

# Silver hoards in Sámi areas

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## Abstract

*The Viking and Middle Age silver hoards have often been assumed to be simply hidden economic resources. However, while the silver of the hoards from these periods may previously have circulated in a certain economic sphere, the hoarding practice itself and the content of the hoards show similarities to hoardings of earlier periods that were probably related to an ancient fertility cult. The similarities suggest that the Viking Age and Early Middle Age hoards should be interpreted as ritual deposits too. The late occurrence of silver hoards in northern Fennoscandia may indicate the adoption of a Norse offering tradition in an unsettling time of changes in society and belief systems. The tradition may have been adopted by a previously “hybrid” population living in the interface between Norse and Sámi cultural groups. A hybrid group could have avoided the harsh methods of Christianization by leaning towards Sámi contacts and identity, though at the same time bringing with them certain elements that were characteristic of the old Norse faith.*

## Keywords:

silver hoards, treasures, Viking Age, Middle Age, fertility cult, economic spheres, cultural identity.

## Introduction

The silver hoards are a significant group of finds from the Viking and Early Middle Ages in northern Europe. Such hoards are particularly common in southern Scandinavia, but are also found in a significant amount in Finland, the Baltic states, northern Poland, north-eastern Germany, Great Britain, and in northern Fennoscandia. A lot of attention has been dedicated to the South Scandinavian hoards (e.g. Burström 1993; Graham-Campbell 1992; 1994; Hedeager 1999; 2003; Hårdh 1976a; 1976b; Skovmand 1942; Stenberger 1947; 1958; Thurborg 1988; 1989; Zachrisson 1998). In northern Fennoscandia these finds have not been discussed as much – perhaps because of their scarcity in relation to the vast geographic area. The northern hoards have been included in certain studies of silver hoards of larger areas (e.g. Rygh 1877; Grieg 1929; Hårdh 1996) and in studies of the Iron Age in general (e.g. Kivikoski 1964; Sjøvold 1974). However, most often they have been discussed in monographs that have other primary objects of study (e.g. Odner 1983; Olsen 2000; Reymert 1980; Schanche 2000; Serning 1956). Only short reports on new finds treat the silver hoards in particular (e.g. Nosov et al. 1992; Ojanlatva 2003; Stamsø Munch 1970; 1978; Storli 2006).

In earlier work I have aimed to analyse the hoards in northern Norway in a more thorough

and contextualizing manner (Spangen 2005). This article summarizes some of my conclusions. The first part of the article provides some background information on the hoards and their history, context, and meaning, primarily based on information from the Norse areas where they are most frequently found. The second part of the article concentrates on the silver hoards' relation to Sámi culture. The article is based on my short lecture at the seminar in Rovaniemi in October 2006.

### The silver hoards in general

The silver hoards may be defined as intentional deposits of silver objects that are not related to burials. No exact count exists for the whole of northern Europe, but there is reason to believe that the complete record of such finds in northern Europe is very large. The complete Norwegian record consists of 148 silver hoards. In Sweden, the well known silver hoard record in Gotland alone is about 700 finds. The hoards date from approximately 800 to 1200 AD.

Hårdh (1996) has shown that some regional variations exist in the compositions of hoards. For instance, the southern Scandinavia hoards often contain hack silver (deliberately fragmented silver objects). The western Norwegian hoards are characterized by large ornaments, as are the hoards of northern Fennoscandia.

However, there are also features that are common to the silver hoards all over Europe: While gold does occur in Viking and Middle Age hoards, it is far more usual that they contain mostly or only silver. The hoards also contain a range of objects that are almost exclusive to this kind of context, such as the elaborately plaited or twisted silver neck rings. Neck rings which are found in other Viking Age or medieval contexts are made of other materials or their shape differs from the hoarded rings (Hårdh 1996: 41; Serning 1956).

The Norwegian record also shows other distinct differences between the contents of hoards and the contents of graves. Both hoards and graves may contain arm rings, penannular brooches and finger rings, but these are of different types and are made from different metals according to the context (cf. Grieg 1929; Spangen 2005: 43ff; Petersen 1928). For instance, many Norwegian hoards include large silver penannular brooches. Also graves include such brooches, but these are smaller and most often made from bronze (Petersen 1928: 174–174). Bronze is generally very rare in hoarding contexts from this time.

As mentioned, the northern Fennoscandian hoards tend to consist of quite impressive ornaments, like the ones from the most recent find in Tromsø which was discovered in September 2005, and the find from Nangunemi by the Lake Inarinjärvi, Finland, in 2003 (Fig. 1 and 2). Such finds are not very common in these arctic areas. In the three northernmost counties of Nordland, Troms, and Finnmark in northern Norway, 29 silver finds that may be defined as hoards have been discovered so far. In addition, ten hoards have been found in northern Finland<sup>1</sup> (Kivikoski 1964: 287; Ojanlatva 2003; Zachrisson 1984: 102, Fig. 53), one in northern Sweden (Zachrisson 1984: 102, Fig. 53), and two comparable hoards in northwest Russia (Jasinski & Ovsyanikov 1998, pl. 40; Kivikoski 1964: 289; Nosov et al. 1992; Tallgren 1931: 112–113<sup>2</sup>).

The traditional interpretation of the hoards has mainly been related to economics. In particular, researchers have concerned 1) the import of the silver through Viking raids or commerce,

<sup>1</sup> Two of these hoards, from Aatservainen and Tavajärvi, were found on Finnish territory which is today part of Russia. They are, however, usually included in the Finnish record.

<sup>2</sup> Tallgren places one of the finds in Kem' by the White Sea. According to the other references, the correct location is by the river Varzuga.



Fig. 1. The silver hoard found in Tromsø, North Norway, in September 2005.  
Photo: Jorunn Marie Rødli, Tromsø Museum.

2) the objects as a means of payment or exchange and 3) the explanation of the hoarding as a way of hiding a person's or family's valuables. The hoards perhaps invite this sort of economic interpretation, especially in southern Scandinavia where they contain a lot of hack silver. However, apart from the anachronism in separating the economy from other aspects of past societies, certain facts cannot be explained by the economic approach. The non-random composition of the hoards, the consistency across a vast geographical area, and the fact that so many hoards

were deposited but never regained, indicate that hoarding of silver was a complex phenomenon, not only a question of hiding valuables. I would suggest that people shared a common understanding of the significance of silver hoarding all over the hoarding area. In local articulations of these concepts, some essential features were preferably kept, like neck rings and arm rings of a certain type. Other features varied according to the local understanding of what would be appropriate in this particular context – like the presence of axe-shaped and cross-shaped pendants in the north.

## The history of neck rings

The phenomenon of hoarding neck rings is not exclusive to the Viking and Early Middle Ages. In Scandinavia, hoards from the beginning of the Bronze Age contain a range of different objects, including neck ornaments. From the end of the Bronze Age, the tradition changes and most of the bronze hoards consist mainly or only of neck rings. These hoards have been associated with the occurrence of a new goddess, often called “the goddess with the neck ring” (Stenberger 1971: 280). The interpretation relates to another type of Bronze Age finds, i.e., small bronze figurines picturing a naked female with neck rings. Such figurines have been found in several places in southern Scandinavia and north-eastern Ger-

many. They have been interpreted as picturing a female goddess of fertility, because of the way the portrayed female holds her arms or hands beneath her breasts (Arne 1909: 176ff and fig. 1–7; Johansen 1993, figure 63; Montelius 1922: 1476–1481, Stenberger 1971: 300).

The bronze figurines have not been found in contexts that could be dated. Comparison of the neck rings of the figurines with neck rings from bronze hoards suggests that the former date to approximately 700 BC (Arne 1909: 178). However, corresponding female representations with the same arm position occur as early as the Palaeolithic. These are widely known as “Venus figurines” (e.g. Johansen 1993: 130–131, figure 65; Soffer et al. 2000, fig. 15). Similar items have also been found in Neolithic contexts (e.g.

Fig. 2. The silver hoard found at Nanguniemi, Inari, North Finland, in September 2003. Photo: Marja Helander, Siida Sámi Museum.



Chapman 2000 on clay figurines from the Baltics, figur 3.7).

Researchers have associated the bronze figurines with the goddess Afrodite / Astarte who has also been represented in images naked with her hands pressed against her breasts (Arne 1909: 178). Afrodite / Astarte is equivalent to Hathor, Ishtar, Anat, Sekhmet and several other goddesses in Egypt and the Near East, as well as the Roman goddess Venus. These were all goddesses of fertility, love, and sexuality, but they were also more or less closely related to war, death, and the underworld. The Roman Tacitus describes a similar goddess, Nerthus, in northern Europe in his book *Germania* from 98 AD. Nerthus could be connected with the female bronze figurines (Arne 1909: 179; Solli 2002: 115ff). The Norse goddess Freyja shows several similarities to the mentioned goddesses. One of her characteristics is the neck ornaments *Brisingamen* (*Gylvagin-ning* 1973: 54).

The contents of a belief in a goddess related to fertility, sexuality, and death have of course had different articulations in different places and times, but the very idea of such a goddess appears to be very old and very persistent. Also, the association between such a goddess and neck ornaments seems to exist both in the Bronze and Iron Ages.

Nevertheless, medieval sources describe an Iron Age cult that has become more male-dominated<sup>3</sup>. The neck rings mentioned in these sources are also related to male gods, especially to Odin. One of his most precious possessions was the gold neck ring *Draupne*.

Two figurines from the Iron Age showing male representations with neck rings<sup>4</sup> have been

found in Sweden. Interestingly, the shape of the figurines suggests that the men are hanging from the neck ring, with their arms and toes pointing downwards. This position has been associated with the myth of Odin's sacrifice of himself to himself: The myth tells that he hanged himself in a tree for nine nights to gain knowledge of runes and magic songs (Zachrisson 2003: 92–94; cf. also *Hávamál* 1985: 138–141). The story may be interpreted as Odin establishing the sacrifice of humans (Zachrisson 2003: 94). It could also be a mythic explanation of a shamanistic initiation ritual when near-suffocation would result in a trance (Solli 2002: 158–59).

*Ynglingesaga* also describes the male use of neck rings in an ambiguous way in the story of Agne. He takes the unwilling Skjálv as his wife after he had killed her father, who was a Sámi king. During the wedding Agne gets very drunk. Skjálv tells him to look after the ring he carries around his neck, so he fastens it closely. When he falls asleep in his tent, Skjálv and her men tie a rope to the ring and hang Agne from a tree (*Snorres Kongesagaer* 1999: 26). Brit-Mari Näsström interprets the hanging of Agne as a sacrifice to Freyja, because Skjálv (or Skjolv) is another name for this goddess (Näsström 2001: 43, 51–54). The story thus seems to indicate that neck rings were worn by powerful males, and they were associated with Odin. At the same time the neck ring is closely related to Freyja.

Compared to the fertility cult of earlier times, the masculine Odin cult of the Iron Age seems to represent something completely new. Still, certain features may be remains of more ancient beliefs. *Seid* was performed by humans as an integrated part of Norse pre-Christian belief. According to Norse mythology, the *aesir* god Odin was the greatest “*seidmann*”, a kind of sorcerer and fortune teller. The myths tell us that the *aesir* first learned the art of *seid* from Freyja, who was a *vanir* goddess. The *vanir* were an older family

<sup>3</sup> Though our perception of the Norse cult obviously rely on the views of the Middle Age mediators who may have been given a biased picture of male and female influence (Solli 2002: 38–39).

<sup>4</sup> Uncertain contexts make it difficult to give an accurate dating, but one at least is suggested to stem from the Migration period (Zachrisson 2003: 92).

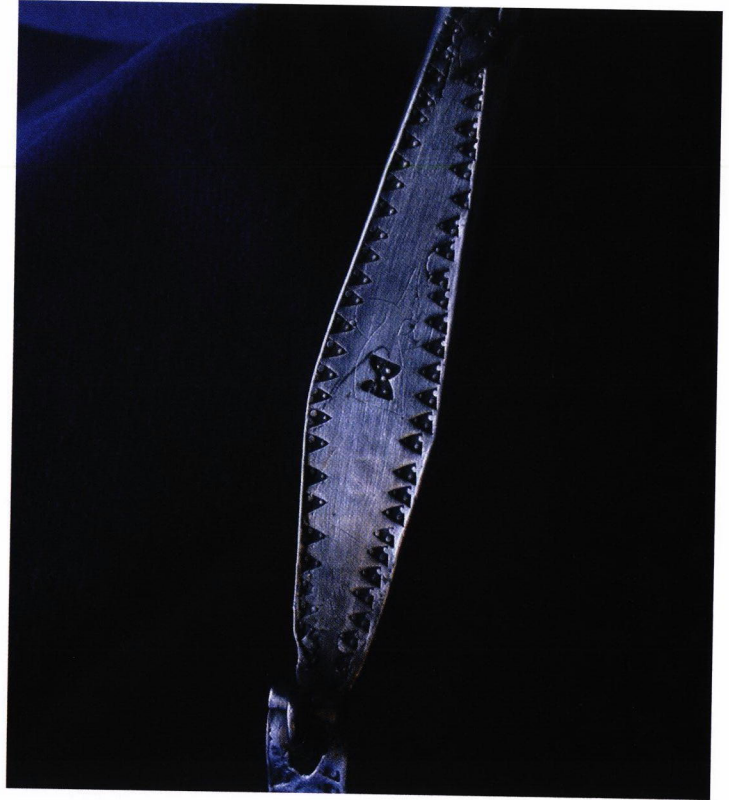


Fig. 3.  
The graffiti figure on the neck  
ring from Botnhamn, North  
Norway.  
Photo: Marte Spangen,  
Tromsø Museum.

of gods than the *aesir*. This coincides with many researchers' association of *seid* with an older Indo-European fertility cult in which women were the essential actors (Solli 2002: 134). Gro Steinsland and Kari Vogt have suggested that *seid* was originally part of a *vane* cult where females played a more central part (Steinsland & Vogt 1984: 158).

Brit Solli finds it hard to combine the interpretation of Odin as a great "*seidmann*" with the understanding of *seid* as an originally female activity (Solli 2002: 134). However, one may interpret this skill in Odin as the prolongation of a central and important element of the previous fertility cult – although in a new and more masculine wrapping. Neck rings may have had similarly ambiguous associations with both female goddesses and fertility, as well as the new more masculine cult.

The idea that the silver hoards are reminiscent of a cult of a fertility goddess with neck rings may also be supported by a graffiti figure on one of the neck rings from Botnhamn, Senja, Troms (Fig. 3). I have interpreted it as the representation of a female in a dress with the same arm position as the bronze figurines described above, i.e. with her hands pressed against her chest. The fact that the Botnhamn graffiti shows a dressed woman and not a naked one like in the bronze figurines, is concurrent with the change Gry Wiker has found in gold bracteates and "*gullgubber*", 'gold men'<sup>5</sup>. The early cut "*gullgubber*" picture naked humans, while the later stamped "*gullgubber*" show people with detailed clothing. This could be due to a "humanization" of the gods that are pictured (Wiker 2000: 79).

5 i.e. very small gold amulets from the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD.

Another possibility is that it was the result of Christian influence on the attitudes towards the female body and nakedness in the late Iron and Early Middle Ages (cf. Solli 2002: 232; Steinsland 1989: 208; 1992: 151; 1997: 158–160).

### The economic value of neck rings and other silver objects

The definition of silver hoarding as a cult ritual does not necessarily exclude the possibility that the objects were used in some sort of exchange before they were deposited. However, in most areas where this hoarding took place in the Viking and Early Middle Ages, silver and gold were seldom used in everyday exchange. Instead, other media represented standardized measures of value, like woven cloth or horned cattle (Gurevich 1985: 217–218, though see, e.g., Gullbekk 2003 for a slightly different perspective). The exchange of silver and gold, particularly ring-shaped silver and gold, was made on a separate level or in a separate *sphere*.

The concept of separate economic spheres is a well-known phenomenon within economic anthropology. According to Igor Kopytoff, they may be explained by the human habit of imposing order on the environment by classifying its elements. This is necessary in order to have knowledge of the world and to be able to adjust to it. According to Kopytoff, culture is a way to impose a collectively shared cognitive order upon a world which, objectively, is completely heterogeneous (Kopytoff 2000: 381). Economic spheres are the result of such culturally based notions. Within an economic sphere, the same things have the same or a comparable value (Kopytoff 2000: 382).

Economic spheres exist in all societies, but may be more recognizable in non-commercialized and non-monetary societies (Kopytoff 2000: 382). Bohannan's study of the Tiv-people is a

well-known example (Bohannan 1959; Eriksen 1993: 211ff; Kopytoff 2000: 382). Until the Second World War, the Tiv-people exchanged goods within three separate exchange spheres. These spheres were hierarchical: a *food sphere* at the bottom (including food and everyday goods), a *prestige sphere* (exchange of things like white cloth, cattle, and slaves), and at the top a *women sphere* in which there were exchanged rights to people, especially women. For Tiv men, the ultimate goal was to have as many women and children as possible (Eriksen 1993: 212).

Exchange within each of the three spheres was morally neutral. However, exchange between the spheres was more complicated. Exchange upwards was satisfying and acceptable, while exchange downwards was associated with shame and only done under extreme conditions. Brass rods were exchangeable in all spheres, but making food into brass rods and brass rods into women required both intelligence and wealth (Eriksen 1993: 211–212; Kopytoff 2000: 382).

Because of the close link between cultural structures and the economic system, the introduction of money after the Second World War had profound consequences to the Tiv people. After a failed attempt to keep money to a separate exchange sphere, it became a common valuator within all the spheres. This resulted in a devaluation of women, because the exchange for money implied that women were goods or commodities in the same sense as yams or chickens (Eriksen 1993: 212–213).

I find this description of the sphere phenomenon very useful for understanding the Viking and medieval economics. The exchange of silver and gold in the Viking and Early Middle Ages has to be understood with regard to the cultural connotations of these metals at the time. Torun Zachrisson (1998) has studied the cultural meaning of silver and gold. She concludes that gold was clearly associated with gods and myths (e.g.

*Skaldskaparmál* 1973: 108ff), but silver was what people had at hand in the Viking and Early Medieval Ages (Zachrisson 1998: 30ff). So, silver was probably conceived of as a similarly mythic or magic metal as gold, in a comparable way as we know from numerous accounts in folk tales much later and ethnographic records in Scandinavia, i.e. silver as protection against beings of the underworld etc.

The breaking and giving of rings is well known as a way to build alliances in the Iron Age. It is likely that such gifts also included silver rings in the Viking and Early Middle Ages since at that time silver was more abundant than gold. The giving of rings was done not only because of the economic value of the metal, but as a token. It was an honor to be given such a gift, but the gift would also indicate a personal relationship: the receiver was expected to return the gesture in some way. One way would be to act as a loyal friend in times of trouble. Because silver and gold were not exchanged on an everyday basis, I find it likely that these metals were part of an exclusive sphere of exchange. This sphere was probably primarily available to the wealthiest elite who would secure their position by exchanging silver and other valuables in order to build alliances and ensure loyalty.

If silver could be used for this purpose among men, it is not unlikely that it was used for the same purpose in relationships with the gods. Gro Steinsland, professor of the history of religions, writes:

“... The heathen relation to the god has to be described almost as a pact of friendship between the human and the god – the god is *ástvinr*, dearest friend, or *fulltrúi*, faithful friend” (Steinsland 1989: 207, my translation).

In *Øyrbyggjasaga* Torolf Mosterskjegg arranges a large “*blót*” (offering) and asks Tor, “his best friend”, how to settle things with the king (*Øyrbyggjasaga* 1989: 11, my translation).

This apparent similarity in the way of relating to gods and to peers could be the reason why very large amounts of silver and gold were deposited in the ground and never regained. The hoards may have been offered as tokens of friendship with the mighty gods and deposited with some specific or non-specific future return in mind.

## Dating of silver hoards in northern Fennoscandia

The silver hoards in Scandinavia containing neck rings and certain other diagnostic objects have often been assumed to derive from the Viking Age or Late Iron Age (e.g. Hårdh 1996; Sjøvold 1974; Stenberger 1958). Hence the hoards have frequently been described as “Viking Age hoards” or “Viking Age treasures”.

However, the Viking Age is usually considered to have lasted until 1030 AD (in Norway: the battle of Stiklestad) or 1066 AD (the battles of Stamford Bridge and Hastings), and the “Viking Age” hoarding does not come to an end by this time. On the contrary, both numismatic and typological datings show that many of the hoards containing typical objects like neck rings are much younger (e.g., Hårdh 1996; Zachrisson 1998). Investigations also show that the further east we move, the younger the dates of the hoards usually are (Hårdh 1996: 71; Stenberger 1958: 316–317; Zachrisson 1998: 81).

A comparison of all the objects in the North Norwegian hoards with material from dated finds in Norway and abroad shows that an appropriate general dating for the northern and northeastern Norwegian hoards is 1050–1200 AD<sup>6</sup> (Spangen 2005). The suggested general dating is supported by the silver hoard recently found in Tromsø. The youngest object in this hoard is believed to stem from about 1200 AD (Storli 2006).

<sup>6</sup> Certain single finds of neck rings are harder to give an exact dating and may be older.



The hoards in northern Finland have also been given a general dating between 1050 and 1150 AD (e.g. Kivikoski 1964; 1973). This matches the dating of the hoards in northern Russia (Nosov et al. 1992). The Finnish datings have recently been reinforced by the radiocarbon dating of the birch bark that was found beneath the neck rings in the Nanguniemi find (see Fig. 2 above). The bark was dated to 1120 and 1280 AD (855±35 BP (Hela-746) / 810±40 BP (Hela-747) (M. Torvinen 03.06.2004, pers.comm.).

It seems, then, that the practice of hoarding silver objects was probably introduced in northern Fennoscandia during the Early Middle Ages. This is an important point because the general assumption that these hoards date back to the Viking Age has frequently been adopted by researchers all too easily. This has given a misleading first idea of the social context of these hoards (e.g. Brøgger 1928 on the silver hoard of Haukøya and its connection to Viking raids and trade).

It may be added that both written and archaeological sources show that the ritual deposition of weapons, tools and jewellery, as well as human bones and bodies, was continued in many parts of northern Europe well into the Middle Ages. The finds are similar to those of earlier periods and thus suggest the continuation of a well-established ritual tradition (e.g., Behrend 1970; Hedeager 2003: 156; Lund 2004; Lund 2009; Nielsen 1991: 262).

### Silver hoards in Sámi contexts

The Sámi area in the Viking and Early Middle Ages was not restricted to the arctic areas, and it would be very interesting to study finds further south in Norway and Sweden according to new knowledge about Sámi presence here (Bergstøl 2004; Dunfjeld-Aagård 2005; Zachrisson 1997). However, for practical reasons this discussion is

limited to the hoards found in the arctic areas, particularly northern Norway.

Many of the silver hoards in northern Fennoscandia contain certain characteristics that differ from the hoards further south, mainly ornaments of Baltic or Karelian origin, such as axe- and cross-shaped silver pendants (c.f. e.g. Makarov 1991). Eastern ornaments have been linked to Sámi culture and ethnicity in northern Norway, due to their frequent occurrence in unambiguous Sámi contexts like scree graves and offering sites (Gjessing 1927; Schanche 2000; Serning 1956; Storli 1991). In other words, some objects in the hoards in the northern areas also indicate a Sámi association.

Metal offerings feature in other Sámi ritual contexts, especially in the large offering sites in inner northern Sweden. However, these offerings usually consist of bronze, copper, pewter, iron, and lead (Fjellström 1962; Serning 1956; Zachrisson 1984). The presence of the metal ornaments at Sámi offering sites may have been the result of an intensified fur trade with Novgorod during the Early Middle Ages. This fur trade seems to have been of substantial importance to the Sámi's eastern relations at this time (Hansen & Olsen 2004: 136–139). The insignificant amount of precious metals at these offering sites may suggest that the Sámi have preferred socially and ritually valuable objects instead of purely economic returns of their products. Several researchers have suggested that the Sámi social structure was based on an egalitarian ideal. This could have been shattered by the arrival of large amounts of valuables. The solution may have been hoarding and rituals which secured that the valuables did not accumulate with individuals, but were invested for the benefit of the whole group (cf. Olsen 1984: 217; Mulk 1996: 69–72).

The anthropologist Arjun Appadurai describes this as a general principle (1986: 31–32):

Consumption and demand are not variables dependant on access, but socially regulated phenomena in all societies. The social control in tradition-bound societies will often consist of long-lasting taboos for the way and degree of consumption. It is a separate question whether such social control did in fact help preserve the egalitarian structure in a Sámi context in the case of an increased availability of goods. The ability to acquire the ritually important objects may also have given individuals increased status, even if the consumption was directed towards collective use. One reason for hoarding metal ornaments may also have been an understanding of the “correct” use of this material – based on the knowledge of hoarding practiced by neighboring groups.

Perhaps this is relevant even to the silver hoards in the north. The ornaments in these hoards tend to have a low silver content (Arrhenius 1970; Hårdh 1996: 152; Munch 1979; Sjøvold 1974: 331; Zachrisson 1984: 105). This has caused several researchers to suggest that these ornaments were in fact produced especially as offerings (Hårdh 1996: 152; Mulk 1996: 67–68; Hansen & Olsen 2004: 85). In any case, the weight value of the silver was apparently not the most important factor to those who received the ornaments.

Thus, silver hoarding would probably not have been an incompatible ritual behavior in a Sámi context, although it was originally a Norse tradition. However, Inger Zachrisson (1984) points out that the distribution of silver hoards in northern Sámi areas is mutually exclusive to the distribution of Swedish inland offering sites containing metal objects. In northern Norway, the silver hoards seem to be deposited in a cultural interface between areas inhabited mainly by the Norse/Norwegians on one hand and mainly by the Sámi on the other hand (Olsen 2000; Spangen 2005). In the Viking and Early Middle Ages,

there lived a population in these border areas which, judging from several types of material, mixed elements that are elsewhere regarded as diagnostic of either Sámi or Norse culture (e.g., Sandmo 1994). This may be a question of accessibility, they had access to products from both cultures but there is reason to believe that they also had family relations both to Norse and Sámi groups through intermarriage (cf. Storli 1991; 1994: 106ff). This dual connection may have been a part of the identity of these border groups that had been previously taken for granted, but that was actualized during the process of Christianization in northern Norway. Christianization was closely linked to the implementation of a new social structure to promote a single person’s rule of the country. The harsh measures to obtain these goals were mainly directed at the Norse population, while the missionary activity among the Sámi was not intensified until the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

I suggest that the “hybrid” border population could possibly avoid this strain by leaning towards their Sámi identities – constituted by Sámi family, Sámi cultural traits, and eastbound exchange patterns. The Sámi belief system had many similarities with the Norse system. By claiming a Sámi identity this intercultural group could maintain a heathen faith and culture. They were not necessarily identified as Sámi by people in core Sámi areas, but it would suffice to be identified as Sámi by the Norwegian missionaries and new rulers of the Christian monarchy (cf. van Dommelen 2002).

In this turbulent situation, offerings to the gods and help from them were probably more important than ever. This may explain why a previously Norse offering ritual such as silver hoarding was introduced in interface areas and adapted by adding eastern and subsequently Sámi ornaments.

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