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# Buried in Between: Re-interpreting the Skjoldehamn Medieval Bog Burial of Arctic Norway

By ASGEIR SVESTAD<sup>1</sup>

*THE 11TH-CENTURY SKJOLDEHAMN GRAVE is a remarkable accidental find, discovered in a bog in coastal Arctic Norway in 1936. The grave consisted of a fully clothed skeleton wrapped in a wool blanket, lashed with leather straps and tin ring-ornamented woven bands. The body was laid on a reindeer pelt, which in turn was placed on sticks of birch. Finally, the body was covered with birch bark, and potentially covered with turf. The grave has intrigued scholars since its discovery, especially the question of ethnic affiliation, and whether it is Old Norse/Norwegian or Sámi. New dating has placed the grave in the period when Christianity was gaining new ground on these outskirts of Europe. Re-examinations of the grave finds suggest a blend of Old Norse and Sámi features, as well as pagan and possible Christian features, and contribute to a new understanding of the burial's material contingency.*

The Skjoldehamn grave is located in the dualistic Old Norse (or Norwegian) and Sámi landscape of Arctic or northern Norway, at the southern tip of Andøya Island in the Vesterålen region (Fig 1). Internationally, the find is not well known due to a lack of publications in English — an imbalance this article intends to redress. The first investigation of the multi-coloured woollen costume, which is believed to be the clothing of a man, was carried out in 1936–1938 by Norwegian archaeologist Gutorm Gjessing and his wife, textile expert Gjertrud Gjessing.<sup>2</sup> Gutorm Gjessing believed that the burial custom resembled that of (south) Scandinavian bog burials of the Late Middle Ages, and may reflect written sources and Christian beliefs which considered bogs an appropriate place for criminals and condemned souls. He regarded the custom as an extension of the late Bronze-Age NW European bog-burial tradition related to Tacitus' description of German tribes burying outcasts or criminals in the bog.<sup>3</sup> Based on the costume, deemed to be a worn-out example of an outdated Scandinavian fashion, Gutorm Gjessing thought that the burial represented a poor individual of Norwegian descent who was buried in the 15th or 16th century AD. Gjessing concluded that the grave was the Christian burial of a Norwegian convict.<sup>4</sup>

In retrospect, it is clear that the diffusionist and ethnocentric perspectives prevalent in Scandinavian (and European) archaeology at the time biased Gjessing's perception.

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<sup>2</sup> Gjessing 1938.

<sup>3</sup> Tacitus, *Dialogus, Agricola, Germania*, ch 9, 276–7, and ch 39, 318–9.

<sup>4</sup> Gjessing 1938, 30–7, 67–73.

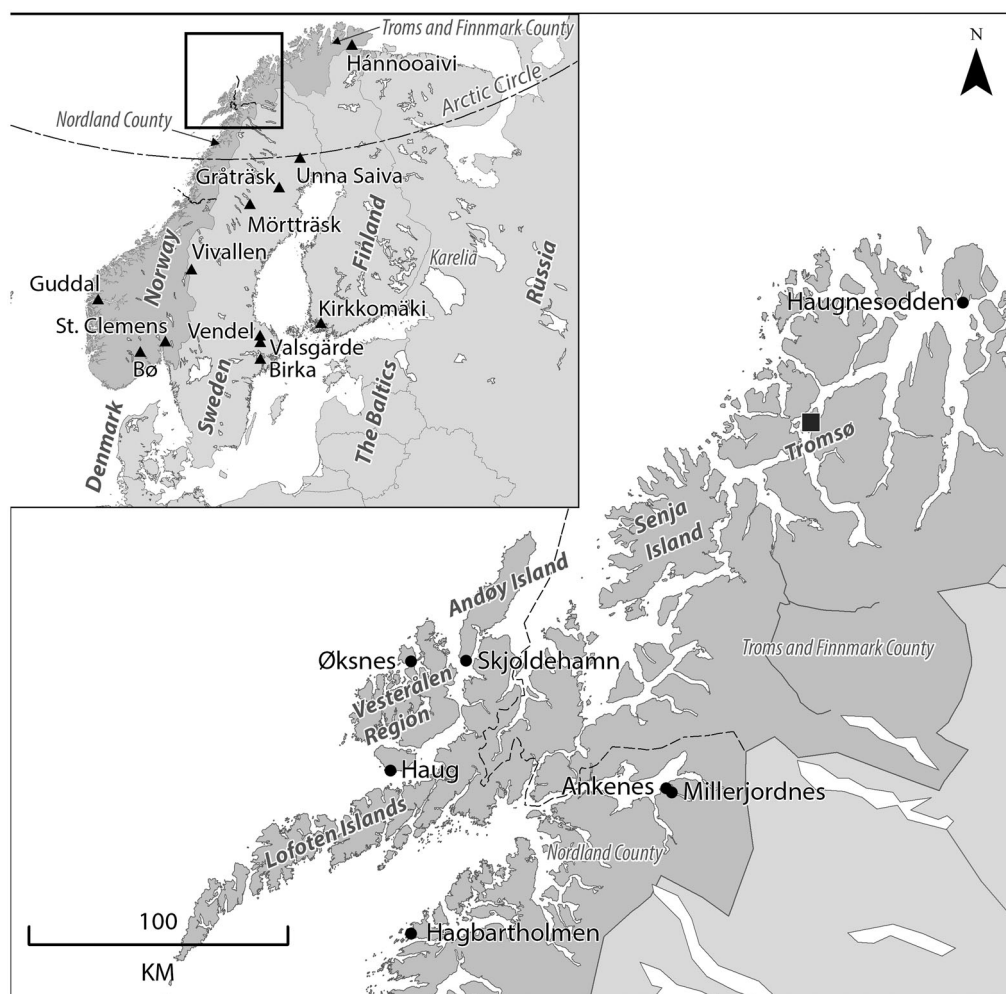


FIG 1

Location of Skjöldehamn and other archaeological sites discussed in the article. *Illustration by J E Amtzen, base map source: EFRI/Kartverket.*

For example, he ignored rather obvious similarities between the shoe fragments and Sámi shoe making, which are discussed in more detail below. In subsequent years, various analyses have attempted to define the ethnic or cultural affiliation of the find. DNA analysis of the human remains, for instance, indicated a lack of Y-chromosomes and Sámi genetic-markers, which suggested a non-Sámi and possibly Old Norse/Norwegian woman.<sup>5</sup> The DNA analysis was conducted in 1999, so the methodological limitations of genetic analysis at the time render these results questionable.<sup>6</sup> Given that biological descent is DNA's primary outcome, the results may also be questioned regarding attributes of ethnicity, which concerns social and cultural identity and belonging, rather than

<sup>5</sup> Nockert and Possnert 2002, 59.

<sup>6</sup> Cf Løvlid 2009, note 6.

biology. Physical anthropological determinations must be subject to similar cautions, and indeed, the analyses of the human remains have been inconclusive, with some suggesting a Norwegian woman, and others a Sámi person of either sex.<sup>7</sup> A firmer definition of the burial's ethnic and cultural affiliation requires a new analysis which places the burial customs and costume details at centre stage, which is where this study begins.

In contrast to Gjessing's dating of the grave based on the costume alone, radiocarbon dating carried out in later investigations has positioned the grave at the point of transition between the Viking period and the Nordic early medieval period, with dates ranging from AD 890 to AD 1224 (see discussion on dating below).<sup>8</sup> Culturally, it is thus situated in the midst of the turmoil and power struggles which accompanied Norway's unification and Christianisation. There is little indication that the grave is directly related to the late Bronze-Age (1100–500 BC) Scandinavian or north-western European bog-burial tradition, which is documented to occur no later than the Roman Iron Age in southern Norway, and does not seem to occur at all in northern Fennoscandia.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, re-examination of the Skjoldenhamn grave and associated discernible customs indicates a blend of Old Norse and Sámi features that challenge previous mono-cultural interpretations.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, new analyses of the costume suggest ethnically diverse clothing customs.<sup>11</sup> On this basis, the burial indicates some level of cultural hybridisation, which may correspond with recent research indicating extensive relationships between the Sámi and Old Norse in the Viking period and the Early Middle Ages.<sup>12</sup>

Cultural hybridity is one of the most commonly applied concepts in discussions of cross-cultural encounters in the humanities and social sciences in recent decades. The postcolonial definition advanced by the literary theorist Homi K. Bhabha is crucial in this discourse.<sup>13</sup> Confronting the homogenous, hegemonic and rigid binary of coloniser and colonised, Bhabha states that the significance of cultural hybridity is not 'to trace two original cultural moments from which the third emerges', but it is rather the 'third space' or 'space in between', which allows other positions to emerge.<sup>14</sup>

At first glance, Bhabha's explication seems suitable as a primary explanation of the mixed features of the Skjoldenhamn grave. However, hybridity has been employed extensively, and often uncritically, as an easy explanation for mixed features in archaeology.<sup>15</sup> Stephen Silliman has argued that the use of 'hybridity' as a concept in archaeology is inconsistent, and that it mostly works superficially as a metaphor for modified

<sup>7</sup> Sellevold 1987; Holck 1988.

<sup>8</sup> For dating, see Holck 1988; Nockert and Possnert 2002; Løvlid 2009. The article is based on Norwegian and Nordic chronology, characterised as Bronze Age (1800–500 BC), pre-Roman Iron Age (500 BC–AD 1), Roman Iron Age (AD 1–400), Migration period (AD 400–560/570), Merovingian period (AD 560/570–800), Viking period (AD 800–1050), Early Middle Ages (AD 1050–1150), High Middle Ages (AD 1150–1350), and Late Middle Ages (AD 1350–1520), cf. Helle 2003; Solberg 2003. The transition from the Migration period to the Merovingian period marks the division between the early and late Iron Ages.

<sup>9</sup> Sellevold 2011.

<sup>10</sup> Svestad 2017.

<sup>11</sup> Vedeler 2007; Løvlid 2009.

<sup>12</sup> Eg Zachrisson et al 1997; Hansen and Olsen 2014.

<sup>13</sup> For further explication, see Young 1990; Acheraïou 2011.

<sup>14</sup> Bhabha 1990, 211.

<sup>15</sup> Eg Lightfoot and Martinez 1995; Van Dommelen 2006; Card 2013; Thomas et al 2017.



FIG 2

The Skjoldehamn burial site during Gutorm Gjessing's survey in 1937. Rickart Olsen and Hans Liavik — two of the locals involved in the discovery in 1936 — are barely visible at the burial site (centre). *Photograph by G Gjessing. © Tromsø Museum.*

objects, instead of being theorized and properly employed.<sup>16</sup> The question is thus whether 'hybridity' alone may adequately explain the entanglements of the Skjoldehamn grave.

This article expands on my previous investigation of the Skjoldehamn grave, and aims to re-interpret its ethnic and cultural significance, as well as to discuss the find in relation to the concept of cultural hybridity.<sup>17</sup> I start by describing the grave's empirical evidence and cultural setting, followed by comparisons with relevant Fennoscandian graves (most brought to light in the aftermath of Gjessing's involvement), and then give a brief review of significant costume features.<sup>18</sup> The final discussion will focus on details of burial customs, the proper use of the cultural hybridity concept, and how Sámi and Old Norse interaction came about.

#### THE GRAVE'S CONTENT, ANALYSES AND DATING

The Skjoldehamn grave was accidentally discovered and unearthed in the summer of 1936 by Rickart Olsen, a local farmer, while cutting peat in the highest elevations of

<sup>16</sup> Silliman 2015, 283–5.

<sup>17</sup> Svestad 2017.

<sup>18</sup> Eg Manker 1961; Sjøvold 1962; 1974; Storli 1991; Schanche 2000.

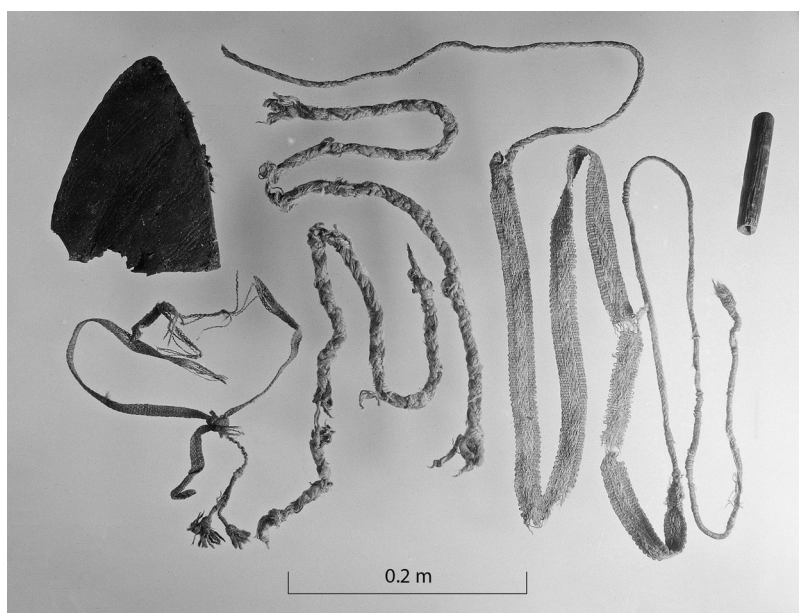


FIG 3

Selected finds from the Skjoldehamn grave. From left: Shoe sole fragment (almost complete front part), carpet band, woollen braid, ankle band 1, and knife shaft. Photograph by G Gjessing. © Tromsø Museum.

Galvmyra bog (c 15 m ASL) at the Gavlneset promontory at Skjoldehamn (Fig 2). The find led to great astonishment, and soon after unearthing it was transported to the Tromsø Museum. Gjessing undertook a further survey of the site in the following year, during which he recovered a few additional human bones and a knife shaft of oak, and recorded information about Olsen's and other local inhabitants' observations and the remaining grave features (Fig 3).<sup>19</sup>

Despite the lack of professional excavation by Olsen, the burial features recorded by Gjessing seem reliable. The grave was oriented in an oblique N-S direction, with the head towards the north, in which the body was completely shrouded in a wool blanket tied with leather straps and wool bands, and was placed on a reindeer pelt in a slight flexed position on the left side of the body. The reindeer pelt was placed on four or five birch rods approximately 0.87–0.92 m below the surface, of which two survived, measuring c 0.5 m length and c 50 mm in thickness. A layer of birch bark covered the corpse, identified by large flakes in the course of discovery and by fragments in the grave's profile during survey.

Gjessing assumed that the corpse had been laid on the ground and had sunk into the bog over the course of time. However, considering the open flat area surrounding the burial, which provides no protection against heavy wind and weather, it is more likely that the body was partly dug into the ground with peat covering the corpse. Otherwise, it is unlikely that the costume, for instance, would have been preserved under such harsh subarctic climatic conditions. The burial costume (as recovered)

<sup>19</sup> Gjessing 1937; 1938; cf Svestad 2017.

consisted of a chaperon or hood with pelerine, a tunic or short kirtle, a braided woollen belt with decorated ropes, a shirt with a tin button, trousers, socks, ankle cloths, ankle bands with tin-ring decorated ropes, and three fragments of shoe-sole leather.<sup>20</sup> There was also a woollen braid, indeterminable textile fragments, a blanket, and lashing (ie leather straps and bands similar to the ankle bands).

Textile analysis has shown that the garments are made of sheep's wool.<sup>21</sup> XRF spectrometry of the metal ornaments (which Gjessing believed to be silver) describes an alloy of tin and a small portion of lead.<sup>22</sup> As noted, analyses of the skeletal remains are inconclusive regarding determination of ethnicity and sex.<sup>23</sup> However, the individual had gracile bones with small muscle attachments that suggest a small stature, and which may indicate a woman. Nonetheless, caution is warranted due to the currently insufficient knowledge of human physical attributes of the actual period (discussed further below, under 'Attributes of the Costume').<sup>24</sup> Depending on the sex, the individual's height is estimated to be c 1.50–1.60 m.<sup>25</sup> Further, the skeletal remains showed no identifiable traumas, abnormal changes or wear and tear, which indicate that the individual did not carry out heavy labour. Other determinations of the skeleton's age attributes and preserved hair suggest that the individual was 40–50 years old and had dark brown hair. Finally, <sup>13</sup>C values indicate a predominantly marine diet, which suggests a person of local, or at least coastal, origin.<sup>26</sup>

Since 1986, several samples from the grave have been AMS-dated.<sup>27</sup> All the resulting dates are older than the age suggested by Gjessing (Tab 1). With the exception of the first date of the carpet (Tab 1, Ua-43), these indicate that the burial occurred between the late 9th and early 13th century (calibrated 2-sigma). In agreement with Dan Løvliid's evaluation, four dates, those of the tunic and a textile fragment of possible shirtsleeve (Tab 1, TUA-7754 and TUA-7984), and particularly the new (second) dating of the carpet (Tab 1, Ua-11037) and the reindeer pelt (Tab 1, TUA-7755) seem most reliable.<sup>28</sup> The calibration curves of the tunic and possible shirtsleeve peak in the 12th and early 13th century, as well as in the second half of the 11th century, while those of the carpet and reindeer pelt show peaks in the late 10th and first half of the 11th century (Fig 4). It is therefore reasonable to believe that the carpet and the reindeer pelt were in use for a longer period than the costume, implying that the dates of the tunic and the possible shirtsleeve are closest to the date of the burial itself. In order to substantiate a more precise dating, all dates (except Tab 1, Ua-43) have been tested statistically with the R-combine function in OxCal v4.4.4, as a means to highlight differences and overlaps.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>20</sup> The bi-conical button measures 12–13 mm in diameter and 7 mm in thickness, while the band rings measure 5–6 mm in diameter and 1–3 mm in thickness, cf Løvliid 2009.

<sup>21</sup> Gjessing 1938; Vedeler 2007; Løvliid 2009.

<sup>22</sup> Tin 87.8–98.2% and lead 1.1–10.9%, cf Svestad 2017.

<sup>23</sup> Sellevold 1987; Berit Sellevold pers comm; Holck 1988.

<sup>24</sup> In comparison, Gjessing estimated the height as 1.60 m based on tunic and trousers.

<sup>25</sup> Sellevold 1987; cf Holck 1988.

<sup>26</sup> Holck 1988.

<sup>27</sup> Cf Holck 1988; Nockert and Possnert 2002; Løvliid 2009.

<sup>28</sup> Løvliid 2009, 150.

<sup>29</sup> The first radiocarbon date for the Skjoldehamn find, Ua-43, taken from the carpet, deviates significantly from the second date of the carpet, which better corresponds with the rest of the radiocarbon dates. As discussed by Løvliid (2009, 150) this strongly suggests that Ua-43 is incorrect.

TABLE 1  
Radiocarbon dates of textile fabrics and other remains from the Skjoldehamn grave.\*

Lab code	Sample material	Lab age BP	$\delta^{13}C$	Calibrated 1-sigma	Calibrated 2-sigma
Ua-43	Sheep's wool carpet	740 ± 80	N/A	AD 1216–1387	AD 1054–1402
Ua-311	Human bone	930 ± 30	N/A	AD 1044–1160	AD 1032–1202
Ua-11037	Sheep's wool carpet (new dating)	1035 ± 50	-24.3	AD 898–1118	AD 890–1155
TUa-7754	Sheep's wool tunic	889 ± 38	-25.5	AD 1050–1218	AD 1038–1224
TUa-7755	Reindeer hair	1034 ± 39	-14.6	AD 906–1038	AD 895–1150
TUa-7984	Textile fragment (sheep's wool) of possible shirtsleeve	958 ± 33	-26.1	AD 1034–1152	AD 1023–1162

\*All dates have been corrected for marine reservoir effect.

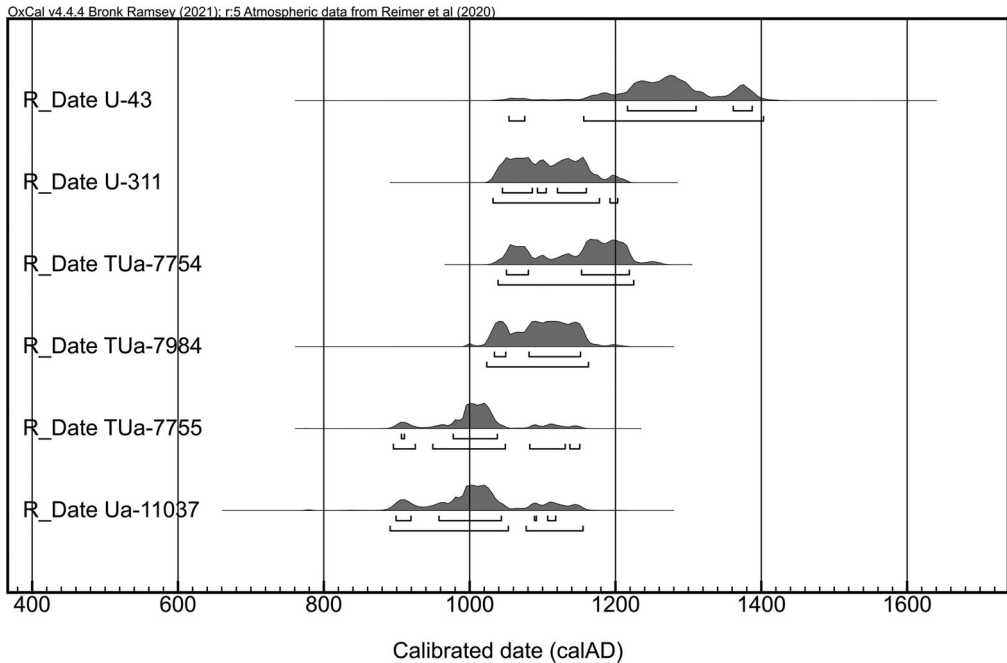


FIG 4  
Radiocarbon date calibration of the Skjoldehamn grave: dates of the carpet (Ua-43 and Ua-11037), human remains (Ua-311), possible shirtsleeve (TUa-7984), tunic (TUa-7754), and reindeer pelt (TUa-7755). Illustration produced by B Hood.



This testing has demonstrated significant differences, suggesting two chronological events. The first event is based on a complete overlap between the dates of the carpet (Tab 1, Ua-11037) and reindeer pelt (Tab 1, TUa-7755), while the second event is based on a significant overlap between the dates of human bone, the tunic, and the possible shirtsleeve (Tab 1, Ua-311, TUa-7754 and TUa-7984).<sup>30</sup> The test gives a clue to the temporal gap between these events, since the date of the possible shirtsleeve overlaps significantly with the first event suggesting that they were close in time. This may find support in Løvlid's costume analysis, which demonstrates limited wear and tear of the carpet, thus pointing to a short period of use and an age close to that of the costume.<sup>31</sup> Corresponding to these indications, it seems unlikely that the carpet and reindeer pelt were used for much longer than a generation.

In conclusion, it is probable that the burial took place in the 11th century. While this compares to the date argued by Løvlid, other dates should not be excluded, of which the first half of the 12th century appears most relevant.<sup>32</sup> We also have to take into account uncertainties with corrections for the marine reservoir effect which, hypothetically, could result in a later date than suggested.<sup>33</sup> However, all dates considered, the dating of the find boils down to the age difference between the carpet and reindeer pelt on the one hand and the tunic and the possible shirtsleeve on the other. As noted, it is reasonable to assume that the dates of the latter are closer in time to the burial than those of the former, which points to the second half of the 11th century as the most likely date for the interment.

### CULTURAL SETTING

Understanding the Skjoldehamn grave requires a brief introduction to the past dualistic landscape of Arctic Norway — that is, the Old Norse/Norwegian and Sámi landscapes. As a precondition, we must acknowledge the political dimensions of earlier research. To be brief, in the latter half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, Fennoscandian archaeology was strongly influenced by nationalistic, social-Darwinian and racial-biological currents in which the Sámi were designated a culturally inferior race of likely recent origin in Fennoscandia. Accordingly, cultural remains found in Norway from the Iron Age and medieval period were, with few exceptions, seen as representative of Old Norse or Norwegian heritage, while any possible Sámi affiliations were unexplored, and the Sámi past in general was considered a subject of ethnography.<sup>34</sup> The identification and investigation of Sámi cultural remains from the Iron Age and medieval period did not become a significant research topic until the 1970s. Since then, Fennoscandian archaeology has dramatically changed with regard to knowledge of Sámi cultural remains and their distribution, as well as

<sup>30</sup> The result  $T = 10.361$  is slightly higher than the critical value  $T = 9.5$ . The results  $T = 0.0$  and  $T = 1.9$  are lower than the critical value  $T = 3.8$ .

<sup>31</sup> Løvlid 2009, 151. It is hard to imagine that reindeer pelts would last for long since they are particularly vulnerable to exuviation.

<sup>32</sup> Løvlid 2009, 151–2.

<sup>33</sup> For discussion of dating, see Løvlid 2009, 147–52.

<sup>34</sup> Eg Odner 1983; Schanche and Olsen 1983; Zachrisson et al 1997; Schanche 2000; Hansen and Olsen 2004.

questions of Sámi ethnogenesis and interaction with their neighbours or other peoples.<sup>35</sup>

According to current knowledge, archaeological sites for both groups date to the latter half of the first millennium BC. The northern Old Norse settlement area in Norway was principally located in the outer coastal areas between the Trondheim fjord (in Trøndelag county) and the border between the former Troms and Finnmark counties, which corresponds to the region of *Hálogaland* in Old Norse written sources; Sámi settlements were found mainly to the north and east of this region and in interior areas.<sup>36</sup> Recent archaeological research suggests that boundaries were less fixed than hitherto known.<sup>37</sup> Boundaries were also blurred in the Vesterålen region, traditionally perceived as an Old Norse or Norwegian settlement area and referred to as *Omð* in the Old Norse sources.<sup>38</sup> The Sámi land extended south, far beyond the Arctic region in the Viking period and the Early Middle Ages, corresponding to *Finnmørk* in the Old Norse written sources (Fig 5). *Finnmørk* (ie the land of the Sámi) thus intersected with non-Sámi settlement areas in interior southern Norway and southern Sweden.<sup>39</sup>

Both written sources and the archaeological record, in particular, indicate a Sámi presence in the Vesterålen region prior to the Middle Ages, but apparently primarily in inner fjords and the interiors of large islands.<sup>40</sup> However, a find of asbestos-tempered Kjelmøy ceramics (a Sámi practice dated 900 BC–AD 300) in the NW part of Andøya Island indicates an early Sámi presence on the outer coast.<sup>41</sup> It may relate to early interactions between the two groups, which nevertheless seem to have increased over the course of the Iron Age, and particularly the Viking period and the Early Middle Ages. This interaction probably implied exchange of goods and services, as well as alliances and inter-ethnic marriages; the latter, for instance, may be indicated by female Old Norse graves with furnishings associated with the Sámi.<sup>42</sup>

## GRAVES IN COMPARISON

Normally, differences in location, morphology, body treatment, and funerary objects separate Old Norse graves from Sámi graves. The former generally date from the pre-Roman Iron-Age period to the mid-11th century AD, and mostly comprise prominently placed stone-constructed burial mounds (ie cairns).<sup>43</sup> From the

<sup>35</sup> Eg Gjessing 1939; Simonsen 1967; Zachrisson and Iregren 1974; Zachrisson 1976; 1984; Carpelan 1979; Storli 1991; 1994; Mulk 1994; Taavitsainen 1998; Schanche 2000; Price 2019; Solli 2002; Hedman 2003; Solberg 2003; Hansen and Olsen 2004; 2014; Bergstøl 2008; Hedeager 2011; Olsen, Urbańczyk and Amundsen 2011.

<sup>36</sup> Mainland Arctic Norway consists of Troms and Finnmark and Nordland counties.

<sup>37</sup> Eg Hansen and Olsen 2014.

<sup>38</sup> Traditionally, Andøya Island equates to the Old Norse region of *Omð*, but there has been much discussion that it may have covered a larger area in northern *Hálogaland*, which includes the Vesterålen region (see eg Bertelsen 2014; Guttormsen 1994, 84).

<sup>39</sup> Eg Mundal 1996; Zachrisson et al 1997; Taavitsainen 2003; Olsen 2010; Hansen and Olsen 2014; Bergstøl 2008; Bergstøl and Reitan 2008; Gjerde 2010; 2014.

<sup>40</sup> Eg Bertelsen 1985; Guttormsen 1994; Skandfer 1997; Borgos 2020.

<sup>41</sup> Jørgensen and Olsen 1988; Hansen and Olsen 2014, 40–5.

<sup>42</sup> Cf Storli 1991; Olsen 2010.

<sup>43</sup> Eg Sjøvold 1962; 1974; Holand 1989.

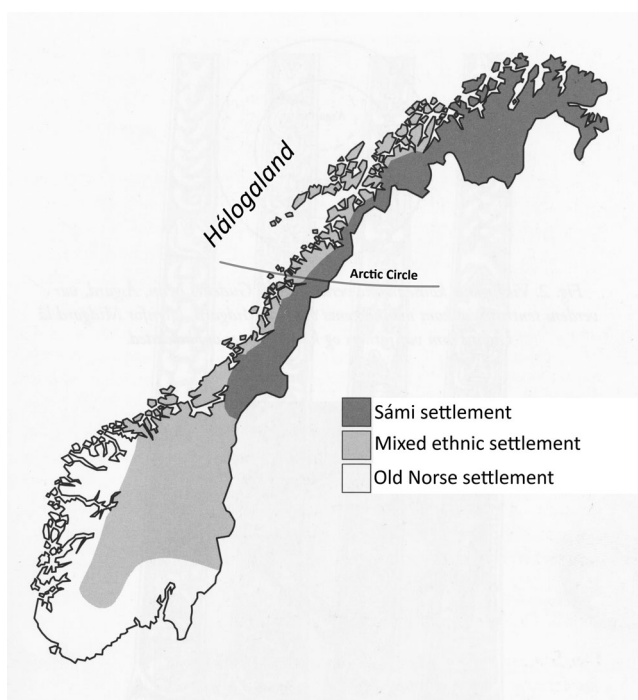


FIG 5

The extension of Sámi and Old Norse settlement in the Viking Age and the Early Middle Ages according to written and archaeological sources. *Illustration (slightly modified) from B Solli 2002.*

Viking period, male graves contain weapons and tools while female graves contain jewellery and housewares, but there are gender variations and status differences. Collectively, funerary objects demonstrate wide contacts between *Hålogaland* and the Continent, the British Isles, and Eastern Europe, as well as the Old Norse *Finnmørk* and other Fennoscandian regions.

Sámi burial customs date from 900 BC to AD 1600/1700 and thus constitute one of the longest surviving burial traditions in Europe. While preferences for stone constructions are common features of both Old Norse and Sámi burial customs, Sámi graves were generally hidden in the landscape.<sup>44</sup> Dry-walled stone chambers in slab-shaped beach rocks, as well as funerals in cavities under stone blocks are typical Sámi features, but cairns, shallow inhumation graves and other grave types also occur. Unique burial features include the shrouding or winding of the corpse in birch bark sewn with reindeer-sinew thread, and/or placement in a *pulka* (North Sámi: *geres*, Sámi reindeer sleigh), the latter only known for certain since the Viking period. From the High Middle Ages, the use of birch bark evolved and was employed as a cover above or a groundsheet beneath the corpse, which was alternately shrouded in reindeer skin, bearskin, and clothing/textiles. Jewellery, particularly of Finnish, Karelian and East-Baltic origin, appears in graves from the Viking period to the Late Middle Ages, which indicates the Sámi's close contact with these regions. In

<sup>44</sup> Schanche 2000; cf Manker 1961; Zachrisson et al 1997; Svestad 2011; Hansen and Olsen 2014.

general, Sámi graves comprise male, female and child burials with few indications of social status differentiation, although grave furnishing varied between genders in the late Iron Age and Early Middle Ages.<sup>45</sup>

It is probably not surprising that Sámi bog-burials are scarcely known, given their preference for rocky and dry burial places. Conversely, there are several Old Norse graves near or in bogs in Arctic Norway, although they are somewhat atypical (discussed further below). It is notable that six burial mounds are recorded on the outskirts of the bog surrounding the Skjoldehamn grave.<sup>46</sup> One of these is located on a minor low rock in the midst of the bog, 50 m south of the grave (Fig 6). Although none of the burial mounds are dated, their proximity indicates that the placing of the Skjoldehamn grave may have been intentional. Moreover, the placement of the Skjoldehamn grave is not surprising given that bogs are a dominant landscape element on Andøya Island and in the Vesterålen region, and its location is coherent with the notion of bogs as boundless and liminal burial places.<sup>47</sup>

At Skogøya Island (Nordland, Norway), one of the islands close to Andøya Island and about 25 km from Skjoldehamn, is the site of the Øksnes boat-grave (dated AD 888–994), which is of particular interest with regard to bog-burials and the Skjoldehamn grave.<sup>48</sup> The grave comprises a burial mound placed in a shallow bog. The grave was also examined by Gutorm Gjessing, who reported that no human remains were preserved. However, among the finds were an axe of Old Norse Viking-Age type, animal hair and, notably, amounts of birch bark preserved under the boat, indicating it may have originally covered the entire boat.<sup>49</sup> A recent study by Carla Dove and Stephen Wickler demonstrated that the animal hair, probably bovine, derived from an animal skin that had most likely served as a shroud for the grave's occupant.<sup>50</sup> Gjessing concluded that the form of the burial — a mound with boat — evidenced Old Norse burial customs, even though the boat's seam was sewn, as often seen in the Sámi tradition.<sup>51</sup> In contrast to Gjessing, Dove and Wickler point to the grave's ambiguity, with its mixture of Sámi and Norse features, such as the burial mound and boat funeral versus use of birch bark and shrouding of the corpse. Whether sewing was an exclusively Sámi technique for boat building in the period is disputed, but the construction of the Øksnes boat may add to the mixed character of the grave, in which the placement in a bog, shrouding, and use of birch bark recall features of the Skjoldehamn grave.<sup>52</sup>

As noted, birch bark is a particular feature associated with Sámi burial customs. It does also appear in typical Old Norse graves, although primarily these date to the

<sup>45</sup> Schanche 2000, 176–226.

<sup>46</sup> Cf Gjessing 1937.

<sup>47</sup> Cf Sanders 2009, 7; Nordeide and Thun 2013, 191. The etymologist Finn Myrvang's 1994 interpretation of 'Omð' argues that it may originate from the North Sámi *opmu*, which means 'mud hole' and/or the similar *hopmú* in Lule Sámi, which means 'swamp'; both allude to characteristics of bogs. The North Sámi region covers the northernmost Arctic areas of Norway, Sweden and Finland, and borders, among other areas, the Lule Sámi region south of the Vesterålen region

<sup>48</sup> Dove and Wickler 2016.

<sup>49</sup> Gjessing 1941, 41.

<sup>50</sup> Dove and Wickler 2016, 30.

<sup>51</sup> Gjessing 1941, 43. The sewing-thread at first believed to be animal sinew is, according to analysis, pine-root binding, cf Pedersen 2002, 79–80.

<sup>52</sup> A recent study (Lund 2018, 74; cf Wickler 2010) suggests that the joining method of most Merovingian-period and Viking-Age boats in Arctic Norway combined clench bolts and sewing techniques. This may represent a fusion of Norse and Sámi boat-builder traditions, in contrast to the southern Scandinavian unilateral clench-bolt technique, as seen in well-known Viking ships.



FIG 6

One of the Old Norse burial mounds (centre) adjacent to the Skjoldehamn grave (behind the rock, outcrop upper left) in the bog on the Gavlneset promontory. *Photograph by A Svestad.*

Roman Iron Age and Migration period.<sup>53</sup> In addition to the Øksnes boat-grave, a richly furnished Viking-Age grave (1/1954) on the islet of Hagbartholmen, 90 km further south of Skjoldehamn, is another interesting example in comparison.<sup>54</sup> The grave, which is located in a Roman Iron-Age to Viking-Age cemetery, comprises an unimposing, relatively flat burial mound that contained the remains of an individual in a wooden coffin/small boat, covered with birch bark. There was a similar use of birch bark in a contemporaneous grave (4/1954) at the same site. The sex of the skeleton in this grave is somewhat uncertain, but the finds mostly consist of objects typically associated with the female sex, such as two tortoise brooches, a Gotland-type round gilded bronze brooch and a Baltic-type penannular bronze brooch. In northern Fennoscandia, brooches of eastern origin (ie the Gotland and Baltic types) primarily occur in Sámi contexts dated AD 800–1200. Thus, it is widely accepted that they served as Sámi idioms, but not exclusively so.<sup>55</sup> Conversely, tortoise brooches are generally considered Old Norse-associated items. Based on these premises, grave 1/1954 corresponds to other female graves in Arctic Norway, with blends of ‘Sámi’ and ‘Old Norse’ jewellery interpreted as an indication of exogamy between the groups.<sup>56</sup> Alternatively, the mixed character of the

<sup>53</sup> Shetelig 1912; Sjøvold 1962; Bruun 2007; Lund 2013.

<sup>54</sup> Sjøvold 1974, 64–6; Munch 1993.

<sup>55</sup> Eg Zachrisson 1984; Storli 1991; Schanche 2000; Hansen and Olsen 2014.

<sup>56</sup> Storli 1991; Munch 1993.

grave (the burial mound, birch-bark layer and jewellery of both Sámi and Old Norse affiliation) could be also interpreted as a result of cultural hybridisation.<sup>57</sup> Regardless, the grave's blended nature constitutes an interesting parallel to the Øksnes boat-grave and more generally also the Skjoldehamn grave.

Although the majority of pagan graves in Arctic Norway contain features that are more typically associated with either Old Norse or Sámi burial customs, the Øksnes boat-grave and Hagbartholmen grave 1/1954 are only two of several pagan Old Norse burials of mixed character scattered along the coast. Their location, orientation, and treatment of the body, as well as the funerary objects, demonstrate similarities with both pagan Old Norse and Sami burial customs; a mixed character resembling that of the Skjoldehamn grave. Interestingly, birch bark is a common link, and, as will be shown, one which continued into the High Middle Ages.

Further comparators to the Skjoldehamn grave are several shallow inhumation graves dating from the late Viking Age to the Late Middle Ages scattered around the interior borderland between Norway and Sweden, and which seem to represent transitional pagan-Christian burials. Their overall impression is pagan, but Christian influences may be seen in the use of inhumation, and/or a wooden coffin, and sometimes Christian symbols among the funerary objects. The Vivalen cemetery in Härjedalen — a medieval province of Norway, though now in mid-Sweden — is a conspicuous example, comprising birch-bark shrouded bodies in wooden coffins and associated funerary objects. There are disputes about their ethnic affiliation; they were initially interpreted as Swedish (Old Norse), but today are generally considered Sámi.<sup>58</sup>

Some 80 km from Skjoldehamn, at Nordland, in the inner region of the Ofoten fjord in Arctic Norway, similar transitional shallow burials with wooden coffins are recorded at the promontories of Millerjordnes and Ankenes (both in the vicinity of Narvik city). The funerary objects, for instance, are Hanseatic bronze bowls, which are generally given a Christian affiliation.<sup>59</sup> As with the Vivalen graves, the ethnic affiliation of these graves is disputed, either interpreted as Old Norse, Sámi or a hybrid of both.<sup>60</sup>

Some distance from these contexts, in Åbo/Turku (south-western Finland), similar shallow inhumations appear at the cemetery of Kirkkomäki, dated c AD 1000–1200.<sup>61</sup> Grave 1, dated to the final decades of the 11th century and containing the corpse of a fully dressed woman, is particularly interesting. Her clothing included headgear and shoes, and she was wrapped in a wool blanket and had been placed on a birch-bark layer in a shallow pit in the ground, and then covered with yet another layer of birch bark.

The grave is remarkably similar to the Skjoldehamn grave, but the cultural context is evidently different. The burial may, however, align with the medieval Lapp culture of southern Finland, which linguistic evidence indicates may also be Sámi people, although this interpretation is contested.<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, the mixed or

<sup>57</sup> Bruun 2007, 73–6, 80–3.

<sup>58</sup> Zachrisson et al 1997, 57–71.

<sup>59</sup> Eg Müller 1998.

<sup>60</sup> Nicolaissen 1912; 1913; Andersen 2002; Bruun 2007; Svestad 2017; Nordkild 2020.

<sup>61</sup> Riikonen 1999.

<sup>62</sup> Itkonen 1948; Aikio 2012; for a different view, see eg Kumpulainen et al 2012.

transitional character of Kirkkomäki Grave 1 resembles the above-mentioned inhumation graves from Narvik and Vivalen, and probably indicates Christian influence, as seen in the Skjoldehamn grave. The placing of the Skjoldehamn grave in a bog may be considered a significant difference, although it is a form of inhumation. Located in the west of the country, Guddal old churchyard is one of the earliest Christian cemeteries in Norway and is dated to the 11th–14th centuries AD. It is characterised by the exclusive use of the bog burial form, and represents an entirely heterogeneous transitional sphere.<sup>63</sup>

The outline given above raises questions about whether the Skjoldehamn grave should be considered a traditional pagan burial or a transitional and potentially Christian burial. Any response requires a review of Christianisation and early Christian graves in Arctic Norway. While there are indications of Christianised Sámi communities in Fennoscandia in the Middle Ages, the Christianisation of the Sámi is generally a later occurrence, dated AD 1550–1750.<sup>64</sup> Conversely, the Christianisation of the Háleygir, the Old Norse people of *Hálogaland*, took place far earlier. In a recent analysis based on archaeological material from selected areas, including graves, Sæbjørg Walaker Nordeide argues that the process took place peacefully and quickly in Norway, although as a whole it may have stretched over two centuries, from the late 9th century AD to the end of the 11th.<sup>65</sup> It is difficult to assess the relevance of Walaker's analysis and conclusion in relation to Arctic Norway because it relies only on empirical data from southern Norway. In contrast, certain aspects of both the written and the archaeological record indicate that Christianisation was more complex and longer lasting in Arctic Norway than in other regions, although research on this topic is limited.<sup>66</sup>

It is well known from Old Norse written sources, such as the Norwegian and Icelandic sagas, that the Háleygir put up the strongest and longest resistance against Christianity.<sup>67</sup> This obstinacy is supported by the archaeological record, which generally indicates a late establishment of the church in the region; that is, in the 12th and 13th centuries AD. In northern Norway, the late chronology of pagan burial mounds, combined with the absence of stone crosses (typical of western Norway), ring-crosses (typical of eastern Norway) and cross slabs (only one possible find in northern Norway) adds to the picture. However, the use of these monuments as evidence of early Christianisation is problematic in itself, and they are otherwise lacking from other parts of Fennoscandia (stone crosses in particular).<sup>68</sup> The transition to Christian burial practice also seems to vary in function and chronology between various Fennoscandian regions, creating a disjointed picture overall.<sup>69</sup> As an example, the co-existence of Christian rune stones and pagan burials in Svealand (Sweden proper) indicates that pagans and Christians lived alongside each other until the 12th

<sup>63</sup> Nordeide and Thun 2013.

<sup>64</sup> Hansen and Olsen 2014. For early attempts at Christianisation, see Aronsson 2013; Mundal 2012; Rasmussen 2016.

<sup>65</sup> Nordeide 2011b, 319–26; for a somewhat similar view, see Solberg 2003 and Sawyer and Sawyer 2003.

<sup>66</sup> See eg Trædal 2008; Nordeide 2011a, 130; Solberg 2003, 315–7.

<sup>67</sup> Cf Hansen and Olsen 2014.

<sup>68</sup> Sjøvold 1974, 341–4; Gräslund 2001; Solberg 2003, 315–7; Trædal 2008; Nordeide 2011a, 130; Bertelsen 1998.

<sup>69</sup> Eg Edgren and Törnblom 1993; Gräslund 2001; Sawyer and Sawyer 2003; Theliander 2005; 2010; Lund 2013.

century AD, while burial customs in Västergötland (SW Gothland, part of SW Sweden) indicate a swift Christianisation during the mid-10th century AD.<sup>70</sup> In Arctic Norway, pagan burial customs seem to endure well into the 11th century AD, and sometimes even later, as is evident at the late 13th-century burial mound or cenotaph at the Haugnesodden promontory on Arnøya Island in Troms and Finnmark county. This is notable for its location in the borderland between the Háleygir of *Hálogaland* and the Sámi of *Finnmørk*.<sup>71</sup>

In Arctic Norway, the picture is just as heterogeneous. In the saga of Ólaf Tryggvason in *Heimskringla* (the history of the kings of Norway), Snorri (Sturluson) relates how the king attempted to Christianise the people of *Hálogaland*. He had success in several places, including through the use of force. Of particular interest, the saga mentions that King Ólaf 'sailed all the way north to Omð, where all the people accepted Christianity.'<sup>72</sup> According to the saga chronology, this occurred in the 990s, but the usual proviso is necessary since the saga was written long after the events happened, and from a Christian vantage point. Nevertheless, scattered 'Christian' finds from the Viking period and the Early Middle Ages indicate early Christian influences in Arctic Norway, including a possible crozier, cross pendants, crucifixes, and encolpia (small, medallion-like icons).<sup>73</sup> There is more irrefutable evidence on Hadseløya Island in the Vesterålen region, namely the cemetery at Haug, apparently one of Norway's oldest Christian cemeteries, dated AD 950–1250.

The Haug cemetery probably contains several hundred graves, as estimated from the density of graves in the investigated areas, and thus likely represents a regional burial facility.<sup>74</sup> As such, it may corroborate Ólaf Tryggvason's Christianisation of *Omð*, or parts of it. Human and non-human remains were recorded from c 40 burials, which revealed heterogeneous burials in wooden coffins somewhat randomly oriented and with varying body positions, such as extended prone, flexed, and crouched, which are unusual in early Christian cemeteries (Fig 7).<sup>75</sup> Of particular interest is a plank carved in the transitional Urnes Style and dated to the middle of the 11th century, which saw secondary use as a coffin lid (Fig 8).<sup>76</sup> Another feature somewhat unusual in early Christian inhumations is the presence of funerary objects in several graves, such as an iron knife or an arrowhead, which compares to the simple furnishing of the Skjoldehamn grave, as well as early Christian graves elsewhere in Fennoscandia.<sup>77</sup> However, birch wands found in three graves comply with the occasional Christian mortuary practice of placing similar wooden objects (so-called burial rods) in churchyard graves from the

<sup>70</sup> Sawyer and Sawyer 2003, 154; Theliander 2005; 2010, 189–90.

<sup>71</sup> Nilsen 2014, 202–3.

<sup>72</sup> Sturluson, *Heimskringla* — *History of the Kings of Norway*, ch 78, 213.

<sup>73</sup> Stæcker 1999; Cruickshank 2002; Spangen 2005.

<sup>74</sup> Sandmo 1990; Holand 1991.

<sup>75</sup> Sandmo 1990; Holand 1991; Munch and Fuglesang 1991; Sellevold 1996; cf Theliander 2005; Nordeide 2011b.

<sup>76</sup> It is suggested that the plank (measuring 1.63 m in length, 0.2–0.27 m in width, and 25–32 mm in thickness) originally belonged to an item of luxury furniture or an ecclesiastical building.

<sup>77</sup> Eg Edgren and Törnblom 1993, 250; Theliander 2010, 187; Nordeide 2011b.





FIG 7

Grave A, Haug cemetery excavation (1987). Revealed was an almost complete skeleton of a woman aged 50–70 years old, placed in a flexed position in a NW/SE oriented birch-bark lined wooden coffin dated AD 985–1165. *Photograph by A Svestad.*

early 11th century onwards in Scandinavia and Britain, as well as elsewhere in northwestern Europe.<sup>78</sup> Other features resemble Sámi burial customs. Two of the coffins (Graves A and 2) were lined with birch bark on the inside, and one of them, from the northern, somewhat boggy part of the cemetery, likely utilised it on the outside as well. Birch bark was also recovered from another grave, and a *pulka*-like container was used instead of a coffin in yet another.

<sup>78</sup> Eg Theliander 2005; Jonsson 2009, 111–22; while burial rods are most commonly made of hazel in Scandinavia, and thus designated ‘hazel wands’, hazel does not grow naturally in the Vesterålen region and above 68° N, which apparently explains the use of birch.

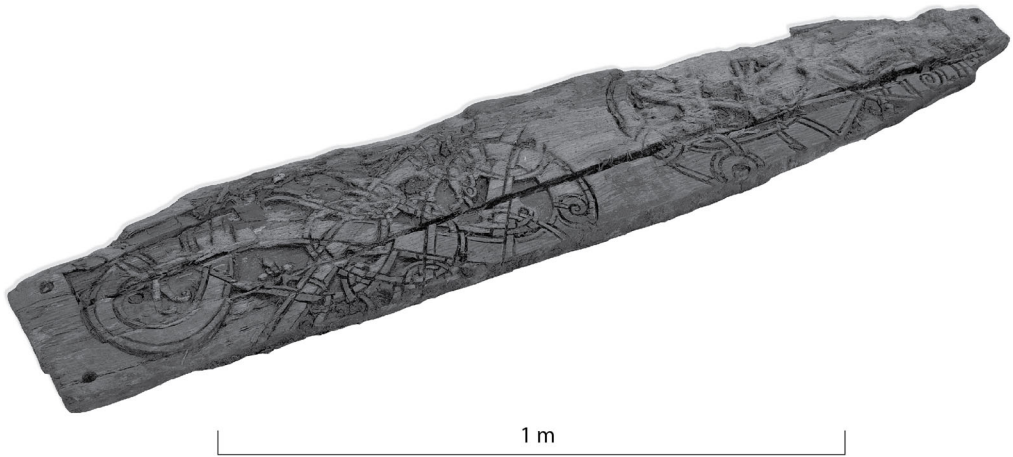


FIG 8

Details of the Urnes-style plank. The pine-made plank surfaced, along with other coffin remains, during digging of a drainage ditch in the northern part of the Haug cemetery in 1989. © Tromsø Museum.

The Haug cemetery indicates that W/E grave orientations and a uniform extended-supine positioning of the body are unreliable Christian burial criteria in the region. On the other hand, N/S grave orientation is equally unreliable as a criterion of pagan Old Norse and pagan Sámi burials. Instead, these seem influenced by topographical and local conditions, although N/S orientation predominates in the Sámi burial tradition. Local conditions also account for variable body positions in pagan burials, but Old Norse pagan graves primarily exhibit flexed positions.<sup>79</sup>

In summary, the evidence from the Haug cemetery indicates a mixed early Christian burial practice probably influenced by both pagan Old Norse and pagan Sámi burial customs. In comparison, the blend of features evident in the Skjoldehamn grave, as well as the transitional graves discussed above, may reflect Christian influences. Although the Skjoldehamn grave exhibits hybrid characteristics similar to those in the cemetery at Haug, its location near a pagan Old Norse burial ground suggests it was not likely to have been a Christian burial.

### ATTRIBUTES OF THE COSTUME

The Skjoldehamn costume, or parts of it, have been subject to several investigations over the years.<sup>80</sup> There seems to be consensus that the costume comprises different cultural traits associated with both Scandinavian/Nordic and Sámi costume traditions, although Sámi costumes older than the 16th or 17th century AD are scarcely known.<sup>81</sup> The tunic, for instance, resembles the rectangular basic cut of tunics or short

<sup>79</sup> Cf Manker 1961; Sjøvold 1962; 1974; Storå 1971; Kleppe 1977; Holand 1989; Schanche 2000; Svestad 2011; 2013.

<sup>80</sup> Eg Nockert and Possnert 2002; Vedeler 2007; Løvlid 2009; 2011.

<sup>81</sup> Vedeler 2007, 89; Løvlid 2009, 164–78, 184–5; for other analyses of Nordic costume traditions, see eg Bender Jørgensen 1986; Larsson 2007; Mannering 2016.



FIG 9

The Skjoldehamn tunic. Waist measurement estimated at c 0.93–0.95 m and length c 1.04–1.08 m. Of note are the multicolour decorations on the right wristband and the V-shaped neck opening. *Photograph by M Karlstad. © Tromsø Museum.*

kirtles known from southern Norway, southern Sweden and Denmark in the Middle Ages (Fig 9).<sup>82</sup> On the other hand, the decorative elements (woven bands, patterns, embroideries, braids etc) and colour combinations (especially red, green, yellow) which unite the garments indicate a distinct ethnic and possibly Sámi affiliation.<sup>83</sup> The short kirtle in combination with trousers was probably considered masculine clothing in the Middle Ages (Fig 10).<sup>84</sup> Accordingly, if the person was a woman she was probably dressed in men's clothes, as remarked by Marianne Vedeler.<sup>85</sup> We do not know whether this dress code was only applicable to Old Norse peoples (or Scandinavians), but as suggested it may indicate a transgendered identity.<sup>86</sup> Interestingly, Løvlid's reconstruction of the woollen socks of the Skjoldehamn costume corresponding to shoe size 3 1/2 (Euro 37) may support the biological indication of a woman.<sup>87</sup> Socks are otherwise not considered part of Sámi clothing, but research is scant.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>82</sup> Løvlid 2011 argues for affinities between the Skjoldehamn tunic and the Sámi tunic tradition, especially the Lule Sámi tunic, but emphasises that further investigations are required. Regarding measurements of the Skjoldehamn tunic, see Gjessing 1938, 44; Løvlid 2009, 60–1.

<sup>83</sup> Vedeler 2007, 81–2; cf Løvlid 2009.

<sup>84</sup> For trouser measurements, see Gjessing 1938, 49; Løvlid 2009, 107.

<sup>85</sup> Vedeler 2007, 88.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Løvlid 2009, 173.

<sup>88</sup> Gjessing 1938; Gjessing and Gjessing 1944; Kirkinen et al 2017.

Nevertheless, Vedeler refers to a possible Sámi parallel at the above-mentioned cemetery of Vivallen. A richly furnished grave (no 9), skeletally determined as probably male, contained several female objects in addition to male objects, such as a necklace of 36 pearls, a silver brooch, a needle case, and a linen tunic similar to those found in female graves at the Swedish Birka cemetery of the Viking period.<sup>89</sup> Another skeletally determined male grave at Vivallen also contained mixed-gender objects.

With regard to other ethnically-associated features, the shoe fragments, ankle bands and metal ornaments are of particular interest.<sup>90</sup> The Skjoldehamn shoes, with symmetrical, bipartite and front-pointed soles and the use of sinew thread in their construction, have no known parallels in medieval Norwegian shoe material (see Fig 3).<sup>91</sup> Sámi shoes, known as *čázet* (summer shoes) and *goikket* (winter shoes) in early ethnographic literature (17th century), have a pointed front with no difference between right and left shoes; the shape and symmetry of the Skjoldehamn shoes resemble this form. Sámi shoe-making primarily utilised reindeer skin, but the leather of the Skjoldehamn shoes appears bovine (cow or calf).<sup>92</sup> However, coastal Sámi traditionally used cow skin, sometimes in combination with reindeer skin, for the all-round *čázet*, but without bipartite soles.<sup>93</sup> Interestingly, the use of sinew-thread (also used for fastening the tin-button on the shirt) is apparently known in Sámi tradition from the mid-6th century AD.<sup>94</sup> In *De Bello Gothico*, the Byzantine historian Procopius notes that the Sámi (*Scrithiphini*) ‘clothe themselves in their skins, and since they have neither flax nor any implement with which to sew, they fasten these skins together by the sinews of the animals [...]’.<sup>95</sup> Although caution is necessary, this information is potentially enlightening.

As noted by Løvlid, it seems relatively clear that ankle bands were used as lashing between trousers and shoes, corresponding to the use of *vuotta* (ankle bands) in the Sámi footwear tradition (see Fig 3).<sup>96</sup> Corrosion imprints, most likely from tin rings on the lower part of trouser legs, seem to verify this (Figs 10 and 11). At first, the small tin rings on the ankle band (as well as on the bands around the carpet) suggest associations with the tin applications on costumes, textiles and cloth accessories unique to Sámi *duodji* (craft), which have been known from ethnographic sources since the 17th century AD.<sup>97</sup> Research on the origin of Fennoscandian tin-craft is limited, but two Icelandic sagas from the 13th century AD contain interesting passages on the issue. The *Kormáks saga* (the Saga of Cormak the Skald) explicitly mentions the Norwegian tinsmith (*tindrátar*) Thorvald Eysteinnsson, who descends from Ál (current Åla) in western Norway. The *Vatnsdæla saga* (the Saga of the People of Vatnsdal) is more implicit, in which the

<sup>89</sup> Zachrisson et al 1997, 78, 82, 148–9; according to ethnographic sources from the 19th and early 20th century trousers are known to be used by Sámi women and needle cases by Sámi men, cf Gjessing and Gjessing 1940, 31, 63.

<sup>90</sup> As regards footwear, Løvlid’s MA investigation and interpretation must be credited (2009), although it relies significantly on expert analysis by Hanna Lukesova, Arne Larsen and Ole-Magne Nøttveit.

<sup>91</sup> Løvlid 2009, 131–5, 173–5; cf Lind 1991.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Gjessing and Gjessing 1940, 19–37, 42.

<sup>94</sup> Løvlid 2009, 99.

<sup>95</sup> Procopius, *History of the Wars*, Book 6, ch 15, 419, in Dewing; cf Keyland 1920. For discussion of Sámi ethnonyms, see Hansen and Olsen 2014, 35–8.

<sup>96</sup> Løvlid 2009, 117–22, 140–2, 178–9; cf Gjessing 1938.

<sup>97</sup> Keyland 1920; Serning 1953; Gjessing and Gjessing 1940; Dunfeld 2000.



FIG 10

The Skjoldehamn trousers. Trouser length estimated at c. 1.0–1.05 m and waist measurement estimated at c. 1.30–1.40 m. Note the multicoloured decorations on the trouser's lower legs (identical to the tunic's wristband) and lateral seams, as well as grey tin-ring imprints on lower legs (esp left leg). *Photograph by M Karlstad. © Tromsø Museum.*

Háleygir Ingimundur Thorsteinsson promises butter and tin to three North Sámi if they would reclaim (through a 'shamanistic' journey) the silver amulet that the Sámi sorceress (*volva*) misplaced in Iceland.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>98</sup> *Kormáks saga*, ch 17; *Vatnsdæla saga*, ch 12.



FIG 11

Details of Ankle Band 1. Note both the band's geometric pattern and the attached tin rings which seem somewhat haphazardly applied in clusters to the apparent upper rope end of the band. *Photograph by A Svestad.*

Even though the existence of Norwegian tin-craft is indicated, tin objects are, to my knowledge, rarely known from Old Norse contexts from the Viking period to the High Middle Ages.<sup>99</sup> On the other hand, numerous locally made objects of tin or tin-lead appear in Sámi metal deposits and votive sites such as Unna Saiva (Gällivare, Sweden), Gråträsk and Mörträsk (both Norrbotten, Sweden), all dated c AD 1000–1350. These objects consist of pendants, spirals, buttons, rings, and the like, of which certain specimens closely resemble the tin-button and tin rings of the Skjoldehamn costume.<sup>100</sup> Similar tin rings and other minor tin objects are also recorded in graves at the Vivalen cemetery.<sup>101</sup> Thus, it seems that tin formed part of the Sámi metal-craft tradition from the Viking period onwards.

Tin decorations in Sámi *duodji* probably connect to this tradition, although caution is warranted due to the time-gap. Nevertheless, Sámi metal-craft probably dates further back in time and was probably influenced by traditions in southern Finland, Karelia and the Baltics. Numerous metal objects (primarily bronze jewellery) are recorded from the aforementioned Sámi metal deposits and offering sites in Sweden, as well as in Sámi graves from the period.<sup>102</sup> Finnish and Baltic bronze-decorations on clothing and textiles are particularly interesting, and may have analogies with the tin ring decorations from Skjoldehamn.<sup>103</sup> It is noteworthy that in the Finnish tradition metal decorations on clothing are ascribed a protective, magical function, which resembles the significance

<sup>99</sup> Cf Petersen 1951; Sjøvold 1974.

<sup>100</sup> Serning 1956, 72; Zachrisson 1984, 49.

<sup>101</sup> Cf Zachrisson et al 1997, 64–7.

<sup>102</sup> Eg Serning 1956; Kivikoski 1973; Zachrisson 1984; Storli 1991; Hansen and Olsen 2014; Svestad forthcoming.

<sup>103</sup> Eg Kivikoski 1973; Lehtosalo-Hilander 1984, 60–3; Erä-Esko et al 2000, 45.

of metal in the Sámi tradition.<sup>104</sup> While there are striking similarities between tin objects from unequivocal Sámi contexts and those of the Skjoldehamn costume, we cannot exclude an Old Norse affiliation. Despite this, the use of tin appears more significant in Sámi tradition, particularly in religious practices.<sup>105</sup>

## DISCUSSION

The use of wetlands (bogs, marshes, lakes, rivers etc) in southern Scandinavia (and NW Europe) for depositions or offerings of items such as vessels, metal items, weapons, animals and human corpses for religious, cultic or other purposes is a long tradition that continued into the Middle Ages.<sup>106</sup> Furthermore, various objects, especially metal objects and jewellery, have been deposited or sacrificed for similar purposes in wetlands (particularly lake shores or riverbanks) in Sámi contexts in northern Fennoscandia, although the lack of human remains comprises a major difference.<sup>107</sup> Thus, given that human sacrifices in wetlands are unknown from northern Fennoscandian pagan Old Norse and Sámi customs, the Skjoldehamn grave appears not to be a human sacrifice, but has features clearly indicative of a burial. However, we cannot exclude links to the custom of wetland deposition, to which we briefly return at the end of the discussion.

As discussed above, regular burials in bogs are well known in Old Norse pagan burial customs from the Viking period, but the Skjoldehamn grave differs significantly from the typical stone constructions in the surrounding burial mounds and also from, for instance, the Øksnes boat-grave. The ‘earthen’ character of the grave may thus be a Christian influence, although this is debatable.<sup>108</sup> On the other hand, Sámi bog burials are largely unknown. However, Sámi graves may appear adjacent to Old Norse burials, such as the Sámi-like graves occurring among the Old Norse burial mounds at Hustad in the southern Vesterålen region (Nordland, Norway).<sup>109</sup>

The reindeer pelt may be a Sámi allusion, relevant to the reindeer’s age-old significance in diet and other multiple purposes in Sámi culture, such as sinew-thread for sewing of textiles, shoes and birch-bark shrouding. However, similar finds have not been made in Sámi graves earlier than the transition to the post-medieval period. Shoe fragments, ankle bands, tin decorations, and the shrouding of the body are probably more significant Sámi markers, while continuing to bear in mind the costume’s Nordic or non-Sámi features.<sup>110</sup>

Although certain traits strongly indicate Sámi affiliation, overall, the burial custom of the Skjoldehamn grave appears ambiguous. The blend of Old Norse and Sámi burial features, including aspects such as orientation, body position, furnishing, and proximity to Old Norse burial mounds, rather indicates a transitional hybrid burial. Cultural hybridisation also pertains to graves from other regions of Fennoscandia in both its northern and southern parts, as well as in relation to

<sup>104</sup> Lehtosalo-Hilander 1984; cf Schanche 2000, 268–9.

<sup>105</sup> Cf Serning 1956; Zachrisson 1984; Zachrisson et al 1997.

<sup>106</sup> Eg Monikander 2010; Fredengren 2018.

<sup>107</sup> Eg Zachrisson 1984; Salmi et al 2015.

<sup>108</sup> Eg Gräslund 2008, 639–40; Price 2008, 261; Theliander 2010.

<sup>109</sup> Cf Schanche 2000, 158–9.

<sup>110</sup> Manker 1961, 147–8; Svestad 2011.

changes in religion and cultural landscapes.<sup>111</sup> Before discussing the archaeological features and their context more closely, the concept of cultural hybridity requires further explication.

According to Bhabha, cultural hybridisation ‘gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognisable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation.’<sup>112</sup> Briefly explained, it implies the occurrence of heterogeneity, contradiction, mimicry, and ambivalence between culturally different groups, and most significantly that ‘all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity.’<sup>113</sup> Against this, Jonathan Friedman has argued that Bhabha’s theory is just another version of essentialism, because it presupposes cultural essence in one way or another.<sup>114</sup> Arguing for cultural hybridisation and at the same time rejecting cultural difference, purity and fixed boundaries, is thus a contradiction.<sup>115</sup> While insisting that hybridity is inscribed in each culture, Bhabha does not reject the reality of cultures in terms of difference, but the crucial question is how we are to understand and relate to these differences analytically in archaeological contexts.<sup>116</sup>

As indicated in the introduction, Silliman has raised significant objections to the use of the concept of hybridity in archaeology.<sup>117</sup> In Silliman’s view, archaeological applications disregard ontological dilemmas, such as the degree of difference required for hybridity to arise, whether hybridity is distinguishable from culture change, whether we know that hybridity relates to change rather than continuity, and whether hybridity is a process or product.<sup>118</sup> He argues that to be useful, the concept needs to be firmly contextualised and situated in long-lasting cultural production, and, most importantly, limited to colonial contexts subject to its postcolonial point of departure.

Silliman’s warning against superficial and metaphorical use, reflection on ontology, and emphasis on contextualisation and process are significant arguments relevant to the use of cultural hybridity in discussions of cross-cultural encounters in archaeology. However, as discussed by Jørn Henriksen, Silliman appears too orthodox and narrow, questioning why hybridity should be exclusive to episodes of colonialism and only relevant to long-lasting cultural production.<sup>119</sup> Silliman also pays little attention to what Jan Nederveen Pieterse considers crucial to hybridity, namely that it problematises boundaries.<sup>120</sup> As such, we may perceive hybridity as layered phases of mixing in history (and prehistory), each as a function of prominent boundaries. Hybridity thus applies to every culture, depending on the character of the cross-cultural encounter or inter-ethnic interaction in boundary or heterogenic contexts.<sup>121</sup> When inter-ethnic involvements become significant, they would probably result in a conspicuous blend of features, especially if boundaries and power structures were

<sup>111</sup> See eg Naum 2010; 2012; Andrén 2013; Lund 2013.

<sup>112</sup> Bhabha 1990, 211.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 211; 1994, 56.

<sup>114</sup> Friedman 1997, 82–3.

<sup>115</sup> Cf Nederveen Pieterse 2001, 226.

<sup>116</sup> Acheraïou 2011, 92.

<sup>117</sup> Silliman 2015, 282–8, 292.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.* 286.

<sup>119</sup> Henriksen 2016, 469; cf Nederveen Pieterse 2001, 233.

<sup>120</sup> Nederveen Pieterse 2001, 220, 231.

<sup>121</sup> Cf Lightfoot and Martínez 1995, 474.



under pressure of dissolution or demolition.<sup>122</sup> These situations may imply that ethnic differences could become blurred or less important, which has consequences for our archaeological understanding and the analytical application of hybridity.

Another crucial aspect concerns the constructive power of things themselves, their ‘unruliness’ so to speak. As remarked by Ian Hodder, ‘things and their interactions with humans have temporalities that result in their coming upon us unawares.’<sup>123</sup> Things are difficult to predict and just seem to ‘happen’ because they constantly offer new opportunities. Consequently, we may consider hybrid archaeological features as the effects of dissolved boundaries, as well as the contingent play of things. Archaeological hybridity thus pertains to both the process and product of brief cross-cultural episodes, as well as long-lasting changes that will either turn into ethnic characteristics, modify or disappear.<sup>124</sup> In this way, archaeological hybridity may adequately explain significant material mixtures of the past, even if this proposal does not solve all obstacles related to the concept.

Let us now return to the Skjoldehamn grave, and more precisely, the power structures, religious influences and material contingency constituting its context. Even if Old Norse and Sámi constituted structurally different societies or dichotomous worlds in the Viking period and the Early and High Middle Ages, both written and archaeological sources indicate extensive relationships.<sup>125</sup> As already mentioned, their relations seem to have started far earlier, as evidenced, for example, by the study of primeval Nordic loan-words in Sámi dialects and Old Norse and Sámi place names, which suggests significant interactions since the Roman Iron Age, although their character and scope are not clearly established.<sup>126</sup> The Old Norse written sources comprise important information for the Viking period and the Middle Ages, even if they contain fictional and anachronistic elements (the sagas in particular), and are written from an Old Norse or non-Sámi perspective. A number of stories and poems, however, mention Sámi interaction with the Old Norse peoples. While there are examples of the mistreatment of the Sámi, cooperation, confidence and mutual respect characterise relationships between them, of which the Sami’s magical skills are particularly valued.<sup>127</sup>

As noted by Else Mundal, some of the stories, legends and skaldic poems are probably of symbolic or mythological significance, such as the well-known marriage between the Norwegian King Harald Fairhair, who purportedly first united Norway, and Snæfrið, the daughter of the Sámi King Svási at Dovre, in the mountains of southern Norway.<sup>128</sup> Another example is the ethnically ambiguous giantess Skaði’s marriage to Óðinn, the war the war god and most prominent of the Old Norse deities. Skaði is associated with typical Sámi features, such as skiing and hunting, and she lives far north in the mountains, alluding to the Sámi landscape of Arctic

<sup>122</sup> Cf Henriksen 2016, 465.

<sup>123</sup> Hodder 2012, 159.

<sup>124</sup> Cf Deagan 2013, 274.

<sup>125</sup> Eg Serning 1956; Zachrisson 1984; 2008; Storli 1991; Mundal 1996; 2009; Pálsson 1998; 1999; Zachrisson et al 1997; Hansen and Olsen 2014; Aalto and Lehtola 2017.

<sup>126</sup> Cf Sjövald 1962, 224–5; Nesheim 1967; Odner 1983; Aikio 2006; 2012; Hansen and Olsen 2014, 79–81.

<sup>127</sup> Mundal 1996; 2004; 2009; Hansen and Olsen 2014, 50.

<sup>128</sup> Mundal 2009, 26–33.

Norway. Their marriage results in several sons, of whom Sæmingr, whose name probably derives from a Sámi word for the Sámi people, became the ancestor of the Háleygir and the mighty Lade earls who aspired to the throne of Norway.<sup>129</sup> As further noted by Mundal, marriage functioned as a mechanism for making peace and solving conflicts between peoples in Old Norse society, and to make or maintain alliances as well.<sup>130</sup> Regardless of whether Skaði was exclusively Sámi and Snæfrið was a real or fictional person, we should see these marriages as symbolic expressions of intimate relationships between Old Norse and the Sámi. Interestingly, proto-Scandinavian loan words in Sámi related to marriage and in-laws that apparently date to the Roman Iron Age may support the occurrence of mixed marriages, as do female graves with mixed ethnic features, such as the Hagbartholmen grave 1/1954.<sup>131</sup>

There is much evidence to suggest that the two groups shared fundamental religious ideas, indicated by beliefs in some of the same gods and similar witchcraft or sorcery. For instance, sorcerers or ‘shamans’ of both groups were able to transform themselves into new shapes, cause bad weather, foretell the future, and use magic to heal or harm.<sup>132</sup> These premises probably constituted mutual resistance against Christianisation, further suggested in the sources by instances in which the Sámi supported the Old Norse by sorcery and fighting on the pagan side.<sup>133</sup> As previously noted, the opposition against Christianisation appears most substantial in Arctic Norway among the Háleygir. The well-known story of the great sorcerer and Háleygir chieftain Raud the Strong in Salten (mid-Nordland), who had a large group of Sámi at his disposal, is apparently symptomatic.<sup>134</sup>

There is perhaps one feature in the archaeological record that particularly correlates to the mutuality witnessed in the written sources between the Sámi and their Old Norse neighbours, and that is birch bark. As noted in the review above, birch bark appears in burial contexts of various and/or mixed ethnic affiliations from the Merovingian period to the High Middle Ages. Other intriguing finds are recorded in several of the prominent Swedish Merovingian-period to Viking-Age ship burials of Vendel and Valsgärde (both of which have parallels to the Sutton Hoo ship burial), where birch-bark ‘rugs’ or ‘shrouding’ were sewn with sinew-threads.<sup>135</sup> This indicates Sámi interactions with the uppermost Old Norse elite in southern Scandinavia. It is worth remembering that birch-bark shrouding sewn with sinew-thread is probably *the* most distinct feature of Sámi burial customs. Hence, the ‘rug’ in Vendel Grave 7 is remarkable, with decorations similar to birch-bark shrouding from a Sámi grave at Hännooaive in the Varanger fjord in Troms and Finnmark county.<sup>136</sup>

<sup>129</sup> Cf Bratrein 2018. In *Vatnsdæla saga*, ch 12, Sámi (Old Norse: *Finnr/Finnas*) men refer to themselves as *sensveinar*, of which Mundal (2009, 28) thinks that the phonetically equivalent first syllable must be a word the Sámi used about themselves (*sveinar* means ‘young men’).

<sup>130</sup> Mundal 2009, 30–3; cf Storli 1991.

<sup>131</sup> Aikio 2012, 79–80.

<sup>132</sup> Mundal 1996, 112–3; 2004; cf Hansen and Olsen 2014, 50–1.

<sup>133</sup> Mundal 1996, 104.

<sup>134</sup> Sturluson, *Heimskringla* — *History of the Kings of Norway*, ch 78, 212.

<sup>135</sup> Zachrisson et al 1997, 194–5.

<sup>136</sup> Cf Solberg 1909, 112; Arwidsson 1942, 106–9; Kleppe 1977; Schanche 2000, 377.

Other interesting examples of birch-bark shrouding (although without sinew-thread) are found in some of the oldest graves at the early churchyard of St Clemens in Oslo, dated from the late 900s to the early 1100s. They make up a small number, and are limited to a specific section of the churchyard, which Sæbjørg Walaker Nordeide and Steinar Gulliksen note possibly indicates burials of a particular group of people.<sup>137</sup> Given the strong indications of a Christianised Sámi presence in eastern Norway in the Early Middle Ages based on written records, one may question whether they represent Norwegian burials, Sámi burials, or perhaps burials with blended Norwegian-Sámi cultural traditions.<sup>138</sup> As a parallel, birch bark is also recorded in five 11th- to 12th-century graves from the early Christian graveyard of Bø in Telemark (southern Norway), of which two are children in birch-bark shrouding. As remarked by Nordeide, it is feasible that these particular burial customs represent Christian Sámi families or Sámi married into Norwegian families.<sup>139</sup>

There may be various explanations behind the employment of birch bark in graves in these contexts, but it stands out as a particular transcultural element reflecting the intimate inter-ethnic relationships described in Old Norse written sources. Rather than being strictly selected, birch bark may be considered an effect of the material contingency that characterises the culturally heterogeneous space at the time. It is notable that later, when Christianisation consolidated in Norway (and Fennoscandia), birch bark disappeared from most of these burial contexts and only remained in Sámi graves.<sup>140</sup>

From the outline above, it appears that regional power structures, religious ideas and practices and, not least, alliances between Norwegians and the Sámi were under pressure from powers aiming to unify Norway through Christianisation. The late-pagan grave chronology and late establishment of the Church in Arctic Norway indicate the Háleygir's resistance to Christianity. Conversely, the Haug cemetery demonstrates Christianisation at the same time, albeit of limited influence. Together, this probably explains the appearance of the Skjoldehamn grave and its mixed features.

At a basic level, the grave manifests a boundary dissolution and the unsettling of cultural codes related to intimate inter-ethnic relationships and the opposition between paganism and Christianity.<sup>141</sup> It is reasonable to conclude that these conditions created a space that allowed new burial forms to arise, not only in *Hálogaland* but in other Fennoscandian regions as well, as exemplified by the various mixed graves known from the Viking period and the Early Middle Ages. The blend of burial features at the Haug cemetery, the St Clemens churchyard, and possibly the Bø churchyard as well point to the hybrid material contingency of the time.

Closer examination of the Skjoldehamn grave evidence suggests that the deceased, probably a woman, was most likely of local or coastal origin. There is reason to believe that those in charge of the funeral at least partly shared religious beliefs with the deceased, implied by the use of carefully arranged birch posts, the placement of the

<sup>137</sup> Eide 1974, 204–8; Nordeide and Gulliksen 2007, 12–13.

<sup>138</sup> Cf Mundal 2012; see also Zachrisson et al 1997; Bergstøl 2008; Olsen 2010; for a different view on ethnic affiliation, see Lund 2013, 54–5.

<sup>139</sup> Nordeide 2011b, 197.

<sup>140</sup> Cf Svestad 2011.

<sup>141</sup> Cf Nederveen Pieterse 2001, 234.

body on a soft reindeer pelt, considerate shrouding in a carpet lashed with straps and bands, and, finally, a protective birch-bark layer. These features speak of care and concern as well as acquaintance or mutual understanding with the dead. They may, however, have had a different affiliation or status, as suggested by the placement of the body in the bog near Old Norse burial mounds. Accordingly, while the costume's cut and frayed condition suggests a person of low social rank, the lack of marks of wear and tear on skeletal remains, the considerate treatment of the body, the mortuary practice, costume decorations, and the placement near a pagan burial ground indicate otherwise.<sup>142</sup> The tin rings, their possible magical significance, and the indication of a woman buried in men's clothes may offer further clues for understanding.

In Old Norse society both non-Sámi and Sámi wore magical clothes.<sup>143</sup> The magic tunic of the Háleygir chieftain Tore Hund from Bjarkøy Island, yet another neighbour to Andøya Island, is notable. It appears from Sigvat the Skald's poem *Erfdrápa* that the Sámi made the tunic that protected Tore in the famous battle with King Ólaf Haroldsson at Stiklestad in Trønderlag in AD 1030 — the incident that ostensibly led to the final breakthrough of Christianity in Norway.<sup>144</sup> The poem underlines the relationships between the Háleygir and the Sámi, as well as the significance of sorcery in their mutual struggle against Christianisation and the unification of Norway.<sup>145</sup>

As is well known, magic or sorcery is attributed to both Old Norse and Sámi, even if Sámi sorcery or 'shamanism' (North Sámi: later referred as *noaidevuohta*) was considered more powerful.<sup>146</sup> Sámi sorcery resembles the 'archetypal' Siberian shamanism, in which the shaman's capacity to transform and overstep boundaries, such as that between genders, is significant.<sup>147</sup> Double gender affiliation or gender mixing was associated with supernatural powers. In accordance with this notion, Inger Zachrisson suggests that the above-mentioned Vivallen grave 9 with gender-mixed objects indicates the burial of a Sámi shaman.<sup>148</sup> The indication of a man buried in women's clothes is particularly notable.

*Seidr*, the Old Norse version of sorcery, also has shamanistic features, although to a lesser extent in comparison with 'Siberian' shamanism. While *seidr* is primarily a female activity, Óðinn is regarded as the most powerful *seidr*-man (sorcerer) and he is paradoxically accused of *ergi* (unmanliness), which underlines *seidr*'s complex and gender-crossing character.<sup>149</sup> Ritual costume is another feature that connects *seidr* with shamanism, according to several scholars.<sup>150</sup> Particular attention is given to the *seidr*-woman Thorbjorg at Herjolfsnes (Greenland), called *Litilvolva* (Little Sibyl), in *Eiríks saga rauða* (the Saga of Eirik the Red).<sup>151</sup> Notably, her 'magical' outfit is described in detail, which includes a blue (or black) cloak with bands and inlaid gems, a black hood of lambskin lined with white cat skin, shaggy calf-skin shoes attached with long thongs with tin

<sup>142</sup> Cf Vedeler 2007, 90.

<sup>143</sup> Mundal 1996, 112.

<sup>144</sup> Sturluson, *Heimskringla* — *History of the Kings of Norway*, ch 228, 514–16.

<sup>145</sup> Mundal 2012, 346; cf 1996.

<sup>146</sup> Eg Mundal 1996, 112; see also Zachrisson et al 1997; Price 2019; Solli 2002; Steinsland 2005.

<sup>147</sup> Eliade 1964, 228–9; cf Bäckman and Hultkrantz 1978; Price 2019; Solli 2002.

<sup>148</sup> Zachrisson et al 1997, 149.

<sup>149</sup> Mundal 1996, 112; Solli 2002, 135–7, 178, 183; Hedeager 2011, 116–17, 126–7.

<sup>150</sup> Eliade 1964, 586; Price 2019, 126–7; Solli 2002, 130–7.

<sup>151</sup> *Eiríks saga rauða*, ch 4.

buttons at the end, and a pouch around her waist with talismans. Among her equipment is mentioned a spoon of brass and an edgeless knife with an ivory shaft. As remarked by Brit Solli, the blue-coloured cloak is a familiar attribute of Óðinn, and the knife with a broken edge is considered healing in Old Norse sources.<sup>152</sup> The metals (including tin buttons) may thus be sorcerer or shaman characteristics, as commented on by Neil Price.<sup>153</sup>

Whether the knife with an oak shaft in the Skjoldehamn grave had a broken edge we can only speculate, but the fact that oak does not grow naturally in the Arctic spheres of Fennoscandia suggests that it was extraordinary. Yet in comparison, the shaft of the apparent female knife in the Vivalden 'shaman's' grave 9 was of antler or bone and different from all the other knives found at the cemetery.<sup>154</sup> While this allusion is purely hypothetical, Thorbjorg's ritual costume is probably more commensurate with the Skjoldehamn costume's features, such as the hood, colourful decorations, and footwear with tin ornaments in particular. Taking into account that gender mixing seems to be part of the trans-boundary capacity of both Old Norse and Sámi sorcerers, the indication of a woman buried in men's clothes at Skjoldehamn is intriguing — perhaps indicating inter- or transsexuality.

Burials in solitude and/or with conspicuous furnishing seem to be common features of Fennoscandian graves believed to represent shamans.<sup>155</sup> The trans-boundary capacity of the shaman may thus correspond to the particular features of the Skjoldehamn grave, as well as the unboundedness of the bog, literally signifying a burial 'in between'. Although the grave does not directly belong to Iron Age Old Norse and Sámi wetland deposition customs, recent research suggesting that wetlands were liminal, powerful and even dangerous places connected with forces, deities or more-than-humans in the under- or other-world may in a subtle way indicate a common link.<sup>156</sup> Accordingly, the Skjoldehamn burial of a possible 'more-than-human' shaman may have brought together or fused Old Norse and Sámi religious perceptions of wetlands as powerful boundaries between different dimensions, at a time of religious upheaval and in the final stages of pagan Old Norse wetland depositions.

## CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this article has been to re-interpret the ethnic and cultural significance of the Skjoldehamn grave by addressing burial features that 'speak' against ethnic stereotypes, specifically the cultural hybridity of the grave attributes. One may, however, object that throughout the discussion the analysis has dealt with features that point to either an Old Norse or Sámi cultural identity in an essentialist manner, which is exactly what the article wishes to challenge. Thus, if we are to take Bhabha's thinking seriously, then neither what can be termed 'Old Norse' or 'Norwegian', nor what can be termed 'Sámi', can be understood as fixed units or entities. The complexity of social identity is

<sup>152</sup> Solli 2002, 130–1.

<sup>153</sup> Price 2019, 127.

<sup>154</sup> Cf Zachrisson et al 1997, 68–9.

<sup>155</sup> Eg Manker 1961; Kopisto 1971; Zachrisson et al 1997, 149.

<sup>156</sup> See discussions in Monikander 2010; Fredengren 2015; 2018.

thus under-communicated. Moreover, the same essentialist bias seems relevant when it comes to gender, which questions the use of the categories of male, female or transgender in a hybrid conceptualisation of the graves.

Even though we accept that everything is hybrid in one way or another, replacing fixed ethnic categories with cultural hybridisation just replaces one form of essentialism with another, as correctly pointed out by Friedman.<sup>157</sup> Moreover, labelling everything as simply 'hybrid' would render the concept meaningless, and the same argument applies to gender. Thus, applying ethnic categories is necessary as a means of emphasising cultural differences or affinities in the archaeological record, as well as hybridisation as a cultural process. Consequently, the primary understanding of hybridity in this context relates to material mixing that appears especially conspicuous, such as the Skjoldehamn grave. In comparison, the majority of graves in the vast dualistic landscape of the Vesterålen region and northern Norway are not conspicuously blended, but rather demonstrate features appropriately labelled as either Old Norse or Sámi. Thus, ethnic categories should not be rejected, firstly because they are analytically relevant and secondly because they variously have played an important role in cultural processes, as is evident not least from the written sources discussed in this context.

However, it is easy to project modern perceptions of ethnicity onto the past. Ethnicity is neither static nor unambiguous and may have been less significant, although not unimportant, at the time of the Skjoldehamn bog burial. Individuals may, in the specific historical situation in northern Norway discussed in this article, have thus presented several identities which would have been utilised in different contexts. Thus, paraphrasing Acheraïou, in comparison with other graves discussed in this article, the Skjoldehamn grave has been perceived in terms of a process 'in which cultural sameness and difference are transcended to allow for new and wider modes of personal and collective cultural identification.'<sup>158</sup> In many ways, the concept of 'entanglement' (as suggested by Silliman instead of 'hybridity') sufficiently explains minor mixing or deviations in the archaeological record, but following the argument here, the concept of hybridity appears more adequate for analysing the extraordinary material assemblages of the Skjoldehamn grave.<sup>159</sup> Hybridity should therefore not be limited to particular contexts, colonial situations, or long-lasting cultural production, but rather applied with regard to its ability to embrace past material assemblages that are difficult to characterise, understand and explain according to notions of cultural difference and fixed boundaries. In my view, the Skjoldehamn burial is a prime example of this, and demonstrates what I consider to be the archaeological relevance of cultural hybridity. Moreover, the concept of material contingency adds to this hybridisation, here particularly related to the interplay of things in disintegrated boundary contexts. The blend of features evident in the Skjoldehamn grave is thus not necessarily intentional, but may rather be conceived as a contingent burial manifestation 'borrowing' from Old Norse, Sámi and Christian burial repertoires, premised by intimate interactions, power structures under pressure, and Christianisation.

<sup>157</sup> Friedman 1997, 82–3.

<sup>158</sup> Acheraïou 2011, 91–2.

<sup>159</sup> Silliman 2015, 291.

Consequently, material contingency should be considered crucial to all kinds of hybridisation.

We cannot preclude that the buried person was an outcast, as suggested by Gjessing, or that the burial custom and grave location are representative of a woman of low social rank, but the evidence supports the idea of a person held in veneration and not accidentally ‘dumped’ in the bog. In the same way, we are not certain that the burial was that of a woman, even if DNA analysis and other evidence leans towards this suggestion, and we do not know whether the person possessed magic and was a sorcerer. Nevertheless, these interpretations drawn from a combination of archaeological evidence and Old Norse written sources may contribute to our explanation of the exceptional bog burial from Skjoldehamn.

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#### Abbreviations

- ASL Above sea level
- NIKU Norsk institutt for kulturminneforskning (The Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research)
- GOTARC Gothenburg Archaeological Theses

#### Résumé

### Tombe de Skjoldehamn dans le cercle polaire norvégien : réinterprétation d'une sépulture médiévale dans la tourbe par Asgeir Svestad

Remarquable, la tombe de Skjoldehamn du 11<sup>e</sup> siècle a été découverte accidentellement en 1936 dans une tourbière du littoral d'une île norvégienne, dans le cercle polaire arctique. Dans la tombe, un squelette entièrement habillé était enveloppé dans une couverture en laine, attachée avec des lanières en cuir et des bandes tissées ornées d'anneaux d'étain. Le corps reposait sur une peau de renne, placée sur des baguettes en bois de bouleau. Enfin, de l'écorce de bouleau recouvrait le corps et était potentiellement surmontée de mottes de gazon. Depuis sa découverte, la tombe a intrigué les spécialistes, surtout au sujet de son affiliation ethnique scandinave/norvégienne ou Sámi. Une nouvelle datation a fait remonter la tombe à la période pendant laquelle la chrétienté gagnait du terrain dans cette zone à la périphérie de l'Europe. Un réexamen des vestiges de la tombe suggère un mélange de caractéristiques scandinaves et Sámi, ainsi que d'autres païennes et potentiellement chrétiennes, et contribue à une nouvelle interprétation des contingences matérielles de la tombe.

#### Zusammenfassung

### Im Schnittpunkt begraben: Neu-interpretation der mittelalterlichen Moorbestattung von Skjoldehamn im arktischen Norwegen von Asgeir Svestad

Das Grab von Skjoldehamn aus dem 11. Jahrhundert ist ein bemerkenswerter

Zufallsfund, der 1936 in einem Moor an der arktischen Küste Norwegens gemacht wurde. Das Grab bestand aus einem vollständig bekleideten Skelett, das in eine Wolle gewickelt und mit Lederriemen und gewebten Bändern, mit Zinnringen geschmückt, zusammengeschnürt war. Die Leiche hatte man auf eine Rentierhaut gelegt, welche wiederum auf Birkenstöcken lag. Schließlich wurde der Körper mit Birkenrinde und eventuell mit Torf bedeckt. Seit seiner Entdeckung sind die Wissenschaftler von diesem Grab und insbesondere der Frage der Ethnizität fasziniert: Handelt es sich um eine altnordische/norwegische oder samische Leiche? Durch neue Datierungen konnte das Grab jener Zeit zugeordnet werden, in der das Christentum in diesen Randgebieten Europas Fuß fasste. Erneute Untersuchungen der Grabfunde deuten auf eine Mischung aus altnordischen und samischen Merkmalen sowie heidnischen und möglicherweise christlichen Merkmalen hin und tragen zu einem neuen Verständnis der materiellen Kontingenz der Bestattung bei.

#### Riassunto

### Una sepoltura a strati: reinterpretazione della sepoltura medievale nella torba di Skjoldehamn, Norvegia artica di Asgeir Svestad

La sepoltura di Skjoldehamn dell'XI secolo è un notevole ritrovamento fortuito che venne alla luce nel 1936 in una torbiera sulla costa artica della Norvegia. La sepoltura consisteva di uno scheletro completamente vestito, avvolto in una coperta di lana legata con strisce di cuoio e strisce di tessuto ornate da

anelli di stagno. Il corpo giaceva su una pelle di renna a sua volta posata su stecche di betulla. Infine il corpo era rivestito di cortecce di betulla e probabilmente ricoperto con zolle erbose. Questa sepoltura ha destato la curiosità degli studiosi fin dai tempi della sua scoperta, specialmente riguardo alla questione dell'affiliazione etnica e perciò se si tratti di una persona di etnia norrena/norvegese

oppure sami. Una nuova datazione ha attribuito la sepoltura al periodo in cui la cristianità stava prendendo piede in queste regioni periferiche d'Europa. Il riesame dei ritrovamenti della tomba fa pensare a una mistura di tratti distintivi norreni e sami, oltre ad aspetti pagani e a possibili elementi cristiani, e contribuisce ad apportare nuova luce sulla circostanza materiale della sepoltura.