



# LUND UNIVERSITY

## Handicraft Archaeology based on Intelligent Technology (HAbIT) 2023–2026

Neið, Michael

2024

*Document Version:*

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Neið, M. (2024). *Handicraft Archaeology based on Intelligent Technology (HAbIT) 2023–2026*. Poster session presented at The 41st Interdisciplinary Viking Symposium, Lund, Sweden.

*Total number of authors:*

1

**General rights**

Unless other specific re-use rights are stated the following general rights apply:

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal

Read more about Creative commons licenses: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/>

**Take down policy**

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

LUND UNIVERSITY

PO Box 117  
221 00 Lund  
+46 46-222 00 00



# Handicraft Archaeology based on Intelligent Technology (HAbIT)

## 2023–2026

Department of Archaeology and Ancient History at Lund University  
Department of Archaeology and Heritage Studies at Aarhus University

In recent years, Viking period scholarship is experiencing an unparalleled renaissance in material research. As a result, it has become 'en vogue' to study ancient craft products. But in regards to religious change, the role of the craftspeople remains strangely under-exploited. HAbIT aims to understand how the applied arts from urban contexts contributed to making Scandinavia a part of Western Christianity. The project title alludes to ancient craft processes, as well as the digital solutions of today that help us unveil them!

The Viking period was an era that saw many tribal societies transform into heterogeneous Christian realms with urban centres, which sometimes would grow further on into Medieval period towns. This transformation can be likened to interlocking chains of events that involved a plenitude of agents with different incentives. The progress of Viking Period research has long been slowed down by outdated dichotomies that prevent a fresh-eyed view on the subject. The first one concerns the idea of a monolithic culture within Christian Europe which suddenly came to dispel a corresponding pagan culture up North. This idea can be traced back to a tendency towards essentialism in the field of Comparative Religions that led scholars to focus on major world religions, while neglecting traditions 'in between'. And yet, previous research points towards the complexities of religious identity during the Christian mission. The second dichotomy concerns two categories of art, i.e. pictorial narratives and symbols on a monumental scale that carried meaningful messages, in contrast to the applied art on practical devices, which was devoid of deeper meaning. This notion was promoted by the combination of a Eurocentric art concept and an evolutionary research paradigm that entailed a pessimistic view on décor-producing, 'primitive' cultures that were not expected to have reached the necessary intellectual level to connect pictures with meaning. As a result, the key role of Viking Period craftspeople in the religious transformation has been bound to eschew our grasp. Although, the scholarly debate on the Viking Period urbanisation process is finally gravitating towards the significance of craftspeople, it still remains to be connected with the similarly important debate on urban centres as meeting points for ideologies and religions – as attested by Rimbert's writings on the missionary Ansgar and his endeavours up North! What sets Viking Period towns apart from antedating central places is a constant increase in standardized utili-

ty goods that conveyed pictorial messages. A collaborative pilot study with UrbNet at Aarhus University demonstrated that metal casting debris yields clues about the processes that fuelled social change: Nowadays, artisans are envisioned as active creators of the cultural universe they inhabit. Many choices within the manufacturing process are culturally conditioned and express a mentality. Thus, an analysis of operational sequences offers a key to the inner workings of Viking Period society. Certain changes in the artisan habitus that facilitated standardization were not likely caused by capitalistic opportunism but by the very gradual mental shifts which contributed to the emergence of the very ideological superstructure that transformed Scandinavia into Christian realms. It is therefore imperative to analyze the interplay between this cultural change and the habitus of Viking Period artisans, their pictorial messages and how their output was received at different stages of the process. HAbIT assesses the potential of this craft-centred analysis, using new natural science data, operational typology and art studies, as well as the theoretical concept of hybridity. It is embedded in a novel conceptual framework, based on *informed GT* (i.e. a variety of the *grounded theory* methodology) – which uses established theories to identify distinct patterns that hitherto went unnoticed. Contradictions which arise from the mix of methods are seen as a generator for progress that gives rise to a new theory. As such, I combine dynamic typology from archaeology, Panofskyan hermeneutics from art history and multimodal semiotics from linguistics. This way, HAbIT generates both new methods and an empirically grounded theory on the materiality of cultural transformation. Until recently, little could be done in that respect, arguably due to the lack of essential data which is now coming into our reach – as a result of accelerating innovations in theory and method in the natural sciences and the humanities, as well as within digital technology.



Reconstructed mould and virtual cast of the lost 'Odin Mask' from Ribe, based on a fusion of 3D laser scans on different debris – representing the pictorial language of a 'pagan' culture?



Urnes style brooch from Lindholm Høje, Denmark – representing the pictorial language of a hybrid culture?



A reconstructed virtual cast of a lost pilgrim token which is based on a fusion of several 3D laser scans of mould debris from the medieval town of Ribe that started out as a Viking Period emporium and transformed into a cathedral town – representing the Christian universe, as created by God the Geometer?

### Publications

The Réseau Opérateur of Urbanization: Craft Collaborations and Organization in an Early Medieval Workshop in Ribe, Denmark. In: *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 29:2.



Støbeforme af sten fra middelalderen: Massefremstilling af metalgenstande til verdslig og religiøs brug i Ribe. In: *Kuml* 2015.



### Contact

MICHAEL NEIß, postdoc & guest researcher  
PHONE: +46-736 462 991  
EMAIL: michael.neiss@ark.lu.se

