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Coins, glass shards and other means of payment

A comparative study of Scandinavian Charon object burials using R. Dawkins' meme theory



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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis' topic is to investigate the evolutionary dispersal of the Charon's fee or Obolus rite outside the Roman provinces in Northern Europe, with a specific focus on Roman Iron Age and Migration Period Scandinavia. The aim of this study is therefore to add further understanding to the spread of Roman cultural influences outside the imperial borders and what made Roman material and ideological culture so attractive to the Germanic and Scandinavian Iron Age peoples. The research questions are as follows: *Is it possible to recognize regional trends or memes in burials with the Charon's fee rite within the archaeological material of Roman Iron Age and Migration Period Scandinavia? Can a rough typology of the Obolus rite be structured through these trends? Do Scandinavian Charon's Obols only occur in graves with rich burial goods and elaborate constructions, or do they also appear in poorer graves?* This thesis investigates six case study burials from various parts of Scandinavia; Engbjerg grave 4 and Himlingøje 1949-2 from Zealand, Denmark, Högom mound 2 from Medelpad, Sweden, Kälder double burial from Gotland, Gile grave 17 from Oppland and a grave at Hol from Trøndelag, both in Norway. These burials are investigated using a comparative method with a focus on the general grave goods, burial constructions, as well as each grave's Charon's fee object. The thesis also uses itself of R. Dawkins' meme theory about self-replicating socio-cultural expressions and trends, and the way they evolve through transmission.

Aside from sharing a Charon's Obol each, a noticeable randomness within the choice of materials and shapes of the Charon's Obols could be seen. Structuring an evolutionary typology of the Charon's Obols therefore proved impossible. The most common materials for the Charon's Obols were precious metals, but glass Obols also occurred in the Engbjerg grave. All of these materials were considered prestigious in Roman Iron Age and Migration Period Scandinavian society, however. The focus on using these wealthy materials, as well as to intentionally shape objects to be placed in the mouth whether they looked like coins or not, points to a deeper understanding of the rite's original meaning, which had been hybridized due to its spreading, with an emphasis on prestigious materials found in primarily elite burials. This is seen in the other artefact categories as well, such as large collections of weaponry, accumulations of imported bronze and glass vessels with origins outside of Scandinavia, as well as locally produced precious metal objects, all of which point towards a series of graves belonging to a class of elite mercenaries. The tendency to be buried next to several other individuals, some of which share very similar grave goods, points towards these tendencies being reserved for whole families. These familiar ties are especially strong in the Kälder burial, which featured two men buried side by side in the same grave, possibly being father and son. A tendency towards primarily male burials can be traced in Sweden and Norway while Denmark features more female burials. The most common body placement in the graves is a north-south direction, while the Högom burial featured an east-west positioning. Other recognizable trends include a focus on burial placements either on or next to topographical heights, like mountain ranges, ridges, or hills, as well as near valleys. Animal sacrifices can also be found in several graves.

Charon's fee, Obolus, Roman Iron Age, Migration Period, Elite Burial, Mercenary, Meme, Engbjerg, Himlingøje, Högom, Kälder, Hol, Gile

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1. Introduction

The Roman empire's material culture would prove pivotal in the formation of cultural expressions and hybridization both within the material provinces and outside the Limes borders. When studying the archaeological record from the Roman Iron Age (ca 1-375 AD) and the Migration Period (ca 375-550 AD), it is undeniable that major levels of Roman influence can be traced within the local material culture, as well as Roman goods from the continent reaching as far up north as Scandinavia. With the dispersal of the material culture came the spreading of ideological world views, expressions and ideas, which were incorporated to a more or less significant extent into the local beliefs. Like memes, these expressions spread from individual to individual and culture to culture and would evolve and change appearance to fit the world views and cultural expressions of the local communities. Among the ideas that found their way outside the Roman imperial borders in a brand-new context the Charon's fee or Obolus rite was included, which has been found in several burials in continental Germanic and Scandinavian contexts. But being an originally Greco-Roman rite, having moved over wide geographical areas, this rite was also bound to change and evolve over time and place. Which were these changes, and can they be traced within the archaeological record? In which ways did the Obolus rite change and how did it reach all these various material expressions?

1.1. Goals and aims

The purpose of this thesis' topic is to investigate the spread and evolution of the Charon's fee or Obolus rite outside the Roman provinces in Northern Europe, with a specific focus on Roman Iron Age and Migration Period Scandinavia. The aim of this study is therefore to add further understanding to the spread of Roman cultural influences and ideas outside the imperial borders and what made Roman material and ideological culture so attractive to the Germanic and Scandinavian Iron Age peoples.

1.2. Research questions

- *Is it possible to recognize regional trends or memes in burials with the Charon's fee rite within the archaeological material of Roman Iron Age and Migration Period Scandinavia?*
- *Can a rough typology of the Obolus rite be structured through these trends?*
- *Do Scandinavian Charon's Obols only occur in graves with rich burial goods and elaborate constructions, or do they also appear in poorer graves?*

2. Research history

In this section, I will account for the research history and research context of previous studies investigating the Charon's fee rite and the occurrence of coins in burials, as well as the influence of Roman culture on Iron Age Germanic and Scandinavian societies. This section will also lift certain research similar in stances to my own, as well as research gaps identified in the research.

2.1. Research of similar stances

Two studies that comes the closest to this thesis' aims and goals are presented by L. Brown in her pilot study "Charon's Obols? A Case Study in the Role of Coins in Roman Burial Ritual" (2008) and her PHD thesis *Charon's Obol? An archaeological study of the role of coins in Roman burial ritual (with case studies from Roman Italy, Germany, Britain and unconquered Scandinavia)* (2013). Brown's aims were to systematically analyze coins and their contexts in their respective burials from selected case studies within Roman provinces in Italy, Germany and Britain, as well as Denmark. The goals were to see if patterns of similarities or differences emerge when analyzing the geographical and chronological spread of the practice when investigating burial type, the deceased's sex and age, burial date, the number of coins and their dating, the position of the coins in the graves, their metal types, denomination, obverse and reverse type, evidence of wear and association with other grave goods. The study also investigates whether the Charon's fee interpretation is correct to use when analyzing coins in burials (Brown 2008, p. 121f; 2013, abstract, p. 6f, 12, 14ff). The results reached by Brown is that within the provincial case study areas contemporary copper alloy coins dominate during most of the researched periods and were most often deposited near the cranium of the deceased. The burials also included in most cases only one coin (Brown 2008, p. 125, 127f; 2013, p. 106, 108, 122f, 156, 159, 175ff, 222, 226f, 239ff, 308, 310f, 319). The chronological dating of the coins is much more varied, with coins being featured in burials in Italy primarily during the 3rd century, 2nd century in Germany and 4th to 5th centuries in Britain (Brown 2013, 126, 151ff, 219f). An exception to many of these norms however is Denmark, where silver and gold coins dominate throughout the entire period between the 3rd and 5th centuries and were in circulation for a longer period before being deposited in the burials. The coins were also less often located near the vicinity of the head. Silver would also become more prominent during later periods in the provinces in both Germany and in Britain. A wider age range of coins would likewise become prominent in the burials during later centuries (Brown 2008, p. 125, 127f; 2013, p. 164, 229, 282, 284f, 287f, 306, 308f, 313). Another conclusion reached by Brown was that not

everyone was observing the custom of offering coins in graves, which can be seen within the small number of burials that did feature coins, while not being connected to any specific geographical locations either. This wide variety leads Brown to theorize that the featuring of coins in burials might be based on individual choice (Brown 2013, p. 92f). What Brown does not investigate however is the occurrence of Charon's fee objects made up of local substitutes, and which similarities and differences these have both in themselves and their respective burial contexts, focusing singlehandedly on burials with coins instead.

Another study that is similar to the aims of this thesis is S. Lyttkens' master thesis *Charonmynt. Myt, makt och människor. Om hybridisering, kreolisering och transformation av en greco-romersk myt i skandinavisk gravpraktik under romersk järnålder och folkvandringstid* (2012). She draws a critical narrative of the Obolus rite interpretation, believing it to be outdated and far too general and inappropriate, since a direct link between the Greco-Roman myth of Charon and Scandinavian burial contexts cannot confidently be assumed, lest it portrays Scandinavia as a passive receiver of Greco-Roman culture. Lyttkens' belief is rather that a certain kind of knowledge of the custom's original meaning has existed but transformed into something completely new over time, through hybridization. This is however as far as she goes when investigating the spread of the phenomenon. Lyttkens focuses instead on presenting an alternative terminology for the phenomenon based on postcolonial debate, gender- and agency theory. She also takes distance from previously used terminologies, such as import, imitation and tradition, and focuses rather on looking at the Charon's fee burials through a perspective based on hybridization, creolization and transformed materialities (Lyttkens 2012, p. III, 1, 3f, 6, 97). These perspectives were then applied in a comparative way on nine Scandinavian case studies, where Lyttkens ignored the Charon's Obols' original interpretative terminology and focused on which material they were made of and what kind of items they were (Lyttkens 2012, p. 121f, 147f). Lyttkens' conclusions were that parallels between myth, social practice and items cannot be drawn, such as they have been in previous research, and should therefore introduce a new terminology for the phenomenon rather than Charon's fee. Lyttkens proposes the term "följemedel" or "take-with-item" (Lyttkens 2012, p. 153).

2.2. The heavily debated consensus

The Charon's fee rite and its various material expressions has been widely discussed and debated in the scientific discourse. Mostly, it has been used as a model to interpret coins or coin substitutes in burials located near the cranium of the deceased without much critical analysis

(Ekengren 2009, p. 182). This interpretation model stretches far back. Some of the earliest titles using this model to interpret coins or coin substitutes in burials includes articles written by O. Almgren (1903), K. Rygh (1912), J. Bøe (1926), H. Norling-Christensen (1951), A.E. Herteig (1955), U. Silvén (1956) and L.V. Grinsell (1957). That is not to say that all of the literature has looked at the Charon's fee interpretation uncritically. F. Ekengren (2009) correctly points out that no agreement has been reached concerning the historical validity of the Obolus practice and its archaeological expressions (Ekengren 2009, p. 178).

J. Gorecki (1975) was one of the first authors to write critically about the rite, pointing out the problematic variety among the occurrence of coins in burials and how the custom was not as standardized as assumed. Gorecki believed that the custom of coins in burials were dependent on a variety of differing ideas, caused by a transmission and transformation of information from the custom's original expressions within Roman and provincial regions. This transformation is characterized by an attempt at surpassing the original custom, using primarily precious metal coins and coin substitutes instead of the original bronze or copper alloy coins found primarily within the Roman provinces. This was done to showcase one's social status through the usage of higher valued coinage. Due to this, Gorecki believes that the interpretation of coins in burials as ferry money is no longer tenable and that a thorough review of the archaeological evidence is needed for a clearer interpretation. His main conclusions however are that single coins in the mouth or hands can indeed be interpreted as a Charon's Obol, while multiple coins would mean something else (Gorecki 1975, p. 187, 199, 231, 242, 248). Like Brown however, Gorecki does not bother looking at substitute Charon's fee burials, focusing rather on only coin burials singly.

K. Grinder-Hansen (1991) is another author who believed that the Charon's fee interpretation is not tenable enough to analyze coins in burials. Looking mainly at the custom in ancient Greek contexts, he concludes that the custom never obtained a central position as a burial rite and therefore does not correlate with the descriptions of the ancient authors and their scriptures (Grinder-Hansen 1991, p. 211). Grinder-Hansen is also skeptical against the various positionings of the coins in the burials, including the placement of coins in the hand, unlike Gorecki (Grinder-Hansen 1991, p. 215). Another critique he presents is that of the literary sources, most which were written several centuries after the first burials using the presumed Obolus rite occurred. He also suggests that the coin burials found in Roman and provincial contexts should be seen as their own independent phenomenon unrelated to the Greek burial custom, and that coins in mouths should be interpreted as a symbolic dowry for the dead instead of a larger amount of grave goods. As a consequence, he calls for a removal of the Charon's

fee interpretation as a whole to be replaced with the terminology “death coin” (Grinder-Hansen 1991, p. 214ff). The geographical focus of Grinder-Hansen’s article is very narrow, however, and would probably give slightly different results if it included other examples of Charon’s fee burials found outside of Greece, such as in Italy and the Roman provinces.

Another critical voice regarding the interpretation of coins in burials as Charon’s Obols is from Brown, who believes that just because coins are found in burials, they are not indicators of being reserved for Charon, but rather provisions for the afterlife (Brown 2013, p. 320). Brown also believes coins found in the hands of the deceased cannot be interpreted as Charon’s Obols, much like Grinder-Hansen (Brown 2013, p. 312). Lyttkens too argues against the vagueness of the Charon’s fee interpretation, primarily due to how rare it was already as a phenomenon within the Greco-Roman world and would already by that early point in time go through major hybridization phases from area to area (Lyttkens 2012, p. 153). S.T. Stevens (1991) also provides certain criticisms, pointing out the discrepancies between the archaeological material and the ancient written sources regarding the Charon’s fee rite, and how only a small portion of the burials contain coins, and in many of these few burials multiple coins are the norm rather than the exception and placed in various locations of the body. Using this as a standpoint, Stevens argues that Charon’s Obols were only one of many manifestations of coins in burials, and how it therefore is restrictively focusing on only one kind of interpretation. Stevens believes therefore that even when the custom was most popular, it is likely it was practiced only by a small part of the population. The fact that the coins were also often deposited together with other objects, and not necessarily only around the head of the deceased, can also be interpreted as representations of social prestige or rank rather than payment to the ferryman. That being said, Stevens also points out that the living put the coins in the mouths of the dead with the intention of the soul, since the common belief was that the soul resided in the head (Stevens 1991, p. 215f, 221, 223, 225).

H. Steuer (2002) writes that while the occurrence of Charon’s Obols in burials are common due to the recurring featuring of coins and coin substitutes in burials, not all coins can be interpreted as Obols. He also argues that only relying on the interpretation of coins in burials as payment for the ferryman obscures the potential for other interpretations. Steuer believes that the variety of interpretations proposed in the scientific literature reflects how the meaning and background of the custom has changed. The addition of a coin in the mouth may therefore have spread without awareness of the context of its original meaning. The range of interpretations of coins in burials is therefore large. He also writes that to take the designation of the Charon’s Obol as

only coins in the mouth of the deceased is too narrow of an interpretation, and therefore, in contrast to Grindler-Hansen's standpoint, believes that coins in the hand of the dead person is to some extent a part of this payment process, and that potential money pouches with more than one coin also could be interpreted as part of the Charon's fee rite (Steuer 2002, p. 499f, 501f).

A particularly noteworthy critique of the Charon's fee interpretation comes from V.S. Evgeny (2021). He argues that this terminology has turned into an unspoken normative rule, a kind of self-evident evidence, to interpret coins in burial contexts in general, in particular coins found near the cranium and the hands. This has been caused, according to Evgeny, by an uncritical attitude to ancient narrative sources and their metaphorical rhetorical contents. Evgeny questions the legitimacy of the terminology as derived from ancient literary sources, paradoxically appearing in greater numbers the further away from the Greco-Roman world one gets. He also meant that according to the mythology Charon did not need coins and that the ancient literature did not imply any payments to Charon, suggesting that the interpretation as a whole is a result of uncritical reading of the literary sources and European romanticism (Evgeny 2021, p. 76f, 79ff). Alternative interpretations suggested by Evgeny is that burial coins might reference the deceased's connection with trade, have magical functions or be a symbol of property (Evgeny 2021, p. 80). There are some problems with this standpoint, however. While no specific myth about Charon's requirement of an Obol or a coin does exist and burials with the Charon's Obol can be hard to interpret, it is an event referred to by ancient writers, suggesting a real existence of the rite. Evgeny does not present any sources to back up the claim about Charon's lack of requirement to have coins either, making this part of his argument in doubtful (Evgeny 2021, p. 77f).

What none of the aforementioned articles have looked into, however, is the spread of the Charon's fee rite phenomenon and if a certain evolution of the rite can be traced. Many of these authors have not looked into the relation between the Obols and the various other grave goods found in the burials either. That is not to say that other authors have not investigated this particular aspect. Especially when it comes to Charon's fee graves outside of the Limes border, the material relations between Charon's Obol and grave goods have been meticulously researched, especially in the context of Roman influences upon local material culture.

2.3. The mercenary and elite burial theory

One common theory among most of the literature is that the Charon's Obol's occurrence in the areas outside of the Roman borders, including Scandinavia, can be linked to the importation of

Roman material goods in connection with elite warriors fighting as mercenaries within the Roman borders, a phenomenon primarily occurring during the 3rd century up until the Western Roman Empire's downfall (Axboe & Kromann 1992, p. 272; Dyhrfeld-Johnsen 2009, p. 134, 138). After having served their time, they would be familiar with Roman culture, the Latin language and paid in full in either Roman coinage or other material possessions of gold, silver, bronze, and glass, which also would inspire the creation of local, Roman influenced artefacts. When these mercenaries later returned home, they would likely influence their home regions culturally, and would in all probability become important members of the local communities (Axboe & Kromann 1992, p. 272ff, 300). M.D. Dyhrfeld-Johnsen (2009) points out that the custom must have spread into Germanic territories from northern Gaul in the Late Roman Iron Age with these returning warriors. The fact that the custom is primarily recorded within the richest burials, aside from featuring collections of weaponry, showcase that these warriors also belonged to the societal elite (Dyhrfeld-Johnsen 2009, p. 133f, 136f, 151f). This is a theory D. Rosenstock (1982) also agrees with, believing 3rd century Gaul to be the origin of the custom's spreading towards such areas as Haßleben-Leuna, where several Charon's fee burials with rich amounts of grave goods have been found (Rosenstock 1982, p. 95, 99f).

M. Axboe and A. Kromann (1992), much like Dyhrfeld-Johnsen, argues that the Scandinavians of the Roman Iron Age and Migration Period knew and understood the Roman material culture and mainly borrowed those aspects that fitted their world view. This included the Charon's fee rite (Axboe & Kromann 1992, p. 271, 276, 300; Dyhrfeld-Johnsen 2009, p. 138, 152f). J. Bemmman (2005) reaffirms this theory, stating that the addition of gold coins and local substitutes for the Obolus rite testifies to a deeper understanding of the rite itself as a means of payment for the afterlife which was easily integrated into the Germanic conceptions of an afterlife. It also points towards a strong Romanized influence among the families practicing the rite, a theory Dyhrfeld-Johnsen also agrees with (Bemmman 2005, p. 27, 29; Dyhrfeld-Johnsen 2009, p. 139f). This Romanization can be seen according to Bemmman by showcasing that most of the imported Roman goods of gold, bronze, silver, and glass in Scandinavia primarily date back to the late Roman Iron Age between the 3rd and 5th centuries AD (Bemmman 2005, p. 20). He also presents the theory that placing coins in burials during the Roman Iron Age and Migration Period was primarily an upper-class phenomenon among the Germanic and Scandinavian elite. Here the Obolus, which was often made out of a gold or silver coin or replaced by medallions or other imitations or substitutes of gold or silver, showcased the status

and wealth of the deceased (Bemmann 2005, p. 23, 37). This is something Steuer also agrees with (Steuer 2002, p. 511).

Several other authors agree with the elite mercenary theory and brings their own additions to it. M. Gaimster (1992) argues that the higher strata of the Scandinavian chiefdoms or petty kingdoms were well acquainted with Roman culture and ideology, which they had acquired through services in the Roman army, exemplifying with the Romanesque designs of domestically produced gold bracteates (Gaimster 1992, p. 15). She also states that these precious metal imports might have consisted of war booty, acquired through ransom payment for captives, gifts, dowries and other payment outside the mercenary wages (Gaimster 1992, p. 8f). Other authors agreeing with this theory includes Steuer (2002, p. 503ff) and M. Odenweller (2016, p. 127). It is worth to mention that despite the overwhelming number of rich burials with Charon's Obols in the Germanic and Scandinavian areas, Dyhrfjeld-Johnsen also testifies that poorer burials with this custom also exists, albeit very few (Dyhrfjeld-Johnsen 2009, p. 151). U. Lund Hansen and P.O. Rindel (2008) also support the theory of the Charon's fee in Scandinavia being primarily a ritual practiced primarily by the socio-economical elite, considering the major amounts of high-status contents in the burials (Lund Hansen & Rindel 2008, p. 113, 128). Their article also showcases that gender- and age-wise, Charon's fee burials are equal between the sexes and that both adults and children could be offered a Charon's Obolus (Lund Hansen & Rindel 2008, p. 141f).

I.M. Back Danielsson (2007), while not discussing the Charon's fee, writes about the importance of the precious metals' luminosity in Germanic and Scandinavian Iron Age societies. Most of this gold was imported from the Roman provinces, including coins which could be remade into pendants worn around the neck, and had therefore changed contextual use, much like the Charon's fee objects, such as substitutes, or even the rite itself. While that is the case, she also argues that coin replications outside the Roman areas should be seen equally as much as a coin as the Roman originals, not so much looking at their motif value but at what they represent metal-wise through a wealth and rank related perspective. This connection between luminosity and wealth can also be drawn with other prestigious goods, such as jewelry and glass (Back Danielsson 2007, p. 180ff, 188). Back Danielsson also argues for a deeper meaning behind gold, connecting its luminosity not just to wealth and rank but to the divine as well, due to how gold is described as the metal of the gods in Norse mythology. This connection between luminous materials like precious metals and the divine can also be seen in the

deposition of precious metal and other shiny objects in bogs and water bodies in earlier periods (Back Danielsson 2007, p. 186ff).

Lyttkens is one of few authors who oppose the elite mercenary theory, believing it to be biased towards a male perspective, especially considering how both male and female Obolus burials have been found, as well as the theory being too lacking in evidence to be believable (Lyttkens 2012, p. 24, 36). An objecting standpoint regarding coin substitutes comes from Brown who comments in particular about glass shards and gold pieces used as substitutes for coins in Charon's fee burials in Denmark, noting that since no other evidence for the Charon's fee rite has been found in Denmark, it is unlikely they should be interpreted as payment for the ferryman. Instead, they should rather be seen as a transformed adaptation of the custom to fit the local ideology. Brown bases her argument on the fact that practically all Danish Charon's fee burials use themselves of valuable items of precious metals or glass, rather than common copper alloys such as within the Roman provincial areas (Brown 2013, p. 297). H.J. Dölle (1991) also presents an objection by R. Laser, who believes that restraint should be used in the interpretation of derivation of the Charon's fee custom from the Greco-Roman regions towards the Germanic and Scandinavian areas. Laser believes that it is necessary to emphasize the inner-Germanic continuity of the custom, believing the coin substitutes in many of these burials to be a phenomenon in itself rather than the Charon's fee (Laser 1980 in Dölle 1991, p. 173).

None of the various articles have attempted at structuring a typology of Charon's fee objects to further show how the rite has spread in an evolutionary manner, especially regarding the stages from coinage to local substitutes. This leaves a research gap I hope to be able to fill in with my thesis. Attempts at tracing the spreading of the rite from 3rd century Roman Gaul has been shown in various parts of the literature, however, suggesting a continental dispersal from there, throughout the Haßleben-Leuna regions and further beyond northwards (e.g. Rosenstock 1982, p. 95, 99f).

2.4. Other research approaches

As with any well researched and debated scientific topic, there are various other approaches towards the Charon's fee rite in the archaeological material. A. Alföldy-Gazdac and C. Gazdac (2013) wrote an article which focused on identifying the general and specific mentality patterns of the Charon's fee rite within the ancient Greco-Roman world in relation with classical mythology and funerary rituals. The source material for this analysis was primarily ancient literary and iconographic sources. Their belief is that the literary and iconographic sources

should be seen as testimony for the custom's existence but also as individual descriptions and representations of the custom (Alföldy-Gazdac & Gazdac 2013, p. 285ff). One particular point brought up in the article was the ancient literature's questioning of whether wealth was a worthy ideal or not by the time of death and discusses whether the Obol itself can be seen as a symbol of parting with worldly wealth (Alföldy-Gazdac & Gazdac 2013, p. 291, 296ff. 300).

J.M. Doyen (2012) writes that coins in funerary contexts should be examined using three theoretical criteria: the "topology", the packaging of the coins and the coins as funerary artefacts. What Doyen means with this is that when studying coins in burials, one should keep an eye out for signs of how the coins are staged, such as if the obverse or reverse side is up, and to determine whether the chosen type of coin was meant to be "seen" by the deceased or by the funeral attendees, referring to the position of the coin in the burial. Doyen points out that this information has rarely been noted within investigations of the Charon's fee rite or coins in burials in general. This will fill missing gaps in the databases, according to Doyen, and help with a proper interpretation and accurate field observations in the future (Doyen 2012, p. 7, 16). Ekengren presented a thorough review of the Obolus rite's occurrences in burials outside the Roman borders, where he wrote that not only coins were featured in this rite, but also glass and ceramic shards, items of precious metals, imitations of coins, bracteates, pearls and other items, and how they are often found in not only the mouth but also in the hands or on the chest of the deceased (Ekengren 2009, p. 178f, 190). A similar conclusion is reached by Dyhrfjeld-Johnsen, who noted this instance occurring already in Greek burial contexts (Dyhrfjeld-Johnsen 2009, p. 133f). Ekengren also believed that the ritual deposition of coins in burials, whether in the mouth of the deceased or otherwise, was a way to mark the transition of the deceased to the land of the dead as well as marking the relationship between the land of the living and the otherworld. He argues that it is possible that similar ideas were already present among the Germanic peoples, but in relation to other forms of material culture, such as various kinds of coin substitutes, and should therefore be seen as interconnected ideas (Ekengren 2009, p. 189f).

E. Fønnesbech-Sandberg (1989), much like the conclusions Brown reached in her thesis about the Danish coin burials, testifies to a longer circulation of Roman precious metal objects, such as coins, exemplifying with the contents of silver and gold depots from the Roman Iron Age and Migration Period, where we often find a comparable mixture of imported and domestically produced objects. This seems to have been particularly common during the Migration Period, due to a decreasing import of Roman objects, which might have spurred on the circulation before being deposited in burials or depots. The imported goods included coins, which often

were worn to a lesser or greater extent, or altered through some means or another, after having been in circulation for some time. Due to this, Fønnesbech-Sandberg believes that one needs to investigate the condition of the coins at the time of deposition to estimate what kind of changes might have been made where and potentially when (Fønnesbech-Sandberg 1989, p. 432, 452). A.S. Gräslund (1967) has also written about the Charon's fee rite, primarily focusing on material from the Viking period and younger Iron Age. She also summarized the by that point current scientific research of the Charon's fee rite (Gräslund 1967, p. 171). Like other authors, Gräslund points out the importance of the inflow of Roman goods into Scandinavia during the Roman Iron Age and Migration Period, likely from either trade or homewards bound mercenaries, and how it would also include a "spiritual import" in the shape of the Charon's fee rite (Gräslund 1967, p. 173f). Unlike the sceptics of other literature, Gräslund believes that more than simply just one coin found in a burial can be indicative of the Charon's fee rite, especially if found in a pouch (Gräslund 1967, p. 179, 188f). J.P. Lamm and M. Axboe (1989) writes in their article about the Roman material and ideological influences seen in the archaeological record, including not just the Charon's fee rite but also bracteates and their picturesque motifs inspired by Roman coinage. Artefacts similar to bracteates are equally mentioned by Lamm and Axboe to have surfaced in burials on Gotland as "death coins", being imitations of Roman coinage, much like the bracteates, but serving a very Charon's fee-like purpose instead (Lamm & Axboe 1989, p. 471). B. Effros (2005) presents an alternative interpretation, that shortages of imported coins will result in the deposition of older coins after a longer period of circulation (Effros 2005, p. 205)

Lund Hansen & Rindel comes with what might be one of the more unique proposals for interpretation of the Charon's fee rite's occurrences in Scandinavia by investigating them through a cosmological landscape perspective. In their article they try to connect the occurrences of Charon's fee burials in southern Scandinavia with their proximity to waterways and sea gates around the regions of Zealand in Denmark, and Scania in Sweden (Lund Hansen & Rindel 2008, p. 113ff, 118f). The results of this investigation were negative however, as most of the burials could not be connected to any major water ways or sea gates (Lund Hansen & Rindel 2008, p. 130ff, 133ff, 144). M.J. Przybyła and E. Rydzewska (2019), much like Lund Hansen and Rindel, also believe in a connection between Obolus graves in Scandinavia and water ways, investigating Charon's Obols made out of Jutland amber. An interesting point here is that no instances of amber Obols have yet been found in wealthy burials according to Przybyła and Rydzewska, making it a breaking point from other Scandinavian Charon's fee

burials which often feature rich quantities of prestigious grave goods. This leads Przybyła and Rydzewska to theorize that Obols occur in both poorly and richly equipped graves. Basing this occurrence of amber Obols in both rich and poor burials, Przybyła and Rydzewska believe that the Charon's Obols in Scandinavia should be interpreted as symbols for water ways, representing a part of the Scandinavian seafaring lifestyle, which affected their views of the afterlife. In a way, using this perspective they also expand upon Alföldy-Gazdac and Gazdac's ideas about the mythological connections to the Obolus rite and applies it in a Scandinavian context (Przybyła & Rydzewska 2019, p. 162f).

Dölle has also written about the Charon's fee ritual. His belief is that the rite's spreading towards the Germanic areas during the Migration Period in particular should be seen as the spreading of a Christian phenomenon (Dölle 1991, p. 171). Odenweller is another author who believes in the connection between the spread of the Obolus rite and early Christianity. Odenweller's theory is based on the fact that the Romans were already Christian by the time of their usage of Germanic mercenaries during the 4th century and would afterwards spread among the Germanic elite warriors and be consolidated as a part of their Christianization during the Early Middle Ages. This can primarily be seen in the iconography of the coins, which are often interpreted as featuring Christian motifs. Some of these Charon's Obols were not even coins, but rather thin silver or gold sheet crosses decorated with ornaments and figures, placed near the deceased's faces (Odenweller 2016, p. 121ff). Steuer, too, pointed out the potential connection between the Charon's fee rite's dispersal and the spreading of the Christian faith. Steuer goes so far as to argue that the Charon's fee rite already developed in a Christian milieu, which he believes can be seen in the first spread of the Christian faith among society's elite using primarily coins of precious metals. Arguing for a connection between the two, he refers to the dispersal of the practice among the Franks during the 4th and 5th centuries along with their conversion to Christianity, the occurrence of coins in the hands of the dead in early Christian burials in Rome. It would afterwards spread within Germanic and Slavic areas in particular connected to Christianity (Steuer 2002, p. 502f, 508, 512).

2.5. Chapter summary

The research literature behind the Charon's fee rite is wide, expansive, and heavily debated. Parts of the literature calls for a withdrawal of the interpretation as a whole, while others tolerate its existence with certain criticisms towards its positionings in the graves or their material appearances. Connecting Germanic and Scandinavian Obols in rich burials with a social stratum

of elite warriors is a popular theory that has gained a lot of ground, as well as explaining why such prestigious materials are used for the Charon's fee objects outside the Roman borders. Some of the research has also tried to connect the Charon's Obols to sea ways, mythological world views, the spread of religion, or suggested to investigate the obverse or reverse placement of the coins in Charon's fee burials. What most of the literature has yet to attempt is to investigate the evolutionary spread of the Charon's fee. Parts have touched upon its spreading from Gaul throughout Germany and northwards but has not discussed the material evolution from coinage to substitutes, leaving a gap in the research.

3. Material and source evaluation

The main corpus of this thesis is a literature study, where the primary material is made up of published literature about six case studies across Scandinavia from the late Roman Iron Age and the Migration Period, around the 3rd to the 6th centuries AD. The focal points of these case studies will in particular be on graves where the Obolus rite has been encountered among the grave goods. All of these burials are inhumation graves. While coins have been found in cremation burials from this time period as well, it is much easier to interpret a coin or coin substitute as a Charon's Obol due to where in the burial it was located. As such, inhumation burials where the Charon's fee has been attested to have been found in the near vicinity of or inside the cranium of the deceased will be of focus in this thesis. Two of these case studies can be found in Denmark, specifically the Roman Iron Age graves of Engbjerg grave 4 and Himlingøje 1949-2 on Zealand from the late Roman Iron Age (Norling-Christensen 1951; Boye 2002a, 2002b). In Sweden, two burials come from respectively Högom, specifically Högom burial mound 2 from the Migration Period, at the eastern coast of the Norrland area, and the double burial at Kälder on the island of Gotland, from between the 4th and 5th centuries AD (Almgren 1903; Silvéén 1956; Ramqvist 1990, 1992). In Norway, two other burials from the Roman Iron Age are also featured, specifically from Gile, Oppland and Hol in Hustad parish in Trøndelag (Rygh 1912; Bøe 1926; Herteig 1955). Due to these burials already being excavated, a select number of articles and other kinds of literature will here act as the primary material sources for this thesis.

When presenting the material from the burials at Engbjerg, two main articles, both written by L. Boye will act as the primary material. The first one is the article "Glas i mund" (2002a) and can be found in the 5th volume of the journal *Skalk*. This article describes in summary the discoveries made during the excavation of the Engbjerg burials, their grave goods, and some

interpretations. The second one, the very similarly named “Glaskår i munden” (2002b) was featured as a chapter in the book *Drik – og du vil leve skønt. Festskrift til Ulla Lund Hansen på 60-årsdagen* and discusses the Engbjerg burials in slightly more detail. Complementary information is mentioned in other articles also, such as U. Lund Hansen’s and P.O. Rindel’s chapter “Charons-objekter. Kosmologi og kulturlandskab i Øresundsregionen i yngre romersk jernalder” (2008) from the book *Kulturella kontakter och samhällsutveckling i Skåne och på Själland under järnåldern* but not nearly in as great detail. The Himlingøje burials, on the other hand, are widely published, where several articles and excavation reports present the bulk of the information. The burials and their contents are presented in summary by H. Norling-Christensen in his article “Jernaldergravpladsen ved Himlingøje” (1951) from the journal *Fra Nationalmuseets arbejdsmark*. More detailed descriptions of the findings in the area are however presented in Lund Hansen et al’s *Himlingøje – Seeland – Europa. Ein Gräberfeld der jüngeren römischen Kaiserzeit auf Seeland, seine Bedeutung und internationalen Beziehungen* (1995). Another source of information is also presented in *Danmarks oldtid III. Jernalderen* by J. Brøndsted (1966).

For Högom burial mound 2, the main sources of information are presented by P.H. Ramqvist in two major publications. The first one, simply named *Högom* (1990) presents a summary of the archaeological excavations, findings, and artefacts from the area (Ramqvist 1990). Meanwhile, the more information rich *Högom. The Excavations 1949-1984* (1992) presents an in-depth description of the excavations, findings, and interpretations of the burial (Ramqvist 1992). The Kälder double burial has one primary piece of literature connected to it, being O. Almgren’s article “Ett guldmünt från en gottländsk graf” in *Studier tillägnade Oscar Montelius 9.9 1903/ af lärjungar* (1903). Further contextual information is also provided by Statens Historiska Muséer (SHM 2023, 11743). Smaller details about this burial are also mentioned by Ramqvist and U. Silvén’s ”Gotländsk vapengrav med charonsmynt?” (1956) but it is nothing Almgren’s article does not already mention (Silvén 1956, p. 103; Ramqvist 1992, p. 125).

The burial at Gile, Oppland in Norway from the late Roman Iron Age has been illustrated and discussed in detail by A.E. Herteig in his “Gilefunnene på Østre Toten” (1955) in volume 19 of the journal *Viking*. The burial at Hol was covered by J. Bøe in his article “Norsk gravguld fra ældre jernalder” (1926) in the journal *BMÅ*. While this article discusses the Charon’s object in detail, a more detailed description of the burial is provided by K. Rygh in his article “Oldsamlingens tillvæxt i 1912” (1912). It is also mentioned by Ramqvist in his book (Ramqvist 1992, p. 126). Further information about all the burials is also presented and

discussed in S. Lyttkens' *Charonmynt – myt, makt och människor. Om hybridisering, kreolisering och transformation av en greco-romersk myt i skandinavisk gravpraktik under romersk järnålder och folkvandringstid* (2012).

4. Theory

The theoretical framework of this thesis is based on R. Dawkins' theory about socio-cultural replicating units and trends, referred to by Dawkins as memes in his *The Selfish Gene* (1976). The term meme should here be defined as cultural or societal expressions which are then replicated and transmitted and evolve with this transmission (Dawkins 1976, p. 189; Shennan 2002, p. 11f, 46). Examples of memes as cultural phenomena includes ideas, music, clothing, typologies, ceremonies, and customs (Dawkins 1976, p. 190, 192; Shennan 2002, p. 48). Even world views, subjective valuations and religious expressions can be seen as memes, such as the belief in gods or an afterlife, or why objects of gold or silver are so valuable (Dawkins 1976, p. 192f). Dawkins defines three major catalysts that affects a meme's survival and transmission: longevity, fecundity, and copying-fidelity. Longevity describes how long lived a meme is within the collective psyche of a culture or within material form. Fecundity is how popular the meme grows, and how widespread it becomes, therefore. Popularity and wide spreading do not guarantee longevity, however. Copying-fidelity on the other hand is how easy it is for the meme to be applicable for imitation, which also affects the meme's spreading, much like fecundity (Dawkins 1976, p. 194; Shennan 2002, p. 46).

Some memes are more popular and thus more capable of replicating than others. This spreading of cultural phenomena or memes is not seamless however, as gradual changes happen occasionally when cultural expressions are transmitted. Like their biological equivalent, the genes, if a meme is successful, they are able to replicate and spread. Memes however spread through imitation. Once a meme starts spreading the chances for evolving or gradual change are increased. After several transmissions, only the basal concepts of the original meme might be discernable within the newer meme, which over time has evolved. Dawkins refer to this as "cultural mutations", where a cultural expression changes from individual to individual (Dawkins 1976, p. 190, 194ff). Occasionally, some memes are directly associated with each other. Hybridization, or as Dawkins puts it "blending" is very much a possible phenomenon between two different kinds of cultural memes. Blended memes can include several meme components thrown into one all-encompassing cultural expression. An archaeological example

of this is how a Charon's Obolus is a kind of burial gift, but also serves a different ritual purpose compared to the other burial goods in the grave (Dawkins 1976, p. 195, 197f).

This is not to say that Dawkins' meme theory has gone without criticisms. As described by S. Shennan (2002) and P. Jordan (2014), the simple "meme-as-replicator" model has its problems in the fact that cultural inheritance often depends on several different factors and therefore tend to be far more complex than a simple transmission of a meme from one individual to another. Cultural knowledge is rarely passed on in neatly ready-made formats but rather undergoes processes of continual regeneration and renewal throughout social contexts and interaction (Shennan 2002, p. 46ff, 63f; Jordan 2014, p. 13, 371). Due to the fact that this thesis only focuses on artefact typologies and their material and shape related similarities and differences and not big data however, these faults within Dawkins' meme theory should not cause any major problems.

Dawkins' theory is used here to examine particular traits seen within specific artefact types and focuses less on the transmission of a whole cultural expression but rather the localized trends and interpretations of said cultural expressions to investigate its potential evolution from a material and shape related standpoint in an attempt to identify an evolutionary typology. Is it possible to detect specific regional or chronological trends by analyzing how the Charon's fee meme expresses itself in the material record of these case studies, and what would these particular regional trends then mean? Are they caused by material circumstances or by the subjective actions of the people who orchestrated the burials? How do they relate to the other grave goods if there are any? Can Dawkins' meme theory be applied on this material, and to which extent does it generate new knowledge? The meme theory will in this study be applied as a heuristic framework to study particular qualitative aspects of artefacts, regarding material, and potential typological appearance. In many other studies, this theory has been applied in a quantitative manner, but since this thesis focuses primarily on the artefacts' qualitative characteristics a heuristic usage of the theory is best suited for the analysis of this material.

5. Method

The method used for this particular study is a comparative analysis, in which the aforementioned case study burials are compared with each other. This is to further distinguish the various local material expressions of the individual case studies and see whether regional trends and overarching memes or trends can be found in a comparison with the other burials.

Using this method, it is my hope to be able to distinguish certain material similarities or differences that can potentially showcase an evolutionary dispersal of the Charon's fee rite and what similarities or differences the various graves share in regards to other miscellaneous grave goods. This comparison therefore focuses primarily on the various material expressions the Charon's Oboli take, but also on which kinds of other artefacts can be found in the graves and potential regions of origin if imported. As a consequence of this comparison, my hope is that clear examples of local trends within the Charon's fee rite will be discernable. In the following chapters there will be a presentation of the contextual historical background of the Charon's fee rite, followed afterwards by an analysis with a description of the case studies and their material record as well as a particular analysis of each Charon's Obolus. The results of the analysis will afterwards be compared and discussed in this thesis' discussion chapter.

6. Contextual background – The Charon's fee rite within the Greco-Roman world, the Roman provinces and outside the Roman Limes borders

6.1. The Charon's fee, its origins and spread within the Greco-Roman world

The Charon's fee, otherwise known as the Obolus rite, is one of many archaeological interpretations of coins or similar artefacts found in graves, specifically either in the mouth or around the head or the hands of the deceased. The custom of placing a coin in the mouth or hands of the deceased was practiced in various parts of Europe, starting in classical Greece, and then spread to the Roman world, into the provinces and beyond (Gräslund 1967, p. 173; Gorecki 1975, p. 236; Dölle 1991, p. 171; Effros 2005, p. 205, 215; Brown 2008, p. 121; Odenweller 2016, p. 125). A general belief was that the Obolus was placed in the mouth at the immediate moment of death after the body had been washed and laid on *lit de parade* to prevent the soul from returning to the body (Jones 1987, p. 813; Stevens 1991, p. 221; Toynbee 1996, p. 43f, 181f; Alföldy-Gazdac & Gazdac 2013, p. 299f; Brown 2013, p. 3). The name is misleading, however, as the Greek Obolus, a type of silver coin, is barely featured in the Greek burials, as bronze and other copper alloys are much more prevalent. This was the case also in the Roman world and its provinces in Germany and Britain. Silver coinage would however become much more prominent in provincial Germanic and British 5th century burials. Other rare metals include gold and billon (Grinsell 1957, p. 263, 265; Stevens 1991, p. 224; Steuer 2002, p. 505; Ekengren 2009, p. 179; Doyen 2012, p. 12; Alföldy-Gazdac & Gazdac 2013, p. 302; Brown

2013, p. 108, 159f, 164, 226ff, 229, 308). A potential predecessor to the Obols of the Charon's fee tradition in ancient Greece could be small spits, later on these were made out of gold, which were put in the grave or placed between the teeth of the deceased. These are also testified to have been called Obolos, or *Ὀβελός* (Gorecki 1975, p. 192f; Gräslund 1967, p. 171f; Steuer 2002, p. 499, 500f).



Fig. 1. Classical Greek white lekythos depicting Charon receiving an Obol from a soul. Housed at the National Museum of Archaeology in Athens, Greece.

Charon's Obol is referenced in the classical literature, primarily describing the deposition of a single coin (Gorecki 1975, p. 185; Bemmann 2005, p. 29; Alföldy-Gazdac & Gazdac 2013, p. 289). The practice's roots are found in the literary sources about Charon, the ferryman of the dead, whose job is to transport the dead over the river Styx or Acheron Hades (e.g. Gorecki 1975, p. 185ff; Grinder-Hansen 1991, p. 207; Bemmann 2005, p. 29). The first mentions of Charon in ancient Greece primarily date back to the turn from the 6th to the 5th century BC.

Pausanias describes the earliest mentioning of Charon from a poem, *Minyad*, which was written by the end of the 6th century BC. Meanwhile, the first official mentioning of the ferryman can be seen in the comedies of the 5th century BC, such as Aristophanes' *The Frogs*. It is also around this time the first picturesque appearances of Charon are starting to appear, as seen on white lekythos pottery, where the ferryman is often depicted accepting the fee from a dead soul (fig. 1). Coinciding with these literary and picturesque references is also the first archaeological findings of the Obolus or Charon's fee practice in Greek funerary contexts (e.g. Sullivan 1950, p. 12; Grinsell 1957, p. 261f; Gorecki 1975, p. 193, 236f; Grinder-Hansen 1991, p. 211, 214; Stevens 1991, p. 216, 223; Steuer 2002, p. 501; Alföldy-Gazdac & Gazdac 2013, p. 287ff, 290). The Roman author Lucian also described this rite in his *De Lucto* (On Funerals), writing that the coin is put in the mouth of the dead at the immediate moment of death, without any serious consideration of what kind of coin is deposited (Grinder-Hansen 1991, p. 209; Stevens 1991, p. 218, 221; Lucian *On Funerals* 10 in Brown 2013, p. 68f). There are also notions that it was a common practice during the 4th and 3rd century BC to keep change wrapped up in cloth in your cheek, which also might indicate an origin of the Charon's fee practice. This also coincides

with the practice of depositing coins in burials during ancient Greco-Roman antiquity (Silvén 1956, p. 102; Brown 2013, p. 69; Grinsell 1957, p. 262; Grønder-Hansen 1991, p. 211).

Obols appear occasionally in the archaeological record, such as in 4th century BC Olynth and the earliest Greek colonies in Italy (Grinsell 1957, p. 262f; Gorecki 1975, p. 194; Grønder-Hansen 1991, p. 211f; Stevens 1991, p. 223f; Doyen 2012, p. 4; Brown 2013, p. 312). Already during the 400's BC coin depositions in graves are varied, appearing sporadically such as in the mouth, the hands, next to the body, deposited in vessels or in the grave fill. From the various depositions of the coins, it can be concluded that not all of them can be interpreted as Charon's Obols (Grønder-Hansen 1991, p. 213; Steuer 2002, p. 499; Dyrhøj-Johnsen 2009, p. 133f, 151; Ekengren 2009, p. 179ff). While Obols do appear in Greek funerary contexts as well as the age of the Roman republic, it wouldn't get a major spreading until the age of the Roman empire, reaching its peak in Italy during the 2nd century AD, and would by the 3rd and 4th centuries mellow out probably due to a change in belief, the practice gradually becoming outdated or the variety of crises that transpired during this time in history (e.g. Gräslund 1967, p. 171; Gorecki 1975, p. 192; Alföldy-Gazdac & Gazdac 2013, p. 300f, 308f; Brown 2013, p. 98, 100ff, 304). Coins were often contemporary with the burials they were found in and taken directly from circulating currency within either 50 or 30 years of its minting at most. However, in some cases older coins can also be found, especially among burials from the late second and early third centuries AD. This may indicate that the coins had other kinds of value than just monetary ones and may have been heirlooms (Grinsell 1957, p. 265; Fønnesbech-Sandberg 1989, p. 429; Brown 2008, p. 126ff; 2013, p. 106). Examples of older coins used for the Obolus rite can be found at the burial site of Frénouville, France, where a burial field from the 5th century featured several coins dating back earlier than the 400's AD (Effros 2005, p. 205).

As the archaeological record shows, there is a lot of variability in the custom, not just throughout the Mediterranean world (Gorecki 1975, p. 187; Stevens 1991, p. 224; Brown 2008, p. 121; 2013, p. 314; Dyrhøj-Johnsen 2009, p. 133). Despite the mentions in literary sources, the Obolus rite is rare in the archaeological record (Grønder-Hansen 1991, p. 211; Stevens 1991, p. 215; Steuer 2002, p. 501; Dyrhøj-Johnsen 2009, p. 134). In fact, the practice is more widespread in Italy than in Greece, appearing in Roman contexts as early as the 3rd century BC, where a variety of coin deposits can be spotted here as well (Stevens 1991, p. 224; Dyrhøj-Johnsen 2009, p. 134, 151; Ekengren 2009, p. 179). A contributing factor to this rarity might be the difficulties in properly using this interpretation on the archaeological records. This may be caused by local kinds of burial rites, or different takes on already existing ones, including

the Charon's fee. These assemblages are most often caused by a multitude of beliefs in an afterlife (Steuer 2002, p. 499; Bemmann 2005, p. 3; Brown 2013, p. 1f, 92).

The key to understanding if a coin can be interpreted as a Charon's fee is based on its location in the grave. The normal assumption is that they were placed in the mouth or the hands, but the location of the coin varies significantly (Dyhrfeld-Johnsen 2009, p. 134; Ekengren 2009, p. 179). Sometimes the coins can be found in the near vicinity of the head, chest area or by the waist or the arms and hands. A likely explanation for coins near the head or around the chest is often that the coin has fallen out of its original placement in the mouth due to decay or other later disturbances (Ekengren 2009, p. 186, 189; Brown 2013, p. 121ff; Odenweller 2016, p. 125). In cases of arm and waist placement, it can be argued that the dead held the coin in their hands in a purse, which could be alternative more direct takes on the Charon's fee. Placement around the legs and feet cannot necessarily be ascribed this interpretation and might just be alternative provisions for the afterlife (e.g. Gorecki 1975, p.187, 225, 230, 240f; Gaimster 1992, p. 9; Steuer 2002, p. 499; Ekengren 2009, p. 179). No specific coin placement in the grave is bound to a certain gender, although age-wise the rite seems much more common among adults (Grinder-Hansen 1991, p. 213; Bemmann 2005, p. 27). One difficulty using the Charon's fee interpretation is the occurrence of more than just one coin in a grave (Ekengren 2009, p. 179; Doyen 2012, p. 11). It is likely that these larger numbers of coins should be interpreted less as Charon's fee and more as provisions for the afterlife and grave gifts. Coins in the grave fill rather than in direct contact with the body can be seen as one such example but can also be interpreted as random debris (Steuer 2002, p. 501f; Effros 2005, p. 205; Brown 2008, p. 127; Ekengren 2009, p. 180; Brown 2013, p. 117, 314, 320). Perforated coins are another category that appears in the archaeological records with their own set of difficulties, mainly as these coins are often interpreted as jewelry or amulets (Gorecki 1975, p. 230). While that is the case, instances of perforated coins have also appeared in graves in the position of the deceased's mouth. This was the case in Emersleben in Saxony-Anhalt, as well as in Thuringia. The interpretation becomes extra difficult when it comes to perforated coins set around the chest, due to coins falling out of the mouths of the dead during decay. This argument can also be used for other artefacts in the same location, like beads (Ekengren 2009, p. 186, 188).

Coins would continue to be deposited in burials after the adoption of Christianity, including in Obolus rite contexts. These versions of the rite can be found, for an instance, in the hands of the dead, as seen in burials from Rome's catacombs. It is likely that early during Christianity's history, coins were added either as a surviving aspect of a pagan practice or as a safety measure

due to a lack of faith in the Christian doctrine of salvation (Grinsell, 1957, p. 265; Gorecki 1975, p. 197; Steuer 2002, p. 502f; Brown 2013, p. 77). Outside of Italy, this Christian continuity can be traced among the Franks during the 4th and 5th centuries (Gräslund 1967, p. 188; 1991, p. 171f; Steuer 2002, p. 507; Odenweller 2016, p. 125). An alternative instance of the Charon's fee within a Christian context has been found in the shape of small gold leaf crosses found primarily in the facial area of the deceased. Examples of such burials include Lombard settlement areas in Post-Roman Italy and in Anglo-Saxon England (Odenweller 2016, p. 122f, 135, 140f; Steuer 2002, p. 508f).

6.2. The Charon's fee rite outside the Greco-Roman world

The Charon's fee rite would continue to spread outside the Roman empire to the Germanic regions and northern Europe through Gaul during the late Roman Iron Age and the Migration Period, mainly with mercenaries returning home after having served in the Roman army. Here the Charon's fee custom would take on even more variations (e.g. Rosenstock 1982, p. 95; Fønnesbech-Sandberg 1989, p. 446f; Axboe & Kromann 1992, p. 272ff; Steuer 2002, p. 503ff; Dyhrfjeld-Johnsen 2009, p. 134, 151). The addition of coins in burials would only occur in central and northern Europe to a significant extent around the late Roman Iron Age, during the time of the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD, along with other kinds of Roman material culture. From there, it would continue to be present sporadically in burials up until the Migration Period. However, in Denmark and other parts of Scandinavia the peak occurs slightly later, around the time between the 3rd and 5th centuries AD (e.g. Bemmann 2005, p. 7, 12; Bergquist 2005, p. 50; Dyhrfjeld-Johnsen 2009, p. 137, 151; Lund Hansen & Rindel 2008, p. 128; Ekengren 2009, p. 179; Brown 2013, p. 98, 151ff, 282, 306). It is likely however that a select few burials featured the Obolus custom already around the early Roman Iron Age, such as a grave in Bæk, North Schleswig where an aureus from ca 26 AD was placed in the deceased's hand, possibly being the only instance of a Charon's fee being placed in the hand in Denmark (Bemmann 2005, p. 8). The practice remained limited and sporadic in central and northern Europe. On Gotland it can be found only in the 4th century and in the area west of the Weser for the first time in the beginning of the 5th century (Gaimster 1992, p. 17; Boye 2002a, p. 8; Bemmann 2005, p. 26).

Like in Italy, mainly contemporary coins have been found in both Germanic and British burials, suggesting they have been taken directly from circulation. There are instances where older coins have been found in graves, though. In Denmark coins could circulate for centuries before finally being buried. This was a trend that would become much more pronounced during the Migration

Period due to a shortage of imported Roman goods, including coins (Fonnesbech-Sandberg 1989, p. 452; Brown 2008, p. 127; 2013, p. 156, 222, 284). It is argued that the Charon's fee, or at least variants of it, was spread throughout western Europe through the influx of Roman goods within Germanic Barbaricum. This influx was often affected by shifting Roman imperial politics. Some areas were also more influenced by Roman material culture than others, which explains the occurrence of the rite in areas where major finds of Roman goods have been found (Silvén 1956, p. 102; Axboe & Kromann 1992, p. 271, 300; Bemmann 2005, p. 1, 37; Bergquist 2005, p. 50). The influx changed gradually over time also. Sometimes some regions had larger importation of coins than others. It should be presumed that it is more likely that coins were deposited in burials during times of larger accumulations of Roman goods than during times of shortage. In Denmark alone 45% of all the finds of imported Roman goods coincides with the period of coin burials in the area, during the late Roman Iron Age around the 200's to 400's AD, and also follows the same distribution patterns (Gräslund 1967, p. 173; Axboe & Kromann 1992, p. 183ff; Bemmann 2005, p. 1, 20; Brown 2013, p. 282, 296).

Outside the Roman empire, the coins took on a very non-monetary use, such as heirlooms or integrated into jewelry like bracteates, medallions, or coin finger rings. Some were even melted down and used as raw material for locally produced artefacts, such as coin imitations (Gorecki 1975, p. 230; Axboe & Kromann 1982, p. 276, 278f; Fonnesbech-Sandberg 1989, p. 441ff; Bemmann 2005, p. 1). Coins occurring in burials outside the Roman provinces was likely a phenomenon occurring among the local socio-political elite and was probably based on intra-Germanic exchanges of precious metal goods among the elite. The regionally varying importance of coinage to represent the status and wealth of the deceased in the death ritual is also expressed in the choice of coin metal. Primarily silver and gold coins, such as Aurei and Solidi, as well as imitations of gold and silver, dominate in northern and central Europe (e.g. Gorecki 1975, p. 142; Axboe & Kromann 1992, p. 286, 299; Bemmann 2005, p. 20, 23, 26, 37; Bergquist 2005, p. 50, 135; Dyhrfeld-Johnsen 2009, p. 133f; Ekengren 2009, p. 187). These coins were often complimented by collections of imported Roman goods of bronze, precious metals and glass, as well as weaponry signifying the dead's status as elite mercenaries, having returned after their service in the Roman areas (e.g. Fonnesbech-Sandberg 1989, p. 446f; Axboe & Kromann 1992, p. 272ff, 295; Steuer 2002, p. 503ff; Bergquist 2005, p. 50, 52, 73, 135; Dyhrfeld-Johnsen 2009, p. 137f, 151f; Odenweller 2016, p. 122, 127f). This kind of burial in central and northern Europe can be traced back primarily to the Haßleben-Leuna-graves, which also included collections of Roman goods and symbolic weaponry in the form of silver

arrowheads. Although single coins do appear in “poorer” graves as well, most scholars associate the Germanic use of coins with the elite (Gorecki 1975, p. 241; Rosenstock 1982, p. 99; Dölle 1991, p. 173; Bemmann 2005, p. 3, 12; Dyhrfjeld-Johnsen 2009, p. 137f; Ekengren 2009, p. 182f). This differs considerably from Roman burials, where coins appear in both common and elite burials and was primarily focused on the inclusion of a coin rather than its metallic value (e.g. Toynbee 1996, p. 119; Effros 2005, p. 205; Alföldy-Gazdac & Gazdac 2013, p. 307). Different kinds of fur from various animals, such as bear skin, have also been found in burials featuring the Charon’s fee rite, as well as hygiene articles like combs made of bone and horn (Silvén 1956, p. 105f; Lamm & Axboe 1989, p. 458).

It is recorded in Northern Germany and Scandinavia that substitutes or imitations of coins were used in burials, with a primary occurrence in especially Zealand, Denmark. In fact, almost all the Charon’s fee objects found in Scandinavia consist of substitutes in various shapes and materials (table 1). Earlier examples of these coin substitutes have also been found in the Haßleben-Leuna areas (e.g. Steuer 2002, p. 499, 503; Bemmann 2005, p. 15f, 20ff, 29, 37; Dyhrfjeld-Johnsen 2009, p. 137; Ekengren 2009, p. 188). On the Danish islands of Zealand and Funen, Charon’s fee substitutes most often appears as finger rings and spiral gold clips. Similar artefacts can also be found in Norwegian burials from around this time, as well as gold and silver discs or plates (e.g. Steuer 2002, p. 503; Bemmann 2005, p. 23; Lund Hansen & Rindel 2008, p. 111, 125; Dyhrfjeld-Johnsen 2009, p. 133f, 151). Another popular substitute included shards of Roman glass. This kind of substitute has occurred in various areas in southern Scandinavia, such as Zealand, Bornholm, Scania in Sweden, and Norway (e.g. Bemmann 2005, p. 26; Dyhrfjeld-Johnsen 2009, p. 133, 135f, 151; Lund Hansen & Rindel 2008, p. 112f, 124f; Przybyła & Rydzewska 2019, p. 153, 162). Amber seems to have acted as a common substitute as well, appearing on Jutland but also at Simris in Scania, Sweden and at Zealand in Denmark such as at Kærup Nord. Belonging to this category are also beads that have been found in the mouth and around the placement of the head and chest in various burials. It is also likely however that they may have been hung on a string around the neck, much like the perforated coins (Bemmann 2005, p. 26; Dyhrfjeld-Johnsen 2009, p. 133f, 137; Ekengren 2009, p. 188; Przybyła & Rydzewska 2019, p. 153, 162, 168). These substitutes were not necessarily used in the lack of coins but should be seen as expressions of material wealth (Gorecki 1975, p. 242; Dyhrfjeld-Johnsen 2009, p. 139f, 153; Odenweller 2016, p. 138f). Less status inducing substitutes have also been found placed in the mouth of the deceased, such as pieces of iron and knives. Fibulae, brooches, and bracteates have also appeared in similar contexts (Silvén 1956,

p. 98; Gräslund 1967, p. 172; Axboe & Kromann 1992, p. 276). The addition of valuable substitutes for gold and silver showcases an ability to adapt the rite to native conditions without altering its meaning. The point was not to position a coin in the grave necessarily, but as a means of payment in the mouth. This is testified by burials where coins were featured while substitutes were still placed in the deceased's mouth (Axboe & Kromann 1992, p. 271; Bemmann 2005, p. 26f; Ekengren 2009, p. 189). The shape of the substitutes was also important, as they tried to replicate the same dimensions as actual coins. This should be taken as both a practical and a symbolic link made between these foreign and local products in an attempt to replicate the original custom as much as possible (Ekengren 2009, p. 187). The influx of coins and Roman raw material also affected the production of local substitutes (Bemmann 2005, p. 20).

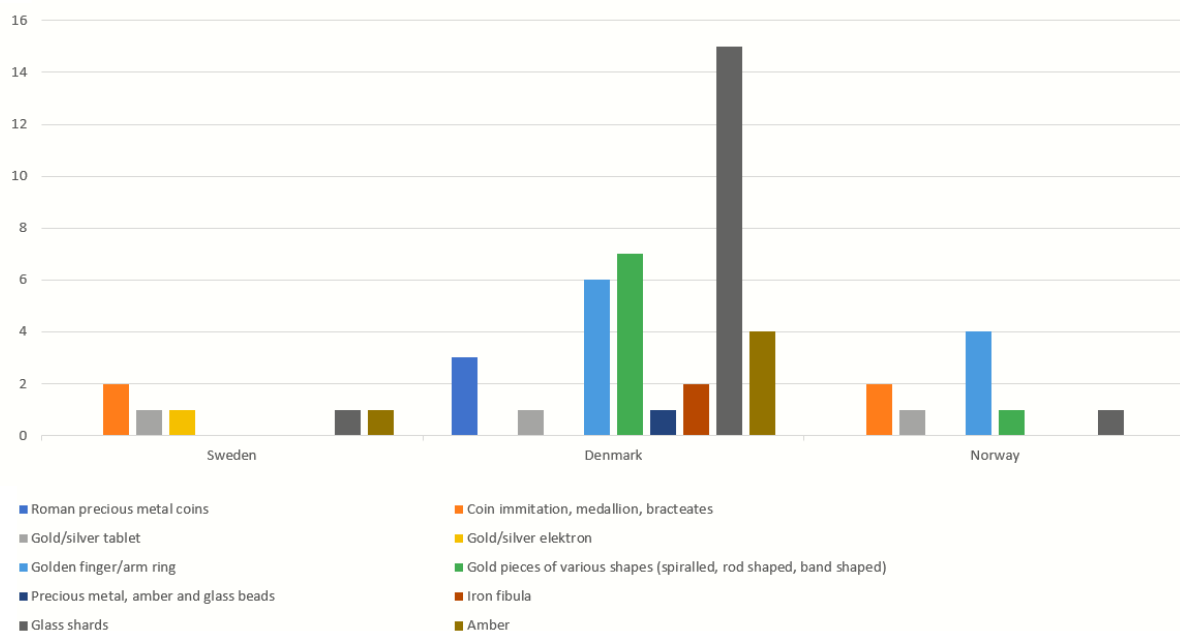


Table 1. Statistics of the occurrence of Charon's fee objects found in Scandinavian burials from the Roman Iron Age and Migration Period based on the account of Lyttkens (2012, p. 41-43).

Gender patterns among coin burials are hard to trace. In Sweden, burials with coins or coin substitutes seem to be focused on males primarily, which also is the case on Bornholm, in Schleswig-Holstein and Mecklenburg. In northwestern Germany and in the Wielbark culture, female graves with coins seem to dominate, but this is probably related to the fact that men can hardly be identified by their grave goods. In the rest of Scandinavia and Germany the burials seem much more balanced gender-wise (Boye 2002b, p. 204ff; Bemmann 2005, p. 23; Lund Hansen & Rindel 2008, p. 129; Brown 2013, p. 296). Family connections seem to be a recurring theme as well within these kinds of burials (Steuer 2002, p. 505f). Age also seems to be of little

relevance in many of the Charon's fee burials. In Haßleben, for an instance, infant burials with coin substitutes in the mouth has been found (Rosenstock 1982, p. 100).

Following the Roman Iron Age, a lesser continuity of the Charon's Obol can be traced. The aforementioned Christian Franks are included here, adopting the Obolus rite around the 4th to 5th century, while the still pagan Thuringians adopted the custom as late as around the 6th and 7th centuries, during a time where the Obolus rite had largely disappeared from most other areas in central and western Europe. Occurrences of the Charon's fee practice can be traced in Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian contexts as well by the time of the Merovingian and Vendel periods, such as in Broadstairs, Kent, where a young man was buried with a Merovingian gold coin in his mouth during the late 6th century (e.g. Gräslund 1967, p. 188; Rosenstock 1982, p. 100; Dölle 1991, p. 172; Gaimster 1992, p. 7; Effros 2005, p. 220; Steuer 2002, p. 507).

6.3. Chapter summary

The Charon's fee or Obolus rite has a long and complex history. Its origins date back to classical Greece from the 6th and 5th centuries BC in ancient literature and comedies and is also depicted on white lekythos pottery from the time. Despite its name, the silver Obolus is rarely used, favored instead by bronze and copper alloy coins. Golden spits of the same name were also featured in the Greek graves. The rite was rare in Greece, however, and would be much more common in the Roman regions and provinces, also here primarily with copper coinage with silver becoming more occurring during later periods and would also be prevalent during the adoption of Christianity. In Germanic and Scandinavian areas, precious metal coins were primarily used, as well as substitutes of precious metal, glass or amber. Charon's fee burials outside of the Roman areas would also feature collections of weaponry and rich grave goods of precious metal or imported Roman ware. Charon's fee burials were distributed between both genders and occur in family connected burial sites. The rite would continue up until the 6th and 7th centuries among the pagan Thuringians, the Christian Franks and in Anglo-Saxon England.

7. Analysis

In this chapter, six case study burials dating back to the Roman Iron Age and the Migration Period from across Scandinavia will be investigated in detail, with a thorough description of their respective burial sites, surrounding environments, grave construction, categories of grave goods and each grave's respective Charon's fee object. The graves include grave 4 from

Engbjerg and Himlingøje 1949-2 from Zealand in Denmark, Högom mound 2 from Medelpad in Sweden, Kälder grave 2 double burial from the island of Gotland, Gile grave 17 from Oppland and the burial at Hol in Trøndelag in Norway.



Fig. 2. Map over Zealand, Denmark with the Engbjerg burial site marked.

7.1. Case study 1 – Engbjerg burial 4

7.1.1. The burial site of Engbjerg

The first case study that will be discussed in this thesis is from Engbjerg in Northeastern Zealand, Denmark (fig. 2). At Engbjerg, a burial site with 25 inhumation graves was found

underneath a hill or mound top, likely a family group, whereof in four of these burials (three female and one male) glass shards were found in the mouths or near the cranium of the skeletons (Boye 2002a, p. 5, 7; 2002b, p. 203, 205f, 208; Bemmann 2005, p. 26; Lyttkens 2012, p. 40, 42). Boye argues that this might be the very first instance of glass shards being interpreted as Charon's fee objects in Danish burial contexts, while potential older candidates from other areas in Denmark and southern Sweden might have been overlooked as Obolus burials (Boye 2002a, p. 8f; 2002b, p. 208f). With the exception of the male burial (grave 6), which aside from the glass shard only included decorated ceramic vessels, these Charon's fee burials were rich in precious metal artefacts and were considered the burial site's richest graves (Bemman 2005, p. 26; Boye 2002a, p. 9; 2002b, p. 204f). Artefact categories in the burials include golden finger rings, beads of glass and amber, brooches of gilded and non-gilded silver, ceramic and glass vessels, silver hair pins as well as animal and food sacrifices (Boye 2002a, p. 5ff). The age range of the burials differed significantly, with the youngest of the Charon's fee rite burials being a girl at the age of 6-8 (grave 12) and the oldest being the aforementioned male burial at an age of around 50 (Boye 2002a, p. 7; 2002b, p. 206f, 207f; Lyttkens 2012, p. 42). The burial site at Engbjerg was found during a roadway construction project in the summer of 1998 near the Copenhagen Vestvegn. Archaeologists dated the burial site to the late Roman Iron Age, ca 150-375 AD. All inhumation burials were directed north-south with the heads placed northwards, with men and boys stretched out on their backs while women and girls were laid on their left side with their legs curled and their faces eastwards. The dead were buried in simple wooden coffins or coffins made out of carved out oak logs. Large rocks were also placed above the graves (Boye 2002a, p. 5; 2002b, p. 203f).

7.1.2. Engbjerg grave 4 – Burial context, grave goods and charon's fee object

The richest of the burials was Engbjerg grave 4, which will be the main focus in this particular case study. The burial, which measured a 4-meter length and a 1,5-meter width, contained the poorly preserved skeleton of a woman of an undetermined age between 20 and 40 at a height of around 1,65 meters. The grave was covered by a big rock (Boye 2002a, p. 5; 2002b, p. 205f). The grave goods she was buried with included various rich miscellaneous items, such as a hair net with glass pearls, a gilded silver hair pin, two necklaces with beads of amber and glass, two golden spiral finger rings at a weight of 5,6 and 9,1 grams respectively (fig. 3a), a swastika shaped brooch of gilded and silvered bronze decorated with tiny glass pieces (fig. 3b), a textile weight of bronze (fig. 3c), a Roman glass vessel (fig. 3d), three smaller silver fibulae, two

undecorated ceramic vessels as well as the decomposed remnants of animal sacrifices, consisting of swine and sheep (Boye 2002a, p. 5ff; 2002b, p. 205f).

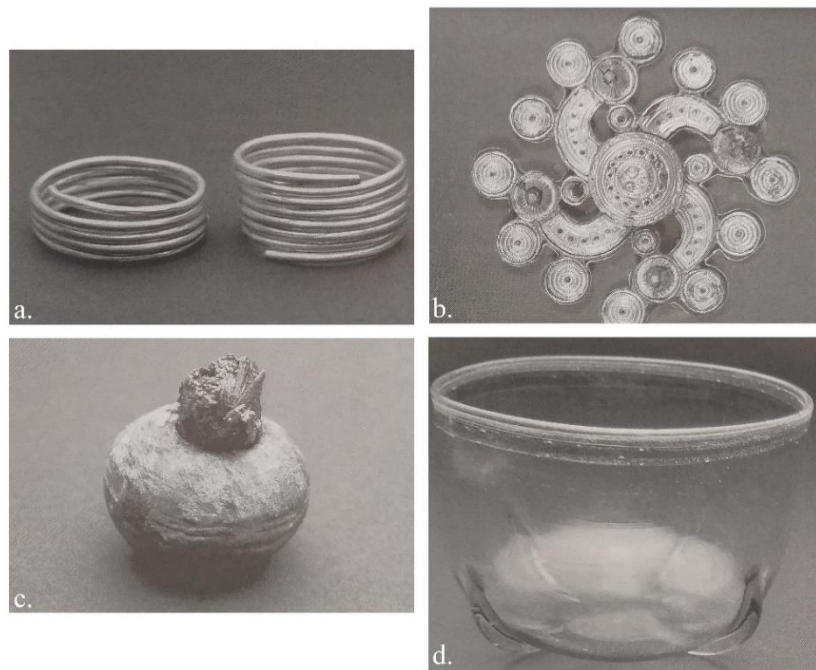


Fig 3a-d (from left to right downwards). Golden spiral finger rings, swastika shaped brooch of gilded and silvered bronze with glass pieces, a textile weight of bronze and a Roman glass vessel from Engbjerg grave 4

In the mouth of the deceased, archaeologists found a rectangular, slightly curved shard of clear provincial Roman glass with a green tint, measuring 1,1 x 0,6 centimeters and a width of 0,1 centimeters (fig. 4). Two parallel lines can be seen on the glass shard, but these were not part of the glass vessel's original decoration and could have been scraped at a later date (Boye 2002a, p. 7; 2002b, p. 205f). The rectangular shape of the shard was made intentionally, according to Boye. Its curvature also signifies that it might have originated from a drinking vessel (Boye 2002b, p. 206).

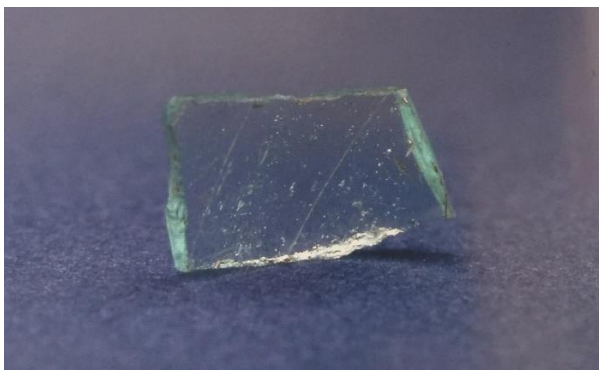


Fig. 4. Glass shard found in the mouth of the deceased in Engbjerg grave 4.



Fig. 5. Map over Zealand, Denmark with the Himlingøje burial site marked.

7.2. Case study 2 – Himlingøje 1949-2

7.2.1. The burial site at Himlingøje

The burial site at Himlingøje lies in a village of the same name outside of Stevn, located 6 kilometers south of Køge on the southeastern part of Zealand, Denmark (fig. 5). The surrounding landscape is dominated by small hills and valleys. This site has produced rich findings of both inhumation graves, most of which were positioned in a north-southwards position, as well as cremation burials (Norling-Christensen 1951, p. 39, 43; Lyttkens 2012, p. 56, 133). The site's archaeological importance has been known ever since 1829, when a series of beautiful finds were donated to the Copenhagen National Museum by the royal family. The site has since then produced various other finds with the first systematic excavations starting in

the late 19th century and continuing during the 20th century. These finds include Roman glass and bronze vessels and golden accessories, like bracelets and finger rings (Norling-Christensen 1951, p. 39ff, 42; Lyttkens 2012, p. 56f). Among the discoveries made over the years include two Charon's fee rite burials, one of which was a male burial from the 3rd century AD discovered in 1894, entitled 1894-1, and featured a major collection of rich grave goods; Roman painted glass and bronze vessels and utensils, golden bracelets and finger rings, silver fibulae, a bronze belt buckle, bone arrowheads, a bone comb as well as piece of spiraled and ring shaped gold stuck in his lower jaw (Norling-Christensen 1951, p. 41; Brøndsted 1966 p. 189f; Lund Hansen 1987, p. 412; Lyttkens 2012, p. 41, 61, 64, 154). This would turn out to not be the only burial of this kind at Himlingøje. Many of these excavations were spontaneous, however. This would in 1948 to 1949 lead to a series of investigations in the area under the leadership of H. Norling Christensen, with a series of parallel ditches dug across the area, each half a meter wide and with a distance of 1,5 meters between them. This investigation would be the one to result in the discovery of the case study used in this part of the thesis (Norling-Christensen 1951, p. 42; Lyttkens 2012, p. 57).



Fig. 6. The Himlingøje 1949-2 grave in-situ display at the Copenhagen National Museum, Denmark.

7.2.2. Himlingøje 1949-2 – Burial context, grave goods and Charon's fee object

The case study burial from Himlingøje is a particularly rich grave which was discovered in 1949 and would get the archaeological title 1949-2. Nowadays this grave is on display in-situ at the Copenhagen National Museum (Norling-Christensen 1951, p. 41; Lund Hansen 1987, p. 413; Lyttkens 2012, p. 57) (fig. 6). It was a grave positioned in a north-southwards direction with the deceased's head southwards. The grave was also covered by large stones, regularly arranged like a frame almost like a coffin or burial chamber, around the grave. The grave's depth reached 2 meters beneath the ground surface (Norling-Christensen 1951, p. 43f; Lyttkens 2012, p. 108). The grave featured a well-preserved human skeleton which was confirmed to be a female at an age of around 35 to 50, lying on her left side. The burial was dated to the 3rd century, between ca 210 and 250 AD (Norling-Christensen 1951, p. 45, fig. 9; Lund Hansen

1987, p. 413; Brown 2013, p. 292; Lyttkens 2012, p. 41). Due to the rich archaeological material found in this burial, as well as the large accumulations of precious metal, bronze, and glass objects, the 1949-2 grave at Himlingøje has been referred to as one of the richest Roman Iron Age burials in the entirety of Denmark (Brøndsted 1966 p. 190).

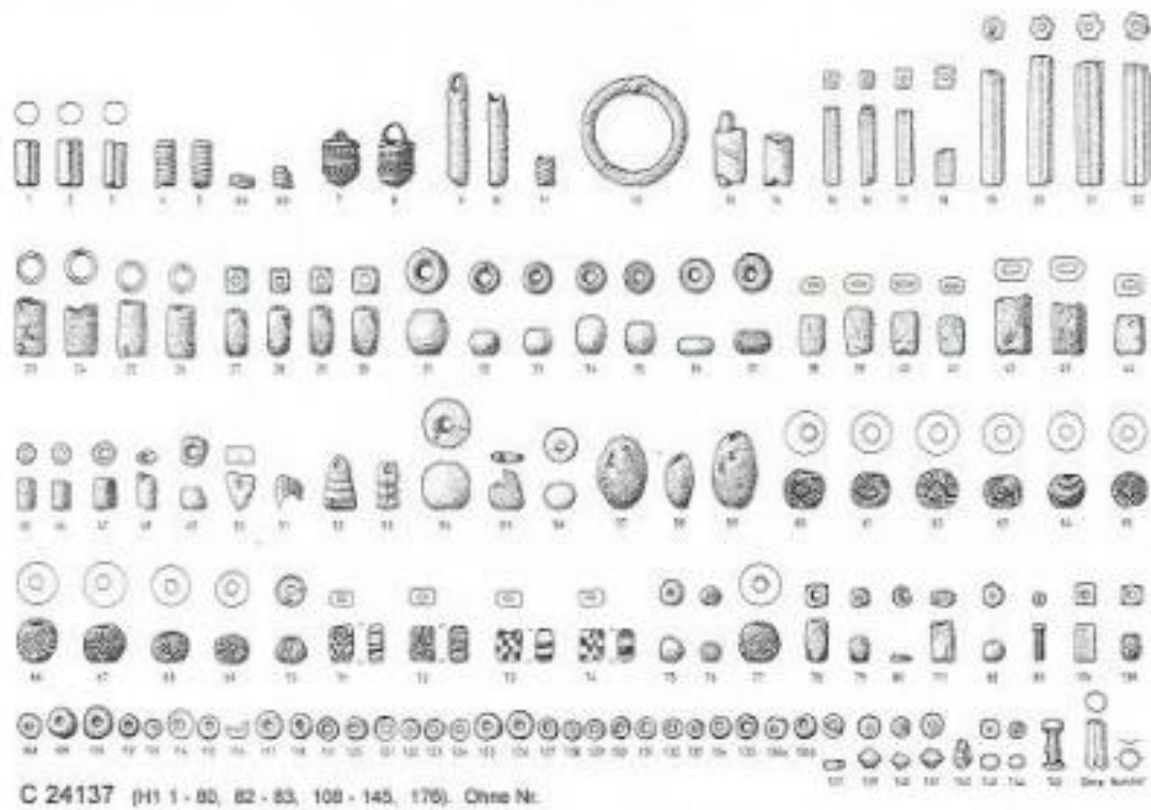


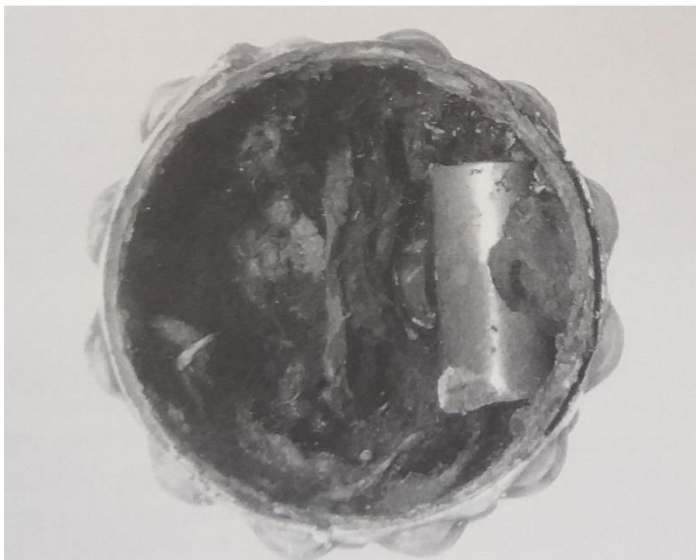
Fig. 7. Glass, amber, bronze and silver beads belonging to a necklace from the Himlingøje 1949-2 grave.

Among the grave goods closest to the deceased's person included 66 glass beads all of various colors and shapes which were part of a large necklace placed around the deceased's neck and chest. Glass was not the only material the beads were made of, as silver, bronze and amber beads also occurred among the artefacts. The amber beads counted up to 43, while the amount of silver and bronze beads found were 9 and 3 respectively. The silver and bronze beads differed in shape, some being cylindrical while others were spiral or straw shaped. 2 cylindric bone beads, one with a small silver fitting, had also belonged to the row of necklaces (fig. 7). In connection to the necklace through a silver chain, an ornamented silver amulet box was also found among the glass, amber and silver beads. Inside the amulet box a small cylindrical silver straw and a mixture of wheat, grass, leather, and other unknown organic materials was located (Norling-Christensen 1951, p. 44f; Brøndsted 1966 p. 190; Lund Hansen 1987, p. 413; Lund Hansen et al. 1995, p. 152f, 153ff, 157; Lyttkens 2012, p. 66, 126) (fig. 8). A bronze ring also

seems to have belonged to the necklace (Lund Hansen 1987, p. 413; Lund Hansen et al. 1995, p. 152f).



Fig. 8. Silver amulet box belonging to the necklace found in the Himlingøje 1949-2 grave.



Several vessels for storing food and drinks were also found among the grave goods (fig. 9). These included 5 local ceramic pots without decoration, as well as imported Roman bronze vessels, counting up to 2. One of these two bronze vessels was typologically determined as a so called Hemmoore vessel, being of a rounded almost bucket-like proportion, decorated with dolphin ornaments by the handle. The other bronze vessel is described as having a steep frame, concave bottom, and a ring-shaped handle. Belonging to these bronze vessels was also a sieve and a ladle, also made out of bronze.

Two Roman glass goblets, one decorated with white and blue glass borders, were also included among the various food and drink utensils. The other glass vessel lacked decoration, however (Norling-Christensen 1951, p. 44; Brøndsted 1966 p. 190, 200ff; Lund Hansen 1987, p. 413; Lund Hansen et al. 1995, p. 156f; Lyttkens 2012, p. 66, 125, 128; Brown 2013, p. 292). A fragmented bone comb belonged to the more miscellaneous finds in the burial, as well as various iron fittings, animal bones after a probable sacrifice and two bronze fittings topped with handles of undetermined purpose (Lund Hansen 1987, p. 413; Lund Hansen et al. 1995, p. 152f; Lyttkens 2012, p. 66, 128, 131; Brown 2013, p. 292).



Fig. 9. Ceramic, bronze and glass vessels and utensils found in the Himlingøje 1949-2 grave.



Fig. 10. Snake-head finger rings and bracelets from the Himlingøje 1949-2 grave.

Gold artefacts, such as two finger rings and two heavy gold bracelets, one of each found on each arm, also belonged to the many artefacts found in the Himlingøje 1949-2 burial (fig. 10). These rings and bracelets belong to a certain category of accessories called snake-head rings, due to their snake head decorations. Where the hair once had been, a hollow golden bead and a gilded silver hair pin, the two seemingly being associated artefacts, were also found (Norling-Christensen 1951, p. 44; Brøndsted 1966 p. 190; Lund Hansen 1987, p. 413; Lund Hansen et al. 1995 et al., p. 156f; Brown 2013, p. 292; Lyttkens 2012, p. 65f, 126f). A large rosette fibula made of silver with the runic inscription “WIDUHUDAR”, probably being a man’s name, is another of the grave’s more famous findings. Three more modest silver fibulae as well as a bronze fibula were also found in the grave. All three silver fibulae were fitted with gilded plates, two of which were decorated with diamond-like ornaments. The remnants of another silver fibula can also be traced within the material in the shape of a cylindrical silver spiral with a profiled button. One of the more peculiar finds of the precious metal category, however, included a Roman silver coin, a perforated denarius, minted during the age of Emperor Titus, around 80 AD. This extension signifies that the coin was part of the aforementioned necklace. Two basket shaped ornamented pendants of gilded silver were also part of the collection of precious metal findings (Norling-Christensen 1951, p. 45; Brøndsted 1966 p. 190, 261, 263; Lund Hansen 1987, p. 413; Lund Hansen et al. 1995, p. 152f, 154f, 157; Brown 2013, p. 292; Lyttkens 2012, p. 66, 125f).

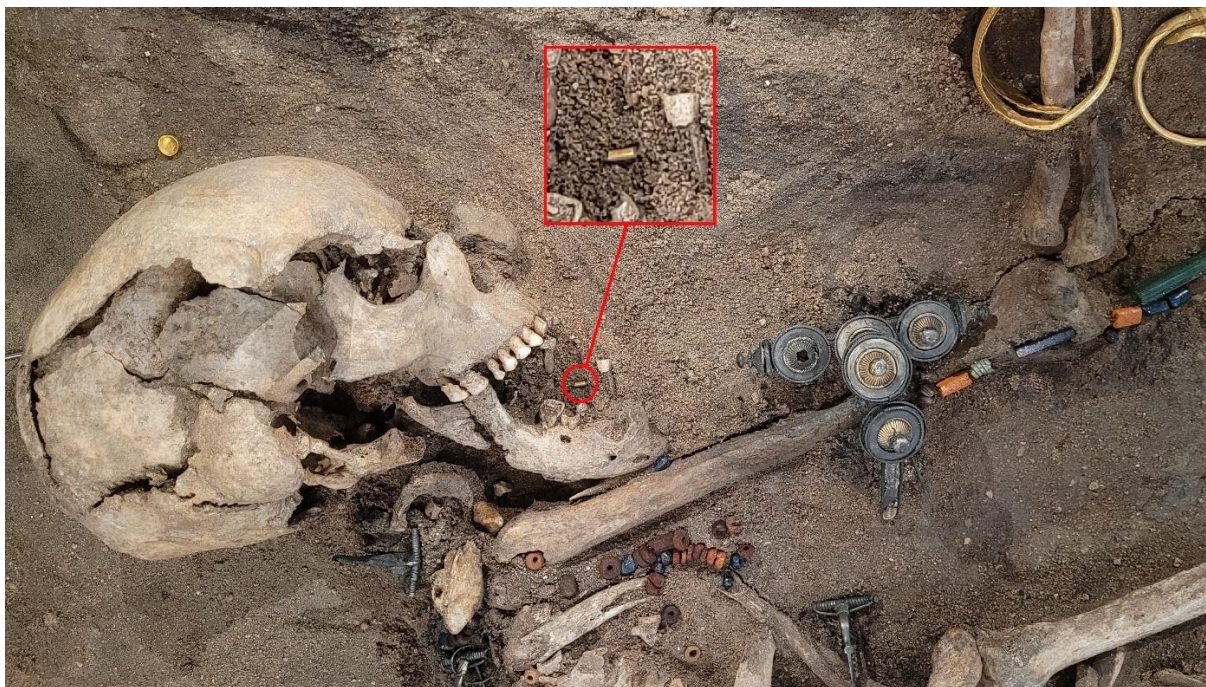


Fig. 11. The Charon’s fee object in Himlingøje 1949-2 as seen in-situ.

The Charon's fee object in the Himlingøje 1949-2 grave was found in the skeleton's mouth and was made up of a small piece of a clipped gold rod of cylindrical shape (fig. 11). This piece measured a length of 0,5 centimeters and a width diameter of 0,2 centimeters. Its weight is uncertain due to it still being part of the in-situ context on display at the Copenhagen National Museum (Norling-Christensen 1951, p. 44; Brøndsted 1966 p. 190; Lund Hansen 1987, p. 413; Lund Hansen et al. 1995, p. 156; Lyttkens 2012, p. 41, 65, 123, 154).



Fig. 12. Map of northern Sweden and Norway with Högom marked.

7.3. Case study 3 – Högom mound 2

7.3.1. The burial site at Högom

The burial site at Högom lies near modern day Medelpad, 2 kilometers west of Sundsvall in northern Sweden. It is located on a gravel and sand ridge known as Sundsvallåsen, which stretches a 10 meters' height and a hundred meters' width within a kilometers' long valley near the Baltic Sea. The area is lacking in stone, and the nearest deposit of stones can be found first 500 meters north of the burial site. Due to the fact that a few of the burials actually featured stones in their construction, including this area's case study burial, this showcases that a transportation of stones over a considerable land distance has occurred (Ramqvist 1990, p. 29;

Lyttkens 2012, p. 76, 134). Högom is also located near the eastern coast with a variety of nearby rivers (Ramqvist 1990, p. 14f, fig. 8). A rune stone from later time periods has also been recorded in the area (Ramqvist 1990, p. 29; Lyttkens 2012, p. 76). Unfortunately, the area has also been subjected to major agricultural endeavors, which has threatened to harm the ancient monuments (Ramqvist 1990, p. 29ff). As a consequence, and due to the burial site's unique characteristics, Riksantikvarieämbetet issued in the 1940's thorough restorations and investigations to preserve the burial site. Many excavations took place between 1943 and 1984, but the ones that would result in the most spectacular findings in the area were made between 1949 and 1951 of burial mound 2 under the direction of Dagmar Selling and S. Jansson in connection with Riksantikvarieämbetet and Statens Historiska Museer (Ramqvist 1990, p. 31; Lyttkens 2012, p. 76). Despite the aforementioned exploitation of the area, none of the at least 17 burials that were recorded at the site had been plundered. After the excavations of the 20th century only 12 graves remain. Most of them are made up of burial mounds, some of which reach up to 40 meters in diameter and 4 to 5 meters high, while the more modest ones reach up to 5 to 15 meters' diameter and 0,3 to 2 meters' height. This concentration of burial mounds is the largest in the surrounding area (Ramqvist 1990, p. 29; Lyttkens 2012, p. 76).

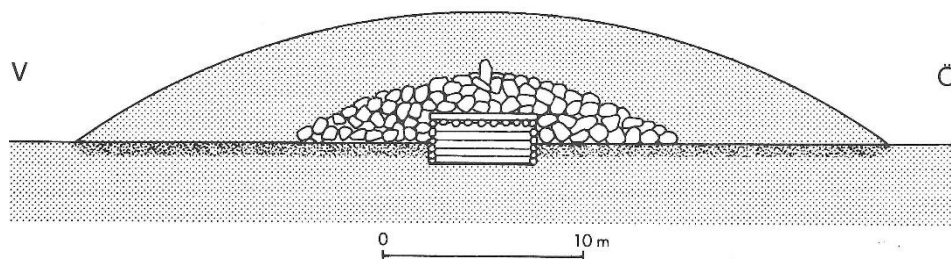


Fig. 13. Sketch of Högom mound 2's construction.

7.3.2. Högom mound 2 – Burial context, grave goods and Charon's fee object

Högom's burial mound 2 was one of the larger graves at the site, measuring 40 meters in diameter and 5 meters in height (fig. 13). The inner part of the mound was made up of a stone cairn at about 19 meters in diameter and 3 meters in height, while the rest of the mound was made up of soil. The topsoil of the mound measured a thickness of 3 meters. On the top of the cairn was a large stone positioned upright some 0,6 meters above the cairn's top, which has been interpreted as masculine symbol. Surrounding the cairn in a frame were larger stones than the others, showcasing a selective choice of stones for the cairn construction. Beneath the earthen mound and the stone cairn, a wooden chamber of about 5 x 2 meters was constructed. Due to the pressure of the stone cairn, the chamber had been compressed to mere decimeters in

depth by the time of the excavation. It is likely that the chamber was constructed with a 0,7 meters' depth into the ground. The chamber was constructed in an eastwards-westwards direction, in which the deceased was placed with his head westwards (Ramqvist 1990, p. 31, 35f; 1992, p. 46; Lyttkens 2012, p. 80, 109). The burial chamber's construction was hard to determine, but it is likely that it consisted of horizontally lying wooden logs or crude planks in a knotted, shifted or corner connected construction with a double layer of logs and birch bark making up the chamber's roof. The deceased was likely placed on a bed-like construction inside the burial chamber, this one also constructed in an eastwards-westwards direction (Ramqvist 1990, p. 35; 1992, p. 46f). Ramqvist dates the burial back to around the end of the 5th or beginning of the 6th centuries AD like most of the burial site's other graves, making this a Migration Period burial, and interprets it as belonging to an elite warrior or even a petty king (Ramqvist 1990, p. 55, 59f; Lyttkens 2012, p. 40, 76, 80). On the floor of the burial, mats and rugs had been laid out, including various textiles and skins and fur from bear, reindeer or roedeer, beaver, polecat, and pinniped or musquash, with the bear skins being the primarily dominant fur type (Ramqvist 1990, p. 35; 1992, p. 46f; Lyttkens 2012, p. 83).



Fig. 14. The sword handle and upper scabbard from Högom mound 2, with its decorations of gilded silver.

A wide variety of artefacts was found in the Högom burial, many of them being imported goods from both eastern and western Europe as well as Norway (Ramqvist 1990, p. 35). A considerable weaponry collection was one of the main artefact categories in the Högom burial, including a long sword on the deceased's left side, a lance, a spear, a dagger or a short sword, a shield, a bow, and arrows, as well as two axes (Ramqvist 1990, p. 35ff; Lyttkens 2012, p. 83, 124). The sword, being a kind of spatha sword, measured 95 centimeters in length, 6 centimeters in width and 2,5 centimeters in thickness, and was found rusted into its wooden scabbard, which itself was decorated with gilded silver fittings with decorations by the scabbard opening and ended in a U-shaped silver ferrule. The grip, including the lower hilt and the sword pommel, measured 14 centimeters. The sword's handle was made out wood with hand guards made out of horn and gilded silver discs. The pyramid shaped pommel was made of gilded silver with spirals on its top (fig. 14). The scabbard's gilded silver fittings were press

plated and decorated in animal style art with niello, filigree, granulation, and granite inlay (Ramqvist 1990, p. 37f; 1992, p. 50f, 51ff). The shield was made out of wood and constructed in a round shape with a covering layer of leather, and was fastened by a round iron frame, nowadays corroded in some parts, an iron handle with bronze bolts and an iron shield buckle (Ramqvist 1990, p. 38f; 1992, p. 57ff). The spear and lance tips, differed from each other through the use of barbs on the spear tip in contrast with the sleeker lance tip, were found by the dead's lower left side and measured up to 30 centimeters. They probably belonged to wooden spears of a likely 3-meter length. The dagger or short one-edged sword measured 30 centimeters in length with a well-preserved decorated handle and leather scabbard with a U-shaped silver ferrule. It was positioned by the deceased's belt. The two iron axes were found above the deceased's head with their blades directed towards the deceased's skull. One of the axes was slightly larger than the other. A collection of 15 arrowheads measuring around 15 centimeters each was also found in the remains of a leather quiver (Ramqvist 1990, p. 40; 1992, p. 59f, 62f, 64f, 106).

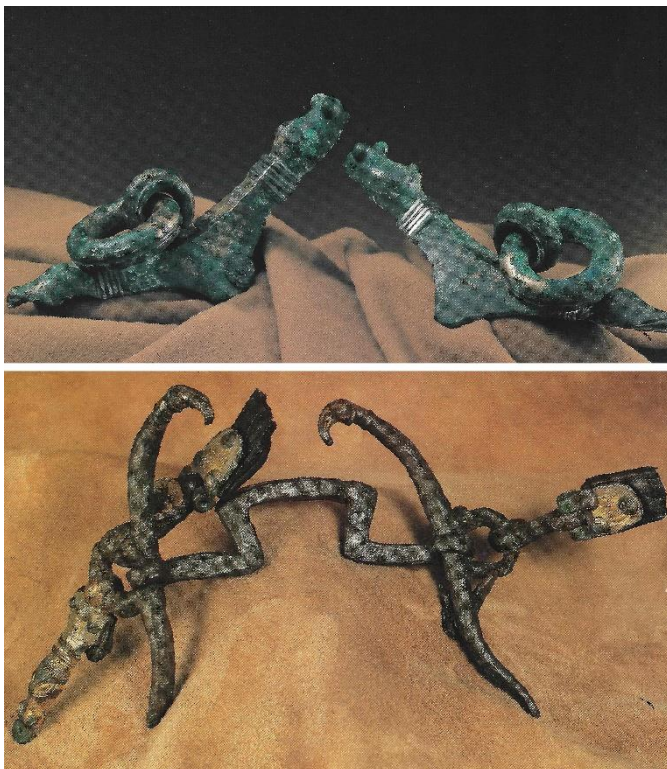


Fig. 15. The bronze saddle bows and the decorated iron bit with bird head decorations of gilded bronze from Högom mound 2.

The horse gear, which was positioned in the eastern part of the grave, is one of the most iconic parts of the burial's contents, which included two bridles, a ring saddle with frontal and backside bronze saddle bows with animal heads, four fittings for the saddle straps and an iron bit with s-shaped rods on each side decorated with bird heads made out of gilded bronze (Ramqvist 1990, p. 35, 40ff, 46; 1992, p.

68ff, 71ff, 75ff, 78ff, 80, 82ff; Lyttkens 2012, p. 83, 128) (fig. 15). A simpler set of horse gear, featuring an iron bit with rings was also featured in the grave (Ramqvist 1990, p. 44; Lyttkens 2012, p. 83, 128).

The belt, which was fitted with various tools and personal items, included an oblong strike-a-light stone of light quartzite, fitted within a bronze frame on the belt with a matching iron fire

tool (Ramqvist 1990, p. 48; 1992, p. 101ff; Lyttkens 2012, p. 127f) (fig. 16). Most of the items connected to the belt was found in bags and pouches. One leather bag with silver fittings included two small golden pins at 6,4 centimeters' length were found, likely meant either as a means of payment or toothpicks. They weighed 0,53 and 0,46 grams respectively (Ramqvist 1990, p. 50f, 58f, 123; Lyttkens 2012, p. 83, 127). In another bag connected to the belt, hazel nuts were also found (Ramqvist 1992, p. 116f; Lyttkens 2012, p. 127). Aside from this, the belt was also fitted with a belt buckle and fittings made out of bronze (Ramqvist 1992, p. 100f). Hygiene articles were also included among the grave goods in the Högom burial, including two pair of scissors in a wooden container fitted with a silver pin, a pair of tweezers made of silver and a comb made out of horn which was found in a leather pouch connected to the belt (Ramqvist 1990, p. 48ff; 1992, p. 103f, 105, 118ff, 121; Lyttkens 2012, p. 127f).

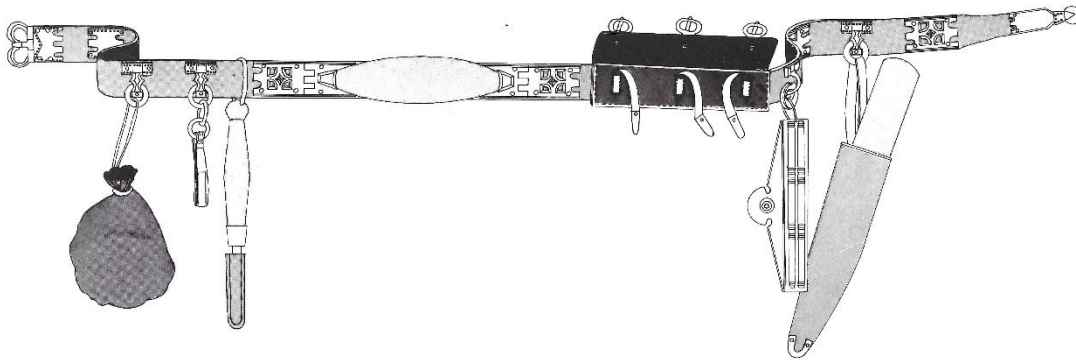


Fig. 16. Reconstruction of the belt from Högom mound 2.

Other artefact categories found in the Högom burial includes different kinds of wooden plates and vessels, counting up to 21. Most of these vessels were concentrated around the south-eastern part of the burial chamber. Two decorated black ceramic vessels, believed to originate from Norway, were found too (Ramqvist 1990, p. 35, 54f, 57f; 1992, p. 129f, 137f; Lyttkens 2012, p. 109, 128f). The most noteworthy of this collection however are the two glass vessels, most likely originating from the Black Sea region, dating back to around the 4th or 5th centuries AD (fig. 12). Both vessels are similar in their design, featuring similarly made oval decorations, although on one of the two vessels these ovals were large enough to clip into each other and form six faceted shapes rather than ovals. Both glasses measure around 15 centimeters' height and 10 centimeters' diameter around the mouthpiece, although one of the two glasses is only slightly larger by a few millimeters. The two glass vessels had also gotten damage reparations with small silver and bronze plates which has been fastened by bronze pins. The bottoms of the glass vessels were not designed to stand on their own without some kind of support. Each glass

has a depth of 134 and 143 millimeters respectively (Ramqvist 1990, p. 54f; 1992, p. 127ff, 137ff; Lyttkens 2012, p. 128f). A so called Vestland cauldron made out of bronze with an original height of 12 centimeters and a diameter of 29 centimeters at the opening and 33 centimeters at the bottom and an iron handle was also found in the burial chamber, and had traces of food residue inside it, suggesting a food offering for the afterlife. Another bronze object found in the grave was a bronze plate of 42,5 centimeters in diameter and 6,5 centimeters' height, within which a bone comb was found, likely being a symbolic gesture for washing and hygiene. These bronzes probably originate from the areas around modern-day Belgium, making them imported Roman wares. Both bronze artefacts had sustained damage due to the compression of the burial chamber (Ramqvist 1990, p. 54ff, 90; 1992, p. 122, 131f, 137f, 140f; Lyttkens 2012, p. 125, 131).

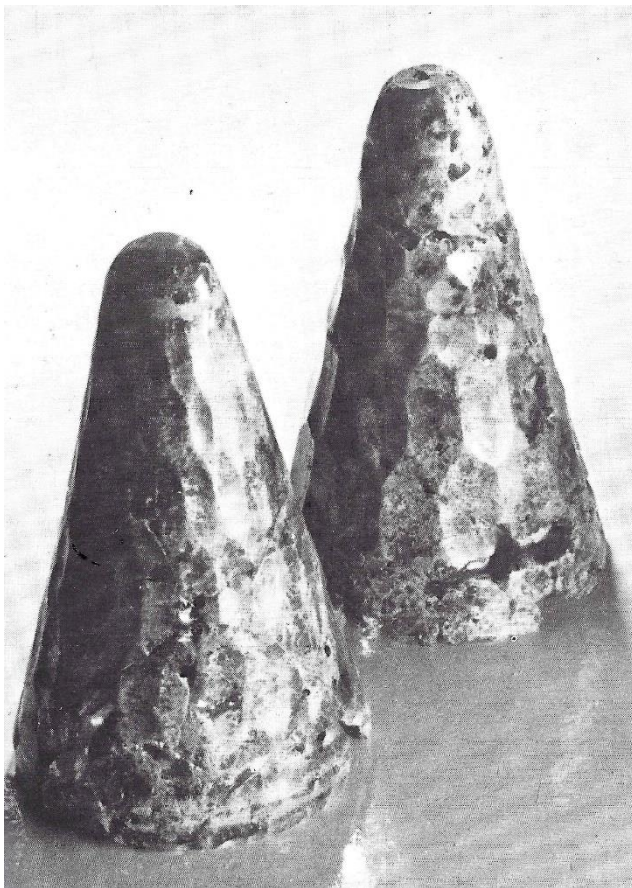


Fig. 17. The two glass vessels from the Högom grave.

Aside from the aforementioned golden pins found in the belt bag, several other objects of gold or gilded silver were found in the Högom burial, such as two spoon-shaped objects at about 7,2 centimeters' length and a maximum width of 1,2 and 1,3 centimeters respectively, decreasing in width the further up the object reaches (fig. 18a). These items probably belonged to some kind of clothing or were considered a kind of earrings. Two golden finger rings were also found, one slightly larger than the other with a cross-section of 4 x 1 millimeters and an external diameter of 21 millimeters (Ramqvist 1990, p. 58f; 1992, p. 123f) (fig. 18b). Attached to clothing remnants near the arms of the deceased's tunic were 12 gilded silver clasp buttons in rows of 3 + 3 on 6 centimeter long and 1,4 centimeter wide bronze fittings. These rounded buttons reached a diameter of 20 millimeters and were 13 millimeters high and decorated with animal art and niello (Ramqvist 1990, p. 51f; 1992, p. 88f, 92ff, 95; Lyttkens 2012, p. 126). Less elaborately decorated clasp buttons were also found by

the dead's ankles with 2 x 3 + 2 x 3 buttons on each ankle (Ramqvist 1990, p. 54; 1992, p. 88f; Lyttkens 2012, p. 126). Two separate clasp buttons were also found near the deceased's head and were likely part of another set of clothes lying underneath the deceased's head (Ramqvist 1992, p. 90f; Lyttkens 2012, p. 126).



Fig. 18 a, b and c. The spoon shaped pendants, the finger rings and the golden tablet found in Högom mound 2.

The main object of interest however is a coin-like tablet made out of a mixture between gold and silver which was located on the deceased's chest, being the one object in this burial that has been interpreted as a Charon's fee object (fig. 18c). This tablet measured a diameter between 18 and 18,5 millimeters and a thickness of 1 millimeter, with sharp and slightly thicker edges in relation to the rest of the Charon's fee object. The weight of the golden tablet was 3,13 grams. The tablet was also hammered on one end while no sign of hammering could be seen on the other end (Ramqvist 1990, p. 58f; 1992, p. 123f, 125f; Lyttkens 2012, p. 40f, 85, 122).



Fig. 19. Map over Gotland with the Kälder burial site marked.

7.4. Case study 4 – Kälder grave 2 double burial

7.4.1. The burial site at Kälder

The burial at Kälder in Fardhem sn, previously belonging to Linde sn, on the island of Gotland, Sweden, was found and excavated during the summer of 1902 by O. Almgren, accompanied by O.V. Wennersten and W. Blair Bruce. The burial site is located on the southern half of the island some 30 kilometers from Visby in a valley-like landscape (fig. 19). This particular case

study burial was one of twelve graves found at the site, all of which were dated back to the transition period between the Roman Iron Age and the Migration Period between the 4th and 5th centuries AD. The particular burial that makes up this case study, otherwise known as Kälder grave 2, was dated back to the 4th century by Almgren. Almost all neighboring graves had been subject of tomb raiders, with this particular case study burial being one of the few exceptions (Almgren 1903, 89f, 95; Silvén 1956, p. 103; Lyttkens 2012, p. 40f, 46, 49, 134). The entire burial site measures up to 240 x 140 meters and is primarily dominated by shrublands, trees and a few other ancient remnants and monuments, such as stone cairns (Lyttkens 2012, p. 46f).

7.4.2. Kälder grave 2 double burial – Burial context, grave goods and Charon’s fee object
 While Almgren does describe the contents of the grave thoroughly, specifically the grave goods with a main emphasis on the Charon’s fee object, there is a lack of detail, specifically with the burial context, including the grave’s construction. However, a general description of the grave construction is provided by the Statens Historiska Muséer’s collections, which also Lyttkens refers to. Kälder grave 2 was positioned underneath a low stone cairn of some 4 to 5 decimeters’ height (Lyttkens 2012, p. 49; SHM 2023, 11743).

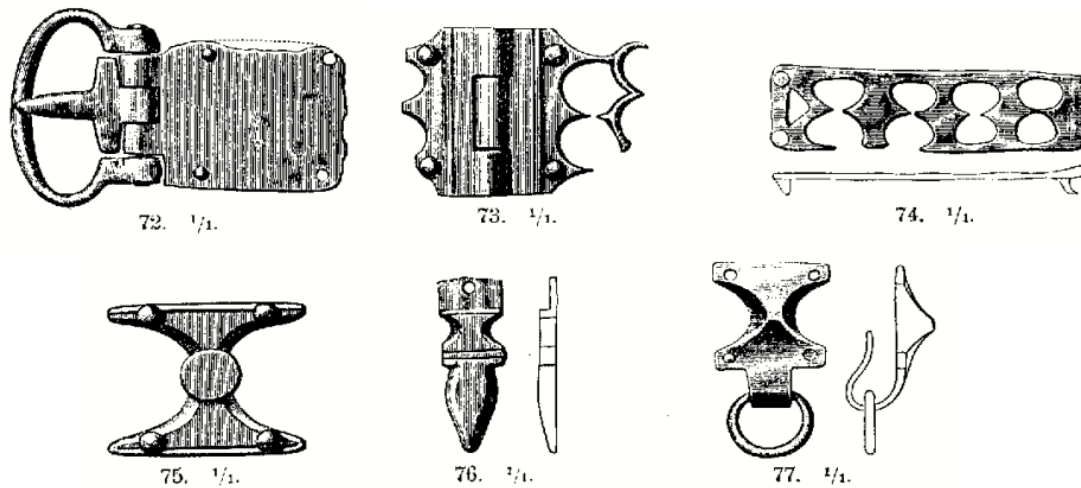


Fig. 20. Bronze buckle and fittings from Kälder grave 2, belonging to the larger of the two burial individuals.

The double burial at Kälder grave 2 featured two male skeletons, buried side by side, seemingly simultaneously, with the larger of the two individuals to the east and the smaller individual to the west. Both men were positioned with their heads northward (Almgren 1903, p. 89; Lyttkens 2012, p. 40f, 49, 108; SHM 2023, 11743). They both wore belts decorated with oval framed belt buckles, the smaller individual’s belt buckle being made of bronze. The larger male’s belt

was also decorated with bronze plates (fig. 20). A buckle made out of bronze was also positioned by the larger man's head, together with a ring (Almgren 1903, p. 89f, fig 2-4; Silvén 1956, p. 103; Lyttkens 2012, p. 40f, 49, 127f; SHM 2023, 11743).

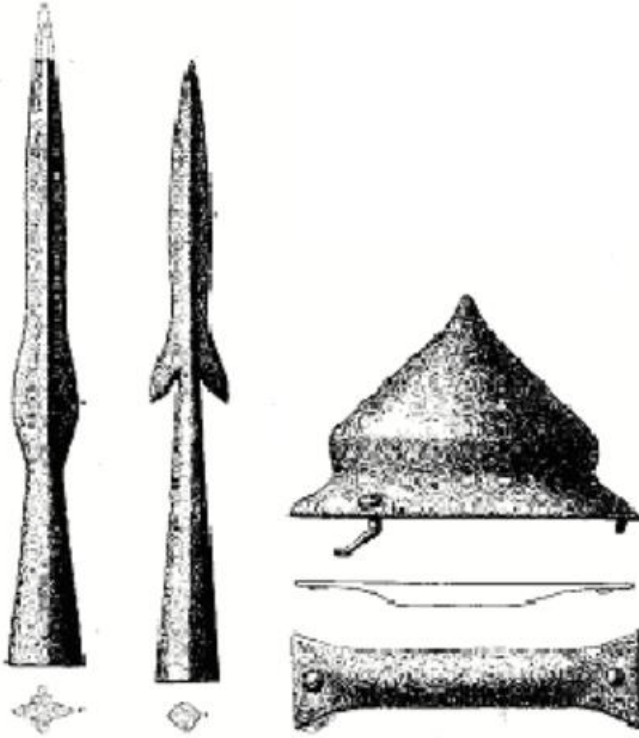


Fig. 21. Spear- and lance tip, and shield buckle and handle from the Kälder double burial.

Remnants of weaponry were also found, including a shield buckle and a handle lying above the smaller man's legs. Next to the larger man's left shoulder the two tips of a spear and a lance were positioned (Almgren 1903, p. 89f, 98, fig 5-6; Silvén 1956, p. 103, 124; SHM 2023, 11743) (fig. 21). Between the craniums of the dead a broken ceramic vessel with decorations was also found (Almgren 1903, p. 89;

Lyttkens 2012, p. 49, 108f, 129; SHM 2023, 11743). A fibula made of iron, placed between the two individuals' legs, and two knives of iron, placed by the smaller individual's left side, were also in the grave (Almgren 1903, p. 89f, fig 5-6; Lyttkens 2012, p. 49, 108f, 124, 125f, 128; SHM 2023, 11743). The artefacts also included a horse tooth (Lyttkens 2012, p. 49; SHM 2023, 11743).



Fig. 22. The golden coin imitation found in the mouth of the larger male in the Kälder grave.

The Charon's fee object was found in the mouth of the larger male, near the lower cheek bone (fig. 22). This object was an imitation of a Roman solidus, made of gold, weighing 4,02 grams,

and featuring a diameter of 22 millimeters. The coin has an obverse and reverse side each: the obverse features an imperial portrait in profile with a wreath and a mantle, and the reverse showcases a profiled spear wielding figure standing over two coiled snake figures pointing his spear downwards. The letters, albeit replicating the Latin alphabet, seem to have mainly been featured as decoration with a nonsensical inscription: TTSVSAISI – VSVSASI (obverse, left and right side respectively) and SIASASAIS-SIVSVSAIS (reverse, left and right side respectively). The design of the imitation shares its similarities with Migration Period bracteate designs. Almgren argues that the Charon's fee object should be dated back to the age of emperor Constantine the Great (Almgren 1903, p. 89f, 91ff, fig. 1; Silvén 1956, p. 103; Lamm & Axboe 1989, p. 467; Ramqvist 1992, p. 125f; Lyttkens 2012, p. 41, 49, 51; SHM 2023, 11743).



Fig. 23. Map over northern Sweden and Norway with the burial site at Gile marked.

7.5. Case study 5 – Gile grave 17

7.5.1. The burial site at Gile

The burial site of Gile lies in a village with the same name at Østre Toten in Oppland, Norway (fig. 23). It is located nearby the district of Hof at the southern slope facing northeast of

Totenbekkenet. The surrounding area is dominated by mountainous terrain with several natural mounds and limestone cliffs (Herteig 1955, p. 49f; Lyttkens 2012, p. 133). The first investigations in the area were made in 1948 by the Universitetets Oldsaksamling in connection with the foundation of the Toten Historielag organization, which also registered many of the region's permanent monuments and antiquities. The excavations under the leadership of A.E. Herteig would first start during the summer of 1950, however (Herteig 1955, p. 49; Lyttkens 2012, p. 91). A whole of 60 graves were found at the Gile burial site, most of which were dated to the Roman Iron Age and the Migration Period. Most of the graves lacked grave goods and appear to have primarily been cremation burials, considering the large accumulation of coal and the few charred bone remnants found in many of these graves (Herteig 1955, p. 68f). Herteig dates our case study burial to the 3rd century, based on its content and the typological categorization of a shield buckle among the grave goods (Herteig 1955, p. 59, 71; Lyttkens 2012, p. 39, 41, 93).

7.5.2. Gile grave 17 – Burial context, grave goods and Charon's fee object

This particular burial was referred to as grave 17 during the excavation and was located on the top of one of the many mountain peaks in the area (Lyttkens 2012, p. 91, 133). The grave itself was buried beneath an earthen mound which was placed upon three or four layers of stones in a semi-circular structure beneath the mound, parts of which were also sticking out of the mound. Inside, a high asymmetrical stone cairn, built in a large oval shape, was found, with its highest point at the northern edge of the monument reaching up to between 6 and 8 meters. Aside from the cairn's height, it also measured some 15 x 20 meters in length and width. The stone structures inside the mound also included a straight north-south stretching stone chain east of the center, as well as concentric stone rings extending from it to the west. It seemed as if the stones were arranged to produce a V-shaped vertical cross section in the grave fill. The earthen mound itself was described as consisting of a thin but even layer of soil with a large stone sticking out some 25 to 30 centimeters above the grass in the middle of the mound (Herteig 1955, p. 57, 71; Lyttkens 2012, p. 93). At the top of the grave filling an arrowhead, a knife and an ornamented bone comb were found in remarkably well-preserved state (Herteig 1955, p. 57; Lyttkens 2012, p. 131). The burial chamber itself was built in a natural ravine and was marked by two steep slopes on one side and was furnished with flat rocks that marked the edges of the chamber. The grave reached a depth of 1,7 meters. The deceased, which Herteig interpreted as a man, was buried lying on his back with his head aimed northwards. Parts of the skeleton had decayed, however, leaving only a hip bone, a calf bone, parts of the pelvic bone and 27 teeth

(Herteig 1955, p. 58, 71; Lyttkens 2012, p. 93, 108). The filling was described as being made up of stones mixed with charcoal, burnt clay, and burnt as well as unburnt animal bones. Many of the bones were described as having cut marks (Herteig 1955, p. 71; Lyttkens 2012, p. 93).



Fig. 24. The weaponry deposit from Gile grave 17.

The deceased at Gile was buried with a collection of weapons, including two poorly preserved iron spear tips, a double-edged sword, and a shield. Belonging to the sword were bronze fittings for the scabbard's belt (Herteig 1955, p. 58f, 71) (fig. 24). While the blade was heavily rusted and had mostly corroded, the hilt was relatively well preserved, consisting of thin parallel disc shaped bone objects of uneven thickness ranging from a few millimeters to about 2 centimeters. The sword attachment was likely based on a Roman gladius (Herteig 1955, p. 58f, 71). The shield buckle, while not described in detail, was typologically determined by Herteig to date back to the 3rd century AD (Herteig 1955, p. 59, 71). The spears are described as having been placed by the deceased's right side, the sword was on the left side, and the shield was laid on top of the dead, near the pelvis (Lyttkens 2012, p. 93, 108). Among the grave goods included burned remnants of bone and charcoal, found by the deceased's left leg, which might have been a secondary burial or perhaps a sacrifice to the dead (Herteig 1955, p. 63, 68f, 71). A bronze ring was also found in the grave fill, according to Lyttkens (2012, p. 127).



Fig. 25. Charon's object found in Gile (left: in-situ photography, right: closeup)

The Charon's fee object found in the Gile burial consisted of a small, perforated and hammered round silver disc with an outer diameter of 1,3 centimeters while the inner diameter measured up to 0,5 centimeters. The disc was slightly curved and had one side where the hammer patterns can be seen while the other side was described to have no such traces. The disc was found among the aforementioned 27 teeth of the deceased, signifying a clear indication of the Charon's fee rite (Herteig 1955, p. 58, 60f, 71; Lamm & Axboe 1989, p. 470; Ramqvist 1992, p. 125f; Bemmann 2005, p. 15; Lyttkens 2012, p. 39, 41, 93, 96, 122f).



Fig. 26. Map over northern Sweden and Norway with the Hol burial marked.

7.6. Case study 6 – Hol burial

7.6.1. The burial site at Hol

The burial site at Hol is located in Hustad parish in Trøndelag, Norway (Rygh 1912, p. 16; Lamm & Axboe 1989, p. 469) (fig. 26). Unfortunately, the literature is sparse with details about the burial site and its landscape surroundings, but Rygh hints at the existence of another larger burial under a stone cairn in the same area (Rygh 1912, p. 21).

7.6.2. Hol grave – Burial context, grave goods and Charon's fee object

The grave at Hol was made up of a large burial chamber inside a stone cairn. The cairn measured 10 meters in diameter and the grave was 2 meters deep with a bottom of bedrock. The stone cairn surrounding the burial pit was made up of several stones of various sizes and weight mixed with soil, as well as some seemingly heavier stones framing the stone cairn (Rygh 1912, p. 21; Bøe 1926, p. 64; Lamm & Axboe 1989, p. 469). Skeletal remains were also found in the burial, but no description of the gender of the deceased or the level of preservation of the bones is given (Rygh 1912, p. 21; Ramqvist 1992, p. 126). The dating of the burial is uncertain. Bøe dates the grave to the 7th century AD, making it the youngest burial as of yet in this thesis while Lyttkens dates the grave back to the Migration Period between the 5th and 6th centuries. Considering the burial material, the artefact categories, and the dated scientific research, I find a Migration Period dating to be much more plausible than Bøe's 7th century interpretation (Bøe 1926, p. 64; Lyttkens 2012, p. 41). Ramqvist too dates the grave to the Migration Period but is uncertain of this dating (Ramqvist 1992, p. 126).

Among the grave goods, pieces of weaponry were included in this grave as well. This weaponry collection included among other pieces a double-edged sword of iron with a 75 centimeter's length and a 5 centimeter's width. It was poorly preserved with only two indistinguishable parts of 6,5 centimeters of the handle left. The blade itself was rusty and was covered by a wooden scabbard without a ferule (Rygh 1912, p. 16). Other weaponry artefacts found at the site were a double-edged spear tip made of iron with a four-sided fold and sharp center spine on one side of the blade. The spear tip too was affected by rust and the front part of the blade was missing. The tip measured up to 34 centimeters. The remnants of a shield could also be found in the Hol burial, including a shield buckle with a spike made of iron, being the main signifier of this being a Migration Period grave rather than from later periods. The buckle measures up to a diameter of 15,5 centimeters and a height of 10 centimeters, while the spike only measures 3,5 centimeters after suffering through erosion. The buckle was fastened by four bolts, which have now rusted away. A collection of iron arrowheads was also found among the deposited weapons, counting up to 10 as a whole, being divided between 4 in one group and 6 in another (Rygh 1912, p. 17). Several other iron objects were found in the grave. Among them included fragments of an iron object with a sort of curved shape which was wider and tinner in the middle, probably belonging to some kind of wooden container or vessel, found in the northern end of the burial between the grave's ceramic vessels. Other objects include a bolt of iron and several corroded iron fittings (Rygh 1912, p. 17).

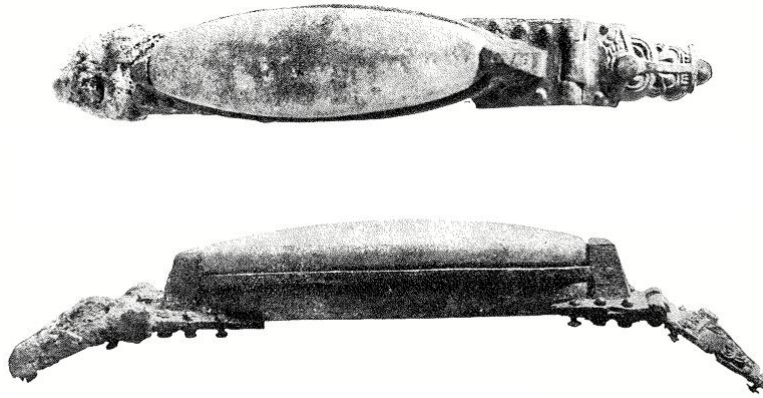


Fig. 27. Quartzite shuttle shaped stone with bronze fittings from the Hol burial, probably part of a belt.

A quartzite shuttle-shaped stone with bronze fitting was also included among the artifacts from the Hol grave (fig. 27). The upper half of the stone measured 10,2- and 10,7-centimeters' width, ca 3 centimeters' length in the middle and 2,2 centimeters in thickness. It was slightly curved in its length, having a very oval shaped form. Both the upper- and lower parts transition into bronze buckles fastening the quartzite stone inside a belt structure. These buckles are later transitioned into a pair of animal heads in relief, whereof only one of these have survived the corrosive environment of the grave. The structure of these bronze buckles was fastened by silver pins. The leather strap of the belt must have been around 0,2 centimeters thick. It is likely that the quartzite stone was used as a strike-a-light stone (Rygh 1912, p. 18, fig. 7a and b). A bronze fitting of 5 centimeters' length with a rounded end, as well as two other square and cross shaped, decorated bronze fittings, was also found belonging to the belt (Rygh 1912, p. 19, fig. 10, 11 & 12). An oval shaped bronze box was also found among the grave goods, fastened to the belt with the opening of the box inwards and the bottom of the box outwards. It had a flat bottom and measured up to 11 centimeters in length, 2 centimeters in width by the middle and had a depth of 1,5 centimeters. It was heavily misshaped and worn by solidified remnants of mud, which have completely penetrated the bronze. Like the belt with the quartzite stone, this box was also likely fitted with silver pins. Rygh (1912) argues that this box might have been used in connection with the stone to store flint and gravel to strike a light and make up fires (Rygh 1912, p. 18f, fig 8 a and b).

A pair of tweezers made out of silver with ornamental decorations with a length of 7 centimeters and a maximal width by its lower part of 0,8 centimeters was also found among the grave goods. The upper part of the tweezers was gilded while the lower part was only faceted (Rygh 1912, p. 19, fig 9). The bronze remnants of potentially two buckles for clasp buttons were also testified

within the grave goods. One of the two bronze pieces was more corroded than the other, but for the less corroded one a hole was for the fitting of three clasp buttons. These buttons, with the exception of one, have since then disappeared. Both potential buckles measure a size of between 4 and 3,6 centimeters in length. Small remnants of textile were also found on these bronzes (Rygh 1912, p. 19f). A Vestland cauldron made out of bronze is another noteworthy artefact within the Hol burial's grave goods. It measured up to 12 centimeters' height and 30 centimeters' diameter over the edge. It was fitted with an iron handle, but the hooks connected to the bronze kettle had long since rusted away. The bottom of the kettle was separated from the rest and fragmented into pieces. No traces of food residue were reported (Rygh 1912, p. 21). Other miscellaneous bronze artefacts included a handle of 8 centimeters with S-shaped ends for a chest, as well as one ring shaped and cylindric pipe with an opening, probably originally fastened to some kind of wooden object (Rygh 1912, p. 20f, fig. 13, 14). The pieces of at least two ornamented ceramic vessels were also reported to have been found among the grave goods. Whether the vessels were broken beforehand or not is not certain, but the corrosive wet soil had ruined the pieces significantly (Rygh 1912, p. 21).

The Charon's fee object found at the Hol burial consisted of a flat, hammered, band-shaped piece of gold with a length of 2,1 centimeters and a 0,5 centimeter's width, as well as a thickness of 0,1 centimeters. It also had hollow sides and was clipped by both edges. The weight of the gold piece was 1,6 grams. This golden object was found near the cranium, most likely placed originally within the deceased's mouth (Rygh 1912, p. 17f; Bøe 1926, p. 64; Lamm & Axboe 1989, p. 469; Ramqvist 1992, p. 126; Lyttkens 2012, p. 39, 41). Aside from this, the literature is sparse with its descriptions of the Charon's fee object, clearly signifying that it lacks other noticeable features. No images of the Charon's fee object exist either.

7.7. Chapter summary

In this chapter, the six case study burials of the thesis are reviewed and presented. Engbjerg grave 4 was a female burial in a north-southward position with the head northwards located in northeastern Zealand, Denmark at a burial site with 25 graves underneath a hill or mound top, 4 of which featured Charon's fee objects in the shape of shards of Roman glass. The grave was covered by a large stone. Aside from the glass shard Charon's fee object, grave 4 also included golden spiral finger rings, glass, and amber beads for two necklaces, a swastika shaped fibula of gilded bronze decorated with glass pieces, a Roman glass vessel, a hairnet with glass pearls, a silver hair pin, silver fibulae, decorated pottery, a bronze textile weight and animal sacrifices.

The Himlingøje 1949-2 grave was a female burial in a north-southward position with the head southwards covered with stones surrounding the grave and located at a rich burial site southeastern Zealand next to several hills and mounds. It was the second Charon's fee burial at the site and featured rich grave goods such as glass, amber and silver beads from a necklace with a silver amulet box, a rosette fibula of silver with a runic inscription, other silver fibulae, Roman glass and bronze vessels and utensils, undecorated ceramic vessels, a Roman coin connected to the necklace, a silver hairpin and a golden bead connected to it, golden finger rings and bracelets, a bone comb, iron fittings and animal bones. The Obolus object was a cylindrical small piece of gold.

The Högom mound 2 burial from Medelpad, Sweden, was made up with a large earthen burial mound on a ridge next to several other burial mounds. The grave had a stone cairn inside and a wooden chamber in an east-westwards direction with the deceased's head directed west. The burial goods included a large set of weapons with a sword decorated with fittings of gilded silver, golden finger rings, wooden, ceramic, bronze and glass vessels, horse gear with details of bronze and gilded bronze, a belt with bronze fittings and a strike-a-light stone, fur remnants, combs, silver tweezers, clasp buttons of gilded silver, two golden pins, golden pendants and a golden tablet found on the deceased's chest, being the Charon's fee object. The Kälder grave 2 double burial on Gotland featured two individuals buried underneath a stone cairn side by side in a north-south direction with the heads in the north. The burial site featured twelve graves, most of which had been raided. The grave included two belts with bronze buckles and fittings, a broken ceramic vessel, spear and lance tips and a Roman coin imitation of gold found in the mouth of the larger of the two individuals.

The Gile grave 17 burial was located in Oppland, Norway in an area dominated by mountainous terrain near 60 other graves. The grave was made up of an earthen mound over an irregular stone cairn construction with the deceased buried with his head northwards. The grave goods included a set of weapons, bronze fittings belonging to the sword, burned remnants of bone and charcoal and a perforated, round silver disc acting as the grave's Charon's fee object. The Hol burial at Trøndelag, Norway featured only one neighboring grave and consisted of a burial chamber inside a stone cairn. The grave goods included a weaponry collection, fragmented iron objects, silver tweezers, a small bronze box, a belt with bronze fittings and a strike-a-light stone, bronze fittings for now missing clasp buttons, a bronze Vestland cauldron, two ornamented ceramic vessels, and a flat hammered band shaped piece of gold acting as Charon's obol.

8. Discussion

With the six case studies presented, it is now time for a general comparison of their respective Charon's fee objects and their general grave goods and constructions. This course of action will be done in order to give proper answers to the research questions formulated during the beginning of this study. The questions went as follows:

- *Is it possible to recognize regional trends or memes in burials with the Charon's fee rite within the archaeological material of Roman Iron Age and Migration Period Scandinavia?*
- *Can a rough typology of the Obolus rite be structured through these trends?*
- *Do Scandinavian Charon's Obols only occur in graves with rich burial goods and elaborate constructions, or do they also appear in poorer graves?*

8.1. Charon's fee objects in comparison

It is undeniable that all the objects found in the mouth or near the cranium of the deceased in the aforementioned case study burials can be interpreted with the Charon's fee or Obolus rite interpretations. This can be disclosed from their close proximity to the heads of the deceased in all case studies, with only the Högom burial being an exception where the coin was located rather on the chest of the deceased (Ramqvist 1990, p. 58f; 1992, p. 123f, 125f). For this burial, it is likely the coin has simply fallen out of the mouth during the decaying process (Ekengren 2009, p. 186, 189; Brown 2013, p. 121ff; Odenweller 2016, p. 125). However, a comparison between the various Charon's fee objects themselves is a hard endeavor, and structuring a typology based on these comparisons is nigh impossible due to this. The primary reason as to why this is the case is due to their completely differing material nature. The grave that distinguishes itself the most in the material category is Engbjerg grave 4, which uses itself of a completely different material from the other investigated case studies. While all other burials featured Charon's Obols made out of precious metals like gold, silver, or gilded silver, only Engbjerg grave 4 (and its three other peers which were left out of this study) had a Charon's fee object made of Roman glass (Boye 2002a, p. 7; 2002b, p. 205f). That being the case, the literature showcases that other instances of glass shards as Charon's Obols have occurred in the archaeological material in Scandinavia, seemingly with a concentration to the southern parts (e.g. Bemmann 2005, p. 26; Dyhrfeld-Johnsen 2009, p. 133, 135f, 151; Ekengren 2009, p. 190; Lund Hansen & Rindel 2008, p. 112f, 124f; Przybyła & Rydzewska 2019, p. 153, 162). Glass was a prestigious material imported from the Roman provinces, which can be seen within the

case study burials which featured glass vessels of various shapes. It is likely to believe that glass shards therefore held a similarly high-ranking status as Charon's fee objects made out of precious metal, as the ones seen in the other case studies. Here we instead see Charon's Obols using precious metals in various shapes and forms. Plain gold is the mostly used material category, featured in both the Himlingøje, Kälder, and Hol graves as recounted above (e.g. Almgren 1903, p. 89f, 91ff; Bøe 1926, p. 64; Norling-Christensen 1951, p. 44), while gilded silver and plain silver occurs in the Högom and Gile burials respectively (Herteig 1955, p. 58, 60f, 71; Ramqvist 1990, p. 58f; 1992, p. 125f). This focus on precious metals and glass can easily be interpreted through Back Danielsson's theories about the political and potentially even divine symbolism of gold and other shiny materials, which in itself goes well with the interpretation of the Charon's fee objects belonging to an elite societal stratum and should include both the precious metal objects as well as the glass shard from Engbjerg (Back Danielsson 2007, p. 180ff, 186ff).

Material is not the only way the Charon's Obols are different from one another, as they all differ substantially in their shapes also. The first distinguishable point that can be ascertained from the contents of the case study burials is that none of the burials used themselves of an actual coin when adapting the Charon's fee rite. The one burial that came the closest to achieve this criterion is the Kälder double burial, where the coin imitation bears a clear resemblance to Roman coinage, but should still be considered a substitute due to the artefact being made locally rather than using an actual Roman coin (e.g. Almgren 1903, p. 89f, 91ff, fig. 1; Silvén 1956, p. 103; SHM 2023, 11743). Similar techniques were used in the Gile and Högom burials, too, featuring rounded precious metal discs but without the decorations usually seen on a coin (e.g. Herteig 1955, p. 58, 60f, 71; Ramqvist 1990, p. 58f; 1992, p. 125f). This points to an intentional choice in making the Charon's fee objects appear as similar to a coin as possible and a deeper understanding of the rite's purpose as payment for the afterlife (Axboe and Kromann 1992, p. 271; Bemmann 2005, p. 26f; Ekengren 2009, p. 189). Similar arguments can be done for the glass shard from the Engbjerg grave, which had been intentionally cut and squared in order to be placed in the mouth of the deceased (Boye 2002b, p. 206). Other, less obvious examples, include simple clipped gold pieces, which are present in at least two burials; Himlingøje 1949-2 and the burial at Hol. While not entirely similar in their appearances, they ultimately both fill in similar material and shape-wise criteria, being pieces of gold clipped with the particular purpose of being placed in the mouths of the deceased (Rygh 1912, p. 17f; Bøe 1926, p. 64; Norling-Christensen 1951, p. 44; Brøndsted 1966 p. 190; Lund Hansen 1987, p. 413; Lamm &

Axboe 1989, p. 469; Lund Hansen et al. 1995, p. 156; Lyttkens 2012, p. 39, 41, 65, 123, 154). This preference for substitutes and imitations instead of actual coins seems to be a dominant feature in Scandinavian Obolus graves in general, as seen when looking at similar graves from around the time in the same regions (table 1).

The focus on using coin substitutes rather than actual coins is intriguing. An important point to bring up is how seemingly the various Charon's fee substitutes have been specifically made to fulfill their purpose as payment in the mouth. The clearest example of this is the glass shard from the Engbjerg grave 4, which was intentionally cut and not just some random glass shard from a broken Roman vessel. It is likely to assume, due to the intentional square cutting of the glass shard, that it was formed specifically to fit in the mouth of the deceased (Boye 2002a, p. 7; 2002b, p. 205f). A similar argument can be made for the coin imitations at Kälder, Högom and Gile, which while similar in shape, and in the Kälder double burial's case even appearance, none the less were locally produced substitutes (e.g. Almgren 1903, p. 89f, 91ff, fig. 1; Herteig 1955, p. 58, 60f, 71; Ramqvist 1990, p. 58f; SHM 2023, 11743). The fact that the Roman Iron Age and Migration Period peoples took their time to not only put something befitting in the deceased's mouth but also replicate the size, and sometimes even appearance, of a coin is something that speaks volumes of the Obolus rite's adoption in Scandinavia during this time of the Iron Age (Axboe & Kromann 1992, p. 271; Bemmann 2005, p. 26f; Ekengren 2009, p. 189). If this argument is to be stretched to its limit, even the Hol burial with its flat, band shaped gold object can be included here (Rygh 1912, p. 17f; Bøe 1926, p. 64; Lamm & Axboe 1989, p. 469). The one burial which does not necessarily live up to this criterion of coin replication is the 1949 burial at Himlingøje. While most burials do not have any coins featured in them, Himlingøje 1949-2 does in fact have a Roman coin. However, instead of using it as a Charon's Obol, it is placed as part of the dead woman's necklace (e.g. Norling-Christensen 1951, p. 45; Lund Hansen 1987, p. 413). It is hard to explain exactly why the clipped piece of gold was favored as a means of payment rather than the coin. A possible theory one can draw out of this is regarding the Charon's fee rite's transformation to showcase wealth, whether using a coin or not, which can be seen in the materials used for the Charon's object, being made of gold, in comparison with the coin which was made of silver. This argument is substantiated also by the rich quality and amounts of grave goods found in practically all of the burials, as well as the prestigious materials the Charon's fee objects are made of (Gorecki 1975, p. 242; Bemmann 2005, p. 23, 37; Dhyrfjeld-Johnsen 2009, p. 139f, 153; Odenweller 2016, p. 138f).

8.2. Burial contexts in comparison

The six case study burials share similarities in some aspects to each other, while in some they do not. Stone cairns of varied sizes are a recurring theme within the burial constructions, whether beneath an earthen mound or not, and can be seen in a majority of the burials, including Högom mound 2, the Kälder double burial, Gile grave 17 and the grave at Hol, while cairns are lacking in the Danish burials (e.g. Rygh 1912, p. 21; Herteig 1955, p. 57, 71; Ramqvist 1990, p. 31, 35f; 1992, p. 46f; SHM 2023, 1743). That is not to say that stones do not appear in the burials of Himlingøje 1949-2 or Engbjerg grave 4, however, as they have merely been incorporated into a different context here. The Engbjerg grave only features one large stone, laid over the burial as some sort of lid, while the Himlingøje burial has a series of stones lined up as a sort of framing wall for a burial chamber (Norling-Christensen 1951, p. 43f; Boye 2002a, p. 5; 2002b, p. 203f, 205f; Lyttkens 2012, p. 108). Other graves with burial chambers include the Högom and Gile graves, with especially Gile sharing similarities to the stone wall chambers featured in the Himlingøje grave, while the Högom burial uses itself of a wooden constructed chamber (e.g. Herteig 1955, p. 57, 71; Ramqvist 1990, p. 31, 35f; 1992, p. 46f). Another case study that uses itself of a wooden construction in its burial construction is Engbjerg grave 4, but in this case the wooden remnants were interpreted rather as a coffin than a chamber due to the size of the grave (Boye 2002a, p. 5; 2002b, p. 203f, 205f). Aside from stone cairns, it is not specified whether the Kälder and Hol graves respectively uses themselves of wooden constructions in the burials or not. It is likely they only used pits underneath the stone cairns (Rygh 1912, p. 21; Bøe 1926, p. 64; Lamm & Axboe 1989, p. 469; Lyttkens 2012, p. 49; SHM 2023, 11743). Burial sites are also worthy to discuss. It seems that in some cases, a significant topographical height is prominent for the sake of the burial site. This was among other burial sites the case with the Högom and Gile burials (Herteig 1955, p. 49f; Ramqvist 1990, p. 29). Even in areas where the burial site wasn't necessarily positioned on a high ground, the placement nearby such high grounds like hills, mounds and valleys is prominent. This was the case with the Engbjerg, Himlingøje and Kälder graves. The only burial that does not necessarily follow these criteria is the Hol burial, primarily because of how sparse the literature is about the grave's surrounding landscape (e.g. Almgren 1903, 89f, 95; Silvén 1956, p. 103; Boye 2002a, p. 5, 7; 2002b, p. 203, 205f, 208). Locations near the sea or water ways are also occurring among the case studies and can be seen in both the Högom and Kälder graves, with Kälder mainly due to being set on the southern edge of the island of Gotland. Aside from these, no other graves were found near the proximity of water or the sea (e.g. Almgren 1903, 89f, 95; Silvén 1956, p. 103; Ramqvist 1990, p. 14f, 29, fig. 8). This follows well with the results from

Lund Hansen's and Rindel's investigation of Danish Charon's fee burials and how they often did not have any connection to water (Lund Hansen & Rindel 2008, p. 130ff, 133ff, 144). The position of the body in the grave also differs slightly from grave to grave. The dominant body positioning is in a north-southwards direction, with Engbjerg, Himlingøje, Kälder and Gile using itself of this placement of the body. Himlingøje 1949-2 derives slightly from the norm with the body being placed with the head southwards while the others had their heads placed northwards (e.g. Almgren 1903, p. 89; Norling-Christensen 1951, p. 43f; Herteig 1955, p. 58, 71; Boye 2002b, p. 203f, 205f; SHM 2023, 11743). This differs from the east-westwards placement of the body in the Högom grave, while the body positioning is completely unknown in the Hol burial (Ramqvist 1990, p. 31, 35f; 1992, p. 46f; Lyttkens 2012, p. 80, 109).

Vessels, beakers, goblets, and pots occur in all of the burials in varied amounts and qualities, with a single exception of Gile grave 17. The burial with the largest collection of vessels is Högom mound 2, in which a whole of 27 vessels of varying materials was found, 21 of which were wooden plates. That being the case, the Högom burial is also the only grave which does feature wooden vessels, but this is likely due to potential other wooden vessels in other burials having decayed away due to being made of organic material (Ramqvist 1990, p. 35, 54f, 57f; 1992, p. 127ff, 129f, 137f; Lyttkens 2012, p. 109, 128f). The most common category of vessels in the case study burials is ceramic pottery. Although, even here differences can be seen, as in only the Högom, Kälder and Hol graves the pottery had been decorated (e.g. Rygh 1912, p. 21; Ramqvist 1990, p. 35, 54f, 57f; 1992, p. 129f, 137f). In some graves the ceramic vessels have even been destroyed, such as in the Kälder and Hol burials. Whether or not an intentional, ritualistic breaking of the pottery has occurred is hard to say, especially in the Hol burial due to the poor preservation of the material there. A ritual breaking of the pots in the Kälder double burial however might be a logical interpretation, due to Almgren's testimony of the Kälder grave being one of very few burials in the area that had not been plundered (e.g. Almgren 1903, p. 89; Rygh 1912, p. 21; SHM 2023, 11743). A much rarer typology of vessels in the burials, however, is bronze and glass vessels. Bronze plates and cauldrons occurred in the Himlingøje, Högom and Hol graves, in which it is noteworthy to mention that both the Högom and the Hol graves both had one Vestland cauldron each, while Himlingøje's bronze cauldrons belonged to other typologies (e.g. Rygh 1912, p. 21; Norling-Christensen 1951, p. 44; Brøndsted 1966 p. 190, 200ff; Lund Hansen 1987, p. 413; Ramqvist 1990, p. 54ff, 90; 1992, p. 122, 131f, 137f, 140f; Lund Hansen et al. 1995, p. 156f). A bronze plate was also featured in Högom mound 2 where it also serves as a symbol of washing due to the featuring of a comb placed in the bronze

plate. This is something not seen in any of the other case studies (Ramqvist 1990, p. 54ff, 90; 1992, p. 122, 131f, 137f, 140f). What the bronzes primarily points towards is the importation of Roman goods, as is seen in many of the Scandinavian and Germanic elite burials outside the Limes border (Axboe & Kromann 1992, p. 272ff, 300). The same argument goes for the glass vessels, which are even more rare in the case studies, appearing in more or less preserved forms in Himlingøje 1949-2 and Högom mound 2, as well as in the shape of the aforementioned Charon's object and single whole vessel in Engbjerg grave 4 (e.g. Norling-Christensen 1951, p. 44; Ramqvist 1990, p. 54f; 1992, p. 127ff, 137ff; Lund Hansen et al. 1995, p. 156f; Boye 2002a, p. 7; 2002b, p. 205f).

That all the case study burials were made for the elite of the Roman Iron Age and Migration Period Scandinavia is abundantly clear from not just the bronze and glass vessels, but also from the other rich amounts of burial goods found in the various case studies. Weaponry deposits are included as a clear indicator of the elite mercenary theory, as argued by primarily Dyhrfjeld-Johnsen (2009, p. 133f, 136f, 151f). The grave with the largest number of weapons is Högom mound 2, with its richly decorative sword, spear and lance tips, dagger/one edged short sword, shield and bow and arrows (Ramqvist 1990, p. 35ff; Lyttkens 2012, p. 83, 124). Most of the other burials, while featuring weapons, did not feature as large deposits, however. In comparison with the Högom burial, only the Gile can compete with its spear and lance tip, decorated sword, shield, and arrowhead (Herteig 1955, p. 58f, 71; Lyttkens 2012, p. 93, 108). Smaller weaponry collections were instead found in the Hol and Kälder burials (e.g. Almgren 1903, p. 89f, 98, fig 5-6; Rygh 1912, p. 16f; SHM 2023, 11743). The only burials with no weapons whatsoever were the Engbjerg and Himlingøje graves, primarily due to being female graves. That being said, neighboring graves at the same grave sites that were in fact male seemed to lack weapons as well, such as seen in the male Engbjerg grave 6 and even more so in the rich Himlingøje 1894 grave (e.g. Norling-Christensen 1951, p. 41; Brøndsted 1966 p. 189f; Lund Hansen 1987, p. 412; Boye 2002a, p. 9; 2002b, p. 204f). The main signifier here for the graves being part of an elite strata of graves is the large amount of precious metal grave goods found in the burials, going well in hand with Back Danielsson's theories about the connection between precious metals and shiny objects and the political elite (Back Danielsson 2007, p. 180ff, 186ff). This isn't anything particularly exclusive to only the Danish burials, however, as rich amounts of gold and silver are found in varied numbers in all of the burials, further signifying the high status of these case study graves. The two richest of the case studies were the Himlingøje 1949-2 grave as well as the Högom grave, both of which were filled to the

brim with prestigious imported goods, such as the bronze and glass vessels, but also with grave goods of precious metals. Looking at the amount of gilded silver and bronze found in Högom mound 2 for an instance, it is unmistakable to refer to this burial as a high-status grave. This includes such items as the two pendants of gilded silver, the two golden pins, the golden and silver details on the sword, the gilded bronze decorations on the horse gear and various silver fittings (e.g. Ramqvist 1990, 1992). The burial at Himlingøje, with its golden snake headed bracelets and finger rings, silver hair pin with golden bead and silver fibulae including the decorated rosette fibula, is easily a contender for the richest grave goods among the case studies (e.g. Norling-Christensen 1951, p. 44f; Brøndsted 1966 p. 190, 261, 263; Lund Hansen et al. 1995, p. 152f, 154f, 156f). Even burials with a smaller amount of grave goods had its fair share of prestigious precious metal items, like the swastika shaped fibula made of gilded silver and decorated with glass pieces from Engbjerg grave 4 (Boye 2002a, p. 5ff; 2002b, p. 205f). Clasp buttons is another category that occurs in more than one burial, specifically the Högom and Hol burials, with only the bronze plates of the button remaining in Hol. This category is rare aside from these two graves, which has likely to do with the fact that clasp buttons are primarily a Migration Period category of artefacts (Rygh 1912, p. 19f; Ramqvist 1990, p. 51f, 54; 1992, p. 88f, 90f, 92ff, 95; Lyttkens 2012, p. 126). Hygiene details made of silver were also present, such as the silver tweezers found in both the Högom and Hol burials (e.g. Rygh 1912, p. 19, fig 9; Ramqvist 1990, p. 48ff). Bronze is a more common metal, featured in various forms in practically all burials for both decorative and practical purposes. Bronze details are especially common on belts, which occur in the Högom, Kälder and Hol graves, whereof only the Högom and Hol graves also featured strike-a-light stones fastened by bronze fittings on the belts. Some of these belts also feature precious metal fittings, like the silver details on the belt from the Hol burial (e.g. Rygh 1912, p. 18f, fig. 7a and b, 10, 11 & 12; Almgren 1903, p. 89f, fig 2-4; Ramqvist 1990, p. 48; 1992, p. 100ff; SHM 2023, 11743).

Animal remnants were found in a select few of the case study burials, which might indicate the occurrence of animal or food sacrifice. This includes the horse tooth in the Kälder burial as well as the remnants of swine and sheep in the Engbjerg burial. Not all of these can be interpreted using this perspective, however. The remnants of food found in the Himlingøje and Högom graves for an instance should probably be seen rather as provisions for the journey to the afterlife, which after all the aforementioned Charon's fee objects are another signifying expression of (e.g. Ramqvist 1990, p. 54ff, 90; 1992, p. 122, 131f, 137f, 140f; Lund Hansen et al. 1995, p. 152f; Boye 2002a, p. 5ff; 2002b, p. 205f; SHM 2023, 11743). Another signifier for

provisions for the afterlife is the featuring of combs made of bone and horn. These occur in Himlingøje 1949-2, Högom mound 2 and Gile grave 17, albeit the Gile comb occurs in the grave fill and not in the grave in itself (e.g. Herteig 1955, p. 57; Ramqvist 1990, p. 48ff, 54ff, 90; 1992, p. 103f, 105, 118ff, 121f, 131f, 137f, 140f; Lund Hansen et al. 1995, p. 152f). Of course, there are also a series of artefact categories that are not as prominent in the rest of the graves. Most of the deriving grave good categories come from Högom mound 2, where the most deriving is the horse-riding gear with its two bridles and gilded and bronze details. This category of grave goods is completely absent from the other burials (Ramqvist 1990, p. 35, 40ff, 46; 1992, p. 68ff, 71ff, 75ff, 78ff, 80, 82ff).

Male burials dominate among the case studies, specifically in Sweden and Norway, which differs slightly from the gender patterns described by general parts of the literature (Boye 2002b, p. 204ff; Bemmann 2005, p. 23; Lund Hansen & Rindel 2008, p. 129; Brown 2013, p. 296). Typical female artefact categories include glass, amber and silver beads and are the prime indicators of the elite status of the buried. While glass beads occur in both the Engbjerg and Himlingøje graves, only Himlingøje 1949-2 uses itself of even more prestigious items for the necklaces. These items include the silver amulet box and the silver beads, both being completely absent from Engbjerg grave 4 (e.g. Norling-Christensen 1951, p. 44f; Lund Hansen 1987, p. 413; Lund Hansen et al. 1995, p. 152f, 153ff, 157; Boye 2002a, p. 5ff; 2002b, p. 205f).

It is likely that some of the Charon's fee burials had family connections. This includes Engbjerg grave 4 together with the other graves with glass shards in the mouth (e.g. Boye 2002a, p. 5, 7; 2002b, p. 203, 205f, 208; Bemmann 2005, p. 26). The same argument goes for most of the other case studies. In almost every burial site there has been a significant number of neighboring graves, many of them dating back to around the same time period. The ones with most neighboring graves is the Gile burial, with 60 graves on the site. The ones with the richest neighboring graves include the Engbjerg, Himlingøje and Högom burial sites. Only the burial site at Hol lacks a significant number of neighboring graves, with only one grave in the nearby proximity (e.g. Almgren 1903, 89f, 95; Rygh 1912, p. 21; Norling-Christensen 1951, p. 39, 43; Herteig 1955, p. 68f; Ramqvist 1990, p. 29). The clearest evidence of direct family connections can be seen in the Kälder grave, with the burial of a bigger and smaller male individual, who could very well be interpreted as having familiar relations, perhaps as father and son (Almgren 1903, p. 89; Lyttkens 2012, p. 40f, 49, 108; SHM 2023, 11743). That many of the Charon's fee burials were gathered in family groups is something argued for in the literature, among others by Steuer (2002, p. 505f).

8.3. Meme theory applied to burials

A number of various similar cultural trends and memes can be traced within the case study burials. The most obvious of them is the Charon's fee rite, as all the burials shares it. However, as stated above, almost none of the Charon's Obols are similar to each other in material or shape. Clipped gold only occurs in Himlingøje 1949-2 and Hol, while rounded coin objects appear in the Högom, Kälder and Gile burials with the Högom and Gile graves sharing the most similarities with their hammered and undecorated Charon's fee objects. Engbjerg grave 4 however is completely different, using not only a different shape but also a different material, being glass (e.g. Almgren 1903, p. 89f, 91ff, fig. 1; Norling-Christensen 1951, p. 44; Lund Hansen 1987, p. 413; Ramqvist 1990, p. 58f; 1992, p. 123f, 125f; SHM 2023, 11743). As such, while the general meme of the Charon's fee rite can be traced within all these burials, a particular development or typology is nigh impossible to trace with only slight recognizable similarities in shape and material. The only other recognizable meme among the Scandinavian Charon's Obols is the usage of rare and valuable objects in all of the case studies. Precious metal items dominate in five out of six burials, but since imported Roman glass was another prestigious commodity, as argued by among others Ekengren, the Engbjerg grave's Charon's Obol should not be ignored in this regard (Boye 2002a, p. 7; 2002b, p. 205f; Ekengren 2009, p. 178f, 190). The focus on prestigious materials and different shapes for the Charon's fee objects instead of simply using coins, as can be seen especially in Himlingøje 1949-2 with its featuring of both a Charon's fee substitute and a Roman coin, opens for a new set of problems, however (e.g. Norling-Christensen 1951, p. 45; Brøndsted 1966 p. 190, 261, 263; Lund Hansen et al. 1995, p. 152f, 154f, 157). Is it possible to still consider these objects as part of the Charon's fee rite or have they transformed into something new and different? While parts of the literature call for a withdrawal of the terminology in its entirety, other researchers state that the Charon's fee rite was never a consistent meme to begin with, differing in not only coin material, ranging from bronze to silver to gold, but also regarding what kind of objects were used for the rite (Grinder-Hansen 1991, p. 214ff; Steuer 2002, p. 499f, 501f; Evgeny 2021, p. 76f, 79ff). An example of this is the original golden spits from the Classical Greek period, which shares many similarities with the golden pins found in Högom mound 2, with the exception of the Högom pins being placed in a pouch and not in the mouth of the dead (Gorecki 1975, p. 192f; Gräslund 1967, p. 171f; Steuer 2002, p. 499, 500f). I personally share the theory presented by Gorecki that a single object deposited in the mouth of the deceased can be interpreted as belonging to the Charon's fee rite (Gorecki 1975, p. 199). Considering how a change in the material value for the Charon's objects can also be noticed when investigating burials outside the Limes

borders, it is believable that what we see here is the result of a cultural transmission that has evolved, or using Dawkins' terminology, mutated into something slightly different (Dawkins 1976, p. 190, 194ff). In other words, the objects are still a part of the general Charon's fee rite, but their value related aspects, as well as possible aspects of the rite itself, have changed in accordance with the world views and cultural expressions of the Germanic and Scandinavian Roman Iron Age and Migration Period cultures (Axboe & Kromann 1992, p. 271, 276, 300; Dyhrfjeld-Johnsen 2009, p. 138, 152f). The featuring of mainly male Charon's fee burials rather than female is also worth to take notice of. Of all the six case studies, only Engbjerg and Himlingøje were female Charon's fee burials, showcasing a trend with clear tendencies towards male burials in the rest of Scandinavia, while Denmark was much more egalitarian (e.g. Norling-Christensen 1951, p. 45, fig. 9; Lund Hansen 1987, p. 413; Boye 2002a, p. 5; 2002b, p. 205f).

Together with the usage of valuable materials for the Charon's fee objects, the other categories of grave goods showcase several different memes characteristic for primarily the socio-political elite of Scandinavian Roman Iron Age and Migration Period society. The rich weaponry deposits in all the male case study burials are an obvious example of a meme belonging to these theorized elite mercenary families (Dyhrfjeld-Johnsen 2009, p. 133f, 136f, 151f). The featuring of imported vessels in bronze and glass, as chiefly seen in the Himlingøje, Högom and Gile graves is also significant for the societal elite during these time periods, signifying their rank through their material wealth (Axboe & Kromann 1992, p. 272ff, 300). Similar grave structures and burial site positionings are also traceable, showcasing a possible trend with a clear preference for areas with high plateaus and valleys, whether on top of these topographical heights or nearby them (e.g. Almgren 1903, 89f, 95; Herteig 1955, p. 49f; Ramqvist 1990, p. 14f, 29, fig. 8; Boye 2002a, p. 5, 7; 2002b, p. 203, 205f, 208). The preferences for north-southwards body placement in the graves is also a significant trend that seems to dominate in all but two of the case study burials, the only exceptions being the Högom grave which was placed east-westwards and the Hol grave which's literature does not reveal any body positioning (Ramqvist 1990, p. 31, 35f; 1992, p. 46f; Lyttkens 2012, p. 80, 109).

8.4. Chapter summary

All of the case study burials feature clear examples of using the Charon's fee rite, and therefore fulfills the requirements of this meme. While that is the case, each respective Charon's fee object is so different from each other in material and shape that a typology or evolution cannot

be structured. Each Charon's Obol share the similarity of using prestigious materials, such as precious metals or glass, which had been reshaped to fit in the mouth or to replicate the appearance of coins in a more or less direct way. Complimented by the prestigious materials used for the Charon's fee objects are also several categories of grave goods of precious metals as well as the featuring of imported Roman glass and bronze vessels. With the featuring of weaponry collections, this all but confirms that these graves belong to a societal stratum of elite warriors and their families. A clear preference for burials near topographical heights and valleys are recurring among the case studies, too. The trend of family burials is also noticeable, with the Kälder grave being the clearest example. Male Charon's fee burials are more prevalent than female ones, which were only occurring in Denmark while male burials occurred in both Norway and Sweden. The dominant positioning of the body was in north-south while only the Högom burial derived with an east-westward positioning.

9. Conclusions and summarized results

In summary, one could argue that the structuring of a typology or evolution in regard to the Charon's fee objects from Scandinavian Roman Iron Age and Migration Period burials is an impossible task. While Dawkins' meme theory helped identify certain material preferences there are far too many differences between the various objects to properly recognize the evolving dispersal of this cultural phenomenon. The only clear answer that can be derived is that valuable materials of precious metals and imported Roman glass were preferred for the making of these Charon's Obols, and that the phenomenon is primarily reserved for the socio-political elite. The material of this category of objects is as such far too random to properly investigate an evolutionary dispersal of, and from the perspective of memes the only recognizable trend is a preference for prestigious and shiny materials occurring among elite burials. What makes the reservation of the ritual used primarily within elite graves even clearer is the large amount of rich grave goods the deceased were buried with, in the form of locally made prestigious objects decorated with silver, gold and bronze, as well as the featuring of imported goods from the Roman provinces, such as glass and bronze vessels. For male burials, which also dominated in numbers compared to the female ones, weaponry was also a recurring artefact category, showcasing the Charon's fee rite to be primarily used by a wealthy societal elite with mercenary or warrior backgrounds, which ultimately confirms the conclusions reached by major parts of prior research about this time period's burials and elite stratum.

To gain a further understanding of the Charon's fee objects in Scandinavia and free Germania during the Iron Age and Migration Period, more attempts to analyze the spreading of trends, memes and cultural expressions within these burials are needed. A good example of tenable aims and goals would be to also focus on other categories of grave goods, such as bronze and glass vessels, different weaponry and accessory typologies and attempt to trace spreading networks between the various graves. To investigate not just the categories of items, but also the placement of artefacts in the graves would also lead to a better understanding of the organization of the burials and give a better idea of rituals and cultural expressions used by the Roman Iron Age and Migration Period elite. To achieve this, a larger quantity of case study burials would most likely be needed to gain a better understanding of regional trends and preferences. The appliance of different, more quantitative methods on this kind of material would also help in gaining a better understanding of the spread of the Charon's fee rite throughout Germanic and Scandinavian Iron Age societies, as well as other recurring categories of grave goods in burials from this time. In summary, there is still much room for interpretative debate within the burial material from the Roman Iron Age and the Migration Period, and the Charon's fee rite still has its place within this debate.

Summary

The aim and goal of this thesis is to comparatively analyze Scandinavian burials from the Roman Iron Age and the Migration Period between the 3rd and 5th centuries AD with a specific focus on artefacts interpreted as belonging to the Charon's fee rite, also known as the Obolus rite. The purpose behind this study is to investigate the potential dispersal and change over time of these Charon's fee objects, as well as tendencies regarding various categories of grave goods, by pinpointing certain local trends within burials from the studied time periods. The aims and objectives are that these tendencies are clear enough to be able to structure a potential typology around. This is done in order to gain a further understanding of the attractiveness of Roman material culture outside of the provincial Limes borders. The study is centered around R. Dawkins' theory regarding self-replicating socio-cultural expressions and trends, termed memes, which was intended to help recognize specific similarities and differences in the material to help structure up a typology. The thesis investigates six case study burials across Scandinavia featuring Charon's Obols; Engbjerg grave 4 and Himlingøje 1949-2 from Zealand in Denmark, Högom mound 2 from Medelpad in Sweden, Kälder double grave 2 from the island of Gotland, Gile grave 17 from Oppland and a burial at Hol from Trøndelag, both in Norway.

Aside from sharing the general meme of featuring the Charon's fee rite, not many other similarities could be discerned, as a particular randomness existed within the materials and shapes of the various Charon's Obols. An evolutionary typology could therefore not be structured. The most prevalent material used was precious metals, like gold and silver, but glass Obols also occur in the material. The focus on using prestigious materials, as well as to intentionally shape objects to be placed in the mouth whether they look like coins or not, points to a deeper understanding of the rite's original meaning hybridized with the emphasis of prestigious materials found in elite burials at the time. Tracing a certain level of evolution or typology from the Charon's Obols may have been an impossibility, but the choice of material showcases an emphasis on wealth and status. This is seen in the other categories of artefacts as well, such as weaponry deposits, imported bronze and glass ware from outside Scandinavia and local precious metal objects, all of which point towards a series of graves belonging to a class of elite mercenaries. The tendency to be buried next to several other individuals, some of which share very similar artefact categories, points towards these tendencies being reserved for whole families. Other recognizable trends include the burial placements either on or next to topographical heights or valleys in the landscape, as well as animal sacrifices, a tendency towards primarily male burials in Sweden and Norway while Denmark features more female burials, and a body placement in a north-west direction.

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Fig. 23. - Lyttkens, S. 2012., *Charonmynt – myt, makt och människor. Om hybridisering, kreolisering och transformation av en greco-romersk myt i skandinavisk gravpraktik under romersk järnålder och folkvandringstid.* Institutionen för historiska studier. Göteborgs Universitet. Fig. 1. p. 44. (redigerad av Markus Ahlberg)

Fig. 24. – Herteig, A.E. 1955. Gilefunnene på Østre Toten. *Viking* 19 (1955). Utgitt av Norsk Arkeologisk Selskab. Oslo, pp. 49-73. Fig. 7. p. 61.

Fig. 25. – Herteig, A.E. 1955. Gilefunnene på Østre Toten. *Viking* 19 (1955). Utgitt av Norsk Arkeologisk Selskab. Oslo, pp. 49-73. Fig. 6, 7. pp. 60f.

Fig. 26. – Lyttkens, S. 2012., *Charonmynt – myt, makt och människor. Om hybridisering, kreolisering och transformation av en greco-romersk myt i skandinavisk gravpraktik under romersk järnålder och folkvandringstid.* Institutionen för historiska studier. Göteborgs Universitet. Fig. 1. p. 44. (redigerad av Markus Ahlberg)

Fig. 27. – Rygh, K. 1912 “Oldsamlingens tillvæxt i 1912”. *Oldtiden* III. pp. 16-21. Fig. 7. p. 17.