



INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDENT SYMPOSIUM ON RELIGION, IDEOLOGY AND CULTURAL PRACTICES IN THE OLD NORSE WORLD

MARCH 21ST 2014, BUILDING 1342, ROOM 455, AARHUS UNIVERSITY

- 9.00-9.10** Welcome and introduction by organiser Lisbeth H. Torfing
- 9.10-9.40** **Nikolaj Skou Haritopoulos**, Aarhus University, *The Contract of Death? – The Contractual Bond between the Hero and Óðinn as a Tutelary Deity.*
- 9.40-10.10** **Klas af Edholm**, Stockholm University, *Týr – Formations and Configurations.*
- 10.10-10.40** **Declan Taggart**, University of Aberdeen, *How Stupid Can One God Be? Þórr, Intelligence and Social Authority.*
- 10.40-11.00** Coffee break
- 11.00-11.30** **Harriet Jean Evans**, University of York, *Sleipnir Lokasonr: Conceiving a Socially-Useful Family Unit in Snorri Sturluson's Gylfaginning.*
- 11.30-12.00** **Yoav Tirosh**, University of Iceland/Aarhus University, **The Fabulous Saga of Guðmundr inn ríki – Representations of Sexuality in Ljósvetninga saga.*
- 12.00-12.30** **Carline Tromp**, University of Oslo, *Crossing Borders in Time and Space: Dreams, Time and the Underworld in Gísla saga Súrssonar.*
- 12.30-13.30** Lunch
- 13.30-14.00** **David Carillo Rangel**, University of Barcelona, *Women and Healing in the Nordic Middle Ages: Medicine, Magic and Religion.*
- 14.00-14.30** **Arngrímur Vídalín**, University of Iceland, *On the Inside Out: Centering the Peripheral Iceland in the Middle Ages.*
- 14.30-15.00** **David T. Feldman**, University of Iceland, *Frisia, Bulwark of the North: The Impact on Scandinavia's Christianization by Frisian Resistance to Conversion.*
- 15.00-15.15** Coffee break
- 15.15-15.45** **Stefan Olsson**, University of Bergen, *Peace-Processes in the Viking Age and Early Medieval Scandinavia.*
- 15.45-16.15** **Csete Katona**, University of Iceland/Aarhus University, *'Unpractical' Objects: The Concept of the King's Gift in the Old Norse World.*
- 16.30-19.00** Reception, held in Nordisk Frokoststue, Building 1485, Room 344.

All are welcome to participate in the whole programme or just parts of it. Please register by sending an email to the organising committee, studentsymposiumaarhus@gmail.com, before 18th of March. All correspondence must be in English.



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**Interdisciplinary Student Symposium on Religion, Ideology and Cultural
Practices in the Old Norse World
March 21st 2014, Aarhus University**

Csete Katona: ‘Unpractical’ objects. The concept of the *King’s Gifts* in the Old Norse world

According to Actor-Network-Theory, an object can have agency in social relations just as much as humans (Latour, 2005). In Old Norse literature, heroic weapons are well-known examples of objects being actors in the formulation of the plot (Torfing, 2012). However, they can have an important influence not solely for their mighty abilities as violent instruments, but sometimes for an unexpected reason as well: their social importance. This survey sheds light on the fact that weapons are not always handled according to their primary functional role and can act as social symbols rather than actual tools of violence. This fact is illustrated through the examination of two swords called ‘*Konungsnautr*’ in *Laxdaela saga*, which are not involved in violent actions, unlike other named weapons in the same saga. Other instances from *Egil’s saga*, *Gunnlaug’s saga* or the *Saga of Harald Fairhair* will strengthen the idea that *Laxdaela saga* is not the only example where symbolic artefacts are actors. An axe used against oxen, swords which do not kill or a cloak which is never worn all demonstrate that objects which are not used in their primary capacity have unique significance in Old Norse world. The physical nature of these artefacts is also essential to the study, so the literary sources are investigated alongside archaeological evidence (Eldjárn, 2000; Lund, 2014). This interdisciplinary research aims to develop our understanding about how were objects handled and opens up the possibility that by following non-human actors we can better perceive the function of material culture in Viking societies.



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