

## Rich and Powerful: The Image of the Female Deity in Migration Age Scandinavia

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In the archeological sources that we have for the first millenium, there is no shortage of depictions of the human figure in the Germanic areas of Western and Northern Europe. The breadth of material ranges from carved wooden figures to metal figurines, cast figures on brooches and pendants, imprinted realisations in precious metal such as on gold bracteates and guldgubber, paintings and reliefwork on picturestones and gravestones, as well as wooden carvings and textile weavings with figurative patterns. In many cases we can easily distinguish between depictions of the male and the female, in others it is possible but less obvious.

A greater number of these human representations are pictures of armed people of various kinds, which have so far always been interpreted as male warriors. They are not necessarily always living humans, but sometimes corpses, sometimes they are part-human, sometimes heroic and sometimes divine, and this is a distinction we should keep in mind.

Weapons are not the only possible way of identifying males, and other more obvious attributes may suggest male divine figures: one-eyed figures are

normally interpreted as a male god, and, although this divinity is less obvious with a little bronze figurine from Rällinge in Södermannland (10<sup>th</sup> century) which is usually identified as the god Freyr, its masculinity is beyond doubt whether god or not. An amulet-like figurine of a capped and bearded figure from Iceland is normally considered to be Thor with his hammer, although scholars have identified the object he holds in various ways as his beard (Gjærder; Eldjarn), or, by Lotte Motz, as a double flute, and most recently by Richard Perkins as his rather outsize moustache. All three interpretations are somewhat unsatisfactory, but one thing is fairly certain, namely that the beard implies the depiction of a male<sup>1</sup>, even if its divinity is somewhat doubtful.

In an attempt to approach the problem of a definitive distinction between male and female figures in a systematic way, we have, as seen from the criteria used above - theoretically - the following possibilities for distinction:

- primary sexual characteristics
- secondary sexual characteristics
- hair style
- dress
- attributes
- context

It is obvious that the lower down the list we get, the less valuable the criteria for distinction are, but they might help in combination with other criteria. Unfortunately, however, it is a rare occasion that the primary sexual characteristics are clearly discernable on representations of human figures in the first millenium. An exception from this rule are the very early and crude wooden idols repeatedly found in Germany and Southern Scandinavia, such as the statues from Braak near Eutin and also those from Oberdorla. The anthropomorphism in these cases is nearly exclusively limited to the parallel growth of two branches representing the lower human extremities, and gender specification is achieved in a very rudimentary, but nevertheless effective, way.

More commonly, however, the decision as to the sex of a human representation is limited to secondary sexual characteristics, such as breasts or the growth of a beard. Fortunately, there is an iconographic tradition running through Germanic art of the entire first millenium to depict females, as long as they are shown in profile, with extremely long hair that is invariably tied into a knot at the back of the head with the remainder of the hair reaching down to at least the middle of the spine, sometimes to its lower end, and sometimes even to

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<sup>1</sup> Per Gjærder: The Beard as an Iconographical Feature in the Viking Period and the Early Middle Ages. In: *Acta Archaeologica* 35 (1964), 95-114; Kristján Eldjárn: The Bronze Image from Eyrarland, (*Speculum Norroenum. Studies G. Turville-Petre*) Odense 1981, 73-84; Lotte Motz: New Thoughts on an Archaic Artifact. In: *The Mankind Quarterly* 32 (1992), 231-240; Richard Perkins: The Gateway to Trondheim. In: *Saga-Book* 25/2 (1999), 179-213.

the floor. This so-called Irish ribbon-knot always seems to consist of a simple half-turn only. Only rarely does the hair seem to be tied into some sort of bunch below the knot, in which case it only reaches shoulder level (as on the silver gilt figure from Köping, Öland<sup>2</sup>). Such a bunch of hair - but without the knot visible - that reaches down to just over the shoulders seems to mark all the female figure of the Oseberg tapestry, whilst the contemporary wood carving on the Oseberg wagon shows a female with hair tightly combed back, the usual knot and hair nearly as long as her whole body flying behind her, where the end of the hair seems to be gathered back in a sort of loop, signifying even longer hair.

I shall pass on human depictions on bracteates for the moment, which are less easy to interpret than those on the guldgubber, and where, I believe, serious blunders have been made concerning the identification of males and females. It is simply inadmissible to interpret any figure with open, shoulder-length hair as female<sup>3</sup> when all the evidence for the centuries in question shows females have only been depicted with long hair tied in the Irish ribbon knot.

This feature is also shown clearly on the guldgubber, which show figures in profile. A Bornholm single gubbe of a female carrying a beaker has long hair hanging from a rather elaborate knot<sup>4</sup> and the eight different double gubber from Klepp in Norway<sup>5</sup> show a very clear knot and very long hair of either knee-length or floor-length. The double gubber from Slöinge<sup>6</sup> in Sweden that could (with the help of accompanying finds) dendrochronologically be dated to around 710 all show the knot with hair of varying length from good shoulder length to about the middle of the back. All the double gubber from Lundeberg on Fyn in Denmark show females with the knot and usually very long hair.

The main result from such an investigation is that female hair style is surprisingly constant from at least 600 to 900 A.D., all the more surprising, as male hair is shown as being anything from more than shoulder length or shoulder length and always worn open, to a rather short fashion clip which ends above the ears. That the standard length of hair of those males depicted on the guldgubber was about shoulder length is confirmed by the somewhat older gold A- and B-bracteates that show the protagonist with wavy, open hair of approx. shoulder length, only rarely shorter. The C-bracteates, however, show the head of a figure with usually much longer hair (Aversi group<sup>7</sup>) that is sometimes

<sup>2</sup> David M. Wilson and Ole Klindt-Jensen: *Viking Art*. Minneapolis 1980, Pl. XIV c; Eva Koch Nielsen: *Kvinden med Hornet*. In: *Skalk* 1986/6, 16-17: 17.

<sup>3</sup> Michael J. Enright: *The Goddess Who Weaves*. In: *FmSt* 24 (1990), 54-70.

<sup>4</sup> Koch Nielsen 1986, 16.

<sup>5</sup> Hakon Shetelig & Magnus Olsen: *Runestenene fra Tu og Klapp paa Jæderen*. Bergen 1909 (= *Bergens Museums Arbog* 1909, Nr. 11), Fig. 3 - 10; Fig. 7 also enlarged as Fig. 11 and a drawing by Watt 1999, Fig. 15a.

<sup>6</sup> Lars Lundqvist: *Slöinge - en stormansgård från järnåldern*. In: *Slöinge och Borg. Stormansgårdar i öst och vest*. Stockholm 1996 (= *Riksantikvarämbetet. Arkeologiska undersökningar. Skrifter nr. 18*), 9-52, Fig. 10, a-h.

<sup>7</sup> Mærít Gaimster: *Vendel Period Bracteates on Gotland. On the Significance of Germanic Art*.

(Ravnstorp group<sup>8</sup>) gathered in a knot-like loop, although it is difficult to tell if that is actually a knot or not. We may thus conclude that the male hair style depicted was more open to regional and/or temporary change, whilst the female hair style is very strictly dictated by tradition which seems to change, if only slightly, in the Viking Age.

Actual secondary sexual characteristics are rarely shown, although the interesting bronze pendant from a grave in Norsborg, Södermannland<sup>9</sup> (which shows quite distinctly two embracing females - Shetelig interpreted them as dancing, although the two figures seem totally static), rather stresses the heavy bosoms of the two figures. They, too, have their hair in a knot and hanging down to the same length, namely their shoulderblades. We know nothing of the date nor the function of this pendant, although in most respects it closely resembles the female figures of the guldgubber.

Our next means of distinction is by dress, which does not differ overly during the Vendel age and early Viking Age, and shows only two major variants of female dress, namely the type of cape or coat worn over an undershirt and the long, decorated or vertically folded skirt worn between. The cape is richly patterned in most cases and held together at the neck with a large button-bow fibula (*rygknapp* fibula) and cut round to a point at no lower than knee height in the back. The alternative - usually shown with the vertically folded dress skirt - is a full length coat that leaves the dress visible in the front, but otherwise goes down straight or in a very slight curve to reach floor length at the sides, thus covering the women's backs completely all the way to the floor, and can be found on Norwegian as well as Danish guldgubber (such as those from Lundeberg<sup>10</sup>).

A close investigation in regional variants and chronological distribution of guldgubber with the varying dress style<sup>11</sup> makes it very unlikely that the differences in dress show a difference in regional fashion. The question whether we are dealing with a different style of dress for different social occasion also has to remain open, although the long coat appears without exception on Norwegian and Danish double gubber, but the incidence on single female figures in Sweden and the occurrence of the short cape on Swedish double gubber show that there is no simple answer here either. The relation of dress style to attribute and context also remains inconclusive; the female bearers of horns can be dressed in either way, as can be the women who are depicted in the company of men. On the other hand, women without any attributes

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Lund 1998 (= Acta Archaeologica Lundensia Ser. In 8<sup>o</sup>. No. 27.), 27.

<sup>8</sup> Gaimster 26.

<sup>9</sup> Shetelig & Olsen 112.

<sup>10</sup> Henrik Thrane: Guld, guder og godtfolk - et magtcentrum fra jernalderen ved Gudme og Lundeberg. København 1993, 54.

<sup>11</sup> Rudolf Simek: The iconography of migration age deities in Scandinavia. In: The image of the female deity in the first millennium. Studies in Memory of Lotte Motz, Vienna 2001, in print.

whatsoever, like some of the silver pendants from Sweden, the Norsborg pendant, the Oseberg tapestry and the stylistically different *en face*-female figure-pendant from Hagebyhöga, Östergötland in Sweden<sup>12</sup>, all show the long coat with the points at the side and the somewhat shorter back. Are only these real, alive women? Are all the other, especially the caped women, mythological figures? I have my doubts about such a simplification, but maybe we can conclude (from the Oseberg tapestry) at least that the sideways pointed coat over a trained dress was indeed a formal dress of real women in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> century, even though it may, of course, be applied to mythological figures, too.

A further category of distinction mentioned above was by attribute. This proves an astonishingly poor field when investigating female representations of the Migration Age, as the only implements to be found are the horn, usually carried as if full, and only once held with the opening downwards<sup>13</sup>. The only other attribute is extremely rare, namely a type of a plant-like object born by the woman in question.

But why were females wearing what seems to be quite secular types of dresses shown on pendants, brooches, and rather luxurious implements at all? Whilst the *guldgubber* may be explained with their possible function as sacrificial payment and the figures depicted on them as humans, dedicating these metal pictures, the other silver figures and implements defy such interpretation. In most cases where we have figures of men depicted or shaped from precious metal, they are clearly distinguished by attributes: cap and phallus, one-eyedness, a cryptic tool, and in most cases they seem to have been used as amulets. The female silver figures from Sweden and Öland, on the other hand, were either of unknown function or could serve as brooches. But who would make, carry, wear or display such a figure if it was a case of a human female only? On the other hand, they were not used in the same amulett-function as the male divine statues. It is therefore possible that even if they were not divine, these figures were at least semi-divine. But who were they?

Karl Hauck, when he started to work on gold-bracteates several decades ago, was certainly choosing his words carefully when he, for lack of a more distinct name, called the main god of the bracteates simply "He". I would like to follow this useful tradition and call the female depicted on the *gubber*, on silver implements, and possibly in the mythological context of the Gotland picture stones simply "She". This does not extend to all depiction of females, as the Oseberg tapestry quite clearly shows human figures of both sexes. I also don't imply that She is always the same one.

"She" is depicted, when shown alone on *guldgubber* anywhere, a long rich

<sup>12</sup> Wilhelm Holmqvist: The dancing gods. In: Acta archaeologica 31 (1961), 101-127, fig.26.

<sup>13</sup> Margarete Watt: Kings or Gods? Iconographic Evidence from Scandinavian Gold Foil Figures. In: The making of Kingdoms. Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History 10. Oxford 1999, 173-183.

dress with an ornate short cape and a major brooch at the neck (cf. Sylten, Ibsker, Denmark<sup>14</sup>). She may, when dressed that way, proudly wear a heavy chain (Tuna, Uppland<sup>15</sup>) or bear a horn (Hjorthammar, Blekinge, and Birka<sup>16</sup>). She may even, as on a single example from Helgö<sup>17</sup> stand close up to a man on one of the double gubber.

In other cases, She is differently, but also richly dressed. On the silver figure from Sibble (Grödinge, Södermannland<sup>18</sup>) She wears the sideways pointed coat, which is decorated, and her richly patterned dress underneath has a train and this trained dress figures also on the above mentioned two silver pendants from Birka and one from Klinta on Öland<sup>19</sup>. On one of the two only *en face*-pictures we have of Her, on a guldgubbe from Sorte Muld, she wears a very rich cape and dress and seems to be holding a horn, but sideways and mouth downwards. On the other example, the named silver pendant from Hagebyhöga, Östergötland, She is richly dressed, seems to be enthroned on a silver ring and wears a quadruple necklace and a big fibula at her neck to hold her sideways pointed coat.

She is not a woman of simple and cheap taste. She does, however, like to appear in different shapes, dresses, coats or capes, either with or without necklaces, fibulae, or horns. It is thus hard to say if She is always the same woman.

We may distinguish, in a more systematic iconography of the females on guldgubber, between the following:

- She -A1: Dress, coat, no attribute
- She -A2: Dress, cape, no attribute
- She -B1: Dress, coat, horn
- She -B2: Dress, cape, horn
- She -C: Dress, coat, 2<sup>nd</sup> woman
- She -D1: Shift and coat, together with a man
- She -D2: Shift and cape, together with a man
- She -E: Dress, with any other attribute.

When trying to explain what a single women on guldgubber and on silverfigures, women on double gubber and those horn-bearing women actually signify, I shall try to exemplify my thoughts with groups B and D only and, in doing so, limit myself to three case studies.

I think that the females on the double gubber (D1 and D2) are the ones

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<sup>14</sup> Holmqvist, *Dancing Gods*, Fig. 28.

<sup>15</sup> Holmqvist, *Dancing Gods*, Fig. 23

<sup>16</sup> Holmqvist, *Dancing Gods*, Fig. 25 and 19.

<sup>17</sup> Holmqvist, *Dancing Gods*, Fig. 1.

<sup>18</sup> Holmqvist, *Dancing Gods*, Fig. 24.

<sup>19</sup> Holmqvist, *Dancing Gods*, Fig. 22.

easiest to interpret, and this is the first one of my three case studies; we may safely pass over Holmqvist's interpretation of dancing scenes, as the figures seem totally static, as opposed to the cut out figures and some single gubber of men from Bornholm, which portray the act of movement in dance quite vividly. On the other hand, I agree with Holmqvist in the observation that "The men and women which occur together on the plaques were, as far as can be seen, portrayed with unexceptionable modesty. In most cases both persons are clad in showy, ceremonial attire and it is doubtful if they can even as much as kiss each other, as several of them keep a short but respectful distance apart. They have their arms about each other's waist or shoulder, indeed now and then it would actually seem that with one hand the woman is caressing the man's chin; but there is no erotic or bacchanalian intoxication about these scenes"<sup>20</sup>.

Indeed, there isn't. Rather, these people make a very serious impression despite their festive attire, which in my opinion points far less to a scene of dancing but much rather towards a ceremony, a scene of marriage, which would not be the bacchanalian scene of unleashed sexual desires as some historians seem to picture it for archaic society, but rather what marriage was in the early Middle Ages: a serious contract between not only man and woman but also two families with major economical, political and dynastic consequences, whatever the social class. This was no occasion for frolics, but at the decisive moment an occasion for asking divine assistance with the contract, whatever festivities took place afterwards.

Is it therefore clear that the different positions of hands<sup>21</sup> are not incidental. Apart from sometimes obviously holding each other round the middle and by the shoulders - thus perhaps embracing or hugging - the couples on the double gubber hold each other by the lower arms, sometimes even by the front of the rich coats they wear. These are by no means dancing gestures, but rather legal gestures of taking into possession and into care. The central point in early Germanic marriage of the early and high Middle Ages was that the husband took the wife into his munt, by which both his family, his care and his jurisdiction are meant. From that moment onwards, he is his wife's only legal representative. I think it is fairly safe to interpret at least those gestures in such a legal way, although even the embrace may have some legal background, although I cannot prove this.

The same gesture as shown on some of the guldgubber is still shown on illustrations in a 13th century manuscript of the German *Sachsenspiegel*, a legal codification of Germanic laws, albeit with its Christian continuation. But the conservative nature of legal gestures allows us to assume that especially the secular aspect of the church wedding was symbolised by this gesture, whilst the exchange of the rings stands for the religious aspect of the same ceremony.

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<sup>20</sup> Holmqvist, *Dancing Gods*, 108.

<sup>21</sup> Watt, *Kings or Gods*.

I should stress the fact that I see the pictures on these double gubber not primarily as a mythological marriage, but if anything the mythological equivalent of the earthly marriage, and more likely, simply a dynastic wedding of some importance.<sup>22</sup>

Of the mythological marriages we have the rather loose marriage between Odin and Frigg to talk of, possibly not an ideal examples for a marriage in this life, and Thors well-balanced marriage with Sif as well as the rather unlucky one between Njörðr and Skaði. The much quoted union between Freyr and Gerðr, as described in *Skírnismál* and misinterpreted by Snorri is not a marriage, but an attempt at rape, and *Skírnismál* does not even state the consumption of it, so that this scene can be discarded as a marriage once and for all.<sup>23</sup> Thus, of all the mythical marriages only the one between Thor and Sif, and, although far less likely, Odin and Frigg could be seen as role-models for actual earthly marriages.

In fact, if we list the instances where marriages between mythological figures are mentioned in the Eddas and other literary source texts, the most frequently named are Thor's marriage to Sif (Gylf 30; Skaldsk 4, 14, 27; Hym 3, 15, 34, Harb 48; Þrk 24, and Skaldic Poetry) and, surprisingly enough, the marriage between Odin and Frigg (SnE Prol; Grm Pr. 1; Yng 3; Saxo Gesta Danorum I, 25f and Paulus Diaconus, Hist. Lang.), which was already mentioned in the 8th century. Thus, Odin, the greatest womanizer among the gods, is also the one in the best known marriage. Otherwise it is Óðr and Freyja, who are mentioned repeatedly (Vsp 25; Hym 47; Grm 14; Gylf 35) and have like Njörðr and Skaði (Grm; Gylf 22; Skaldsk 1) some claims to ancienité, whilst Freyr and Freyja as well as Skjöldr and Gefjon are only mentioned by Snorri.

It is therefore absurd to associate, of all things, the so-called marriage of Freyr and Gerðr that is only mentioned once by Snorri as archetypal for the heathen marriage rite. If we are looking for a mythological model, it is far more likely that the solid marriages of Thor or perhaps Odin served as a role model rather than a rape or possibly shot-gun marriage like Freyr's.

My second case study concerns the horn-bearing women.

Iconographical images of women with a horn have, in almost all handbooks, been identified as valkyries. This seems to be solely based on the fact that women with horns in their hands are not only to be found on Danish and Swedish guldgubber, pendants, and brooches, but also on some of the Gotland picture stones. Here, they are shown to offer a horn, filled with drink, we assume, to the rider of the 8-legged horse, who may either be interpreted as

<sup>22</sup> We may possibly draw a parallel to a tradition which still continues today with the minting of celebratory coins to mark special occasions.

<sup>23</sup> Rudolf Simek: Lust, Sex and Domination. *Skírnismál* and the Foundation of the Norwegian Kingdom. In: Sagnaheimur. Festschrift Hermann Pálsson. Vienna 2001 (in print).

Odin or as a dead warrior arriving at Valhöll on Odin's horse. Snorri Sturluson does indeed talk of valkyries offering the slain arriving in Valhöll a drink of mead (Gylf 38) and he bases his description of Valhöll on the Eddic *Grímnismál* (25 and 36) as well as two 10th century skaldic poems, namely *Eiríksmál* and Eyvind's *Hákonarmál*<sup>24</sup>.

While the similarity between the horn-bearing women on pendants, gubber, and Gotland picture stones may be striking, the interpretation as valkyries is by no means as obvious as that. Germanic mythological and heroic literature is full of women offering drinks in horns, and the examples are not even limited to Germanic literature alone. It is therefore necessary to categorize the occurrences of mead-proffering ladies further.

1. As shown above, Snorri (Gylf 38, based on Grm 25 and 36), talks of the valkyries offering mead to the *einherjar*. In fact, Grm 36 only mentions a group of women, most likely valkyries, doing this, whereas Grm 25 talks only about the provenience of the mead (from the udders of the cow Heiðrun). *Eiríksmál* und *Hákonarmál* do not mention any mead being offered, so that the only apparent source for Snorri's assumption must have been *Grímnismál*.
2. In *Skírnismál*, Gerðr offers Skírnir a cup of mead when she finally has to give in to his threats: *ok tak við hrímkálki, fullom forns miaðar!* "Accept this frosty (?) cup of ancient mead", she says, as a sign of finally bowing to his bullying. This gesture of peace - albeit forced upon her - is quoted in *Lokasenna* 53, where Sif offers Loki a cup in exactly the same words, but is instantly demasked as having committed adultery with him. Therefore both cases have an underlying sexual connotation, even though the gesture is overtly one of peace-offering.<sup>25</sup>
3. The similarity of offering Peace with a cup of mead in *Skírnismál* and *Lokasenna* on one hand and *Beowulf* on the other has been noted before, both by Magnus Olsen and Carol Clover.<sup>26</sup> Whether the peace offering by queen Wealhðeow (*Beowulf* v. 624b) to Beowulf is really to be seen in the context of the two young Eddic Poems, or rather with other mead-offerings in *Beowulf* must remain open for the time being. However, James Enright has shown in a couple of publications that the serving of mead to the heroes

<sup>24</sup> Klaus von See: Zwei eddische Preislieder: *Eiríksmál* und *Hákonarmál*, In: Festgabe U. Pretzel. Berlin 1963, 107-117; Edith Marold: Das Walhallbild in den *Eiríksmál* und *Hákonarmál*, In: *Medieval Scandinavia* 5 (1972), 19-33; Tor Ulset: Merknader til en del skaldedikt, Oslo 1975; Joseph Harris: *Eiríksmál* and *Hákonarmál*, In: *Dictionary of the Middle Ages* 4, New York 1984, 414-415.

<sup>25</sup> Karl Hauck: Die bremische Überlieferung zur Götter-Dreiheit Altuppsalas und die bornholmischen Goldfolien aus Sorte Muld (Zur Ikonologie der Goldbrakteaten, LII) In: *FmSt* 27 (1993), 409 - 479: 429.

<sup>26</sup> Magnus Olsen: *Edda- og skaldekvad II. Lokasenna*, Oslo 1960, 54ff, and Carol J. Clover: The Germanic context of the Unfer\_ episode, In: *Speculum* 55 (1980), 444-468: 465f N. 72.

has an important function in the linking of the Germanic comitatus to their lord, in this case via their queen.<sup>27</sup>

4. Many Old Norse prose texts show the offering of drinks by women at a feast in a more or less secular setting: the men are simply being served by the women of the household, just as they could be served by servants. It should be noted, however, that this secular setting does not provide a single example of women serving mead in horns, it is usually beer or ale if a drink is mentioned. An investigation in any functional difference between the two possible settings 3 and 4 is still lacking
5. There is yet another literary reference to horn-bearing women, namely in Saxo Grammaticus, when he talks about the Rugian cult of the Slavonic god Sventovit (Svanovit) (*Gesta Danorum*, XIV, 39), which is used to predict the fortune of the new season - we would say, *ár ok friðr*, by pouring wine into a horn which a four-faced stone idol held: if it remained full over night, it would be a good harvest. Both William of Malmesbury (*Gesta Regum Anglorum*, II, XII; written before 1143) and later, Helinand de Froidmont (*Chronicon*), refer to a similar cult of the (Polish) tribe of the Vindelici, who, they say, worship the goddess Fortuna, who has a horn in her hand which they fill with a beverage made from honey and water and called *hydromelium* by the Greeks, i.e., mead. Otherwise he describes the ceremony in a very similar way to Saxo, namely that the full horn symbolizes a fruitful year, an empty one a bad year. Thus, the horn in the hand of this Slavonic deity can be interpreted as the horn of plenty.<sup>28</sup> These references seem to refer to a Slavonic four-faced idol with a horn that belongs to a much larger and well known type of idol, to be found in Slavonic, Baltic and northern Turkish areas and normally known as Baba-stones. These full-size stone idols are characterized by one or more attributes, among which there is, however, always a drinking horn. In addition, there are several examples of stone statues of a Slavonic goddess called Sviatovid (e.g. the statue from Zbruch<sup>29</sup>), which is sometimes shown as male, sometimes as a female deity.

Whilst one should not fall into the trap of equating the Slavonic representations with the Germanic ones - because related representations need not reflect related ideas - the similarities help us to look at the horn-bearing women from a

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<sup>27</sup> Michael J. Enright: Lady with a Mead Cup. Ritual, Group Cohesion and Hierarchy in the Germanic Warband. In: *FmSt* 22 (1988), 170-203; Michael J. Enright: Lady with a Mead Cup. Ritual, Prophecy and Lordship in the European Warband from la Tène to the Viking Age. Dublin 1996, part. 2-37 and 69-96.

<sup>28</sup> Slupecki, Leszek Pawel and Roman Zaroff: William of Malmesbury on Pagan Slavic Oracles: New Sources for Slavonic Paganism and its two Interpretations. In: *Studia Mythologica Slavica* 2 (1999), 9-20.

<sup>29</sup> Slupecki, Leszek Pawel: Slavonic pagan sanctuaries, Warszawa 1994, 215ff.

different perspective: they probably should not be totally separated from cupbearing males in contemporary iconography. However, it must be noted that the consistent distinction between males holding cups of a particular type, namely the *Sturzbecher*-type glasses of Franconian origin, and females who always bear horns, might very well suggest a similar difference in the type of liquid contained or else that a completely different meaning is attributable to the scenes.

My third set of considerations concerns the differences and the similarities in the iconography of women in the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup> century.

I have claimed that there may be a correspondance between the actual dress of the day and the women on the *guldgubber* and pendants, but whether that is the case or not, it is obvious that there are significant distinctions, which are only partly attributable to regional variation, whilst chronological development seems to have played very little role between 600 and 800 or even 900 A.D. Therefore, the distinctions in the iconography may point either to a variety of functions of one person or to a variety of persons actually depicted.

If we assume, as has been done in the past, that the *guldgubber* play a cultic role of some sort, whereby the double *gubber* are seen to have a cultic role especially in marriage ceremonies, then their relative rarity suggests that this was only the case in places of affluence. So, looking at marriages, we may only be talking of dynastically important marriages, and then the role of the few single *gubber* with depictions of Her may be seen in a similar light. We know from Snorri's descriptions that he understood some minor goddesses (whom he lists among the *asynjur* but who are far from that), namely Lof, Sjófn (Gylf 34) and perhaps Vár (Prk 30) to be in charge of love and marriage, just as was the case with the 4<sup>th</sup> century Germanic Goddess Hæva who was venerated on the lower Rhine. Her name is cognate to \*hiwan "marry". These deities, like their predecessors from the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries, the *matronae*, one could not call *asynjur* of the same standing as Freyja or Frigg. Rather, they were helping female deities which were in the north might have been identified with the *dísir*. In Old High German, where we hear about their function in times of war in the First Merseburg charm, they were called *idisi*; they bound fetters, they hemmed the enemies' progress, and they helped prisoners of war to escape. I cannot go here into the functions and sources for the *dísir*, this has already been done, if to date albeit not sufficiently. Let me just say that when She was venerated, depicted, or called upon, this was in the early Middle Ages not only a matter of the female domain, but rather a family domain. It should be noted that, with the many hundreds of altars erected by members of the Germanic tribes in the second to fourth centuries A.D. inside the Roman empire to the mother goddesses "pro se et suis", that is to say, for themselves and their families, every single dedicant was a man.

Whenever She was venerated or a sacrificial gift made to Her, in whatever form She took, and for whatever purpose this gift was made, it was certainly not

only women who venerated her. It was men and women together, and to ascribe their veneration to the female sphere alone is to mistake grossly the social situation of the younger Iron Age in Northern Europe. However, I think it fairly safe to conclude from what we have seen, namely a wide variety of representations and iconographical realisations, that She is not the Great Goddess of the North<sup>30</sup>, as she has been called, if there was such a thing, but rather one of the many manifestations of minor deities which were later in ON called the *dísir*.

Thus, I may sum up and formulate three conclusions:

1. Double gubber represent the legal-ritual aspect of marriage, whether the couple depicted is human, semi-human or divine. If the scene has indeed to be related to a divine union, the only possible ones are the marriages between Thor and Sif or the somewhat liberal marriage between Odin and Frigg, and not one of the other ill-fated marriages from Eddic mythology and certainly not the supposed union between Freyr and Gerðr.
2. Horn-bearing women can be interpreted in a whole series of ways, and the interpretation as valkyries is the least likely: rich dress, rich jewellery and a matron-like appearance make it most likely that “She” is either the lady of the hall, either in her secular or divine appearance, or else a Nordic goddess of fortune and plenty, which might be loosely associated with the *dísir*, the older Rhenian matronae and the Slavonic manifestations of Fortuna.
3. As becomes clear from conclusions 1 and 2, that when we are confronted with HER, these are not manifestations of the Great Goddess, but rather of a wealth of female deities or semi-deities. Just as Christian female iconography does not (only) centre on the Virgin Mary despite her importance in mythology and cult, but also on a wide variety of female saints for different purposes and personal needs, the heathen iconography shows a wide variety of female deities, even in such a limited area as southern Scandinavia in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries, let alone in the wider context.

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<sup>30</sup> cf. Britt-Mari Näsström: Freya. The Great Goddess of the North, Lund 1995.