand, Denmark, with eight raven-eye rivets. c. The magnificent buckle buckle from Åker, Hedmark, Norway, with bird heads with raven eyes. Photos and drawings: a. Stolpe 1912, pl. XXXIII. b. Danish National Museum and Anne Nørgård Jørgensen. c. Kirsten Helgeland, Kulturhistorisk Museum, Oslo.

contexts (Nugent and Williams 2012; Williams 2011). Furthermore, Neil Price and Paul Mortimer have advanced the idea that intentional visual effects were lain into the representation of the eyes on the Sutton Hoo helmet, to make one eye appear darker than the other (Price and Mortimer 2014).

Once we start noticing the raven-eye rivets, they suddenly appear everywhere. The splendid sword from Bildsø, western Zealand, Denmark for example, has eight "raven eyes" that decorate the heads of the rivets that hold together the upper and lower parts of the sword hilt (Figure 3b). The sword dates from ca. 650 AD and has belonged to the top military elite in the western Zealand area. It was found in 1866 by workers digging a ditch near the banks of the drained Lake Bildsø. Unfortunately, we have no further information regarding the find context.

Another group of objects, Germanic Iron-age shield bosses, can also be richly decorated. The hemispherical boss is surrounded by a collar that is attached to the shield's wood by means of five strong rivets (Figure 3a). Those collar rivets belonging to a specific type SBA can be regarded as raven-eye rivets (Nørgård Jørgensen 1999, 78–80). These rivets are for example seen on the shields from Vendel grave XII in Uppland in Central Sweden dating from around 600 AD, and the late 6th-century shield found in Vendel grave XI (Stolpe 1912, pl. XXVIII, 1–2).

On the splendid buckle from the assemblage found at the farm Åker in Hedmark, Norway, we see a man flanked by animals (Røstad 2020) (Figure 3c). Often interpreted as eagles, these birds nonetheless seem to have the characteristic corvid eye rivets. As mentioned above for the "raven lance" head from Sorte Muld, it is often difficult to distinguish ravens from eagles in Scandinavian art of the 5th to 8th centuries, as the two species seem to overlap and merge in both iconography and meaning (Pesch 2015, 382–88). Indeed, this is acknowledged in poetry, where in the poem *Hrafnsmál*, for example, the raven is called *arnar eiðbróðir*, "the eagle's oath-sworn brother" (Jesch 2002, 265). With the Åker find, we are again in the absolute top military level, with parts of a magnificent sword with a ring knob (denoting a member of the retinue) (Nørgård Jørgensen 1999, 158–60, 2001, 103).

Edward James has a fine definition of what characterises the military elite in the early Middle Ages (James 1997, 19). It is a militarised society

> … in which there is no clear distinction between soldier and civilian, nor between military officer and government official; where the head of the state is also commander-in-chief of the army; where all adult free men have the right to carry weapons; where a certain group or class of people (normally the aristocracy) is expected, by reason of birth to

> participate in the army; where the education of young thus often involves military element; where the symbolism of warfare and weaponry is prominent in official and private life, and the warlike and heroic virtues are glorified; and where warfare is a predominant government expenditure and/or major source of economic profit (James 1997, 19).

It is in this sphere that we must understand the symbols used by the retinues of the Germanic Iron-age military elite.

Raven-eye rivets in iconography

Although occurring in different contexts, we believe that the rimmed-eye decorations particularly refer to the raven's eye, as this is a feature particular for the raven among other corvid species. How important these symbols were on weapons can be gleamed from the pictorial frieze on the helmet from the rich boat grave at Vendel (grave XIV) in Uppland from the later part of the 6th century (Figure 4b) (Stolpe 1912, pl. XLII, 1), the high point of the use of raven-eye rivets on the military elite's splendid weapons. It shows five warriors wearing bird-crested helmets and carrying a ring-knobbed sword, which indicates that they are members of the *hird*/retinue (Steuer 1989, 107). All also carry lances with the large decorative raven-eye rivets on the socket that we know from the real-life objects described above. No other types of large rivets on lance heads are known – with the exception of rare examples on "bear rivet lances" (one from By in Steinkjer, Trøndelag, Norway, no. T1269) and one from Vendel XII in Sweden (Stolpe 1912, pl. XXXIV, 5). Thus, it can only be raven-eye rivets that are depicted on the frieze from Vendel XIV.

The attentive observer will be able to see that the sword scabbard of the warrior in the middle has three "wraps" (Figure 4b). This fitting is probably made of solid gold like the ones we know from Gudme on Funen, Denmark. The scabbards of the two warriors on the left have fittings with two "wraps", while those on the right have none. The illustration by Stolpe (1912, pl. XLII, 1) must be considered very accurate and clearly depicts a ranking order that is remarkably strict. There is no doubt that these details were considered important and significant – for the one who made the frieze, the one who wore it on the helmet, and for those who saw it and were impressed by it.

The raven-eye rivets do not always imply a transformation of the object as is supposed in the case of the "raven lance", but their presence may nonetheless mean that the objects were understood as animated or "seeing" (Williams 2011, 104). In this light, the prominence of bright, piercing eyes as symbols of power or noble descent is an interesting perspective.

Bright shining eyes, kingship, and one-eyedness

In several heroic tales recorded both in Old Norse sagas and by Saxo Grammaticus, strong, piercing eyes described as shining and even vibrating or pulsating, are a motif that often reveals the noble, royal, or even divine descent of certain individuals, both men and women (Kroesen 1985). Some hero-warrior characters are described as having eyes so powerful that they have to cover them to prevent scaring others or even doing harm to them. The eyes are thus mirrors that reveal an "other-worldly" quality of these particular super-human individuals. On this background, Eldar Heide has suggested that in some descriptions, these sharp eyes should be understood as actual weapons (Heide 2000). It seems likely that a part of the runic inscription on the bracteate Nebenstedt I, Niedersachsen, Germany (IK128b) should be interpreted in this light: it reads **glïaugiz**, which probably is a name or byname, translated *Gliaugiz*, "the one with shining eyes" (Figure 5d) (Düwel and Nowak 2011, 434–38; Peterson 2004, 8), and it may be referring to a powerful person of special descent, reflecting the force of their gaze (see also Sundqvist 2009, 305). This reminds us once again of Odin. As stated by Anette Lassen: "one of Óðinn's heiti is Báleygr, the fire-eyed. The eye, that Óðinn still has, is powerful: with his gaze Óðinn can frighten his enemies,

Figure 4. a. Helmet decoration from Vendel, grave I. b. Helmet decoration from Vendel, grave XIV a. After Stolpe 1912, pl. VI, 1. b. After Stolpe 1912, pl. XLII, 1.

blind or deafen them in the struggle, and stop weapons in the air" (Lassen 2000, 225).

As bright eyes are a key feature of heroes and rulers alike, this is a characteristic that links this high-status group with Odin as a deity. The motif on the Nebenstedt bracteate is a (naked?) man with large hands, posing or dancing. Floating around him are eight round symbols in the exact same shape as his enlarged eye. Could this be a ruler, perhaps personifying Odin? The recently presented interpretation of the inscription on the bracteate X13 from Vindelev in Jutland, Denmark, "he is Odin's man", indicates that the images on the bracteates may be portraying figures related to and/or representing the deity (Imer and Vasshus 2023).

A special eye symbolism related to knowledge and esoteric insight surrounds the one-eyedness of Odin, who pledged one of his eyes to Mímir to achieve wisdom (Lassen 2000; 2003). Lassen has argued that Mímir was connected to the underworld and to feminine, chaotic forces and that through sacrificing one eye, Odin gained a capacity to look out from the underworld, allowing him vision in both worlds (2000, 224–25).

This paper is not about one-eyedness, but it should be noted here that there is an ongoing discussion about the dissimilarity between the two eyes in a single face on various objects and iconographies. Researchers such as Arwill-Nordbladh (2014), Price and Mortimer (2014), and Arrhenius and Freij (1992) have discussed whether one eye on some images were deliberately rendered different than the other, either as a part of the original design or as a secondary treatment. This has been discussed for example regarding the imagery of the Sutton Hoo helmet (Price and Mortimer 2014), the horned and dancing figure on one of the Torslunda plates (Arrhenius and Freij 1992), a figure on the Högom textiles (Nockert 1991), and some figurines (Arwill-Nordbladh 2014). While an intentional difference between the eyes of a single figure is quite difficult to prove, as wear or damage to objects may have happened through time, Arwill-Nordbladh (2014, 90) has pointed out that there are so many instances of dissimilar eyes that it must be seen as a pattern.

We can add a possible example of such a difference that has hitherto gone unnoticed: a gilded copper-alloy clasp from Zealand features the so-called "eagle-boar-wolf constellation", arranged symmetrically on both sides of a bearded human face (Figure 5a). This is a recurring motif in Style II that researchers have also related to Odin or royalty (e.g., Høilund Nielsen 2001, 474, see also Wamers 2009). Recently, close-up photography of the clasp at the National Museum in Copenhagen, Denmark, revealed differences between the eyes of the anthropomorphic face (Figure 5a–b). In contrast to the copper alloy eye rivets of the animal heads, which were not gilded, the perforated eyes of the male face were originally both conical and gilded on the inside, however the man's right eye seems to have been treated secondarily and now appears cylindrical, darker and slightly larger. Preliminary observations by Michelle Taube at the National Museum's scientific department indicate some residue on the inside, requiring further analyses. The special treatment of one eye does not necessarily mean that the image depicts the god Odin, but the emphasis on eyes and their expressions in these objects and images seems clear.

Individuals possessing special insight

Basically, we can point to an intricate relation between strong eyes, royalty, divinity, and Odin in the written sources and indirectly in objects and iconography, as well (see Düwel and Oehrl 2017, 97–98). In relation to Odin, the eye symbolism is further closely connected to his obsessive and eternal quest for knowledge. Perhaps we should generally see eye symbolism and ocular effects in images and on objects as a way of expressing the possession of or access to special (esoteric?) wisdom and insight?

One of the special skills acquired by Odin was knowledge about runes. In Iron-age inscriptions, the art of writing runes is related to the designation *erilaz*. It is not yet clear what the term *erilaz* actually described, but it seems to refer to individuals associated with knowledge about runes and with religious as well as military leadership and high rank (though not necessarily kingship or rulership) (see discussions referenced in Sundqvist 2009, 301–2). One of these is commemorated on the Järsberg rune stone from Värmland, Sweden, that points towards a connection between the raven, the military elite, and esoteric knowledge: in translation, the inscription reads, "(Le)ubaz[?] I am called, Raven I am called, I the eril wrote the runes." While the first personal name is obscure, it is clear that the person calls himself **harabanaz**, "Raven", and that he claims to be an *erilaz* and to be the one who wrote the runes.

Olof Sundqvist connects this inscription and the term *erilaz* in general to Odin, partly because of the Järsberg identification with the raven, partly on the basis of associations with lances (Sundqvist 2009, 306–9). He also emphasises the formula "I am called", used both in the context of *erilaz* inscriptions and in poetic passages concerning Odin (Sundqvist 2009, 303). The dating of the Järsberg stone to around 520/30–560/70 AD (Imer 2011, 170–96), is particularly interesting seen in relation to the subject of this paper, touching on links between eye and raven symbolism, esoteric knowledge,

Figure 5. Various ocular effects on Germanic Iron-age objects. a. Gilded eagle-boar-wolf clasp C5480 from Zealand. b. Close-up showing the different eyes on the centrally placed bearded mask/face c. Bird brooches, likely ravens, from various sites on Bornholm with masks and eyes on their backs and wings. d. The Nebenstedt bracteate. Photos: a–b. Rikke Søgaard, Danish National Museum. c. Arnold Mikkelsen, Danish National Museum. d. Morten Axboe.

the military elite, and mythological symbolism in the 5th–8th centuries AD.

To conclude

Odin was not only an all-powerful god, he was also a god of war and considered the god of kings and the aristocracy (Figure 4a), associated in particular with wisdom and the search for knowledge (Hedeager 2011, 7–11; Schjødt 2020). His ravens represent an aspect of this quest, working as his extended eyes and gathering information and intelligence for him. We have argued that the raven-eye rivets and eye symbolism in animal art and on weaponry could be related to this conceptual framework.

If Huginn and Muninn were extensions of Odin's mind and gaze, attaching their eyes symbolically on military objects, might be considered as creating an extension of Odin's vision. If interpreted more broadly, they simply were a part of the ever-present eye-theme. In this conceptualisation, religious ideas and warrior ideology go hand in hand. We are aware that there is a lively discussion about the origin and development of Odin as a deity and that while some scholars argue that this figure has deep roots, others believe he was introduced in Scandinavian religion sometime around the 4th–5th centuries (see Schjødt 2019 for further discussion and references). Is it conceivable that Odin-related beliefs can be followed indirectly in the archaeological objects? If so, this would point to a date of this form of expression of the Odin cult to the latter part of the Early Iron Age (Late Roman Period) into the Late Germanic Iron Age (ca. 200–650/700 AD). The images known today that could be interpreted as depicting Odin date from the late 6th century and beginning of the 7th century AD (Stolpe 1912, pl. VI, 1) (Figure 4a), and as we have seen, Odin seems to be mentioned on a 5th century bracteate (Imer and Vasshus 2023).

Most of the raven-eye rivets are found on objects belonging to Style II and are associated with aristocracy and wealth. It is documented all over the world that styles follow dynasties, and the animal styles in parts of Scandinavia probably do, too. The transition from Style I to II could therefore be a sign of a dynastic shift (cf. Hedeager 2000, 129; Høilund Nielsen 1998; and Wamers 2009, 153–54, for a critical view).

It is not new information that the animal styles might be linked to elements of Old Norse mythology. However, the imitated raven-eyes give us a glimpse of the imaginary world that belonged to the elite, strengthening the assumption that the Odin cult was indeed closely connected to the aristocracy of the time. Furthermore, it is highly likely that craftsmen were aware of symbolism and mythology and that they were surrounded by a consensus of knowledge that influenced and determined the design of status objects for a special social group in a very large geographical area.

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