

## Book Review

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**BOOK REVIEWED:** JANE F. KERSHAW. *VIKING IDENTITIES: SCANDINAVIAN JEWELLERY IN ENGLAND, MEDIEVAL HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY* (OXFORD: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2013), XVI + 308 PP. ISBN: 9780199639526.

This is a beautifully presented volume that provides a stimulating presentation of data, which is largely derived from finds recorded through the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) in England over the last 25 years. It is, however, very much more than a discourse on artefact types and stray finds, providing a contextual analysis in an archaeological, historical and art historical framework. The volume has an ambitious aim, clearly stated on page 2 (paraphrased here): finds of female jewellery of both Scandinavian and Anglo-Scandinavian forms and styles add a new dimension and make possible a substantial reassessment of the female contribution to Viking society in the Danelaw. The work presented here makes considerable inroads into this discussion and enables a much fuller consideration of the PAS finds to be integrated into the otherwise relatively incomplete archaeological record for the ninth to eleventh centuries in parts of England.

The material under consideration is essentially derived from the North and East of England, in areas within the Danelaw region, and the terminology of Scandinavian and Anglo-Scandinavian is discussed as cultural labels and not ethnic or geographic terms. The dataset, approximately 500 items in total, comprises brooches and pendants and all are pre 2008 finds. Of the total corpus, 89% are finds derived from metal detecting. The seven chapters are logically divided: Chapters 1-3 deal with the material evidence and methodologies of approach as well as the Scandinavian background;

Chapters 4-7 focus on the significance of the Scandinavian style dress ornaments and particularly use-length, manufacture, gender implications and trends in the distribution patterns. The final chapter, 7, also provides a synthesis of jewellery use and an innovative discussion about the negotiation of cultural identity as seen through choices in jewellery styles.

Each of the chapters contains carefully considered and re-assessed information used in an innovative manner in many cases, and provides major insights for Danelaw studies (which are seeing a growing resurgence, as for example at Torksey) and indeed to artefact studies. Following on from an introduction to theoretical approaches in artefact studies, such as the role of artefacts in embodying and shaping the identities of users, providing a framework for the negotiation of social identities and relationships, Chapter 2 provides a useful guide to the identification of both Scandinavian and Anglo-Scandinavian jewellery types. Although conventional typologies are utilised, the author is clearly able to demonstrate a shift in the use (and presumably dress styles) across the Scandinavian and Anglo-Scandinavian variants in the ninth and tenth centuries throughout Chapter 3. Her detailed study of the finds distribution (which she feels is largely reflective of the overall original picture despite the nature of recovery of pieces) indicates that the regional variations within the Scandinavian homelands (e.g. oval brooches being less commonly found and/or used in Denmark) are mirrored within the Danelaw assemblages. Importantly, this suggests a varied population arriving in the Danelaw.

In Chapter 4, the evidence presented supports the view that items found in England and of purely Scandinavian type are imports, whereas obviously, those that demonstrate variations of pin position or artistic variables (Anglo-Scandinavian) would be of English production. Interrogating the length of use of both categories, Kershaw posits continued cultural contact between the Danelaw and England to the Norman Conquest. Indeed, it is possible that Scandinavian and Anglo-Scandinavian forms may have continued longer in the Danelaw than within Scandinavia. It is however, worth noting that independent dating is very scarce, with only seven dress accessories being recovered from datable contexts. The use of stylistic dating is usefully discussed. In terms of manufacturing evidence, traditionally one would have focussed on the York evidence, but to this should now be added spatial clustering around the Danelaw towns (e.g. Thetford and Norwich, where metal detecting has a long established record) and in rural contexts.

Chapter 5 focuses on the use of the brooches themselves as cultural indicators, through different styles of wearing and consequent implications for dress style and fashion. A good example of this (p. 162) is seen in the study of the catch – plate evidence, where Anglo-Scandinavian forms mirror those of Anglo-Saxon brooches and suggest hybridity. An important implication however, with specific reference to gender and the role of metal jewellery in the ninth to tenth centuries, is that ‘there are grounds for suggesting that female metal dress items more than male, were used in displaying Scandinavian artistic styles. This in turn, suggests a clear role for women in negotiating cultural identity within the Danelaw’ (p. 171).

Chapter 6 includes a consideration of the challenges of using the distribution of small dress items as a guide to Scandinavian influence and settlement in England. Kershaw identifies the ninth- to tenth-century Scandinavian jewellery find spots as suggesting the Danelaw region was a cultural boundary. The lack of examples in the Northern Danelaw could be explained by lack of recovery and the systematic recording of metal-detected finds, although it could equally be that the situation is different in the Northern Danelaw. Dense concentrations of Anglo-Scandinavian forms around Norwich could be interpreted as an area of production, once more perhaps underlined by considerable metal detecting in that region.

Chapter 7 considers the construction of cultural identities, and she notes that the extensive range of Scandinavian brooch types in England (a.k.a. Danelaw in this case only!) does encapsulate almost the full range of those in use in contemporary Scandinavia. Of significance is her observation that the limited use of oval brooches within most of the Danelaw could help distinguish the different cultural spheres in the region: the North West English burials, for example do often include oval brooches and this is in the area viewed as Hiberno-Norse rather than Danish, elsewhere oval brooches are less commonly noted. The changes in the catch plates noted between Scandinavian and Anglo-Scandinavian brooches would have been obvious to the wearer, the decorative and visible surface appearing Scandinavian and the method of wearing (and indeed clothing?) being more hybrid in form. The combination of brooches worn may also have differed, with the Anglo-Scandinavian brooches worn singly rather than in complex sets and interestingly selective XRF investigation indicates some Anglo-Scandinavian brooches were created using Anglo-Saxon metallurgical methods.

One thing that is very clear however to this reviewer at least, is that the current distribution of finds may still be an artefact of recovery in areas where metal detectors and metal detectorists have found good working relationships with archaeologists and PAS officers. Kershaw notes that the situation in the Northern Danelaw may change with more recent finds which are now being notified more regularly. Regardless of this somewhat inevitable caveat, Kershaw uses the distribution pre 2008 to considerable effect, and considers this to be indicative of the situation in the ninth and tenth centuries.

This volume is a wonderful asset to Viking Studies, it is well written and presented in a logical form and provides a clear route through the complexities of this range of metal jewellery finds. It is a statement of the significance, use and interpretation of otherwise stray finds to 2008 and provides a firm foundation for complementary studies of different aspects of the PAS database. The critical assessment of artefacts, a consideration of the biography of the objects themselves and their potential lifespans in combination with traditional typological studies is a crucial step forwards and Kershaw is to be commended for her facility with this material. This book should now be required reading by all who work with material culture, be it Scandinavian, Anglo-Scandinavian or otherwise.