

PENDANT

Unique ID: SF9305

Object type certainty: Certain

Workflow status: Published

Silver 'Valkyrie' type pendant.

Surface metal analysis conducted at the British Museum indicated an approximate silver content of approximately 90%; the black inlay is niello. The object weighs 5.6 grams.

The object is cast in the form of a human figure - possibly male rather than female, in spite of the costume - standing to the left (height 40mm), holding a circular shield under the left arm and an upright, fullered sword with a short, straight guard in the right hand, as the usual symbol of a warrior. The figure wears a long dress-like tunic covering the feet and leaving the visible arm bare, with what may be a scarf round the neck, knotted at the front. The vertical ribbing on the tunic may indicate pleating, and the hem is ornamented with a row of five squares between horizontal linear borders and short, vertical bars. The beardless face is shown in profile, with a single, incised, oval eye and short hair, which is indicated by a line running back from the brow to the neck and a comma shape over the latter. Sitting on top of the head and projecting front and back to end in a small, voluted knob, is an arc-shaped feature with worn, interlace decoration. This appears to represent some form of plaited head-covering rather than hair.

The shield is shown, unusually, from the back, the figure's hand grasping a horizontal, bar-shaped shield-grip, which runs across the central opening behind the shield-boss (on the hidden front) and reaches almost to the edge of the shield at each end. The back of the shield is decorated with four, or possibly five, radiating, incised motifs that might be meant to indicate animal limbs in profile, their feet pointing clockwise. The rim is marked by a circle of punched dots, which may stand for the rivets of an edge-binding. There are the remains of black niello in the incised lines. It might be questioned whether the jeweller was here attempting to represent the front of the shield at the same time as the back.

On the back of the object is a single, pierced lug, which may be either for suspension from a neck-string, or perhaps for sewing the object to the clothing.

Notes:

The object may be compared with a series of similar, early Viking-period, usually female figures of the 9th century from Scandinavia and England, made either as items of jewellery in silver or gilded bronze, or occasionally carved in amber. They were also embroidered on textile hangings and resemble other figures incised on standing stones on the island of Gotland. The figures may be portrayed singly, with or without the addition of a spear or sword, or else (the female ones) in front of a warrior on horseback, either holding out a drinking-horn or beaker to him as a sign of welcome, or carrying a shield. It is generally thought that the women represent the valkyries of Norse myth, the maids of Odin who, on

the one hand, acted as the guardians of young warriors, presenting them with splendid swords, but who, on the other, also chose who was to die in battle, welcoming the fallen warriors to Valholl, the hall of the slain, where they served them with mead and beer.

A bronze pendant in the form of a hooded human figure with a shield, spear and sword from Bourne, Lincs., provides the closest recorded English parallel to the Wickham Market find (*The Searcher*, issue for April 1993, fig. on p. 18). Examples of other related jewellery figures from Swedish locations such as Öland, Klinta, Birka and Tuna, including a male figure in a long tunic holding a sword and stave (from Birka) and also a brooch with an armed valkyrie in front of a mounted warrior from Hedeby (Haithabu), Germany, are illustrated by J. Graham-Campbell (1980), *Viking Artefacts. A select catalogue* (London), pls. 516-518; and in the article by H. Vierck (2002), "Zwei Amulettbilder als Zeugnisse des ausgehenden Heidentums in Haithabu", pp. 9-67, in K. Schietzel (ed.), *Das archäologische Fundmaterial VII* [Berichte über die Ausgrabungen in Haithabu, vol. 34], Abb. 6, 1, 2b-6. Further examples of paired valkyries and mounted warriors are known from Bylaugh, Norfolk, Steninget and Ribe, Denmark, from the Peterborough area, in the British Museum, and an unprovenanced, gilded silver brooch (S. Margeson (1997), *The Vikings in Norfolk* (Norfolk Museums Service), fig. 8; *By, Marsk og Geest*, vol. 5 (1992), pp. 42-3, figs. 3-4; British Museum, registration no. MME 1988,4-7,1; N. Mills (2001), *Saxon & Viking Artefacts* (Buxton), illust. on p. 56, no. V120). A human figure from the tapestry found in the celebrated early Viking-period ship-burial at Oseberg, Norway, apparently wearing a boar-headed head-dress and holding up a shield, as well as amber 'valkyries' from Kaupang and Longva, Norway, are also preserved (Vierck, *op. cit.*, Abb. 6, 7; C. Blindheim (1959), "En amulet av rav", *Universitetets Oldsaksamling Årbok*, 1958-1959, pp. 78-90).

Other contemporary illustrations of men dressed in long tunics include the rider on one of the circular mounts from Gokstad, Norway, and the seated warrior with sword on the late 9th/early 10th-century Nunburnholme cross-shaft, East Yorkshire (J. Graham-Campbell & D. Kidd (1980), *The Vikings* (London), fig. 90c, right; J. Lang (1991), *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, Vol. III, York and Eastern Yorkshire* (Oxford), ills. 709, 713; references kindly supplied by Prof. J. Graham-Campbell). From the later Norse period in Scotland, a number of the male chess-pieces from the Isle of Lewis on display in the British Museum also wear ankle-length tunics, which were clearly part of the military costume of the time and not female attire. The Nunburnholme warrior wears a closely similar head-covering to the figure from the Wickham Market area, which may further indicate that the latter is also male. The dress ornaments noted above may have been worn as amulets.

The sculptural parallels suggest that the pendant from near Wickham Market is an Anglo-Scandinavian product. It is a reflection of the main Danish settlement in East Anglia after around 879 and can be dated to about this time, if not to later in the 9th century.

Find of note status

This is a find of note and has been designated: County / local importance

Subsequent actions

Current location of find: Ipswich Museum

Subsequent action after recording: Acquired by museum after being declared Treasure

Treasure details

Treasure case tracking number: 2002T195

Chronology

Broad period: EARLY MEDIEVAL

Subperiod from: Middle

Period from: EARLY MEDIEVAL

Subperiod to: Late

Period to: EARLY MEDIEVAL

Ascribed Culture: Anglo-Scandinavian style

Date from: Circa AD 850

Date to: Circa AD 900

Dimensions and weight

Quantity: 1

Length: 40 mm

Discovery dates

Date(s) of discovery: Sunday 1st September 2002

Personal details

This information is restricted for your access level.

Other reference numbers

Treasure case number: 2002T195

Materials and construction

Primary material: Silver

Completeness: Complete

Surface Treatment: Inlaid with niello

Spatial metadata

Region: [Eastern](#) (European Region)

County or Unitary authority: [Suffolk](#) (County)

District: [Suffolk Coastal](#) (District)

To be known as: Wickham Market

Spatial coordinates

Unmasked grid reference accurate to a 0.01 metre square.

Discovery metadata

Method of discovery: Metal detector

Discovery circumstances: While searching with a metal-detector

Current location: Ipswich Museum

General landuse: Cultivated land

Specific landuse: Character undetermined

Vierck, H., 2002 [*Zwei Amulettbilder als Zeugnisse des ausgehenden Heidentums in Haithabu*](#) pp. 9-67