The Imaginary self

Art and social identities of Kúabót Iceland

A contextual analysis

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Abstract

In the year 1972 an excavation started on a peculiar ruin situated along the southern shore of Iceland. The next four years archaeologists unearthed quite interesting medieval farmstead there. This particular farmstead has been given the name Kúabót and has had great impact on the Icelandic archaeology. The aim of this thesis is to investigate this farmstead and especially two artifacts in detail. The main question is: how are certain visual and symbolic entities displayed, consciously and/or unconsciously via art, in the process of creation and maintenance of social identities at Kúabót, medieval Iceland? I will use contextual analysis to answer this intriguing question. A contextual analysis that include the art elements, presented on the two objects chosen, in deciphering the elusive and abstracted social identities. The main conclusion enforces the methods applied and indicates the nature, meaning and construction of social identities of Kúabót medieval Iceland.

Acknowledgement

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Chapter 1. Research parameter

1.1 Introduction

Experiencing art is quite similar to experiencing archaeology, wrote the archaeologist Colin Renfrew (Renfrew 2003). But what do these words imply? What is the relationship between art and archaeology? What can archaeology contribute to the artistic discourse and vice versa? This thesis will attempt to combine these disciplines in the contextual analysis of social identities of Kúabót, medieval Iceland. The investigation will be presented in five chapters. The first chapter gives an overview of the main subject and approaches, material, methods and theoretical framework. The second chapter outlines the archaeological discourse on style/art and social identities. The third chapter concerns the archaeological discourse in Iceland on art. The fourth chapter is the soul of this investigation. There I will present the archaeological material relevant to this investigation. Finally in the fifth chapter the discussion concerning the investigation will be laid out and the conclusion presented as well.

1.2 Main subject and approach

Despite its relatively recent introduction archaeologists have embraced the concept of social identity and kept it central in countless papers, articles, books and dissertations. With this thesis I want to participate in that discourse. The recent interest of archaeologists in social identities has created invaluable research background for this investigation as well as showed me the potentials of that particular discourse.

Bearing the vastness of the concept chosen for this investigation in mind some limitations, focusing and clear approach is direly needed. Therefore my approach is to investigate the relationship between the art element presented in the archaeological material and the creation and maintenance of social identities at one medieval farmstead in Iceland. That site is Kúabót situated on the southern shore of Iceland. The reasons for choosing that place will be discussed in the material chapter and presented in full detail in chapter four. I have actively chosen to refer to style as art wherever possible. The reasons behind that will be discussed more thoroughly in chapters 2.3 and 2.4. In the nexus of all the above mentioned the main research

question was formulized. The main question is; how are certain visual and symbolic entities displayed, consciously and/or unconsciously via art, in the process of creation and maintenance of social identities at Kúabót, medieval Iceland? It is considered the main purpose of this investigation to work within the boundaries created by this question in the quest for its answer.

1.3 Material

The archaeological material for this particular investigation has been carefully chosen with three important variables in mind. The first variable of concern is high archaeological visibility at the site. By that I mean the relatively large quantity of archaeological material unearthed. Even though this investigation will only be focused on one medieval site in Iceland, more precisely on two artifacts found there, it is my argument that Kúabót offers an excellent opportunity for investigation like this. The second variable I considered was choosing a site that is relatively well dated. I will go more thoroughly over the archaeological material in chapter four. There I will focus on giving solid arguments, which are based on the variables presented above, why the archaeological material from that site was chosen for this particular investigation and how that is relevant to the main question. To accomplish that task we should look at the methods I will use actively to get the required information in the purpose of answering the main question.

1.4 Methods

The subject, approach, material and the theoretical standpoint all have an integrated effect on the method chosen. One could even argue that the theoretical standpoint is in fact a method in its own right. This investigation is a reminder of those testaments. Considering the main subject, approach and the main question a contextual analysis is a suitable alternative. Contextual implies that I will both go thoroughly over the context of the depicted art elements on the archaeological material chosen and the scientific background behind the main concepts of the thesis. The background analysis is in my opinion an essential method for the purpose of the investigation as a whole. In an attempt to decipher such esteemed and vast concepts like social identities and art, solid contextual analysis on both the scientific discourse concerning the concepts and the artifacts itself are vital. The contextual analysis of the archaeological discourse concerning the concepts are self-explanatory but by contextual analysis on the two artifact chosen I refer to an extensive research on the archaeological, ethnological and historical context of the artifacts with

primary focus on the artistic elements. This is due to time allocated for this investigation. It is therefore considered neither the means nor the ends of this investigation to examine all the artifacts in extreme detail.

Chapter 2. Theoretical background

2.1 Style

Cultural concepts like style should always be contextually investigated, thus an introduction chapter is vital for further understanding. What I want to accomplish here is to introduce, briefly, how scholars have actively investigated the concept of style and how that research history has shaped my ideas which will be presented further on. Few issues in archaeology have been given as much attention as style and decoration. Numerous archaeologists have tried to define the concept and the idea. The discourse concerning style can be viewed as a thread through which archaeology has spun out of. Ultimately numerous questions arise; what is style, what is decoration? Is style a form of decoration or vice versa? Can there be style without decorations? How does one draw the line between the object and the style, between the objective and the subjective? Is style, decoration and symbols perhaps just one unified concept which needs to be viewed in that sense? Overview of the archaeological discourse concerning style and art reflects how archaeologists have dealt with the concept in their attempt of answering the questions presented above.

One of the primary concerns in the field of archaeology in its spawning days was the variability in ceramics designs. This discourse spun out of writings by archaeologists like Müller 1880, Hildebrand 1883 and Montelius who wrote his groundbreaking study, *Typologien utvecklingsläran tillämpad på det menskliga arbetet*, in the year 1884. There he tried, through ambitious and extensive typological investigation, to link certain stylistic elements to natural phenomenon which were, according to his viewpoint, the link to ethnic groups (Baudou 2004, Müller 1880, Hildebrand 1883). Bernard Salin presented, under heavy influences from both Sophus Müller (1880) and Montelius (1884), his monumental research on style in the year 1904. There he establishes his well-known tripartite (I-III) style groups concerning Nordic animal art based on extensive typological research. The first group (I) was thought to be stylistic motives from the Migration period in Scandinavia roughly from 300-700 AD. The second group was

considered to have eastern elements embedded in it and has been called older Vendel style. The third style variation was called the younger Vendel style and was considered to be the first true Nordic style and he dated the stylistic motives to the late 8th century. In his research crystalizes the approach of using and investigating style as a valid dating method (Salin 1935, Wilson 2008, Dickinson 2002, Kristoffersen 2002, Magnus 2002). The typological approach prevailed and endured for quite some time though with minor alterations. Under the influences of cultural history view Gordon.V. Childe published his book *The Dawn of European Civilization* in 1925. It is considered to be the first publication in the realm of archaeology that tries to research and define the concept of style, though that can of course be questioned for obvious reasons. First of all, Montelius, Müller and Hildebrand all published their work some 40 years earlier and secondly, Childe was more interested in ceramic designs variables rather than style per-se. Fluctuations within the designs were interpreted to be the result of diffusion, invasion or migration. Childe then used these similarities and fluctuations to shed a light on ethnical links within Europe (Childe 1947).

In the light of the ever growing influences of natural sciences within archaeology the notion arose that changes within the sociocultural system should be viewed as an adaptation. Lewis Binford was one of the pioneers of that particular field and he stressed that change in design and style over space and time was a cultural expression of adaptation to a specific environment. Furthermore the stylistic motives used in that expression came from a static stylistic norms or a pool which the society exploited in the process of adaptation (Binford 1972). The notion of these norms include that style was a passive and predictable cultural entity that could be measured, quantified, statically registered and tested. Style was furthermore thought to be peripheral; the functional significance was the most important attribute (Shanks & Tilley 1992). This drift in focus can furthermore be seen in the work of archaeologists like Mogens Ørnes. There he tries to link stylistical elements in Danish finds to different groups of style. His approach is solely an attempt to create a quantified dataset of observable stylistic similarities (Ørnes 1966).

During the late 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s more and more scholars ignored the notion of the static attributes of cultural concepts like style. This was mostly due to increased attention towards the elusive symbols within the material culture (Shanks & Tilley 1992, Hodder

1982). Bjørnar Olsen, amongst others, has pointed out, the apparent link between the discourse concerning style and the theoretical advancement which has been known as post processualism. The first phase of those theoretical changes was strongly under the influence of structuralism which viewed style as the product of interactions between various social units, increasing degree of interactions would result in stylistic similarities (Olsen 1997). Based on this premise the information exchange theories concerning style sprung forward, masterminded among others by archaeologists J.R Sacket, Polly Weissner and H. Martin Wobst. In 1977 Wobst published an interesting article, *Stylistic behavior and Information exchange* which reflects his contemplations regarding the subject of style. His main argument is that decorations and style are solely symbols. These symbols are therefore culturally embedded phenomenona within the material culture. The style is furthermore considered to be a medium for communication of symbols and that communication needs to be interpreted, hence the phrase for that theoretical discourse; information exchange. His contribution to the discourse on style was more abstract since he saw style as symbols in complex communication which were important in adaptive survival. According to his ideas style is both adaptive and communicative because it makes the social interaction, like survival, more stressful and painful (Wobst 1977, Shanks & Tilley 1993). These writings influenced Ian Hodder and his ethnoarchaeological investigations in Kenya, Zambia and the Sudan where he presented his idea that style was an integral part of a complex symbolic cultural structure and because of that fact archaeologist should not produce such predictable models concerning it. Furthermore, he demonstrated with material evidence that stylistic similarities have no direct correlation with the degree of social interaction as earlier archaeologists had suggested. Two groups could have frequent interactions without sharing any stylistic similarities (Hodder 1982).

Polly Wiessner became more abstract in her academic writings concerning style and took the communication part, introduced by Wobst, a step further. She demonstrated how style could be viewed as a medium for communicating information through long distances. The longer the information must travel the more rigid and evidential the stylistic design must be. The most common entities emitted through this way would be group identities, affiliation, status, wealth religious beliefs and political ideas since the two groups must share some acquaintances (Wiessner 1983, 1985). Though these approaches present a groundbreaking way of dealing with style it fails in three major ways of providing sufficient and adequate framework for

understanding it. Firstly she fails to attribute the active status of the material culture and style is succumbed to a passive level since material culture is assumed to be merely a passive reflection of individuals, identities and ethnicities. Secondly, signaling identities through style has nothing to do with a high visibility as Ian Hodder has demonstrated (Hodder 1982). Thirdly, the notion that style only mirrors different social strategies cannot be accepted. Style should be viewed as an active agent that mediates those strategies (Shanks & Tilley 1993).

Within that framework J.R. Sackett presented his ambitious ideas concerning style in two articles in 1982 and 1985. There he addressed the importance of realizing that concepts like style and function were so embedded in each other that any attempt to investigate them separately would be doomed to be inaccurate and incorrect. Furthermore he stated that any artifact might either have an utilitarian or non-utilitarian importance. Style acts then as medium for combining, simultaneously, those two elements of functional value. This is what Sackett has called isochrestic form of style because it neither suggests nor requires an explanation of why any given kind of attribute does or does not have stylistic significance in any given situation. The group chooses the different attribute needed for different exploitation. This indicates that style and function are highly contextual and furthermore the product of learned behavior (Sackett 1982). His approach to the investigation of style has been criticized heavily in the last decade. It has not been entirely rejected but thought to have over-simplify the subject. Shanks and Tilley describe how this approach evades the question of meaning behind the style and lacks the fundamental relation to the social matrix from which it arises. They believe that Sacket was too focused on the functional relationship of style that he overlooked that the material culture is full of style and function but function is embedded or adheres to the style, not vice versa (Shanks & Tilley 1993). What we presently perceive as one form of functional value may have completely different meaning for past societies.

The different opinions on how to approach the issue of function and style were the spark of a great debate between Sackett and Wiessner. While Sackett´s ideas have been presented here, Wiessner rejected the functional link provided by Sackett and suggested that the choice of attributes in which to invest style appeared to be the result of historical events, rather than following coherent principles (Wiessner 1983, 1985). She furthermore categorized these stylistic attributes into two distinctive groups; the emblemistic and assertorics (Olsen 1997).

As Shanks and Tilley cleverly point out in their discussion on style and ideology, concept of style is quite elusive and any attempt to decipher and/or interpret it will always partially be deemed inadequate (Shanks & Tilley 1993). They begin, with their alternative approach on style, in outlining one fundamental criteria, the dichotomy of style and art within archaeology which they think is not logical. They suggest; *"One cannot consider style without considering the nature of art and vice versa. It does not seem to be useful to maintain a radical separation between the two terms. Art mediates style just as style inheres art"* (Shanks & Tilley 1993 p147). In this spirit they present their ideas, or the tripartite vision of the social, which art operates to create, and how archaeologists should approach style and art. The first level deals with art in terms of habituated forms of social consciousness, the second with the principles of structural order depicted through art and the third one, which I will focus on here, art as an active medium of the insertion, manipulation, strengthening and interpretation of ideology which depicts social dominance. The last one deals with the role of art within the context of power relations in society of any kind and insertion of new ideas through hierarchy. Art may become, or perceived to be, ideological when actively utilized to resolve contradictions within the society. Art can in these terms express and suggest distorted views of the society. It does not need to depict the whole truth. It could as easily depict things as they should be rather than how they actually are. Graphic design can then play an active role in the production of social order (Shanks & Tilley 1993).

In the days of archaeological maturity the concepts of style have been rejuvenated by multi-disciplinary approaches and methods. But what does Ian Hodder mean when referring to the archaeological maturity and how can those revelations be viewed in the discussions concerning the subject of style today? The maturity is rated in the confidence of both contributing to and the borrowing of ideas and theories from other social sciences. The growing emphasis in cross-disciplinary research is a good testament to evolution. The maturity is also rated by the understanding and welcoming of multi-various nature of the archaeological theoretical debates which is due to the fact that even though our primary research subject is the material culture our questions are numerous, our approaches many and our methods varies. The importance of singular archaeological theory is alien to me because it ignores the multicolored nature of the discipline. One testament and outstanding example of that is the book *Föreställd hedendom* by Gunnar Nordanskog. In his work he has successfully presented how different disciplines can contribute to each other in positive ways to get a better insight into the subject at

hand. When investigating medieval art work depicted on church doors and portals in Scandinavia he examined, in great detail, the whole context of the subject. Realizing that the archaeology could not solely provide the answer needed he exploits other established methods from various disciplines like history, art history, theology, linguistics and various crafts concerning the techniques behind the doors (Nordanskog 2006). In my sense realizing the limitation of focusing solely on one method from one discipline is not a sign of weakness for that particular method or theory. It is a sign of maturity to embrace your boundaries, acknowledging your limitations. By doing that, contribution to other disciplines will be securely put forward.

2.2 Social identity

Social identity is a highly processual cultural phenomenon because it can be for example trained, accessed, exchanged, experienced, acquired, blurred, blocked, given, forced, etc. (Meskell & Preucel 2007). All this reflects how identity involves the process of identification (Jenkins 2008). That process is important in relation to how identities are created and maintained within the human society. Scholars have pointed out the vital link between self-awareness, empathy and ancestral group dynamics in the creation of social identity. Within the group and in the presence of peers one is forced to view, articulate and process the differences within that very group. The outcome is pivotal in understanding identity, the unquestionable distinction between us and others (Gärdenfors 2000). Identities are maintained through active dialogues, motivated by different agents, social structures and by knowing who you are and how and why you are different in relation to others (Meskell 2007). But how have archaeologists dealt with the concept of social identity and how can I exploit that discourse in the context of my investigation?

Archaeological interests concerning identity have a deep root within the social sciences beginning with the theories of Marx and Weber in sociology, but only recently have archaeologists openly participated in the discourse concerning social identity. Though the archaeologists of the late 19th century did not entirely engage in the discourse of social identity they did address several matters which link to it. Montelius, for example, tried to link typological similarities to ethnical traits (Baudou 2004). In the beginning of the 20th century the cultural historical approach still prevailed and was widely acknowledged as the fundamental archaeological theory. The characteristics of the cultural historical approach within archaeology concerning social identities are that the materialization of cultural similarities correlates with

members of the same ethnic group, tribe or race (Childe 1947, Jones 2007 Olsen 1996, Thomas 1996).

With the emergence of the new archaeology, in the 1960s, the concept of social identity was slowly creeping its way into the discipline. This new theoretical approach saw society as complex sets of social structures, as social identity, interacting with one another in a predictable way. Archaeologists were focused on ethnicity and categorizing societies according to western taxonomies like male vs. female, elite vs. non elite and heterosexual vs. homosexual and identifying institutionalized status of inequality via evolution between band, tribes and states (Johnson 2010). In this spirit the first studies conducted within the new archaeology concerning social identity were heavily concentrated on rank, status and structural adaptation with more evolutionary approach in U.S.A (Renfrew 1976, Clark 1957, Binford 1962, 1972. Myhre 1964, Johansen 1979). This can also be seen in the work of Stjernquist and Hagens. Hagens wrote in his doctoral thesis from 1970 that archaeologist should not pursue to investigate social groups, that would be better suited for social anthropologists. Of most importance for archaeologists was to approach issues like ethnicity and identity with positivism and adopt a processual standpoint (Hagen 1970). In the 1960s, Berta Stjernquist, begun to conduct systematical Iron Age investigation on Gårdlösa in South Eastern Scania. In her publication from 1971 she concluded that most importance was to investigate ethnicity and identity as a form of adaptation to the natural environment. Similar visual depiction of similar ecological situation indicates group identity (Stjernquist 1971). Many archaeologists have criticized these approaches including Lynn Meskell who points out how these approaches have forgotten to take into account the interpoling of other axes of the identity (Meskell 2006).

The time period between the New archaeology and the post processual era has often be neglected in theoretical discourse concerning social identity but many interesting ideas were presented then which had dramatic influences on the preceding debates. Even though we are prone to think that the post processual archaeology begun swiftly in the beginning of 1990s things are never that simple. Archaeologists, like Renfrew, Earle and Shennan, were still firmly focused on materialization of power structures. There the individual was reduced to a passive actor fulfilling his prescribed role within the society. One could say that the primary drive force behind the social identity was that the individual was motivated for his own interest of

accumulating power (Meskell 2006). With the acknowledgement and silent agreement of the passiveness of the individual the discourse on social identity slowed down and critiques and new inspiration were desperately needed. The aid and the fresh ideas came from two French scholars, a philosopher and a sociologist. Foucault, 1978 and Bourdieu 1977, introduced key elements in the advancement of the discourse on social identity within all the social sciences including archaeology. Bourdieu emphasized on the individual and his motivation for creation and maintenance of social identity while Foucault introduced the concept of agency in his publication *History of sexuality* (Foucault 1978, Bourdieu 1977). Even though during the 1980s archaeologists like Renfrew, Shanks and Tilley were still concerned with identity as an ideological process in maintaining power, Bourdieu's ideas were creeping in and would gain better understanding within the discipline in the coming decades (Jones 2007, Meskell 2006, Fowler 2004).

From all this mixture of theories the post processual archaeology arose from around the mid-1980s. Archaeologists under strong influences from both Foucault and Bourdieu pointed out the obvious flaws in the strict structural ways of the new archaeology and new perspectives concerning social identity were born. The discourse was then under heavy influence from both structural ideas (Giddens 1977, 1979), which can be characterized by how modes of economic relationships are translated into social structures, like social identities, and Marxism which can be characterized as how social inequalities, the struggle of classes, affects the negotiation and creation of social identities (Pettersson 2003). This can be seen in the writings of anthropologists like Daniel Miller (Miller 1984). Within this framework Ian Hodder conducted his ethnoarchaeological studies in Kenya, Zambia and the Sudan where he investigated cultural similarities within different tribes and areas. He thwarted the common notion that increasing cultural similarities were an index for interaction between tribes. The symbols embedded in the material culture played an active role in nearly every phase of the society, be it style, function, ethnicity or identity (Hodder 1982). At this point the discourse concerning social identities was, by some exclusion, characterized by the notion of its focusing on the active codependent relationship between the individual, symbols, material culture and social identity. Multiple scholars followed quickly in Hodder´s footsteps and participated in the discourse on ethnicity, social identity and style. One of the fundamental approaches provided by this movement, which was crucial for the advancement of the discourse, was the new ethnical approach. Ethnicity was

not synonymous with singular entities like race, language and material culture. Style, food or materialization of characteristic behavior were more adequate in tracing past ethnicity (Meskell 2007). With this shift from single-issue to plurality of cultural phenomena, like social identities, the focus turned to the obscured and muted entities, which disciplines like archaeology had not considered to be active agents in the creation and maintenance of social identities. This time the perspective came from a new strand of thought within the social sciences; the feminist theories that would have dramatic influence and shape the discourse concerning concepts like identities next decades to come.

With the groundbreaking article from 1984, *Archaeology and the study of gender*, Conkey and Spector pointed out how archaeologists had neglected gender and feministic concepts in their investigations (Conkey & Spector 1984). This article has since to be known as the first gender article in archaeology and has had huge impact. With investigations focused on women´s place in the past, conducted within the framework of first wave of feminist theory, the horizon widened dramatically (Gilchrist 1991). However it was not until the third wave of feminist theory was introduced; that gender was inclusively related to multiple identity markers such as class, age, ethnicity and sexuality (Meskell 2006 Sweely 1999 Brumfiel 1992, Sigurðsson 2006). Brumfiel argued, in her article from 1992, strictly against the ecosystem approach in favor of a much more agent oriented one and also that the elite was not the primary mover of cultural alterations and changes (Brumfiel 1992). This theoretical development has spun of new branch within the discipline of archaeology; gender archaeology. Roberta Gilchrist has pointed out how the life cycle should be seen as an experience in continuum where identities are constantly negotiated through the body and how the material culture is actively used in these negotiations (Gilchrist 1999). Sørensen takes a similar approach to the issue and argues that gender is fundamentally about identity and difference and how we communicate, through our bodies and activities, our differences as individuals and as a group (Sørensen 2000). What this provides us with is the important notion that identity is not something that is given, like DNA, but is gained and socially constituted, unstable and fluid (Johnson 2010). These three approaches give us a good overview of both gender and discourse on social identity in the most recent years since they have been quite intertwined.

Archaeological discourse concerning social identities in the present has been characterized by focus on agency, the individual and the personhood by investigating the embodied and experienced behavior and the materialization of those patterns in both the past and the present (Insoll 2007, Ekroth 2008, L. Voss 2006, Meskell 2007, Thomas 2002, Roslund 2009, Jenkins 2008, Langdon 2008, Mizoguchi 2004). I will concentrate, in the purpose and light of my investigation, on personhood, social memory and art in relation to social identity.

Personhood

Through the history of the discipline archaeologists have been focused in their search for the people of the past, what it meant to live in the past. We try to link various activities with certain people or groups in the past, their experience, and their relationship to animals, their technique and art. While we are still trying to get at these answers we have not really, as Chris Fowler has pointed out, addressed the questions of what it means to be a person and how we incorporate their personhood in our investigation (Fowler 2004). Personhood refers to the meaning behind being a person (Fowler 2004) and is seen as a way of interrogating materials for evidence of how embodied actors engage in social relationships (Clark & Wilkie 2006). By introducing the importance of the concept of the person and personhood archaeologists explored one of the fundamental entities between the social identity and gender and have provided us with an approach that allows us to shift from consideration of gross categories, such as woman, to a consideration of socially constructed roles that incorporate gender, such as mother (Clark & Wilkie 2006). Furthermore and fundamental to my investigation Fowler states also that personhood is one of the medium which social identity is actively conscientiously and unconscientiously portrayed through various forms of communication such as style and art. I would also like to add that, which is important for the investigation, the material culture or the artifacts that archaeologists explore can also, through different life stages, have their own social identity like personhood.

Social memory

The social memory is essential in relation to learned behavior, experiences, certain techniques, crafts, and activities related to the display of visual materialization because it reflects continuously active choice. That choice is furthermore made at certain levels to remember or to

forget, distort or refigure a certain event or places that are vital in the creation and maintenance of social identities. Events are crucial in the relation of social memory and social identity (Alcock & Van Dyke, Meskell 2003, 2005). Arvill-Nordbladh has demonstrated in her writings precisely that. She has investigated the role of social memory in different activities associated with Viking age mortuary rites which has played a vital role in the creation of distinct social identities (Arvill-Nordblad 2008). Event can be on macro level and spun over long time, but event can also be singular, reoccurring on the micro level such as art production.

Art and social identity

Archaeologists have a long tradition of investigating style and identity, as I have demonstrated in this chapter but it is quite recent however that they have actively referred to style as art. By doing so the focus becomes much broader, contextual and relevant to the mature nature of archaeological theory today. In the book *Archaeology of art*, edited by Janz, Fiore and May, from the year 2008 ideas concerning visual materialization of the whole spectrum of social identities are presented which I suggest cannot be neglected in the purpose of this investigation. Furthermore since the book is relatively recent it gives an invaluable insight into the exciting world of archaeological theory, art and social identity today. The book focuses on three artistic endeavors, rock art, body art and portable art which are decorated artifacts or artifacts shaped with specific form. The major theme in this investigation which reflects the importance of those concepts in today´s discourse is post colonialism, social memory and learned behavior, experience. Sally K. May goes thoroughly over the importance of social constituted access of learning art and how that education played an immense importance in the maintenance of chosen identities within the Aboriginals in Arnhem Land Australia (May 2008). Ultimately the question arises how we can link with more precision the fluent visual aspects of our material culture with the creation and maintenance of the central theme of my investigation, the social identity? That is an intriguing, alluring and interesting question. In my view Inés Domingo Sanz, Dánae Fiore and Sally K. May have made an interesting argument on precisely that in their first chapter of the previously introduced book. They argue that visual art is filled with many levels of information about the identity of both the artist and the audience or the recipients which can be decoded via analysis of material culture. They continue and add that if we accept that art, or visual display of the material culture, is a vital part of social mechanism of social identity construction, then we

can assume that style and stylistic differences can be used to identify groups and their social identities. Technological implications embedded in art production are quite related to symbolic, religious, economic and political values and that requires learned process which provides relevant information of social identity and evidence of particular individual or groups (Sanz, Fiore, May 2008).

2.3 Art, social identities and the material culture

The only limit of the human endeavor is our imagination. The phenomena of imagining the nexus between the past, present and the future is one of the cognitive capabilities of the human race, which has functioned as an invaluable medium for displaying and portraying our views on ourselves and the cosmos which we inhabit. The spectrum of our imagination seems limitless, there seem to be no boundaries or barriers for the form and platform of our imagination. One of the facets of the imagination is self-awareness, i.e to acknowledge that you are both self and part of the group. Self-awareness is the notion of understanding and accepting that you, the socially constituted you, are both one and a group. Furthermore by realizing that the individual both seeks to emphasis his role as an individual and as a part of larger whole. How do we accomplish that complex task? There are multiple ways, with cultural differences, available or at our service. The most integrated one and perhaps the oldest is with some sort of communication. Our roles are emphasized by communication within the self and the group. These communications, which fascinate me as an upcoming archaeologist, can be verbal, nonverbal or mixes of both. Body language plays an important role in the communication of our imagination concerning ourselves. The medium that has proven to be quite an effective way of communicating our self-awareness is the material culture. The ways of displaying the complex self-awareness through the material culture are astronomically many, the approaches to the subject are therefore nearly without barriers. I will now describe my approach to the elusive and intriguing sphere of communication through the material culture.

The spectrum, function, form and visibility of the communication we portray are great in numbers and complex to decipher. Social identities are an integrated part of them. Social identities are a fascinating part of our communications. First of all because the spectrum of social identities are many, for example gender, age, race, ethnicity, nationality, etc., which all are

related to different form of communications. Secondly; different forms of social identities can be communicated differently and consciously or unconsciously.

My suggestions are based upon my interpretations of the relation between social identities and the material culture. My interpretations, and ultimately my approach are as follows. Certain patterns of communications leave certain material cultural traces behind. Re occurring activities make those patterns visible and thus available for investigation. Archeological approach to those patterns is to investigate how, why and to what extent the role of the material culture played in the development of those patterns. The material culture and the patterns of communication are an integrated part of each other, heavily intertwined and counter affective. The communication, the social identities, and the material culture should therefore be investigated as such. Social identities, as one form of communication as I have discussed earlier, are actively displayed through the material culture by various reasons, functions and agendas. Since the social identities are an integrated part of the self-awareness they contain a wealth of information both on the individual, the person and the collective, the group. That is precisely one of the most fascinating aspects of archaeology; to investigate the material culture in our search for the people, persons and individuals of the past.

Then ultimately the question arises; how do we spot those patterns? How do we spot the active display of social identities through the material culture and furthermore how do we interpret what we have found? There is no ultimate or unified answer to those questions. My suggestion is to exploit art as a guiding light, beacon, in our search both for spotting the patterns and interpreting them. Art, as the visual materialization of those cultural and social patterns mentioned, is one of the fundamental phenomenon with which we actively display our ideas concerning social identities. Both the activity of art creation and communication through art leave traces behind, similar to others patterns mentioned above. In the process of art a part of the individual is transferred and materializes into the artwork. The part which interests me in relation to my investigation and which is transferred, interacted with the artist is the social identities. Here we have reached a pivotal point in my arguments. I therefore propose the following; by investigating the contextual and social meaning behind the art work, presented on the objects chosen, we should get a trace of the social identities which are, due to the artist, embedded in them. In our aid and deeper understanding of the complex social forces behind that

embeddedness I introduce the importance of social memory. I will argue that the social memory is a vital denominator and the scope with which we should investigate social identities through art because art is a learned behavior.

Essential and central in the discourse concerning social memory are event and space. No event can occur in a total vacuum and without the event there can be no social space since our interpretations of that space is determined by the events occurred. Both the event and the space creates the fundamental niche in which reoccurring activities, like activities associated with art, are actively produced and altered. In reoccurring activities, active choices must have been made, where the importance of remembering or forgetting certain aspects are vital. In that sense social memory is essential in our attempt to decipher and investigate traces of re occurring activities of the past. Therefore I have chosen to embrace the importance of social memory in relation to the creation and maintenance of social identities through art and actively use the concept in the investigation.

To summarize my view and approach to the relations between the material culture and social identities; art is one of the fundamental medium through which social identities are displayed. By contextually investigating the importance of the art elements depicted in the material culture and examining the role of social memory in that relation one gets a richer picture and deeper understanding of the cultural meaning of the social identities displayed. The investigation presented in this thesis will follow the approach described here above. Though I will respectfully acknowledge that this approach is not by any means the ultimate approach in the attempt to investigate the relationship between the material culture and social identities, it is an adequate and valid one. After I have presented the artifacts chosen and my study of them I will argue, more thoroughly, for the benefits of using it.

The methods and theories outlined here provide the perfect background and theoretical standpoint for the investigation which lies ahead. The exploration of the visual art form in Kúabót, the techniques, motifs and meaning ascribed has been given much needed theoretical background. However, then the question arises; what is medieval Icelandic art? Before we dig into the bulk of the investigation it needs to be answered.

2.4 Three theoretical points of departure

My theoretical standpoint for this thesis is first and foremost influenced by three major contributions to the archeological discourse of style and social identity. First I will present a fundamental book, *Archaeologies of art -time, place and identity* by Dánae Fiore, Inés Domingo Sanz, Sally K May, for this thesis and my theoretical standpoint. They argue strongly, and I concur, that style should not be investigated separately to art. Another emphasis in their work is the importance of investigating art as a learned behavior in the construction and maintenance of social identities. I will argue that archaeological investigation of style without including or introducing the importance of art would be dry, ineffective and without contextuality. The two concepts, art and style, are so integrated that any attempt to dissolve the two would be futile. Style should neither be investigated as a sub-category of art nor art investigated as the superclass of style. To avoid the obvious pitfalls of separation between the concepts I will follow in the recent trend, as presented in the work mentioned above, and refer to the phenomenon of concern as art.

The second contribution which has influenced my theoretical approach is an ambitious work on Scandinavian medieval art. This is the doctoral dissertation; *Föreställd hedendom* by Gunnar Nordanskog. His integrative analysis of art and social identities depicted in medieval Scandinavian Church doors has proven to me how one can investigate the complex and contextual social aspect of the material chosen without ever losing the focus on the real issue at hand, the art itself and on its own terms. Essential to the contextual investigation is the importance of approaching and interpreting art on its own terms. Not in relation to the text written near it, not entirely by the literary links of the motives expressed but more on the art itself and the people behind it. Furthermore the contextual approach is quite fascinating since it focuses, by using artistic models, on the artwork an approach which is direly needed in the Icelandic archaeological discourse concerning art.

The third contribution is the book *Archaeology of personhood* by Chris Fowler. His arguments on how archaeologist have constantly ignored what it meant to be a person in the past, how personhood can be investigated and the importance of identifying and actively investigating individuality and personhood when dealing with the creation and maintenance of social identity (Fowler 2004). Art is the creation and testament of individuals and persons. The blatant and

obvious reality how archaeologists have consciously or unconsciously ignored the individual and persons behind the socially constructed phenomenon of art can no longer be tolerated. Individuality and personhood lies at the very heart of art creation which is, amongst other things, where social identities are meditated.

In the light of all these contributions my approach and theoretical aim are crystalized to investigate style in a wider and integrative spectrum as art and emphasize on the medieval Icelandic art as a communicative learned behavior influenced by complex and /interacting/ nexus between personhood and social identity.

Chapter 3 Icelandic medieval art. The panels from Flatartunga and Bjarnastaðahlíð.

In the previous chapter an overview of the style/art and social identities discourse within archaeology was pointed out. Contextual analysis and detailed investigation on the subjects of social identities and Icelandic medieval art requires a good context of the consistency, definition and characteristic of the Icelandic Medieval art discourse.

The discourse concerning Icelandic Medieval art has been quite focused, with few exceptions, on church objects and dominated, in the recent 50 years, by an interesting debate concerning richly decorated medieval panels from the farmsteads Flatartunga and Bjarnastaðahlíð in Skagafjörður, Northern Iceland. I have chosen to shed a light on this debate here. The purpose and arguments for that choice are two folded. Firstly, since those objects are like a thread through the medieval artistic discourse in Iceland, they give vital insight into how different scholars have tackled and interpreted their implication and origin. Secondly these objects have dominated the discourse and new perspectives are needed. It's not the place or meaning by this thesis to cast a shadow over the ambitious investigations that have been firmly focused upon these illustrious objects. Rather acknowledging that Icelandic medieval art has a broader spectrum and a lot more to offer. By shedding a light on these objects I want to argue for the necessities of alternative approaches and the importance of archaeological involvement in the discourse. Both these arguments create a

Figure 1 The panels from Flatartunga (Ágústsson 1989).

fundamental basis for the subject, material and method chosen in this thesis and are therefore essential for the arguments presented further on.

The panels are thought to have been transported from Hólar, the bishop seat situated in Northern Iceland, at some period, to Flatatunga. After the hall there was renovated the panels were moved again in 1874 to Bjarnastaðahlíð. In 1924 those panels were salvaged and transported to the National museum of Iceland. Interestingly, when the Flatatunga farm was demolished in a fire in 1956 four other panels where found which are thought to belong to the same construction as the panels from Bjarnastaðahlíð (Kristjánsdóttir 2005). Since their arrival to the National Museum they have been subject of extensive investigation (Eldjárn 1956, Selma 1959,
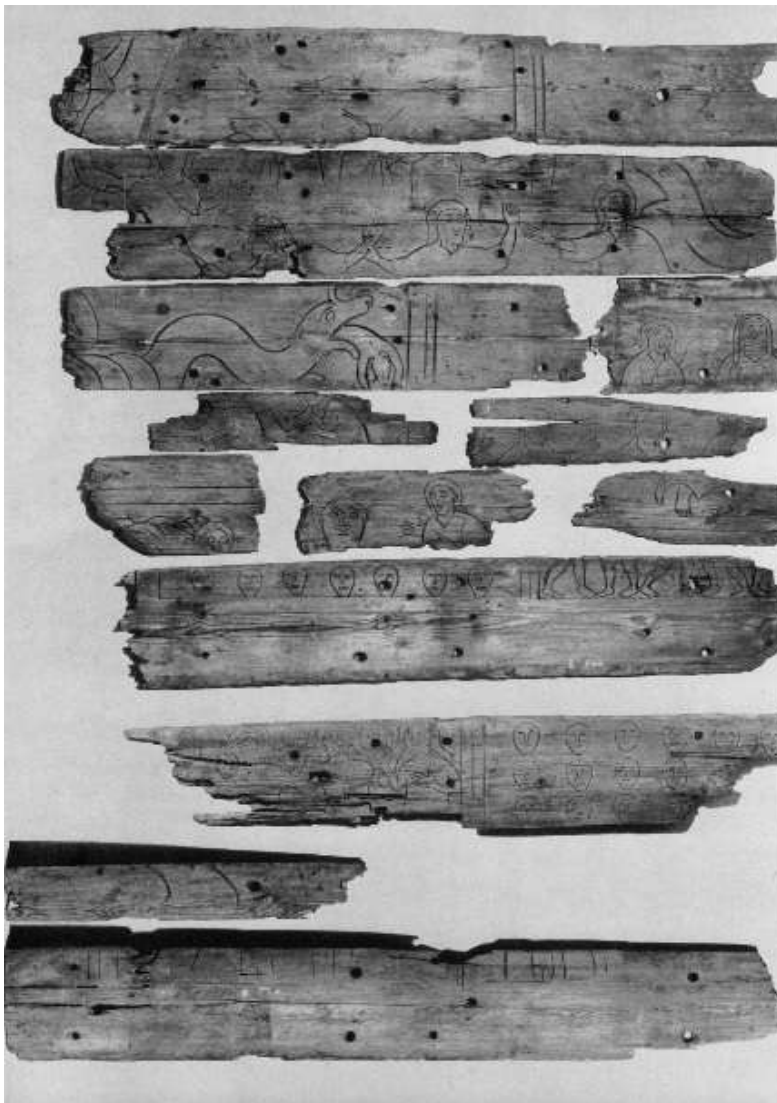
Figure 2 the panels from Bjarnastaðahlíð (Jónsdóttir 1959).

Mageröy 1955 & 1965, Hörður 1989, Kristjánsdóttir 2005). They crystalize different ideas scholars share on the subject of Icelandic medieval art and are therefore invaluable in relation to my investigation.

Kristján Eldjárn, archaeologist, the national antiquarian of Iceland and the president of Iceland from 1968-1980 did a stylistic overview in his monumental work, *Kuml og haugfé úr*

heiðnum sið á Íslandi, publicated in 1956. Even though his primary focus was on the Viking age burial customs and artifacts associated to the burials he did both write a stylistic analysis on these artifacts and stylistic background chapter where he traces the stylistic elements from 800 A.D-1000 A.D. Within those stylistic chapters he describes and traces the stylistic meaning of the panels which the national museum had just recently acquired at that time, the Flatatungu panels. Even though one could argue that of course Matthías Þórðarsson wrote an overview on the panels from Bjarnastaðahlíð, 1924, he did not discuss their stylistic significance. I would argue, for now, that Kristán Eldjárn was amongst the first Icelandic scholars to spearhead the interest on these illustrious pieces of art. Therefore, in my view, his ideas reflect what scholars thought to constitute as Icelandic medieval art.

Kristján Eldjárn was focused on the panels from Flatatungu which he described as a monumental work and a testament of the ambition of the Icelandic inhabitants during the medieval times. He argues for strong Ringerikstyle influences depicted on them with a strong cultural link to the seventh century Christian and English motives. Eldjárn argues, furthermore, that this link is one of the fundamental reasons for the uniqueness of the panels presented and testament of the endurement and long continuity of the rich Nordic style and art (Eldjárn 1956).

His views, as it crystalizes in his discussions concerning the panels, is in sense both influenced by Salin´s and Müllers work and can therefore be interpreted as cultural historical but his views are also heavily influenced by the ambitious work of the Norwegian archaeologist Haakon Shetelig. According to Salin and Müller, presented earlier in the thesis, style should be typologically researched for absolute dating method (Salin 1904, Müller 1880). This can be seen in the work of Kristján Eldjárn were his main concern is to present the „right" style to provide the solid dating method, in this case the panels from Flatatunga (Eldjárn 1956). Shetelig was most known for presenting one of stylistic links between heathen and Christian Scandinavia. Shetelig named this style Ringerikstyle and argued for the strong English and Christian motives in other quite Nordic heathen style. Furthermore Shetelig tried to establish, quite ambitiously I must say, the link between the artwork and the artist. He tried to investigate the artistic fingerprints on the artwork itself (Shetelig 1949). Kristján spots the similarities between the Ringeriks characteristics and the artwork of the Flatatungu panels and without hesitation links the whole object to the Ringeriksstyle and therefore to the 11th century (Eldjárn 1956). Even

though scholars have pointed out that the situation was not quite that simple as Eldjárn expressed his stylistic interpretation has more or less been unquestioned (Ágústsson 1989). Nevertheless one should not ignore his background and archaeological context when criticizing the archaeological ideas which Eldjárn presented. His conservative view on style, even for those days, is due to two major facts. First of all his archaeological education cannot be interpreted as extensive one, one year in Copenhagen University, and secondly the nature of Icelandic archaeology. From the beginning of the 20th century to more or less 1987, the discipline was heavily influenced by strong historical implications (Friðriksson 1994, Einarsson 1994).

The wooden panels played a central role when the interests concerning past Icelandic art arose in the 50s and 60s. None of the scholars which have studied that field have excluded the panels Eldjárn wrote about. In a totally different approach, methods and theoretical perspectives
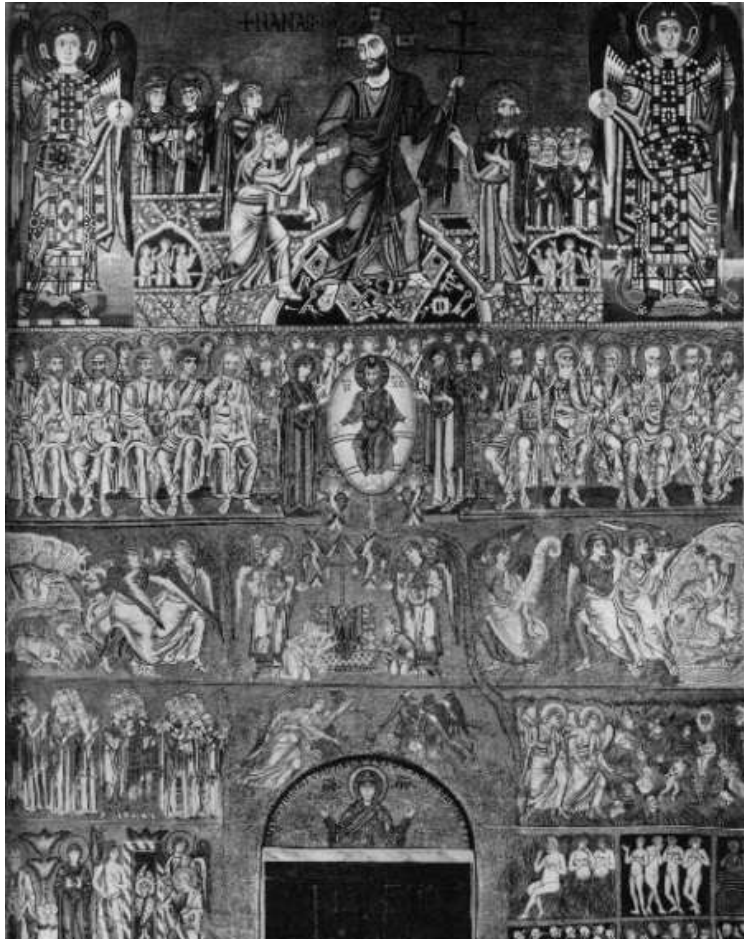
Figure 3 Last judgement Mosaic from the Torcello Cathedral (Jónsdóttir 1959).

Selma Jónssdóttir presented her doctoral thesis on the role of medieval Icelandic art, with special focus on depiction of 11th century Byzantine judgment in relation to the panels in the year of 1959. In her work she is firmly focused on the artwork depicted on the panels from Flatatunga and from Bjarnastaðahlíð. This doctoral dissertation can without a doubt be named the first scholarly thesis, in Iceland, that focused upon imaginary depiction of archaeological objects. Her artistic view on the panels had great impact on the discourse on them and Icelandic medieval art in greater context. Her primary conclusion

was that the panels depicted a well-known 11th century Byzantine last judgment artwork. Her

approach was to use artistic analogies and other sources to shed a light on the link between the panels and other artworks which depicts the 11th century Byzantine last judgment idea. But where does that imagery originate and how does she connect the panels to this idea? Selma suggests in accordance to the ideas of Georg Voss, that the famous 11th century Byzantine last judgment picture or idea has probably a great root in the biblical descriptions of Homilis of St. Ephraem Syrus. That writing did then inspire artist in the East Roman church or the Byzantine one to make various depictions of that specific tale. One of the Last judgment depictions that Selma uses for her artistic analogies and argument for her interpretation on the panels from Flatatunga and Bjarnastaðahlíð is the imposing splendor of the great mosaic picture in the cathedral at Torcello near Venice.

Selma´s strongest arguments are the artistic analogies, as mentioned above and which I will not criticize, but she does also present a weak interpretation of 19th century testimonies of different eyewitnesses that saw the panels when they were a part of the interior of the Flatatunga farmstead. She furthermore links the testimonies to one famous Icelandic saga, the saga of Þórðar Hreðu which was thought to be the founder and farmer of this farmstead as well as the artist behind the panels. Selma concludes that the fragments, from the farmstead Flatatunga, which the National museum got in the 1956 could not have been the ones that the eyewitnesses described in their writings. Mainly because of the different style presented and also because these panels have been placed vertically thus cannot have formed the part of the Byzantine last judgment in the hall in Flatartunga, although coming from the same hall (Jónsdóttir 1959). This can sound quite confusing, argumentatively wrong and misleading.

A few years later, 1967, Ellen Maire Magerøy presented here ambitious and extensive work on Icelandic woodcarvings art, *Plantornementiken i islandsk treskurd*. This catalogue of Icelandic art is an invaluable investigation in both the relation to Icelandic art history and more precisely my work. It is worth noticing that her focus is not especially within the medieval period. Majority of the wooden objects she investigates derive from the 17th-19th century. Nevertheless she addresses the medieval wooden artwork as well in detail because she talks quite much about five wooden artifacts, which she thinks are only comparable to the wooden objects found in the Åsebergmound that have clear medieval elements on it. Among those objects are the panels from Flatatunga and Bjarnastaðahlíð. On one place she criticizes Selma and Eldjárn as

well and places the panels, from the farmstead Flatatunga, in between Gokstad and Urnestyle but on another hand she is convinced that the panels are in Ringerikstyle. Strangely enough, even though she is partially presenting new ideas with this writings she does not argue anything for different dating for that artwork. Furthermore she is not convinced, like Selma, that those panels come from two distinctive artworks, though coming originally from the same hall of Flatatunga. Her focus is firmly on the plant decorations and therefore she studies more precisely the panels from Flatatungu which she argues for strong Ringerikstyle elements. It is something to dwell on that even that Magerøy was not focused entirely on these panels that still she decided to participate, like me I guess, in their interpretation and discourse which is like a thread through the intertwined story of medieval art and archaeology in Iceland (Magerøy 1967).

In the book *Dómsdagur og helgir menn á Hólum*, published in 1989, the author takes a firm standpoint in the discussion mentioned earlier and criticized Selma heavily for her interpretations concerning the panels and presenting interesting new perspectives on their artistic context and meaning for the Medieval Iceland (Ágústsson 1989). One of the main reasons for the great depth of the arguments put forward by Hörður in his publication is the fact that he was always postponing the release, because new information concerning the panels was constantly piling up. He begun working on the book in 1970 but published it, as mentioned earlier, in 1989. I would argue that the timespan of this work has only aided him in his task and strengthened his arguments that Selma was, fundamentally, wrong in her interpretations. His criticism on Selma´s work was mainly four folded; architecturally, artistically, new and more criticized overview of the testimonies mentioned and last but in no way least, archaeologically. I will now go shortly over his main criticism and therefore present new perspectives essential for its interpretations.

Hörðurs main critique on Selma´s work was based on architectural arguments. He doubts that the panels could have come from the hall of Flatatunga. Hörður presents his measurements of his recreational work of the art work in whole and concludes that the width w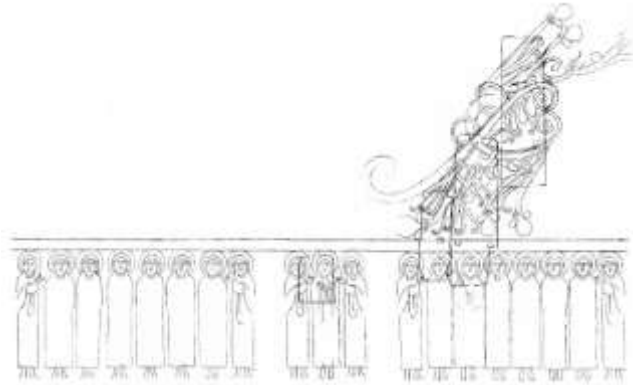ould have been around 7.27 m. The sheer size of that artwork would then never have fitted in the hall of Flatatunga, even

Figure 4 possible origin of the panels from Flatartunga (Ágústsson 1989).

though if the hall would have been as imposing as described in the saga. He is also, and I concur, astonished that Selma uses the famous Icelandic saga of Þórðar Hreðu as her main source of argumentations concerning the origin of the panels. His artistic criticism of Selma´s argumentations is mostly based on where she thought the idea on the artwork had originated and the construction of the panels within that same art work. Hörður presents strong argumentations for how the idea for the artwork brewed inside Jón Ögmundsson, a bishop of Hólar, on his voyage, around 1104, to Rome, to receive his Ordination from the pope. On his way he stopped at the newly strengthened bishop seat at Lund and at Nidaros. When he returned home to Hólar he issued an order of building of his new cathedral. Inside his cathedral at the holiest of all
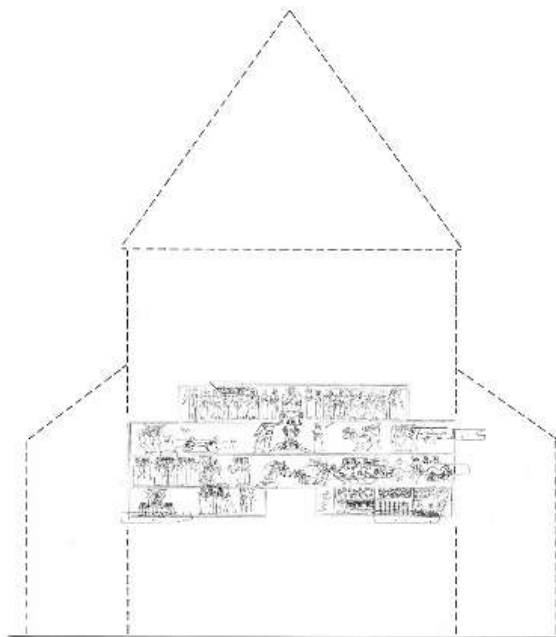
Figure 5 The Jón Ögmundsson cathedral at Hólar and the panels as the altar table (Ágústsson 1989).

places, the altar should stand a splendid testament of god's glory on earth. Of which the panels from Flatatunga and Bjarnastaðahlíð were an integrated part of. He gives furthermore few examples (Sundrechurch on Gotland) of how widespread the imaginary related the last judgment day was in Medieval Scandinavia (Sawyer & Sawyer 2000). Hörður does, furthermore, criticize Selma´s idea that two distinctive pictures were depicted on the panels since some of them were horizontally and some vertically constructed. He gives strong arguments

against these both artistic and from a new written source, from 1977, which describes the panels. One of the strongest new written evidence concerning the panels is a letter which is dated to 1851. The letter describes the panels to be upside down and not correctly placed in the hall of Flatatungu and the farmer's distaste of them in general. Hörður believes that could be one source of Selma´s misinterpretations on her testimonies because if they have been placed upside down its more likely that they had lost their artistic value when arriving to Flatatunga in 1729 and thus never a part of the original farm there. Even though his argumentations mentioned here above were all strong towards thwarting Selma´s idea on the origin and architectural construction concerning the panels the archaeological argumentations which he presents is most important here (Ágústsson 1989). If Selma is right and the panels did originate, according to the saga of Þórður Hreðu, from the 10th century hall of Flatatunga we are arguing for that notion that the hall has in fact stayed more or less unaltered since it was constructed, possibly in the 10-11th century, until it was demolished in 1953. As archaeologists we could never accept those feeble arguments. Scholars today still participate in this tradition spearheaded by Eldjárn and Selma but with Hörður´s interpretations and approaches.

One of the most important aspect of Hörður´s work was to acknowledge how scholars had blatantly ignored the archaeological evidence in this dilemma and by presenting the discourse, shedding a light on how it has dominated our view on the Icelandic Medieval art and expressing how archaeological evidence has been neglected, I have clearly demonstrated and presented the necessities for more archaeologically participation in the Icelandic medieval art discourse. Necessity which will be answered and put to the test in my investigation presented in the next two chapters of this thesis. The question is of course how and what can archaeology add to the discourse that will enrich it for years to come?

Chapter 4. Art and social identities of Kúabót.

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter the main investigation will be carried out within the framework presented earlier. Solid overview of the site, Kúabót, will be given as well as the archaeological objects that I will investigate will be thoroughly and contextually investigated. Then that material will be used to shed a light on the creation and maintenance of social identities at the medieval farm, Kúabót.

4.2 Kúabót-Geographical, historical and archaeological context.

Kúabót is a medieval farmstead situated in the $600km^2$ large sand dune in the peripheral regions between Álftaver and Mýrdalssandur along the Sou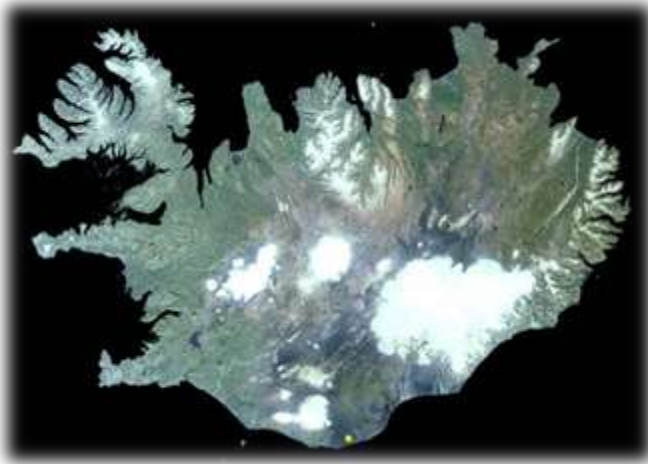thern shore of Iceland. It's not quite clear where the landmarks are or have been in these regions of lava fields and windblown deserts. It has been quite difficult to decide where to situate this remarkable ruin, in the region of Mýrdalssandur or Álftaver. I will follow the tradition and situate the ruin in the outskirts of Álftaver. Where the ruin is situated geographically can be furthermore seen on the figure to the left marked as a yellow dot. Between the two small rivers, Austasti Kælir and Vestasti Kælir (e. The eastern Cooler and the westernmost Cooler) was a rather high sand dune that was named Kúabót (e. Cow-part). The original name of the farm is unknown. After 1918 this particular sand dune begun to erode until it had almost disappeared in 1950 unveiling the unprecedented, monumental and extremely well preserved medieval farmstead of unknown magnitude in Iceland. Scholars are not anonymous in their ideas on when the farmstead was abandoned, but agree that colossal glacial flow after eruption in the volcano Katla could be responsible (Árnadóttir 1987). According to the tephra analysis the farmstead was built or rebuilt few years after the Katla eruption of 1416. The next known Katla eruption was 1490 and therefore it is conceivable that

Figure 6 Geographical location of Kúabót marked as a yellow dot.

Kúabót was abandoned just prior to the glacial flow after that eruption (Árnadóttir 1986, Þórarinsson 1975).

The farmstead was excavated from 1972-1976 under the supervision of Gísli Gestsson. This particular excavation was a great milestone in Icelandic archaeology both in terms of size and layout of the farmstead but also in relative high value of archaeological material unearthed during the excavation. Kúabót remains the largest single medieval farmstead, over 40m long, ever excavated in Iceland and will without a doubt continue to inspire and encourage students and scholars alike (Árnadóttir 1989).
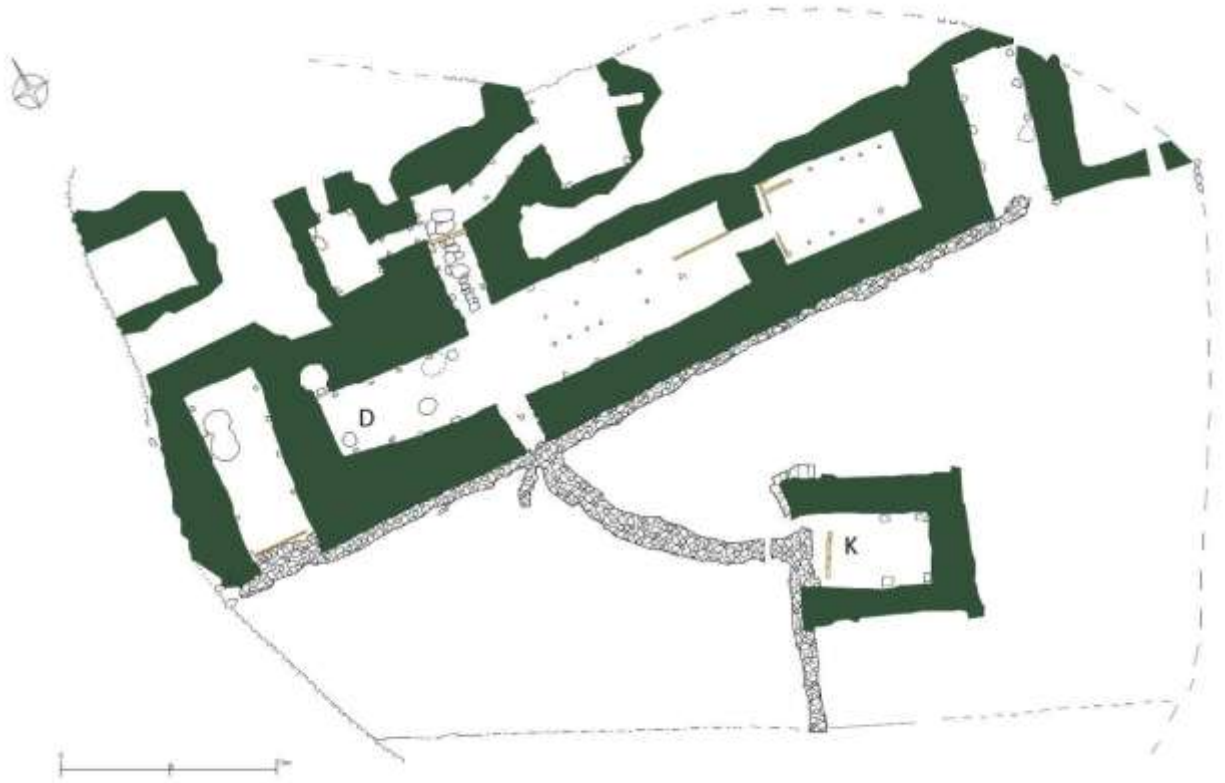

Figure 7 Kúabót. Space D as the pantry and K as the church.10 m scale.

4.3 Archaeological material

As I mentioned briefly above the archaeological material unearthed during the excavations at Kúabót 1972-1976 are for numerous reasons quite unique in the context of Icelandic archaeology. First of all the preservation status of the ruin was remarkable, parallel only to Gröf and Bær in Öræfasveit (Einarsson 2005-2009, Gestsson 1986). The majority of the walls were still standing strong and some of them were measured at remarkable height of 1,75 m. The size of the farmstead is also interesting and it is apparent that Kúabót is amongst the largest medieval farmsteads excavated in Iceland. The number of archaeological objects unearthed at Kúabót was also unusually many or 679 artifacts. In comparison Forna-Lá in Þjórsárdalur, which was excavated in 1942 by Kristján Eldjárn and have been dated roughly to 1450-1550 yielded eleven artifacts in total (Eldjárn 1951). From the door of the main hall at Kúabót a paved stone path leads to left and right of the hall and also, remarkably, to south to a peculiar structure that has been interpreted as a church (space K). This evidence is unparalleled in context of Icelandic archaeology. It is worth noticing that during those years in Icelandic archaeology excavation methods were firmly focused on the architectural features of the ruins excavated. The cultural layers, like the floor layers, were more or less left behind and untouched. Furthermore osteological material was regarded as samples and as a result most of them were not described in detail in the find register and more or less discarded. These facts should not be ignored when it comes to comparing and interpreting archaeological material from these sites.

4.4 Selected artifacts presented

In my attempt to trace and interpret the social identities displayed and presented in the archaeological materials from Kúabót I have chosen to pick out two strong representatives of the qualities described in the first chapter of this thesis. It is not an easy task to choose from such rich archaeological material. The artifacts which I have chosen are the palm leaf plate and a wooden Stylus. My contextual investigation concerning those artifacts will all follow the same five folded guidelines. Firstly (1) I will discuss their archaeological context. Then (2) I will present and argue for my functional interpretation related to them. Thirdly (3) their ethnological context will be briefly discussed. It is the firm believe of the author that these three categories will provide the contextual necessary for further and more detailed interpretations. The bulk of the investigation will be carried out in section (4) and (5). In section four the decorations visible

on the artifact will be presented, discussed and interpreted. Consequently, section five will be centered on how their social identities can be traced and interpreted. Furthermore in section five I will follow the discussion that I presented earlier in this thesis concerning my interpretations of the relationship between material culture and social identities.

4.4.1 The palm leaf plate

Figure 8. The palm leaf plate. Picture from the National Museum of Iceland. Taken by Ívar Brynjólfsson.

In this wooden object is embedded a fascinating tale. A tale which allows us a glimpse into the past. Gísli Gestson who supervised the excavation at Kúabót from 1972-1976 describes the artifact in the find register as following; "*carved wooden object with two adjacent ears with three carvings on each, 17,3 cm in height and 11,2 cm at length, 0,4-0,6 cm at width. Interpreted as a spade or a scrape*" (Gestsson 1986, p. 85). The ambiguous nature of this artifact gives room for countless interpretations. The contextual meaning of the objects is infinite in numbers. It is one of its better qualities and makes it a good representative for the investigation ahead. The

craftsmanship and artistic qualities embedded in it makes it not only interesting in the context of Kúabót but also Icelandic archaeology as well. After it had been salvaged from the sand dune at Kúabót in the year of 1974 the short description made by Gísli is the only lines that have been written regarding it. Lying dormant and waiting for further interpretation which he respectfully deserves. I will now contribute to the interpretations regarding this illustrious object realizing that this is hopefully only the beginning of long and fruitful road.

Archaeological context

In the excavation of 1973 a rectangular space adjacent and west to the hall was investigated. The structure (D), which was interpreted as a pantry, was measured 7,6 m at length and 3-3,4 m at width. The walls were conveniently structured out of stone framework and turf. Eight pillar stones, four along the north and south wall, for posts or similar timber structure were also discovered. One of the most interesting features in this space was the two pits revealed during the excavation. Gísli suggests that they

Figure 9 Structure D. The cross marks the place where the artifact was found.

could be evidence of storage vessel (Sáir) that was placed in the ground. In the eastern one, which was 0,8 m in diameter and 0,6 m in depth, a wondrous wooden artifact was salvaged. The storage vessels mentioned above are quite interesting for a number of reasons specially in relation to creation and maintenance of social identities which I will define in more detail later on in this chapter.

Function

Functionality is a quite ambiguous matter dependent on the context which it is conducted within. Objects can almost have a reverse function depending on their context. Furthermore functionality is not something which ought to be used in singular terms since archaeological objects can have multiple functions depending on the context and situation. When I am referring to function I am referring to the conceivable archaeological and social context in which the object was primarily used within. In my view the probable functional context of the artifact is pivotal in constructing contextualized knowledge regarding the object and the social identities associated.

The possibilities regarding this particular object and functions are vast. I will only discuss three probabilities best suited with the progression of the investigation in mind. These are my interpretations; further functions should of course not be completely excluded. However I will focus on these three functions here. Firstly I will argue for the possibility that this object could have been used as decoration on a large storage vessel (Sáir) which have been forgotten when the vessel was taking just prior to the abandonment of the farmstead. Secondly as a piece in a larger wooden artwork perhaps associated with the church unearthed at Kúabót or thirdly, a part of them both at some point during its lifespan.

Ethnological and historical context

The relation to where those vessels are stored and the integrated link to food production are also interesting. Investigating these contexts could shed a light on the art carved out in the artifact found at Kúabót. These storage vessels, or tubs, have played a pivotal role in storing nutrition and are relatively well known throughout Iceland. These tubs were situated in the pantry of the farmstead, which were built for storing nutrition and for various food production activities, on wooden planks along the walls or dug down through the floor (Ágústson 1987, p.237-341). A vessel like this was found at Kúabót is likely to have been used for or related to dairy production and storage. Dairy products were of highest importance in a country which had no good access to wheat. One of the dairy products stored in tubs at this time was the famous *skyr* which was used in various food combinations in medieval Iceland. I will solely outline the importance of that particular product here and one of its side products; the whey. The whey was tapped of the *skyr* tubs and stored separately for further use. It was used for multiple purposes ranging from cleaning cloths, to as refreshing drink on hot summer day, or for the storage of meat. Then the meat was placed in certain whey tubs, which were dug down halfway into the soil to prevent the ingredients from freezing, thus limiting the effect of the whey as storage method. Where there were significant problems of getting salt for storing food this process of putting the meat in whey was invaluable (Jónsson 2010). *Sáir* is then the Icelandic word for those storage tubs or vessel and the word *sáfar* means the pit for it.

Archaeological evidence regarding these tubs or vessel seems to correlate rather nicely with the interpretations mentioned above. As part of the famous and fruitful Þjórsárdals expedition in the year of 1942, Mårten Stenberger excavated, among other farmstead, a ruin

called Áslákstunga fremri. The ruin was rather badly preserved and damaged due to wind erosion but he managed to identify two instinctive spaces, among one is a pantry. The space was 5 m long and 2-2,5 m at width. At the northern end of the space Stenberger unearthed evidence of dugged in feature and at the bottom of that feature he found a pile of wooden staves. Stenberger argues and I agree that this bears all the marks of classic storage pit which have been dug down. It is then probable that it could have been used to store meat in the precious whey as Jónas Jónsson suggests and I have gone over here above (Stenberger 1942).

Ethnological and historical context in relation to functional value

In the functional overview of this object I have argued for the possibility that it could have derived from a larger artwork perhaps related to the church or the annex unearthed at Kúabót. For the support of this suggestion lies two firm and fundamental arguments. Firstly that decoration and woodcarving was not something alien to the Icelandic artists. As I have gone over extensively in chapter three plant decorations were quite common in medieval Iceland and I suggest that this artifact bears resembles to that art element. Evidence of the Icelandic woodcarvings from the medieval is both rich and quite unique according to Magerøy and her investigations concerning Icelandic woodcarvings (Magerøy 1969) and more precisely on the famous drinking horns from medieval Iceland (Magerøy 2000). According to Ágústsson and Jónsdóttir artwork on religious panels were also not alien according to the illustrious panels from Flatartunga and Bjarnastaðarhlíð (Ágústsson 1989, Jónsdóttir 1959). Secondly because of our knowledge of paintings on panels in the medieval times which seems to suggests that the wooden object had a rich painted surface. Ágústsson firmly argues that the panels I mentioned earlier were without a doubt painted as the majority of medieval panels were (Ágústsson 1989). There is presented on the object conceivable remarks of a painting process, but before I yield that lets look on the painting process closely.

One source far excels all others when dealing with medieval arts and crafts and that is the *Treatise* which is the work of Theophilus from the twelfth century which have preserved through two copies written in German. Theophilus is thought to have been an early twelfth century Benedictine monk with special interest in various forms of craftsmanship. His writings have been extensively investigated and are believed to be one of the first detailed writings on the majority of the complex medieval technical processes, including illuminations in codexes, glass and

metalworking and paintings on various materials such as wooden panels. If the wooden artifact unearthed at Kúabót was in fact a piece of a larger wooden artwork associated with the church there, then this source is pivotal in contextualizing the artifact. His description on the process of mixing the paint and applying it on different surface is one of the best known part of the source. Knowing the right pigment for the right surface was of course paramount and he mentions how egg yolk and lime were used for pigments to reach that brilliance. Furthermore he describes vividly the mixing of different coloring for various purposes in the context of the art work. If we take into consideration how the pigment was mixed one realize that the mixture is quite thin and it would be hard for it to stick probably on the surface chosen. Therefore it is described how to prepare the surface before the paint is applied to it. One of the techniques was to apply squeezed lemon on the surface in the purpose of reaching the right level of humidity so the paint would stick as well as possible (Hawthorn & Smith 1979). I suggest that one possibility for the conceivable cut marks presented on the wooden artifact is evidence of that purpose. The process of applying paint on panels in medieval times was as following. Firstly the panels were chosen and glued together with casein or attached with hinges. Then, if the wood was too slippery, it was carved with small incisions that would grip the foundation better. Then a form of glue was applied on the panels making the surface even. The next step involved was to applying foundation on the surface made from chalk. After that foundation was dry and even enough the painting could be applied on it (Grinder-Hansen 2004).

Decoration visible on the object

The most noticeable decoration visible on the artifact is; the two carved wings, the circular shape and last but not least how the artwork is contained. I think, as I have pointed out earlier, it is quite conceivable that this artifact could have been a part of larger artwork, one of which could have depicted a plant ornament. Why is that? Let's look closer at the art elements.

The palm leafs

What Gísli interpret as a two carved ears which are adjacent to the central circular shape I would interpret as a palm leafs which were, according to Magerøy, common in the Icelandic medieval art (Magerøy 1969). The palm leafs are one of the best known Christian artistic symbols and motives. Variations and depictions of it can be seen throughout the medieval Christian realm and even beyond. Scholars have pointed out their long continuity and have traced them as far as to the Nineveh tablets in the ancient realm Mesopotamia, the land between the two rivers Efrat and Tigris (Scarre 2010). Palm leafs are commonly found in every major art form of the medieval era and well known Christian motives trough out the continent. Scholars have been dealing with representation of them a long time indeed and they are thought to represents the resurrection of Jesus Christ after he had laid in the cave, considered deceased. In manuscripts, codexes, frescos, in interiors and on panels. They have been depicted in every major material, which do not need to be of surprise, such as stone, metals, glass, ceramics and wood. It is interesting that palm leafs and plant ornamentation in Icelandic medieval context have primarily been preserved in manuscripts, such as in Jónsbók and codex regius, Grágás and on drinking horns, such as the horn Velkenhornet, and on wood panels, such as the panels from Laufás, Mælifell, Flatartunga, Bjarnarstaðarhlíð and Möðrufell. (Magerøy 1969, 2000). The palm leafs present at the object of interest is quite interesting in the context of Icelandic plant ornamentation. They seem to correlate more to the palm leafs at the panels from Möðrufell rather than the other ones. It is well grounded knowledge within the artistic, historic and archaeological discourse concerning ornamentations that a different variation of palm leafs exist. The palm leafs at the Möðrufells panels have one stalk and then two leafs from each sides (Magerøy 1969 p 30-31). That decoration seems to correlate with our artifact from Kúabót which has two identifiable branches of palm leafs from each side. If the artistic relation between them is conceivable it is intriguing in the archaeological context. Based on the stylistic elements, such as the palm leafs and other elements depicted on the panels from Möðrufell, Magerøy puts them chronically between Gokstad and Urnes style. That suggests the panel could be as old as 11th century (Magerøy 1969 p 23, Þórðarsson 1916 p 26-30).

I think it is well conceivable that the wooden object unearthed at Kúabót was in fact once a part of larger artwork that got passed on from some church to the farmstead at Kúabót where

the artwork was kept could be similar as with the panels from Flatartunga and Bjarnarstaðarhlíð which I described vividly in the second chapter of this investigation. It is quite likely that such artwork was used and reused multiple times before they were finally forgotten and lost and found again.

The circular shape

Artistic elements can be ambiguous and quite hard to identify. Where the objects end and artistic symbols depicted begin and vice versa? I would argue for the notion that artistic elements do not nessacerily need to be depicted on the artifact. It can as well be the artifact itself or its shape for that matter. Now I will discuss the role of the shape of the artifact in it artistically and archeological interpretation. The sheer shape of the artifact should not be viewed to be just accidentally circular. It is my argument that the circular shape plays a pivotal role in the meaning of it and ultimately its relationship concerning social identities.

One of the characteristic of the pre Christian Scandinavian styles such as the Jellingestyle or the Ringeriksstyle is that they were both fluent and smooth. With relief surface depicting stylish animals and large stalks intertwining, encircling and running across the picture surface in perfect, perhaps chaotic, equilibrium (Wilson 2008, Frederiksen 2010, Klæsøe 2002). The end phase of these styles was thought to be extremely stylish. In the mixing pot of artistic influences during the 10-12th century a certain control in the art can be visible. This has been called the romantic influences in the art. More order of things becomes visible. One of the artistic evidence of that is depicting various motives, ranging from roses, lilies and lions, entrapped on the surface with a rectangular or circular frame (Snyder & Luttikhuizen & Ververk 2006). This is quite interesting in the context of Icelandic medieval art and that implication on the interpretation on the wooden artifact from Kúabót. Within the circular shape of the artifact from Kúabót could have been another inlaid carving. That kind of circular feature, as I mentioned earlier, was one of the characteristics of the pre Christian and roman style, particularly in Iceland. This can be seen on the chairs from the church at Grund in Eyjafjörður (Þórðarsson 1918), 13th century chalice from the church at Fitjar, though the elements could have been placed in the cirles later on, (Björnsson 1996) and the panel from the St. Benedictine monastery at Munkaþverá in Northern Iceland. The monastery was under the bishop seat at Hólar. During its lifespan from the year it was found in 1155 to the moment it was dissolved in 1551, many wondrous items have been

registered to it according to the inventories. As the reader can see on the picture here the panel from Munkaþverá depicts plant stalks which creeps their way up the surface, intertwining elegantly and forming a total of nine circles. Within each circles a part of provoking story is told which ends in the last circle with a large rosette. Above the rosette a quite interesting feature is visible. It is a head of roaring animal which is outside the circles (Mageröy 1969 p 38, Eldjárn 1969). It is as we have a contrast a duel or fluently united style elements here. One which is outside the rule on the periphery, and one that is contained. The room for the artistic expression in the latter one is evidently contained, controlled and entrapped within the boundaries created by the stalk of a rigid plant. The panel can be seen as a hybrid between the plant decoration within the romantic styles and the natural (animal) motive of the more gothic style. By artistic and stylistic elements and similarities in illuminations from manuscripts, Svalbarðarbók (AM 343) which was written 1363 especially, she dates the decorations on the Munkaþverár´s panels to the 14th century. Those artistic elements were also quite common in the Icelandic textile production in the medieval times.

Figure 10 The panel from Munkaþverá. From www.natmus.is.

What are then the relationship between the artifact unearthed at Kúabót and the panel described?

If the wooden artifact from Kúabót was, as I have suggested, a part of a larger artwork it bears a clear artistic similarity towards the panels from Munkaþverá, the chairs from Grund and the chalice from Fitjar. In all of these artwork is the containment, encircling and entrapment of the artistic motives apparent. I propose that it could well have been if not certainly that inside this artistic circular element lay once a marvelous painting. What was depicted we could only guess but that had a grave impact on reflective idea of the inhabitants at Kúabót. Grave impact on the social identities presented there. It is then conceivable that the wooden artifact from Kúabót could have been a part of a larger wooden artwork with some illustrious depiction, imaginary or picture fastened within the circular shape. With the cut marks presented in the circular shape as the only remnants and testament of the rich imaginary present at the medieval farmstead of Kúabót.

4.4 The decorated Stylus.

Figure 11 The Decorated Stylus. Picture from the National Museum of Iceland.Without scale. The object is approx. 13 cm at length. Taken by Ívar Brynjólfsson.

In the farmyard, just south west from the main door to the farmstead a peculiar wooden object was unearthed during the last stages of the excavation of Kúabót. At the farmyard the evidence of a catastrophic glacial flow were quite clear. A thick clay like layer of glacial alluvial sediments covered the farmyard like a gypsum caste. According to this stratigraphic description taken from Gísli´s diaries the wooden object of interest here must have been dropped between stones in the pavement or it have been moved by the alluvial sediment from the hall or the corridor to the farmyard. Given the circumstances of the demise of the farmyard I think the interpretation mentioned here above could be well plausible. Further arguments concerning the find context of this artifact will be given later on. Back to the decorative wooden object. According to the find register for the excavation at Kúabót Gísli describe this particular object like this; *"Wooden tool that could be a Stylus or some tool to erase a written scribements on wax tablets. Cylindrical, pointed with a small circular feature attached to it. That feature is decorated."*(Gestsson 1986, p 96). It is worth noticing here that another stylus, made of bone,

was found near the church at Kúabót. That stylus was not decorated. Though it would be interesting there is not space for discussing it now. What can the wooded artifact here possibly been used for, was Gísli right with his interpretations and what can be said on the decoration presented on him? Furthermore, what that decoration means in artistic and archaeological context?

Archaeological context

Though not commonly discovered, similar objects have been found in Icelandic medieval context before. Majority of them have been found near or at archaeological investigation regarding cloisters, monasteries, churches or large medieval farmsteads. Excavation at the monastery in Viðey from 1986-1990 revealed a wealth of knowledge regarding monasteries in late medieval time in Iceland. The monastery at Viðey was founded in 1226, according to sources, and was one of the richest cloisters in Iceland (DI p 486, Hallgrímsdóttir 1991). The excavation was the first one conducted in Iceland where the research focus was firmly on monastics ruins and has therefore been granted a rather special place within Icelandic archaeology. Among
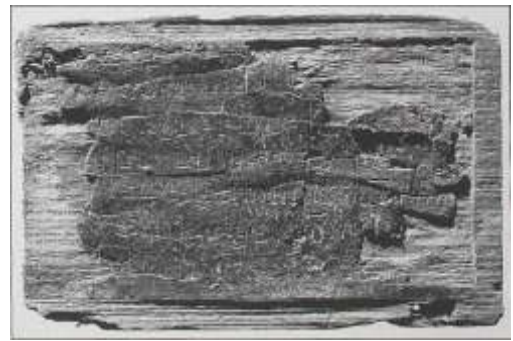
Figure 12 Wax tablet no 5 from Viðey (Hallgrímsdóttir 1991).

numerous artifacts unearthed there were, in a decorated leather skin, five wooden wax tablets. All of them were found in the main hall (*skáli*) and were made out of wood which was the most

Figure 13 Wax tablet and a styli from Stóruborg (Tómasson 1983).

general material for those artifacts. Essential to this objects and functions which was required of them were various other objects, like the stylus (Hallgrímsdóttir 1991). Þórður Tómason the curator at the museum of Skógar salvaged a peculiar tin object, 12,6 cm at length, 3,4 cm at width and 0,4 cm at height, from the eroded farm mound at Stóraborg a spectacular medieval farmstead, situated along the southern coast of Iceland 1971. He has interpret this object to be a classical medieval stylus and a clear evidence of the high status

farmstead which ones stood rigidly there in medieval times (Tómasson 1983, p. 103-113). Styli are also well known in the Scandinavian medieval context and are frequently found in the context of medieval cloisters, churches and monasteries. Multiple styli were for example unearthed during the renovation of the choir chairs at the cathedral in Lund, Sweden, in 1833. They have also been found in Dalby Skåne, as well as the oldest wax tablets have been found in Lund Sverige from around the year 1000 (Roesdahl 2004 250-254).

Functional context

All the evidence points strongly towards that interpretation that this particular artifact was in fact a stylus. Used in the context of literacy as I will present vividly in the next subchapter. Other alternatives should not be excluded though there is not suitable room here to discuss the further here.

Ethnological and historical context

Styli, like the one unearthed at Kúbót, were presumably mainly used with wax tablets. The wedge-shaped ends could then be used erasure in wax, which was contained in the wax tablets. Wax tablets and styli are then clear evidence of literary craftsmanship, scholastic and ecclesiastical establishments. Where paper was extremely rare and expensive the wax tablets and the styli were essential in the literacy craft. Finding it in archaeological context suggests that both the knowledge of the artwork, the written word and literacy were vividly presented at the places I have gone over. But how was the writing stylus actually used and furthermore what is it significant in relation to artwork and ultimately social identities? Wax tablets were an integrated part involved in the literary culture and craftsmanship involving books and the written word in medieval times. They were often small wooden or ivory tablets used as a format for taking notes from other manuscripts or for educational functions. The stylus was then an integrated object and part of them. After the process of heating the wax it was poured into these wooden tablets for a quick cooling. Tools like styli were then, after the wax had cooled down, used for drawing or carving the text and decorations with the pointed end. They were also used for marking horizontal lines in manuscripts to acts as writings guides (Egan 2010 p. 270-274, Roesdahl 2004 250-254).

The word stylus and styli is derived from the latin word "stilus" which is a peaked object with broad end. The broader end was used to erase old letters and decoration but the other one was used to conjure new ones (Mårtensson 1962 p. 108-142). They could essentially be made out of any long and pointed object, like pins or needles, but majority of them, like the ones from Viðey and Stóruborg were made out of tin. Sources indicated that they could as well, since the sheer shape was not that important, been made out of various other material such as; bone, stone and wood (Tómasson 1983, Hallgrímsdóttir 1991). The most common shape of those styli were to have them shaped as an flat axe in one end and peaked in the other (Mårtensson 1962 p. 108-142). When one was using stylus that had two pointed ends or the other in decorated odd size a special heated flattener stone was required in the purpose of erasing the old words (Jónsson 1948). Scholars have also pointed out the use of pumice for the same purposes as the flattener stones. That kind of pumice stones have been found in archaeological context concerning monasteries in Iceland before, like at the cloisters at Skriða and Viðey (Kristjánsdóttir 2007). Cloisters and monasteries in Iceland where, like anywhere else on the continent, the center for art and crafts. And centers for the creation of arts as the literacy craftsmanship is testament of.

If we draw our attention back to the stylus at Kúabót it is quite evident that the peaked end of it was in fact used for scribing sentences or decoration, but the circular shaped decorated end could have worked as a handle since it is not fitting to function as eraser according to the sources mentioned above. By exploiting the stylus on the warm wax situated on the wax tablets one could without much troubles or time consuming put down ideas and thoughts concerning every aspect of the social existence. There are surely no boundaries on the level of creativity available here. People write down what they think is important and that choice creates an excellent opportunity to explore the vision of how the social self was portrait and displayed actively through the social activity of scribing words. The opportunity presents itself through the reoccurring and active use of the material culture in art manipulation which is one of the nexuses where our social identities are portrait.

The artistic elements and decoration

The importance of the selected object in relation to the social context of art working have been outlined and I will not spend more space on that issue. Instead I will focus on the decoration, style and the art itself depicted on the stylus and investigate what that can imply. The first

obvious characteristic presented on the object is it shape. The thin peeked body with an elegant oval shaped handle. On the handle a carved decoration is present, which can be described as a number of radiant spheres from a single small point or a spark. The spheres are quite fascinating artistic decoration with nearly unlimited ways of interpretations. The sphere can be described as a spark of unknown entity, it can also be interpreted as a radiant energy source or the illumination of the beginning. The circle is well known symbol within all religions, mysticism and rituals related to the human kind. It is more or less a symbol for the circle of life, the creation and the inevitable. Creation and destruction is the same set, one can not exist without the other. All of the interpretations are heavily linked to creation and destruction as the precipitous reader can perceive which is interesting in context of its primary functions. the beginning of something new, the spark of creativity, the origin of the muse for the artist (Snyder & Luttikhuizen & Verkerk 2006).

I suggest that the artistic elements depicted on the stylus can be both interpreted as a sphere and a spark. Furthermore they symbolize both the major functions of this artifact, which is to create the words of infinite beauty and glory and also to erase them to make space for new messages. In that sense the decorations is an integrated and obvious part of this particular artifact. Symbol which was essential in carrying out the communication required in the interesting and complex process of social identities.

4.5 Selected artifacts in relation to social identities

The framework which I constructed earlier in the thesis concerning my viewpoint on the relationship between the material culture and the social identities will dictate my discussion concerning the two objects of interest. My approach was, to recapitulate, to investigate the activities surrounding the objects in an attempt to trace patterns of communications, which is essential in the creation and maintenance of social identities. I argue that certain pattern of communications leave certain material cultural traces behind. Reoccurring activities makes those patterns visible and thus available for investigations. This is where the importance of the social memory becomes apparent and therefore one of the keys to understand reoccurring activities. Essential to social memory is the event and space as I described in detail in the first chapter. Here I would like to add that event can both be singular and plural. Plural events are reoccurring activities. Embedded in the reoccurring activities lies the choice that we make, conscientiously or

unconscientiously, where the social memory plays a pivotal role because within the social memory lies the capability not only to remember but also to forgetting. Remembering or forgetting certain social identities are then performed within the activity, there crystalizes our choices of creating or altering our social identities. Social activities like art creation, alteration and interpretation are one of ways to interpret this process and thus our social identities. But representations of social identities are many, the approaches vast in number as I have described in the first chapter. With that in mind I will investigate the artifacts through one aspect of social identities. Aspect which social memory plays important role. That aspect is personhood.

Both of the artifacts that I have investigated in my thesis are quite special in relation to activities, social memory and social identities. Firstly because the palm leaf plate is connected with multiple activities during his life stages. From being a part of large painted artwork to being a decoration on a diary storage vessel. These different roles give us an opportunity to investigate how the social identities changes through different activities. The wooden stylus is then quite interesting in this relation because it can be linked nearly directly to the creative activities like art and literacy since it is a tool to create. With those special perks about these artifacts I will begin to investigate them. Firstly I will present the invaluable link between them, the activities associate with them and social memory. Secondly I will use that knowledge in trying to decipher their relationship toward personhood. In the end I will discuss the insinuation of those combined.

The artifacts and the social memory

As I mentioned earlier investigating the activities concerning the artifact is a paramount approach in determining their insinuation toward the social identities. Now the contextual analysis that I performed earlier will be quite invaluable because within that analysis lies their different activities. If we then look closer to the activities related to the artifacts of interest here, the wooden plate and the wooden stylus.

The palm leaf plate and social memory

Within the palm leaf plate crystalizes multiple activities during his life stages as I described earlier. As an integrated part of a larger artwork it could have been related to religious, beliefs or ritualized activities. As I have pointed out the palm leafs were a well-known Christian symbol and if the wooden plate was a part of larger art work it may have been related to religious

activities. Within the religious activities an interesting choice is related where the social memory plays an integrated part of. It is of gravest value for the individual and the society to follow certain rules in religious activity. Within the social memory our knowledge of the appropriate actions of divinity is suppressed or elevated, forgotten or remembered. The art or the imaginary depicted on the plate played an enforcing role in favor for either letting the individuals forgetting or remembering certain aspect of the ideology and the activity involved. This is one aspect of the art as an alteration or obscuration of ideology as Shanks and Tilley describes and I mentioned earlier in this thesis. The object played a vital role in communicating certain artistic and religious ideology which had an impact on the social identities of the population. The same principle applies when looking at the object in context of activities related to storage, food and consumption. If the object was on later stages used as a decoration on storage vessel (sáir) then it plays yet another interesting role within which social memory acts in peculiar ways. Many scholars have pointed out the relationship between nutrition and social memory especially in relation to the gender discourse (Gilchrist 2008, Mullins 2008). As I mentioned in the first chapter the gender discourse had a grave impact on the archaeological thought and progress in general. The relationship between certain activities, images, art, social memory and gender is quite interesting one and I propose that the wooden plate can be interpreted via those alternatives. The importance of forgetting or remembering certain activities concerning nutrition is essential in deciphering it importance. Many cultural costumes exist corning that and one might think it would be important to enforce certain ideology concerning it via decoration, art and essentially former function of the plate. We can therefore see how complex and vital enforcing certain activities concerning the wooden plate which gives us vital clue in its role in creation and maintenance of social identities at Kúabót.

The wooden Stylus and social memory

Even if we could acknowledge that the function regarding this particular object can be viewed as rather straight forward the activities corning it are complex, vital and interesting especially in relation to creation and maintenance of social identities.   The key concept of social memory for that object is learned behavior which enforces the importance of certain social activities. The object reflects certain importance of enforcing particular activities related to art creation via the written word. The wooden stylus is an active agent, an active tool, in the process of forgetting or

remembering certain aspects of the creation behind the craftsmanship of transmuting thoughts and ideas into words. In this the social memory plays the leading role of what should be enforced and what should be downplayed. That reflects the choice which is crystalized in this object and furthermore is crucial in creation and maintenance of social identities and can say quite something about the individuals, the persons, who exploited it.

Personhood and the artifacts from Kúabót

As I mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis, archaeology is a discipline which investigates people, individuals and their material remains. Even though we have not been so keen in acknowledging that as the history of how archaeologists have dealt with style and social identity clearly demonstrates. The notion of the personhood as a vital part of our social identities, put forward by Fowler (2006) and Aldhouse-Green (2004) for example, and has been a paramount step in the right direction. A direction which leads us closer to people and the individuals of the past. Art is furthermore one of the aspects that personhood is actively communicated in the process of social identity. Now I will participate in that tradition by examining briefly the artifacts from Kúabót with the activities and social memory in mind to approach the social identity of personhood.

The wooden plate and personhood

Again, the different activities regarding the different roles and functions that this object had makes it versatile and interesting in our attempt to link it to personhood. In this it is vital to acknowledge that notion that artifacts can be persons in them self and thus share a special personhood which interacts within the material culture. As Fowler said; personhood refers to the meaning behind being a person and we incorporate our social identities into the material culture which again interacts with our personhood. That is one of the reasons why we can investigate the material culture in our search for the personhood of long gone individuals. Aldhouse-Green has pointed out in every image there is an intention of some sort. Intentions which is loaded with different cultural meaning of which one is social identity. That representation is furthermore, according to Aldhouse-Green, good in exploring personhood (Aldhouse-Green 2004). I would furthermore add and argue that the same could be said about the artistic elements. Elements such as the palm leafs and the circular shape, which I have discussed in detail earlier in this chapter,

can then express certain identities such as personhood via reoccurring activities. Let look closer at the artistic elements and the activities with that in mind.

If the object was in fact once part of a larger artwork and associated with religious activities, as I have mentioned, it must have played an active part in the development of personhood at Kúabót. Fowler addresses that religious ideas are vital process in the formulation of personhood (Fowler 2004). I concur and think the religious activities practiced via this object had a huge impact on the persons and individuals of Kúabót. The object reflects the active creation of certain religious ideas that the individuals at Kúbót took, conscientiously or unconscientiously, part in. That reflects a will to assimilate to the presented ideas, whoever they might be. Might it be status, ethnicity or power? I think that what this object suggests what the personhood of the individuals at Kúabót were that they were well aware of the potential ideal meaning of this particular object and it was apparently deer to them since they reused it as a decoration for storage vessel. The ideas that the people at Kúabót incorporated in the object from the artistic elements played clearly a huge role in their everyday live as individuals.

If we look at the palm leaf plate in relation to the context of nutrition and consumption it becomes even more interesting. Gunnel Ekroth wrote a quite interesting article in the book *arkeologi och social identitet* were she describes the interesting connection with food, nutrition and consumption in the process of creation and maintenance of social identities. In more detail she investigates the embodiment, lived experience and transformation of symbols through feasting which are seen as the major forces behind status, hierarchy and social identity. She focuses on access and distribution of food and how that altered and interacted with the formation of social identities (Ekroth 2008). It is quite interesting in the light of my investigation since one of the activities that the wooden plate took part in was food access and distribution. I would then add to Ekroth fruitful ideas and say that not only does the material culture itself creates these social identities via food but also, and more importantly, the artistic elements presented and associated with the material culture. What does the artistic elements in relation to a storage vessel affect the social identity at Kúabót? First of all because the action of providing food can be seen as vital process in the formation of social identity and the palm leafs and the shape play a vital part in that process. The artistic elements enforce the significant of those activities concerned. Therefore I conclude that, not only the food and related activities was extremely

important, but the access and consumption of them defining the person there via certain context and activity.

The wooden stylus and personhood

The stylus unearthed at Kúabót, which I have described, is interesting and fascinating when exploring the concept of creation and maintenance of social identities through art. Its relation to the craftsmanship, knowledge and art through the activity of scribing words and symbols are one of most interesting nexus where the social memory, Social identities and personhood is actively conjured, created, manipulated, obscured and expressed. The key to the establishment of these concepts mentioned is the learned behavior.

Sally K. May presented quite illuminating approach to the creation and maintenance of identities through art in her article from 2008; Learning art, learning culture. There she demonstrates how socially institutionalized learned behavior is actively used in the purpose mentioned here above. Learning the right techniques of painting and adapting to new imaginaries are one of the fundamental process where the social identities and the personhood is created, tested, adapt and negotiated. Learning art is then the key to learning the way of the particular culture (May 2008). In many ways I think that can also be said on the wooden styli from Kúabót. The object has a vivid link to the activity related to art creation. That can also be said on the art elements and decorations visible on the object. The thin peeked body with an elegant oval shaped handle. On the handle a carved radiant spheres or a spark is presented. Learning the symbols in this relations are also important according to May. The sphere or the spark can be related to the idea of creation which is interesting in the context on the personhood. To know how to express and negotiate your social identities and personhood was clearly something of importance for the individuals presented at the farmstead. This particular object reflects furthermore the importance of literacy and art due to its context with those activities. The personhood of the individuals from Kúabót can be viewed in that light. Therefore I argue that the wooden stylus played pivotal role in the formation of social identities like personhood at Kúabót.

Chapter 5. Discussions and conclusions

5.1 Discussion

In this chapter I will go over the main research question and approaches to broaden the investigation and hopefully raise further discussions. The actual benefits of conducting a contextual analysis will be recapitulated as well as including art in an archaeological investigation. Lastly the conclusion will be presented.

Now that I have conducted my investigation it is worthy to take a step back and contemplate the research question and the main approaches before they will be properly answered. The main question; How are certain visual and symbolic entities displayed, consciously and/or unconsciously, in the process of the creation and maintenance of social identities at Kúabót medieval Iceland? To get a cohesive and comprehensive grip on this question I chose to investigate artistic elements and communicative activities in my quest for reasonable answer. By exploring the archaeological discourse on both style/art and social identities I have created invaluable foundation for my investigation. It has been invaluable for my contextualized investigation, concerning the objects, to be able to refer and situate my ideas within the broader archaeological discourse. Since the investigation is based on two objects, I am positive that without the background or the contextual information regarding them I would never have been able to get the information needed for the interpretation. Since my investigation was heavily based on tracing the activities regarding the objects it was imperative to include the contextual features regarding them.

5.2 Further studies, new questions

When we are getting near the end it would be interesting to ask if there is an opportunity, using this approach, for further studies of similar material. I would say that in many ways this investigation primarily enforces the approaches put forward. Exploiting contextual analysis that includes art on archaeological material provides, in my view, an excellent platform for further studies especially in the Icelandic context where archaeologists, with few exceptions, have been reluctant to include art in their research. Further studies should include much more material than I was able to use in my investigation. There are other interesting medieval sites in Iceland, for

example the medieval trading post Gásir which was recently excavated (Pálsdóttir & Roberts 2007) and the cloister at Skriða (Kristjánsdóttir 2007). It could also be fruitful in investigating the artistic context between medieval Iceland and Scandinavia, perhaps the whole continent.

With further studies new and intriguing questions arise, questions that I did not include in my investigation, questions that wait future archaeologists to contest and answer. Questions like: What other forms of social identities could we explore through art? What about gender, ethnicity, sex and masculinity? What about using an alternative theoretical approach like exploring the materiality of art in relation to social identities? What is the link between artistic materiality and social identities? What about experimental archaeological alternatives? Could we actually revoke the old methods of painting on panels, carving a decoration or making wax tablets and styli in attempt to answer the same questions I begun with? What would those methods tells us about the link between art and the creation and maintenance of social identities in medieval Iceland?

5.3 Conclusion

How are certain visual and symbolic entities displayed, consciously and/or unconsciously via art, in the process of creation and maintenance of social identities at Kúabót, medieval Iceland? If we draw all the material together, all the contextual information, the two objects from Kúabót and the artistic elements depicted on them, a conclusion has been reached. A conclusion which is intertwined with the archaeological discourse on style/art and social identity, presented in chapters 2.1 and 2.2, and the three theoretical points of departure presented and described in chapter 2.4.

The archaeological discourse concerning style/art and social identities provided the framework in which this investigation has been conducted and has therefore made an impact on the conclusion reached. The framework was used to look at artistic elements as a medium for communication where our social identities are emitted. Activities and context alters the medium, artistic elements and ultimately the social identities emitted.

The book *Archaeology of art* has proven how important it is to include art in an investigation concerning social identities because, according to the authors, art is a learned behavior where our ideas about ourselves, the social identities, are actively displayed. Visual communications embedded in art are essential in negotiating ideas like social identities. The

ideas presented by Gunnar Nordanskog in his book *Föreställd hedeondom* has also proven effective in dealing with the material and the questions of this investigation. His contextualize methods have proven effective in my attempt of deciphering social identities through reoccurring activities. *Archaeology of personhood* has also proven effective in the context of the investigation. Artistic depiction and an archaeological object, according to Fowler, can have personhood in itself. That personhood changes through different activities and context. Understanding that context in relation to social identity takes us one step closer in understanding the social identities presented at Kúabót.

With those writings in mind two conclusions have been reached. (1) Without the contextual analysis the relationship between the activities, material culture, art and social identities would have been obscured. (2) I will argue that one of the most fruitful ways of exploring social identities is through reoccurring contextualized activities and studying the communication depicted in the artistic materialization. That is one of the ways that certain visual and symbolic entities are displayed, consciously and/or unconsciously, in the process of creation and maintenance of social identities at Kúabót, medieval Iceland.

What can archaeology contribute to the artistic discourse and vice versa? If experiencing art is quite similar to experiencing archaeology would it not be obvious that the interpretations would follow in similar footsteps? With these writings I am hoping that a new chapter in the archaeological discourse on style will be written, a chapter that embraces the cross-disciplinary methods, similarities and differences between art history and archaeology.

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