

Ēode þā tō setle – Female Leadership in Iron Age Uppåkra

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Abstract

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In the Uppåkra house the place for a possible high seat dedicated to the woman is marked out by a deposit consisting of a bronze beaker with embossed gold-foil bands and a glass bowl originated from the area around the Black Sea. These objects acted as props in the drinking ceremonies and social activities involving gift giving carried out by the queen or the lady of the house. The exclusive nature of these objects as well as the functions in which they were used by the woman illuminate her importance in the aristocratic hall and grant her a similar seat, as can be identified depicted on some of the Gotlandic picture stones. In the written sources several female characters can be identified, and it is plausible that the women in Iron Age society, especially the lady/queen, did uphold some if not all of these. Some of the female aspects found in the written accounts include the provocative *Hetzerin* or valkyrie, the sorcery-working *völva* and the divinatory norn. Through these abilities the lady and/or queen acted as an advisor and a mediator between the king and his retinue of warriors and as such could influence the course of action. This intermediate relationship between male and female roles as earthly equivalents to Odin and Freyja is essential to the interpretation of the Uppåkra house as well as the high seat dedicated to the woman. Erika Rosengren, *Lunds Universitets Historiska Museum, Box 117, SE-221 00 Lund*.

Introduction

The verse from the Old English epic poem *Beowulf*, cited in the title of this article, can in modern English be interpreted as “So she went to the high seat” (*Beowulf* v. 1232). On the basis of this poem, Lönnroth believes that the consort of the king had her own place in the king’s hall, the *undvegi* opposite the high seat of the king (Lönnroth 1997, p. 34). In the special house found in Uppåkra, it is my opinion that this place is marked by the deposit of a bronze beaker with embossed gold-foil bands and a glass bowl originating from the area around the Black Sea (for a more thorough account of the objects see Hårdh 2004 and Stjernquist 2004).

Based on the exclusive nature of these two objects, the drinking ceremonies of which the beaker and the bowl formed a part were probably important elements in the ceremonial activities in the Uppåkra house. In the written sources these drinking rituals are performed by women, in the aristocratic context preferably by the lady of the house or the queen. These grant her a central role within the hall which makes her deserve a place of her own – a high seat of her own – for several reasons, which will be outlined below.

According to Enright, few studies of the Germanic warband have concentrated on illuminating the relationships between the king, the queen and the *comitatus*, i.e. the retinue of warriors loyal to the king. The surveys that

have discussed the role of the queen have mainly dealt with her domestic activities or the influence over the intrigues within the court and hence she was not assumed to have any functions in connection with the warrior retinue tied to the leader (Enright 1996, p. 2). However, in recent years the interest in the importance of the woman in Iron Age society in this and similar aspects has grown (Söderberg 2005, p. 179). This opens up for a discussion dealing with the versatile role of the lady/queen in the hall.

The question of whether the deposit with the beaker and the bowl may mark out the site of a possible high seat dedicated to the woman is essential for the present study. Other types of finds will also be treated as arguments for the existence of this seat. In order to answer these questions the interpretation will be conducted in analogy with archaeological equivalents to the building and its finds, as well as the statements in the written sources describing rituals where different kinds of drinking vessels were used. In most cases the drinking ceremonies as described in the written sources are carried out in connection with festive activities in the aristocratic hall, which presupposes that the house in Uppåkra should be interpreted as a hall building in order to make comparisons relevant. However, one must consider that the social circumstances then and now resulted in different ways of living and development.

We cannot approach the Old Norse culture or religion with the help of any type of source without a healthy amount of source criticism. For example, the written material is principally made up of what Hultgård calls indirect sources, where the Old Norse religion has been described by persons belonging to a different social context (Hultgård 1996). Although they are believed to derive from a comparatively late date it has been argued that the content originates from orally narrated originals from pre-Christian time (Enright 1996, p. 69; Lönnroth 1997, pp. 31 f.).

It should also be pointed out about the use of these sources that different translations of the early texts often provide very different images of the content that is mediated.

Description of the Uppåkra house

The Uppåkra house was 13.5 × 6 m (Fig. 1), in other words it covered an area of barely 80 m², and it is the primary reason why some scholars think it unlikely that the building had the same functions as the great festive halls of the literary sources (see e.g. Lenntorp & Lindell 2001, pp. 46 f.). However, it should be emphasized that the size of the ground area of the Uppåkra house is compatible with the large banquet halls in the hall buildings in, for example, Borg (Lofoten, Norway) and Järrestad (Scania) which measure only 14 × 8 m and 16 × 7 m respectively (Stamsø Munch 1991, pp. 324 ff.; Söderberg 2003, p. 296, fig. 8). Furthermore, the evidence indicates that the building in Uppåkra was constructed as a tall timbered house, the long side walls, for example, were curved, a measure intended to stabilize the walls (Herschend 1998, pp. 42 f.). Even the disproportionately large post-holes of the final phase (house 2) of the use of the building, which is believed to have contained a set of roof-supporting posts reaching 5–6 m above floor level, support this conclusion (Larsson & Lenntorp 2004, p. 30).

Besides, the house fulfils several of Her-



Fig. 1. A plan of the Uppåkra house with the find of the beaker and bowl marked.

schend's criteria for identifying halls. For example, it is made up of a single room with a minimal amount of roof-supporting posts, the placing of the building within the area of the settlement is prominent, the building's hearth was not used for cooking, and to that one may add that the finds from the building distinguish themselves from the ones found in more everyday houses within the settlement (Herschend 1998, p. 16). That it is a high-status building is demonstrated by the exclusive objects, some of which are imported, that have been found in the house. It should, on the other hand, be pointed out that it can be problematic to set up to rigid guidelines for the design of these halls when in some respects they were seen as ways to express the unique preferences, the social status and the needs of the "owner" or the leading family (Herschend 1998, p. 37; Söderberg 2005, p. 108).

Nevertheless, the traditional ideals determining the design of the hall resemble the principles for how Iron Age houses were constructed in general, both in the division of rooms and the number of entrances. It was the custom, for example, to have one entrance room and in some cases even comparatively small halls were equipped with several doors, connected with difference in status (Herschend 1998, p. 37). According to Herschend it is possible in the archaeological material to follow the development of the hall from a smaller building with a simple plan, made up of a single room, to a much larger hall building containing several rooms. This larger building, he believes, is partly the result of the elite outgrowing the old hall building (Herschend 2001, p. 40).

Although the house in Uppåkra was rebuilt on several occasions, the same design was maintained with only insignificant changes (Larsson & Lenntorp 2004, p. 18). It was unusual for a house to be reconstructed on exactly the same site as its predecessors in the Iron Age, and the considerable continuity of

the Uppåkra house (from the Roman Iron Age to the beginning of the Viking Age) is thus a powerful argument for the interpretation of the building as a hall (see e.g. Andersson 2001, p. 72). During phase 15 (late Roman Iron Age) a number of ember pits surrounded the central hearth on three sides (Larsson & Lenntorp 2004, fig. 13), making it possible to conclude that the tradition of the use of high seats probably was not introduced into the Uppåkra house until the end of the Roman Iron Age or the beginning of the Migration Period. It is thereby likely that the house was used as a hall during the Migration Period at least, and presumably even longer. Enright, for example, has placed the main extent of the tradition of drinking rituals in the Migration and Vendel Periods based on the amount of drinking vessels recovered from female high-status graves dated to these periods (Enright 1996, p. 128).

According to Larsson the limited area occupied by the building could have been sufficient to serve as a place of assembly for the leading stratum of the estimated population in the community at least during the early Iron Age. Ten or so people could easily have gathered in the house. In the late Iron Age, in contrast, he believes that the house was probably too small for these purposes but emphasizes that it was still used and maintained in its original size (Larsson 2005, p. 118).

The beaker and glass bowl were probably deposited in phase 12, but due to uncertainties connected with the excavation, the deposit can with some degree of certainty only be placed in phase 14 (pers. com. Karl-Magnus Lenntorp, 2006). The objects thereby probably fell out of use during the Migration Period while the house was still being utilized (Larsson & Lenntorp 2004, pp. 6 f., 14). Larsson and Lenntorp place a male high seat (*hásæti*) close to the northern long side of the inner room, not far from the north-western post in the Uppåkra house (Larsson & Lenntorp

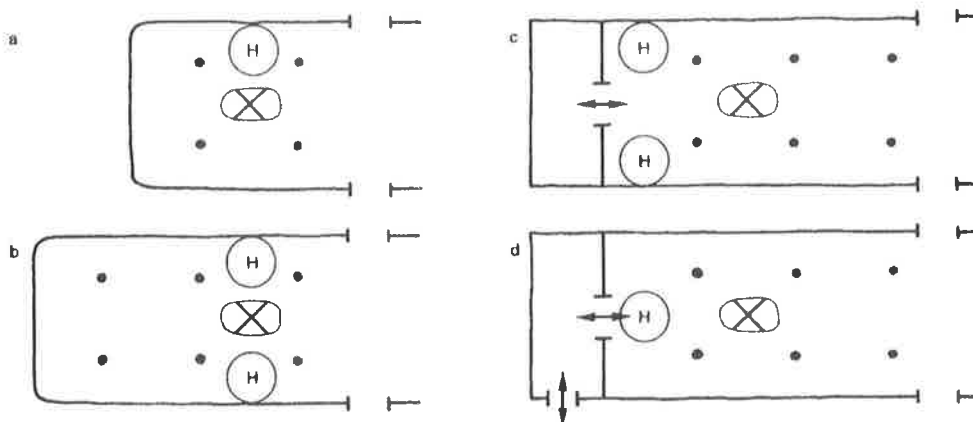


Fig. 2. The placing of the high seat and the *undvegi* according to Herschend (1998, p. 29, fig. 9).

2004, p. 35). This placing corresponds well with where Herschend places the high seat in the hall building in the Iron Age, but he in turn also indicates the place of the possible “opposite chair” (*undvegi*), also called “the lesser seat” (Fig. 2) (Herschend 1997, p. 51; Sundqvist 2000, p. 81). The distribution of finds in the supposed hall in Vallhagar as well as the scene on a picture stone from Butle Änge No. I (Fig. 3) help to support such a combination of opposite seats, according to Herschend. On the Gotlandic picture stone from *c.* AD 700 a high seat is depicted on the right standing on a ledge, whereas the ledge on the seat on the left is missing and consequently is lower (Herschend 1998, pp. 25 f. and works cited there). According to Birkeli there is evidence for the high seat having a solely social and political meaning, whilst the opposite seat had both a religious and a social function which caused this seat to be abolished with the introduction of Christianity (1932, p. 36). It should, however, be pointed out that he sees the opposite seat (*undvegi*) first and foremost as an honorary seat for the farmer and does not consider the aristocracy to any great extent in his analysis. On the basis of the figures’ clothing it is possible to identify the person sitting in the high seat as a man and the figure in the left

seat (the proposed opposite seat) as a woman, and she seems to be reaching for the beaker the man is holding in his hand.

In this context it can also be said that the traces of a long-house (11 × 34 m) were found just east of the Uppåkra house. This house has been construed as a hall, primarily on the basis of its more conventional dimensions, but also because of its close vicinity to the Uppåkra house. Only a small proportion of the remnants of this house have been excavated, and because of this the interpretation should be seen as inconclusive (Lenntorp & Lindell 2001, p. 47). The metal detectors could only pick up weak indications of metal handicraft, primarily in the western end of



Fig. 3. The scene on the picture stone from Butle Änge No. I (after Herschend 1998, p. 26, fig. 6).

the area (closest to the Uppåkra house). In the central part of the building a concentration of five loom weights made of unburned clay was unearthed, which were interpreted as the remains of a collapsed loom associated with activities in the long-house (Lenntorp & Lindell 2001, p. 40).

The woman in the hall

At the western gable of the Uppåkra house a widespread layer containing bone fragments and burned stones was found. The bone material comprised nearly 22 kg and mainly consisted of the common meat-producing animals (cattle, pigs and sheep/goats) as well as a comparatively high amount of horse bones (Svensson 2004). This layer, according to Larsson, is probably the remains of several extensive banquets where the food was cooked on a paved hearth or in ovens with stone lining (Larsson 2005, p. 113). On the basis of the distribution of finds in the ship burial in Oseberg (Norway), which, according to Herschend, is a representation of the female sphere in the hall, he is able to place the kitchen in the western part of the hall. Thus he believes it to be the woman's main function to mind the kitchen in the aristocratic hall (Herschend 2001, p. 82). The lady's task was consequently to supervise the kitchen staff and their assignments rather than preparing the food herself (Fell 1986, pp. 48 f.).

Our ability to distinguish remains of sacral versus secular meals is problematic in many ways, and in this context possibly fruitless (Svensson 2004). Hultgård has stated that Old Norse sacrificial traditions integrated food and drink as the meat from the sacrificed animals was consumed (Hultgård 1996, p. 44). The affluent households probably contributed the largest and most prestigious animals at these assemblies (especially horses and cattle) as an expression of generosity (Söder-

berg 2005, p. 250). This is probably connected with food and drink being the foundation for social gift giving in Iron Age society, where a gift demanded a gift in return of equivalent value (Enright 1996, pp. 20 f.). Since several important matters probably were settled in connection with the ritual banquets, the loyalty of subordinate individuals could possibly be secured in this way.

It is plausible that the queen/lady in the role as a cultic leader (*gyðja*) took an active part in the religious activities played out in the hall (Sundqvist 2000, p. 74; Ingelman-Sundberg 2002, pp. 208 f.). Support for this view of the woman's religious role can be seen in the circumstance that women were often given the names of goddesses like Freyja, Gefion and Hlökk in combination with epithets like "of the beaker", "of the horn", "of the cup" as well as "beer", "mead" and "wine" (Enright 1996, p. 80).

Another of the royal hostess's contributions to the festivities, which is clearly shown by the aristocratic heroic poems, was probably the task of maintaining etiquette and providing splendour in the court (Damico 1984, p. 5). The personal adornment of the queen or the lady of the house does not have to constitute the only type of splendour the woman provided in the hall, since she was also responsible for the decorations of the hall in general and the setting of the table in particular. There is a description of how an aristocratic woman sets her table in the poem *Rígsþula*, and an illustration from 11th-century England shows how the table cloth could be arranged (Fell 1986, p. 144, fig. 15). It was thereby the woman's right to set the table in order to honour the house and its guests. The way she did so could reflect her opinion of her husband's status as well as the status of his friends (Enright 1996, p. 51). The table was probably, if possible, set with the decorative and precious objects which indicated high status. In addition to them being important and

valuable to their owner in themselves, they were also considered to represent wealth for the whole community (Enright 1996, pp. 49 f.). Gold represented the honour of the owner, as well as his wealth, and great honour meant influence in Iron Age society (Enright 1996; Hedeager 2002, p. 10). In this material beakers and plates were thus seen as attributes of kings and often constituted gifts to kings (Enright 1996, p. 50). When they were not being used they were stored in special storerooms together with the other riches of the household which the lady or the queen had the keys to and the responsibility for (Enright 1996, p. 49; Gräslund 2002, pp. 77 f.).

According to Larsson, the find of the glass bowl and the beaker indicates that guests were received in the Uppåkra house with a welcoming toast and other activities that involved this prop (Larsson 2005, p. 112), and the scene on the picture stone from Butle Ånge No. I undoubtedly places a woman in the opposite chair in connection with a possible beaker. Moreover, Hårdh has argued that the representations on the gold-foil bands on the beaker, like the ornamentation on for example gold bracteates and relief brooches in style I, can be connected with a female sphere (Hårdh 2004, p. 87).

In her capacity as *freðuwebbe* (peace weaver) the queen promoted solidarity and cohesion among the king and his comitatus in the royal hall. The ritual as such, according to Enright, was probably a model that can be traced back to the lady's domestic tasks in the early Germanic household, where she acted as an agent between the father, the sons and the rest of the household members. The drinking ritual probably had an important function, in order to create such an element of solidarity, in a group of society that evolved around the idea of fictitious kinship. The primary purpose of the drinking ceremonies, however, was to establish the individual leadership of the person who was served first and whose name was

mentioned first (i.e. the king). By then serving the retainers in a strictly hierarchic order she also sanctified the status of every one of the king's retainers in relation to each other (Enright 1996).

Another of the plausible obligations the queen/lady had in the hall was to distribute gifts – usually to reward some male achievement. Manifesting the importance of this task is, for example, the fact that the hall, parallel to being called *mead hall*, is also called *gift hall* (Lönnroth 1997, pp. 32 f.). Viewed in this light, it is Damico's opinion that the beaker Queen Wealhtheow gives to King Hrothgar in the description of the second banquet scene in the heroic poem *Beowulf* does not necessarily contain liquor, but the gifts she later gives to Beowulf as a reward for ridding them of the terror of the monster Grendel (Damico 1984, p. 166). Stjernquist likewise questions whether or not the bowl found in the Uppåkra house was used as a drinking vessel or possibly a vessel from which gifts were distributed. A possible parallel to such a procedure is seen in the mosaics in the church of San Apollinare Nuovo (Ravenna) from the 6th century AD, where gifts like gold and incense can be seen handed over in similar bowls (Stjernquist 2004, p. 139, fig. 30). Hence, the queen/lady performed a series of important functions in her capacity as her husband's representative (also see Enright 1996, pp. 18 ff.).

Different types of drinking ceremonies were probably also performed in connection with the sealing of oaths and agreements and were most likely an important element in sacrificial rites similar to the ones described in the written sources (for example *Hákonarmál* and *Egils saga*). Promises made in connection with the drinking had a powerful social significance. It is often promises of future bravery, among other things, made in the mead hall that are described in the written sources (Enright 1996, p. 17). In several instances the lady or the queen is described offering the

warrior the beaker, and it is therefore most likely that she had a connection to these rites. According to Enright, it could have been her assignment to remember heroic acts and sing about them (Enright 1996, p. 18). Plausible proof for such a function also exists in the Anglo-Saxon source *Maxims I*, where the queen's tasks are described as including the preserving of knowledge and giving good advice to her husband (Arrhenius 1995, p. 87). The heroic poem *Beowulf* and the description of the ideal queen in *Maxims I* can be seen as the strongest evidence for the execution of the drinking ceremonies, but a similar course of events is depicted in several sources which indicate that it was a common practice (Enright 1996, p. 7).

The complex woman

As is apparent from the previous section, the lady of the house and/or the queen probably conducted some religious and social rituals in the hall, but the importance of her presence and performance has not yet been fully accounted for. For example, it seems that the lady or the queen, at least in some cases, did not only listen passively to the men swearing oaths during the banquets; instead there are reasons to suspect that she also had the function of inciting them. An example of this behaviour is described in *Beowulf*, where Wealhtheow carries around the sanctified beaker and seems to goad Beowulf into promising to help them get rid of the beast Grendel (*Beowulf*, lines 625–640). Further, the role as instigator (*Hetzerin*) is the dominant female character in the Icelandic sagas, where the lady of the house is not the only woman upholding it. In warrior society it was up to the women (the mothers, the sisters and the wives) to praise courage and despise cowardice, demand wounds but also heal them, and in this way it was their role to value the reputation of the

men (Enright 1996, pp. 43–66).

Further evidence depicting the woman as a leading figure in the hall and as having an important role in the warrior society comes from the motifs on the gold-foil figures. The circumstances surrounding the discovery of these objects in most cases reveal that they were fastened to the posts of the high seat (for example see Lundqvist 1997, p. 94; Larsson & Lenntorp 2004, p. 23) in order to provide the posts, the hall and its master with holy power (Lönnroth 1997, p. 34). The motifs on the figure foils include beautifully dressed women holding what appear to be drinking horns, well-dressed men raising a cup or beaker in front of their faces or armed men in various positions. This type of figures has been assigned to the *prince group* (Watt 1991, p. 378). On some of the figure foils with the motif consisting of armed men, small rings can be identified which can possibly be compared to the gold ring in the reward the hero is given by the queen in *Beowulf*. This detail on the figure foils can thereby symbolize the hero or possibly a thegn, a warrior hired by the king, and thereby be seen as an additional expression of the aristocratic warrior ideology.

Gold-figure foils, with the motifs mentioned above, have been found in Uppåkra, Sorte Muld on Bornholm as well as other places in Scandinavia (Watt 2004). That the lady/queen occurs as a separate motif indicates that her function was seen as somewhat independent of her husband and his retinue of warriors. She is, however, also depicted together with a man, probably her husband due to the intimate portrayal of the scene, and previous interpretations of the motif take it as a representation of the god Frey and his wife, the giantess Gerd (see Olsen & Shetelig 1909). An alternative interpretation says that it instead could portray Freyja and her husband Óðr who should be interpreted as a variant of Odin (Ellis Davidson 1984, p. 152). This interpretation of the double motif seems

plausible since the woman in several cases seems to grasp the man's wrist, which can be seen as an expression of how Freyja taught Odin the art of *seiðr*, a skill otherwise reserved for women. Based on the aspect of aristocratic hall life as an earthly equivalent to life in Valhalla, for example, it is plausible that the rendering was also meant to depict the lady/queen who functioned as her husband's advisor through the use of predictions. That there was a close connection between Freyja and the aristocratic woman is further verified by the fact that the honorary name for wives of high-status men – *fru* – originates from the name of the goddess (Näsström 1991, p. 262). Such multivalency was not uncommon in Iron Age mythology. Odin, for example, was seen as a reflection of the warrior aristocrat, his *einberjar* as the aristocrat's retinue and Valhalla as his hall (Nordberg 2003, p. 100).

The valkyrie who serves beer at the festivities in Valhalla is another aspect that can be successfully related to the lady of the house (for examples see Damico 1984; Nordberg 2003, p. 103). This female character can be connected to Odin but also to Freyja, the most prominent of the valkyries (Damico 1984, pp. 18 f.). They are described as performing such domestic chores by Snorri Sturluson, who writes that they were assigned to set the tables in Valhalla and to serve the *einberjar* with drink (Nordberg 2003, p. 178).

The valkyrie, however, like the lady/queen, is a complex female character, as will be illustrated below. For example, it is also the valkyrie who in Old Norse heroic poetry offers the man a challenge which makes him a hero, should he succeed. It distinguishes him from others if he accepts, transforms his personality and fills him with honour (Damico 1984, p. 56). Different connections between the goading woman (*Hetzerin* or valkyrie), the sorceress (*völva*) and the prophetess (*norn*) are described in several of the written sources, for example in *Hrólfs saga kraka* and *Norna-Gests*

þátrr (Price 2002, p. 113; Nordberg 2003, p. 102). The roles were also to a varied extent associated with the use of magic (Enright 1996, p. 67). One of the most prominent examples of the affinity between the female aspects mentioned above is the grave at Oseberg, Norway. It is believed to contain the remains of a queen, and many of the objects that accompanied her indicate functions connected with *seiðr*, including two tapestries whose motifs show a close relationship with Odin and Freyja, a possible staff and seeds of cannabis. It is thus Price's opinion that this aristocratic woman possibly constitutes the "ultimate" *völva*, but that this role only represented one of many she played in Iron Age society (Price 2002, pp. 159 ff.).

In other female graves, possibly *völva* graves, from the late 9th–early 10th century, amulets in the shape of small miniature "block chairs" have been found (Price 2002, pp. 164–167). Some scholars have interpreted these as symbolic *seiðr* platforms or high seats dedicated to Odin (Price 2002, pp. 164–167; Söderberg 2005:201). In some cases pendants with so-called "valkyrie" motif were found together with the miniature chairs (Price 2002, pp. 164–167). This is a widespread motif that occurs on Gotlandic picture stones as well as fibulae from, for instance, Nygård (Bornholm) and Tissø. On the fibula from Tissø there is no doubt, according to Vang Petersen, that it portrays a valkyrie seeing that she is armed (Vang Petersen 2005, pp. 76 f., figs. 40 & 41). In Uppåkra a number of similar figures have been found, for instance a fragment of a fibula or mount from the Migration Period that depicts a female figure with a button-on-bow brooch under her chin (U2677). The motif has equivalents on the gold-figure foils and can possibly depict the lady of the house and/or Freyja with her famous jewel *Brisin-gamen*. On the reverse there are remnants of an attachment, showing that the figure may possibly have been worn as an amulet (Hårdh

2003, p. 58, fig. 9). That the motif depicting a woman holding a beaker on the gold-figure foils could represent a valkyrie is not unanimously accepted, however. Watt, for instance, presents the idea that the women with drinking horns instead portray *disir* (Watt 2004, p. 213). These were a kind of demi-goddesses and in Old Norse literature (heroic poetry) they are seen as women born in royal or heroic families. The *disir* possess supernatural powers and function as a link between humans and gods. Here, however, the valkyries also fit in and reveal a common ancestry for the two female aspects (see Damico 1984, pp. 38 ff.).

Furthermore, the small pendants in the shape of miniature chairs are to a great extent reminiscent of the block chairs depicted on the picture stones from Butle Änge No. I and Sanda. On the stone from Sanda (Fig. 4) on Gotland a man and a woman are shown sitting opposite one another. A bird (possibly a goose or a swan) stretches over the woman. Since the *völva* is often described as accompanying Odin, it is possible that it is this aspect of the woman that is represented on the stone from Sanda, for example (Price 2002, p. 167). The presence of a possible swan, however, brings to mind the female aspect of the valkyrie since she often takes the shape of a swan when she appears in animal form in the written sources (Damico 1984, p. 52). The female figures with bird heads that are found on the tapestries from the Oseberg grave likewise indicate a religious connection to the valkyrie and/or

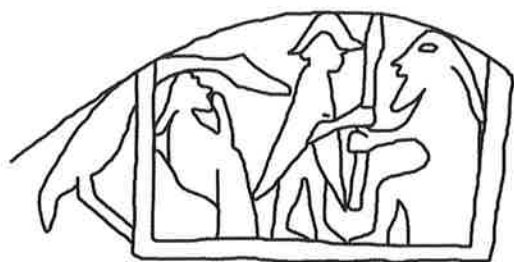


Fig. 4. The scene on the picture stone from Sanda (after Price 2002, p. 167, fig. 3.50).

the *völva* (Price 2002, p. 173, fig. 3.56).

On the stone from Sanda an additional man can be seen standing between the two sitting figures in the scene. The standing man is facing the sitting man and seems to be handing over or receiving a spear from him. The spear is one of Odin's attributes (for example see Ellis Davidson 1984, pp. 50 f.) which emphasizes the possible sacral meaning of the motif. As has been shown earlier, however, it is possible that the scene also depicts an earthly equivalent where the king or chief carries out similar activities.

As has been mentioned before, the queen or the lady seems to have possessed an ability to predict future events. For example, it is Enright's opinion that Wealhtheow possessed the capacity for divination which he identifies as a significant part of the mead-cup motif (Enright 1996, pp. 66, 126). Furthermore, Tacitus described how the Germanic people regarded their women with a specific holiness and that they possessed abilities to foretell the future which made their advice worthy of consideration (Tacitus 1960, 8:2). Since these women were believed to have prophetic skills they had a great influence on the course of events, both political and military. They were admittedly in part controlled by their warlords, who used their prophecies as political propaganda, and in the written sources it seems that gifts could influence the prophecies in a favourable direction. The same is valid when it comes to political alliances (Enright 1996, pp. 60 ff.; Price 2002, p. 114). At the same time, the warlords were dependent on the women, since they needed their predictions of victory and close connection to the gods to promote their aspirations and to raise the morale of his followers (Nordberg 2003, pp. 100 f.). The religious-political power during the late Iron Age thereby consisted of a union between the male and the female which, according to Steinsland (1990, p. 86), is particularly clearly expressed in the double-motif on the gold-foil figures.

Different kinds of tools for weaving can, according to Enright, be connected to the warp and weaving of destiny as well as the “binding” and “loosing” of spells closely associated with the valkyrie tradition. The women who used them can thereby be associated with magic and prophetic abilities in the Germanic tradition (Enright 1996, pp. 115 ff.). This interpretation could in part be the explanation why weaving tools often constitute some of the most prominent finds in excavated Iron Age halls in addition to weapons and broken drinking horns (Nordberg 2003, pp. 104 f.). The same relationship can be identified for objects associated with weaving and sewing manufactured of exclusive materials such as glass and crystal in women’s graves (for examples see Fell 1986, p. 40).

Conclusions

It is most likely the social significance of the hall that (together with the need for legitimizing) contributed to the fact that the Uppåkra house maintained the same size and design even though it probably was too small to fulfil all purposes. In spite of the changed external ideals the house was not demolished and redesigned but the existing building was instead adapted to fit them. It is thus my conviction that the house had high seats (one dedicated to the man and one to the woman) similar to the ones in more “conventional” hall buildings. For example, the central hall and the two entrance rooms constitute common elements in the design of the halls later during the Merovingian and Viking Age. The lack of everyday objects rules out that it was used in part as a living area, and the small size of the house did not allow room for a specialized kitchen either. Instead of a specific room for this purpose, the cooking was therefore done outdoors, to the west of the house’s gable, and the long-house to the east can in the same way

have been used to accommodate the owner of the hall and his family. The possibility that this house took over the role as hall when the Uppåkra house grew too small has been presented and the loom found in this house could possibly support this idea. It is my opinion, however, that *both* the continuity and the remarkable finds point to the Uppåkra house as the main building within the settlement as well as the functions it housed.

On account of the prominent role of the lady/queen as an officiator at the drinking ceremonies, where different kinds of beakers were used as props, there is a strong connection to the female sphere in the Uppåkra house due to the find of the beaker and the bowl. The significance of her function is, among other things, attested by the exclusive design of the objects. As has been mentioned earlier, the drinking and exchanging of gifts were two of the most important activities conducted in the hall, and they are both represented in the Uppåkra house by these objects – deposited within the area of a possible high seat dedicated to the woman.

Further evidence that weighs heavy in favour of such a seat in the Uppåkra house comes from the literary accounts that have been presented above, as well as the archaeological finds made within the settlement of “valkyrie pendants”, which on the basis of the close connections with the woman in the hall perhaps should also be called “lady amulets”. To what extent this welcoming cup-bearing figure on the picture stones and pendants is representative of the Old Norse religious ideas is questionable. The same goes for the implications the interpretation of the valkyrie motif as an earthly representation of Odin’s warrior maidens has for the explanation of the motif on, for example, the Gotlandic picture stones. In Nordberg’s opinion it is more likely that these figures with drinking horns depict women in the aristocratic culture than the “real” religious beliefs about the valkyries

(Nordberg 2003, p. 179). Although a review of the archaeological evidence to some degree can support the statements in the written sources, we have to conclude that it is mainly an idealized view of the activities in the hall that is described.

The lady/queen has her place in-between the leader and his retinue of warriors in the same way that the valkyries acted between Odin and his *einherjar* in the written sources. In the same way that the valkyries advanced the will of Odin, it was the lady's/queen's task to advanced the will of the king as his representative. An activity that fulfils such a function and that is shared by the two female characters is the duty to serve drink at the banquets. The earthly woman is, however, represented by several of the other female characters in the written material, for example the *Hetzerin* and *völva* (who had the capability of divination and *seiðr*), which gave her the possibility to influence her husband and the warriors in the hall.

The many conformities that have been demonstrated in the relationship between the king and his queen and Odin and Freyja lead the way to the interpretation of the Uppåkra house as dedicated to the cult of these two divinities. The relationship between male and female power that is expressed in the archaeological material is essential for the interpretation of the high seat dedicated to the woman in Uppåkra.

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