



CHAPTER 1

THE CHARISMATIC POWER OF OBJECTS

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For a number of years, there has been a discussion in archaeology and anthropology about agency, and whether objects have the capacity to act (e.g. Ahern 2001; Appadurai 1986; Gell 1998; Hodder 2004; Hoskins 2006; Kopytoff 1986; Steiner 2001). On the premise that objects can be perceived as actors within a common cultural space, some objects stand out as more powerful agents than others. How has such extraordinary power been understood and controlled? We will use the term ‘charismatic objects’ to distinguish objects that can arouse awe. In this view, the agency of objects depends on culture-specific cosmological ideas. Weber’s definition of charisma will be used as a tool to understand and differentiate between different forms of acting objects and their biographies. But is it, as Weber suggests, a characteristic feature of these objects that the power added to them is transferable? And is Weber’s postulate that objectified charisma must be depersonalized always the case?

Both the physical features of the object and the myths and stories surrounding it, can expand the meaning and value of an item. Cultures worldwide have individual objects that are believed to possess special powers. In this book, we will focus on some groups of objects that might have been given such power in different ways, but nevertheless within a cosmological framework, thus understanding both objects and humans as part of an animated universe.

The significance of material culture has gone unnoticed in the modern discourse of charisma, although the idea of charismatic objects is not new. The concept of charisma that has been widely discussed in sociological literature has concentrated on personal leadership. Still, Weber has described forms of charismatic power based on a belief that forces can enter an object, as well as animals and humans (Weber 1968a). In cases where this force is believed to be within a physical thing, it is no longer just another object, but a thing of great value and a possessor of an important collective narrative.

THE CONCEPT OF CHARISMA

Several scholars have pointed out that the very essence of the phenomenon charisma lies in the *extraordinary*, in the ability or power to arouse awe (Nisbet 1966; Shils 1965:200–201; Spencer 1973:342). But in line with Weber, we could also see charisma not so much as a quality of a person or an object, but as a magical, transcendental, or religious power endowed with volition: something that enters a concrete object and becomes the source of awe. In this view, the belief in such a power is the engine or foundation of charisma. In cases where the force is believed to be within a thing or object, this object becomes both powerful and dangerous.

Is charisma about controlling central parts of people's lives? It could be argued that the need to structure our understanding of the world is a general human trait. Existential questions related to understanding ourselves as beings in the world, need to be answered through a common structure or order. If so, those who are believed to create or maintain such an order have the potential to arouse awe (Shils 1965:201). Studies of

modern leadership show how great leaders work hard to articulate a vision that is sufficiently compelling to evoke attributions of greatness or charisma among their followers (Emrick *et al.* 2001:527).

Charismatic power has, on the other hand, often been seen as a power of God, or a magical power that influences human life and cosmology. As Weber sees it, charisma is

a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities.

Weber 1968b:48

According to Weber, this form of charisma occurs in periods or cultures when the attitude towards awe is conceptualized into a system of fate, as part of a world controlled by spirits, gods and demons (Spencer 1973:341). In the same kind of spiritual world, it is also possible for depersonalized forms of charisma to be transferable through blood lines, through roles or attached to an institution (Weber 1968a:1136). It is within

this concept that objectified charisma plays a key role. This objectified power can be transferred to others, and becomes a ‘depersonalized’ and thereby controllable force (Weber 1968a:1136).

In comparison to a rationalized and more abstract form of charisma, the belief in the enigmatic power of objects discloses the logic of this belief in a more genuine and possibly older manner. When studying prehistoric societies, material culture is the main contemporary source of information. The objectified type of charisma is therefore of special interest for archaeological studies.

To Martin Spencer, charisma historically occurs in two main forms, namely as supernatural and as secular charisma (Spencer 1973:341). Edward Shils, on the other hand, does not see any large difference between supernatural and secular charisma. In his view, an explanation, or an insight into creating order in existence can be made in different ways. It is, however, important that all these forms have the power to control the perception of reality. Sometimes this power is held by a man or an object that is perceived as divine or magical, other times through a person with reflective insight,

through scientific analysis or artistic expression (Shils 1965:201). This could be a fruitful approach in relation to archaeological objects. Special objects take part in various forms of human interaction: religious, secular or other kinds of interactions. They can be seen as carriers and representatives of cosmology, objects reflecting people's ways of envisioning the world and how it works.

THE ANIMATED COSMOS

The concept of social agency in objects, as formulated by Alfred Gell in his book *Art and Agency*, suggests in principle that all people 'form what are evidently social relations with things' (Gell 1998:18). He sees agency as 'attributable to those persons and things who/which are seen as initiating causal sequences of a particular type, that is, events caused by acts of mind or will or intention, rather than the mere concatenation of physical events. An agent is one who causes events to happen in their vicinity' (Gell 1998:16).

Weber's and Shils' concept of charisma, on the other hand, has the power to control the perception of reality. This implies the superiority of some objects above

others, not only to one person but to a whole group of people. This also implies that a common concept of cosmological ideas must be present to 'make the charisma work'.

The common idea that all things in the world are animated by a holy power can be found in texts from antiquity as well as from the late middle ages. Albertus Magnus was a professor at the University of Paris and Bishop of Regensburg in the early 13th century. The idea of the animated cosmos is most clearly expressed in his idea of *form*. In our modern Western worldview, we are accustomed to regarding man-made and natural objects as dead, in contrast to living things like plants. In the medieval worldview, these were not necessarily considered different things. All things, animals, plants, men, and stones were perceived as having an animated *form* with special properties and powers. A form can exist independent of a material thing, but the matter is in turn dependent on a mental form to hold together the matter. Every physical combination of matter will therefore be raw material for a form. A form in this worldview, is thus a combination of heavenly forces and of the matter that binds it together (Magnus 1967:64-65).

Still, this does not mean that all things were thought to have a soul, a much-debated issue in the 13th and 14th century.

Albertus Magnus was strongly influenced by Aristotle and his theory of causes. To him *form* was the identity of a man, an animal, or a stone (Wyckoff 1967:xxxiv). There are several examples of Greco-Roman authors who write about objects as actors. Mineralogical studies were for example concerned with the influence and properties of stones, and their ability to affect events (Plinius, *Historia Naturalis* 37). Some items even appear to be charismatic, as they were considered to have particularly powerful individual properties. Features occurring in some individual objects, and not in others, are by Aristotle called accidental properties (Wyckoff 1967:xxxiii).

We thus see a common understanding of objects as acting forces in both the Roman world and in medieval Europe. Through examples drawn from peripheral areas of Scandinavia in the period between the early and the late Middle Ages, the articles in this book show that the idea of animated objects probably also existed here, despite great differences in religion. However, this

does not mean that the same objects had the ability to awaken awe throughout this long period.

The biography of the objects seems to be an essential part of why and how objects obtain charismatic power. Memories and legends attached to them, can offer an explanation or insight into a common perception of reality. In this sense, objects can attain power through layers of histories attached to them (Gosden & Marshall 1999). This requires a common framework of understanding.

LINEAGE CHARISMA: HOW CAN CHARISMATIC POWER IN OBJECTS BE TRANSFERRED THROUGH BLOODLINES?

One of the forms of depersonalized charisma mentioned by Weber is so called «lineage charisma», transferable through bloodlines (Weber 1968a:1136–1137). In contrast to personal charisma, it is not based in an individual person, but in ‘the immortal household as property-holder’ (Weber 1968a:1136). Weber sees this form of charisma as an historical form, based on the idea that a household and a lineage group are considered magically

Figure 1. A disc-on-bow brooch from Øyer, Oppland, Norway (C716) dating to the 5th century AD. Gilded copper alloy inset with garnets. Photo: © Mårten Teigen, Museum of Cultural History, UiO.

blessed. According to Weber, this form of power gives autonomous legitimacy to the lineage group. This kind of charismatic object should in principle be possible to recognize in archaeological material. In societies where burial gifts are common, one would suppose that objects holding lineage charisma will eventually end up in a high-status grave at the end of its time of usefulness in relation to the status of the lineage group.

In her paper ‘The Immortal Brooch: The tradition of great ornamental bow brooches in Migration and Merovingian Period Norway’, Ingunn M. Røstad argues that particular types of bow brooches were set apart and treated as charismatic objects and bearers of awe-inspiring powers in the period between AD 400 and 800. The great ornamental brooches are found in graves representing the upper levels of society. Some of the brooches were several hundred years old when they finally followed their bearer into the grave. The contexts of the finds, their decoration, traces of wear and combination of materials all suggest that they functioned as devices transferring family history and myths of origin. It has been suggested by several scholars that some of these brooches might not only have functioned



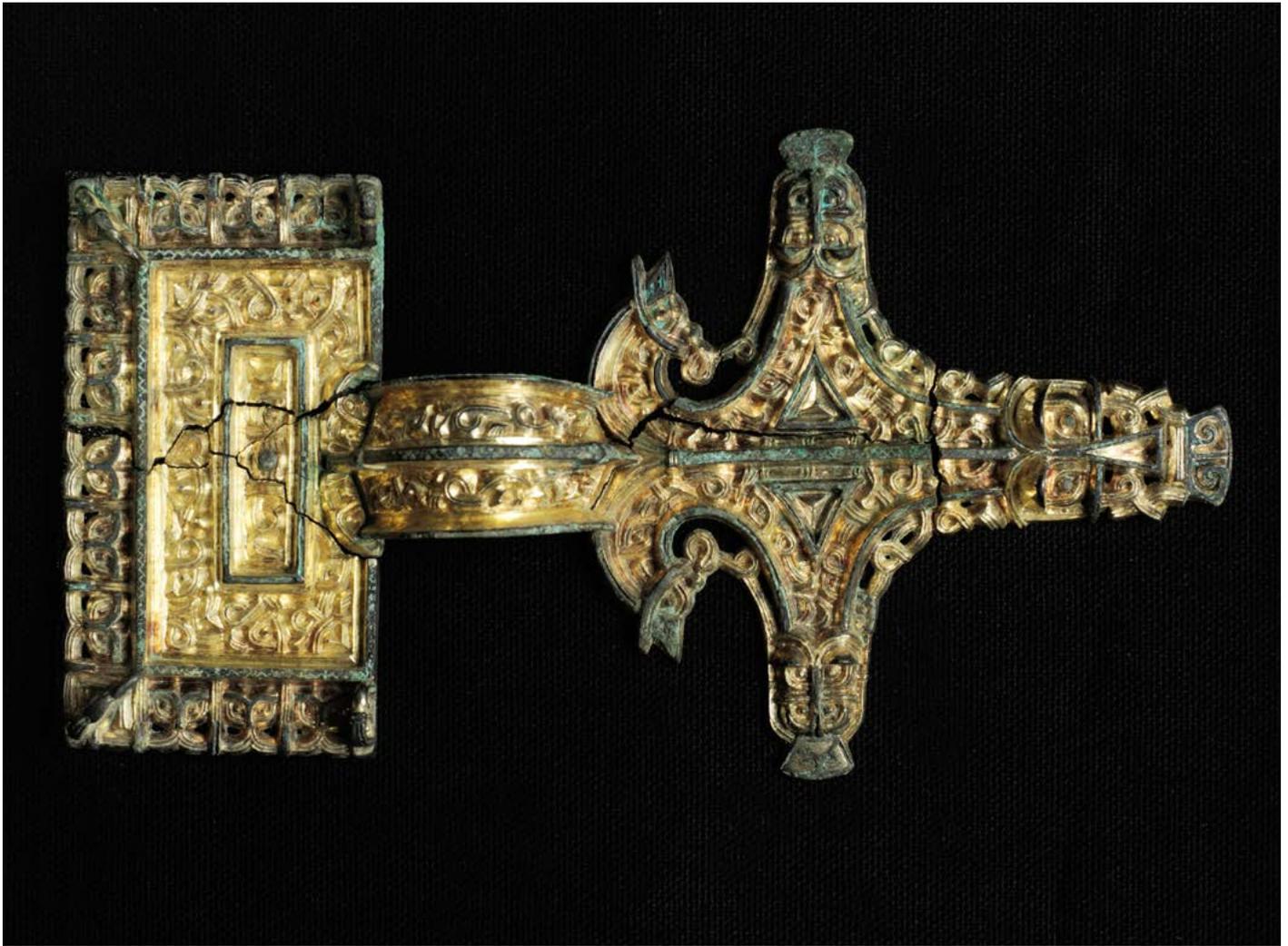


Figure 2. A large square-headed brooch from Sande, Vest-Agder in Norway (C55731/1), dating to the 6th century AD. The ornamentation, typical of the late Migration Period, shows twisted and dissolved animal bodies as well as masks. In the Museum of Cultural History Collections, UiO. Photo: © Ellen C. Holte, Museum of Cultural History, UiO.

as a symbol of the glooming jewel *Brisingamen* of the goddess *Freyja*, but that they were also worshipped as single objects (Arrhenius 1962:93,97, 2001:306; Glørstad & Røstad 2015:201). Røstad argues in this volume that their charisma was created through their history as heirlooms, as well as through their individual biographies connecting them to ancestors, heroes or Gods.

The large and costly brooches, some of them over 30 cm long, are clearly not made for daily use. According to Weber, the power of charisma grows in situations lifted out of daily life. The charismatic leader arises in times of distress, in extraordinary situations (Weber 1968b:18). When life falls back to normal, the best way for the charismatic leader to survive is by creating traditions, says Weber (1968a:1121–1122). Objects with lineage charisma offer a form of tradition that is transferable and suitable for worship. Through the creation of traditions of worship, the objects are lifted out of daily life. The function of tradition and the importance of preserving traditions involving heirlooms in Roman and Early Medieval Scandinavia have been highlighted by several scholars (Jones 2007).

THE CHARISMA OF ROLE: DRESSED IN POWER

The objectified charisma of a role or institution is well known (Weber 1968a:1136). A royal crown or the bishop's mitre have the ability to evoke awe. This depersonalized

type of charisma is in its nature transferable. The objects are designed to bear the power of the group.

Examples of garments designed to evoke awe for roles and institutions are to be found in both written and archaeological sources throughout the Middle Ages. A particularly strongly regulated system of clothing of this kind was developed in Byzantium in the 10th century. Through the Book of Ceremonies, we get to know in detail which shape, silk quality and patterns are to be used in ceremonies for different employees at the Great Office of the Emperor and in the Imperial Chamber (Piltz 1997:44; Vedeler 2014:97–101). Silk fabrics served as an important basis for power for Byzantine rulers, and one of the roles of ceremonial dress in 10th century Byzantium was to express a God-given order (Morris 2003:254). Through differentiation in the quality, color and pattern of silk, the Byzantine rulers controlled a hierarchy of awe-evoking objects. The tactile quality, all the materiality absorbable through human senses, is strictly regulated into objects that carry the charisma of a particular role. When the emperor dressed in his purple silk depicting a striding lion, an imitation of the

Divine Creator, the garment created a strong association to God's act of creation and to the written word:

And I will clothe him with thy robe, and strengthen him with thy girdle, and I will commit thy government into his hand, and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah

Isaiah 22:21

The unspoken signals of power dressing that are sensed, sometimes less consciously, have the potential of endowing such garments with great propagandistic value. In line with Terrence Turner and Jane Burns (Burns 2014), Ingrid Lunnan Nødseth argues that such unconsciously perceived sensory aspects of clothing should be seen as a 'social skin'. Through this concept, she reveals a more complex understanding of the relations between dress, power, and charisma in her paper 'The Linköping Mitre: Ecclesiastical textiles and episcopal identity'. She argues that this sensory or somatic aspect of clothing and how it communicates meaning, is particularly relevant for ecclesiastical vestments.

TRANSFERABLE POWER AND PHYSICAL TOUCH: FROM FLESH TO WRAPPING

When taking on a 'social skin', the bishop is given new power through meaningful clothing. The transaction of charisma however, can also go the other way, from the body of a charismatic leader onto an object, the charisma transferred from its human source to an objectified representative.

The belief that some body parts carry personal properties is widespread (Hallpike 1979:101). Hair, nails, and other parts of a dead body become potentially important because these things can give access to the dead person's qualities and skills (Douglas 1996). Parts of the charismatic leader's physical body can, in this view, maintain a personal charisma even after the person has died. This sentiment is expressed in the cult of relics worldwide and is the basis for the understanding of a relic as an object (Sharf 1999:78). Medieval relics must therefore be seen not just as representatives of the respective saints, they *are* the saints. Through the relics, the saints are present with their charisma.

Figure 3. The Holy robe of Trier on display at The Trier Dom Cathedral under an annuary ten-day religious feast in 2013. Photo: Stephani Schafer, PD Commons.



The charisma of the saint is not, however, only present in parts of the body. There are also examples of artefacts that are regarded as bearers of charisma only because they have had a physical relationship with a charismatic leader. Some of the relics of the Catholic Church are powerful examples of this. A robe, a shroud or a tunic that has been used by a saint can be elevated to a position of worship if the personal charisma has been strong. The charisma ‘rubs off’ on the object, which bears elements of the person’s abilities. The Catholic Church traditionally speaks about three types of relics, ranked by importance. Relics of the first class are the saint’s body or parts of the body, such as a leg or a finger. This first category also

includes the tools of Christ’s suffering, like the nails and cross. Relics of the second class are the clothes and objects that the saint carried or used in his or her lifetime. But there is also a last class of so-called *brandea* or relics of touch. The definition of these is as follows: ‘Relics of the third class consist of everything that has touched a relic of the first class’ (The Catholic Church in Norway: http://www.katolsk.no/tro/tema/helgener/artikler/relikvier_peo).

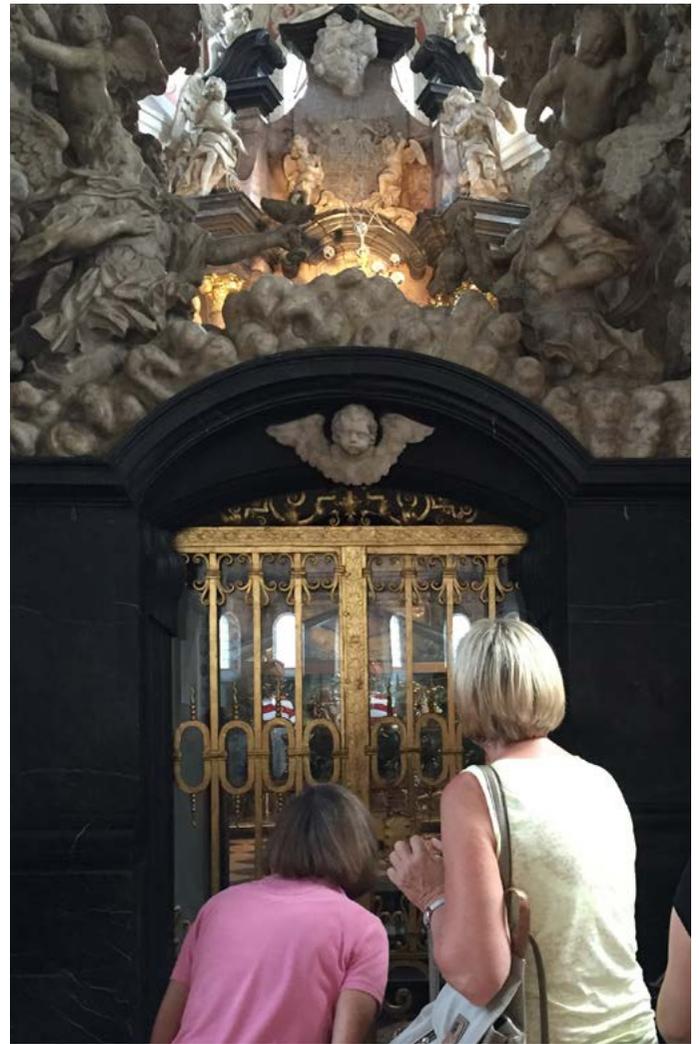
Some of the most famous relics of the first and second classes are attached to the story of the life of Christ. The Holy Robe of Trier is a relic that has been venerated from at least the 12th century up to present time. According to legend, Helena, mother of Constantine the

Figure 4. Visitors trying to get a glimpse of The Holy robe of Trier, locked up in a special room dedicated to the relic in August 2015.
Photo: © Marianne Vedeler, Museum of Cultural History, UiO.

Great, brought the seamless robe of Christ to Trier in the 4th century (Lauchert 1913; Nickell 2007). The Bible tells us that after they had crucified Jesus, four soldiers took his garments and divided them among themselves.

Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also [his] coat: now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout. They said therefore among themselves, ‘Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be: that the scripture might be fulfilled, which saith, “They parted my raiment among them, and for my vesture they did cast lots”’.

John 19:23-24



The Holy Robe of Trier is now kept in a reliquary inside a special room dedicated to the relic in the the High Cathedral of Saint Peter in Trier. An annual ten day religious feast is dedicated to celebrating the Holy Robe. The physical touch of the body of Christ at a critical moment has literally transferred some of his personal charisma to the robe.

Physical closeness between a charismatic leader and her followers is an important instrument for strengthening mental ties. Through physical touch, for example the leader's hand on a follower's head or shoulder, the charisma becomes palpable and the bond between the leader and the follower is strengthened (Immergut & Kosut 2014). The same mechanism of bonding through physical touch is active in the meeting between charismatic objects and their admirers and worshipers (Srinivas 2012; Wingfield 2010). When the mental bond strengthens through physical nearness, the importance of the object grows.

The physical contact of the charismatic leader, with the charismatic object and its followers is important. But it is equally important to control the physical distance. By lifting the charismatic object out of daily life through tradition, the object becomes elevated (Eisenstadt 1968:52). Restricted access to a charismatic object gives the object an aura of elevation and solemnity.

The Holy Robe of Trier is a good example. It is now kept in a closed reliquary inside a special room dedicated to the relic. There is no open entrance to the room, and it is not possible to see the robe when visiting the

church except for one single occasion each year. During an annual religious festival, the Holy Robe is put on display and seen by thousands of pilgrims and tourists.

Relics of the third class in the Catholic concept of relics, consist of items that have been in contact with a more powerful relic of the first class. In her paper 'Tracing Charisma: An "Anglo-Saxon workbox" from an early Viking Age burial in Norway, its Scandinavian counterparts and European context', Zanette T. Glørstad presents a group of objects that might have been perceived according to this concept, yet outside the religious sphere of Catholicism. In this case, the cosmological concept of relics goes beyond religion, spreading from Christian Europe to heathen Scandinavia in the early Middle Ages through close cultural and economic contact.

These are objects 'borrowing' charismatic power from other, more powerful objects. The concept implies that relics of the first class are capable of transferring some of their charisma to another object through physical contact.

At some point, objects related to holy persons stop being relics and become simply tokens or souvenirs. But where is the boundary? Pilgrim badges are

an interesting group of objects on the outskirts of the charismatic sphere. Are they to be seen as merely 'tokens' or symbols of a past journey, or do they represent a group of objects carrying charismatic power? In her paper 'Medieval Pilgrim Badges: Souvenirs or valuable charismatic objects?', Margrete F. Simonsen looks deeper into the custom of pilgrim badges. She argues that these objects represent valuable amulets and icons that people care for throughout their lives.

BUT IS THE POWER OF CHARISMATIC OBJECTS ALWAYS TRANSFERABLE?

A special feature of all charismatic objects, according to Weber and Spencer, is that their power is transferable (Spencer 1973:341-432; Weber 1968a:1135). By controlling the object, you also control its power. Objects can be handed over from person to person, if the transaction follows given rules. This gives the charismatic objects an extra dimension and makes them especially attractive as tools of power and control. We argue that this is the case for objects like the bishop's mitre. The great ornamental bow brooches could also be a good example,

their power being transferred through time according to strict rules relating to who had the right to use them. Røstad points out in her article that by transferring the same material object, tied to unchanged or only slightly changed legends, it is possible to create an illusion of permanence. Time changes but power remains. But is objectified charisma always transferable?

In his article 'The Death of Serpent-head Rings: Ritual destruction of elite insignia from the Roman Period' in this volume, Håkon Reiersen offers examples of objects that were most probably perceived as containing non-transferable personal charisma. He presents a small group of serpent-head rings from the 3rd century that have been deliberately destroyed before they were deposited. The destruction of serpent-head rings seems to have been a ritual practice shared within a regional network of elites in western Norway. It is reasonable to assume that the charismatic trait then would be considered destroyed together with the physical object. Reiersen argues that if the serpent rings were used as relation binders in person-dependent alliances, their power might have been related to that specific personal bond.

Relationship binders might also have existed between humans and animals in the Viking Period. Lotte Hedeager has emphasized the importance of animals in pre-Christian cosmology. In contrast to the Christian perception of man as superior to beasts, the border between humans and animals was fluid (Hedeager 2011:81). A group of objects that might have been used as relation binders in pre-Christian Scandinavia, is the varied group of horse equipment found in graves. In her paper ‘Transformative Theft of Past and Present: The human-horse bond reflected in the biography of the Viking Period Gausel bridle’, Kristin Armstrong Oma points to the important role horses played in everyday life, as well as in the sphere of mythology and religious practice. She proposes that horse equipment manifested and formed human-horse relationships, and that horses should ultimately be seen as a companion with the ability to act, emote and perform magic in human society.

In addition to the serpent-head rings from the Roman Period, there are also deliberately destroyed objects dating to the Viking Age. In her paper ‘Charisma,

Violence and Weapons: The broken swords of the Vikings’ in this volume, Hanne L. Aannestad points out that a significant number of swords dating to the Viking Age have been deliberately destroyed before they were deposited in graves. She argues that the bending, twisting and destruction of a great number of swords in Viking Age Scandinavia should be seen not only as the destruction of individual charismatic power, but as an expression of a more general idea of charismatic swords. The destruction of charismatic objects could then have served as a way of preparing them for use in the afterlife, a form of *rites des passage*, so that the rightful owner could continue to use their power in the world of the dead, thus ensuring a continued alliance.

Objects that seem to act as relationship binders between man and man, horse and man, as well as objects attached to a single person, are all to be found in graves dating to the pre-Christian period. The variety in the ways the objects are treated, shows that not all of these had charismatic power that was perceived as transferable. However, they also demonstrate the complexity of objects as charismatic actors.

Figure 5. Crucifix from Røldal Church in Norway, dating to the mid-13th century. The crucifix is believed to perform healing miracles through mysterious sweat at Midsummer's Eve. Photo: © Iver Schonhovd, Riksantikvaren.

MUST THE CHARISMA BE DEPERSONALIZED TO EXIST IN AN OBJECT?

One of Weber's arguments for the existence of objectified charisma, is that the charismatic power becomes *depersonalized* (Weber 1968a:1136). Said in another way, the objects do not have personal charisma. It is however tempting to see this argument as an outcome of a cosmological concept separating 'dead' things from 'living' humans. There are several examples of objects that were considered to have a personality of their own in the medieval period, in line with Aristotle's and Magnus' ideas of *accidental properties of form* (Wyvkoff 1967:xxxiii).

Some of the most prominent examples of objects able to change reality through their personal charisma are to be found in the religious sphere. Miraculous crucifixes from the Middle Ages are among the most prominent. Such objects were widespread in medieval Europe and are in some cases preserved to this day even outside the Catholic core area; 500 years after the Protestant Reformation should have swept them all away. We have a striking example of this from the



small medieval church of Røldal, situated in a mountain pass between eastern and western Norway. The church hosts a crucifix from the mid-13th century (Blindheim 2004:120). The cross of Røldal was believed to perform healing miracles, and the remote location is one of Norway's most important pilgrimages (Blindheim 2004:120; Kielland 1921:21). The story of the divine power of the

cross of Røldal is powerful, concrete, and personal: mysterious sweat with the power to heal sick limbs. Every Midsummer's Eve (June 23) during Mass, sweat appeared on Christ's forehead. The liquid was wiped off with a linen cloth, and then spread solemnly onto the limbs of sick pilgrims who flocked to the crucifix to be healed. (Iversen 2007). The cross of Røldal clearly had the power to change the reality of believing individuals in the Middle Ages. The story of the crucifix from Røldal shows that objects can possess personal charisma. Its personal charisma was not transferable. The object itself holds the power.

This is one of a great many known examples of charismatic objects carrying a collective, religious tale. On one hand, the crucifix is a representative and bearer of the 'larger' collective story of Christ on the cross. On the other hand, the crucifix also embodies a story in which the object itself is the protagonist. The object is, as Chris Wingfield puts it, 'the subject of a myth formation obtaining a form of personal charisma' (Wingfield 2010). The 'small tale' makes this specific crucifix a charismatic object arousing awe, having the ability to change people's lives here and now. The object is personified, and

worship is directed towards this object as well as to the cross as a symbol of communication between God and the individual.

EXTENDED BIOGRAPHIES

The biographies or life histories of objects require a transfer of knowledge to remain attached to the object. Pilgrimages to Røldal continued in hiding even after the Reformation in Norway in 1537 but were finally stopped in 1835. Today, the pilgrimage route to Røldal is again active. Several scholars have argued that objects can accumulate an 'extended biography' by existing and moving through time, space and different systems of understanding (Gillings & Pollard 1999:179-180; Joy 2009:541; MacGregor 1999:258). The Røldal crucifix is an example of an object with personal charisma that was given an 'extended biography' by moving through time. The visual appearance, or language of form of these objects, plays an essential role in adding meaning to the object. This does not, however, mean that the original significance remains intact. Elna Siv Kristoffersen's paper in this

volume, 'The Charisma of Extended Biographies and Aesthetics: Migration Period cases', explores how legends and stories attached to prehistoric objects affect our senses. She argues that new layers of meaning, given to objects through time, have the ability to add new charismatic power to the object. Her case study, a Migration Period gold ring, is an example of how an extended biography added in the 19th century gave new meaning and emotional power to a prehistoric object: a significance that was relevant as part of a common cosmology of the time.

MYTHS OF ORIGIN AND ENCHANTMENT

A charismatic object is adored through the relationships, memories and legends attached to it. But there can also exist physical traits and characteristics of the object that evoke admiration and awe. These might include extraordinary handicraft or artistic execution, something we do not fully understand. Then the genesis of the object becomes almost magical.

The fact that valuable objects present themselves shrouded in incomprehensibility and inaccessibility,

is precisely the source of their value, argues Alfred Gell (1992:48). This is what he calls the technology of enchantment. For the desire for some special objects is not just a result of the restriction of access to them, he claims. This mechanism works on two levels. It is related to money and availability, but it is also linked to the difficulty we have in understanding the genesis of the objects. These objects were created through a technical process that we do not fully understand and which we therefore are forced to see as almost magical. The perception of the object as magical is a by-product of uncertainty (Gell 1992:49). The attitude of the viewer is thus entirely dependent on her understanding – or rather lack of understanding – of the technical process that created the object.

In a medieval perspective, it would be crucial to know what properties were given the animal, object or human being at the time of creation, to be able to control their power. The myths and histories of their origin explain their magical properties. In the book *Physica*, Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179) explains the medical properties of gemstones by using myths of origin. This is what she has to say about the emerald:

The Emerald (smaragdus) grows in the wee hours of morning at sunrise, when the sun is powerfully placed in its orbit, traversing its route. Then the natural vigour of the earth and grasses is especially lively, the air still cold, the sun hot. The herbs vigorously imbibe vitality, as a lamb sucking milk. The heat of the day is scarcely sufficient to dry that day's vital energy, and it gives nourishment, so the plants become fertile and produce fruit. Therefore, the emerald is powerful against all human weakness and sickness, since the sun readies it, and since all its matter is of the vitality of the air

Throop 1998:138



Figure 6. Finger ring from Oslo (C2274) dating to the 14th century. Copper alloy with emeralds, lapis lazuli and a ruby in the centre. Collection of the Museum of Cultural History, UiO. Photo: © Museum of Cultural History, UiO.

Objects made by nature, carry in this worldview a power given them by God through nature (Vedeler & Kutzke 2015). Objects made by magical creatures were given the same type of power through their magical abilities. There seemed to be no difference between what we now perceive as man-made objects and natural stones. Their charisma or special properties are explained through veiled myths of origin in the same way. It is through these myths that the objects acquire their special ability to awaken awe.

The Norse sagas are filled with myths of origin related to objects created by magic. Some of them are related to swords. In medieval Norse society the sword was an object indicating high male status. It was both expensive and difficult to produce. Making high quality swords demanded special knowledge and training. In the Old Norse legends, it was often dwarves who mastered the art of making swords. In this process, they could also place curses upon the object and literally forge magical properties into the object. A well-known example is to be found in the history of Tyrting (Aannestad 2015a:54-55).

In the Saga of King Heidrek the Wise, we hear about the creation of a magical sword. The dwarves Dvalin and

Durin are forced by King Sigrlami to forge a magical sword decorated with gold. The sword must have the sharpest blade ever made, and it must never rust. And most importantly, it must bring victory to every man carrying it in battle. The king got his sword, with all its powerful magic forged into it by the dwarves. But when it was handed over to the king, Dvalin cursed it, and said: 'May your sword, Svafrlami, be the death of a man every time it is drawn, and with it may three of the most hateful deeds be done; may it also bring you your death' (Tolkien 1960:68).¹

The magical properties of the sword Tyrting occur at the moment of creation, and the curse is then laid upon it by its creators. The secret and silent knowledge of the forging dwarves is crucial. But the attitude of the viewer is entirely dependent on her understanding of how the sword was created in the myth, and how it got its power. It could be argued that the enchantment may lie in knowledge of the myth, as well as in a lack of technological insight.

¹ sverð Pitt, Svarfrlami, verði manns bani hvárt sinn er brugðit er, ok með því sé unnin Þrjú niðingsverk in mestu; Þat verði ok Þinn bani (Tolkien 1960, 67).

**SUMMARIZED:
THE NARRATIVE OF CHARISMA**

The term charismatic objects could be a useful tool to describe and differentiate objects that have the ability to arouse awe within a given cosmological frame. By looking at various forms of objects, we argue that objectified charisma has occurred not only as a power transferred from the classical charismatic leader to objects, but also as a power believed to arise from within the objects themselves. According to Weber, the objectified form of charisma occurs in periods or cultures when the attitude towards awe is conceptualized within a system of fate (Spencer 1973:341). The papers in this book show a variety of charismatic objects from Roman times to the Middle Ages, examples of objects produced within a cosmology where objects are considered to have properties animated by a holy or magical power. Despite the religious transformation from paganism to Christianity, the belief in an animated cosmos remained. There are many examples of objects with a perceived charismatic energy that exert a hushed but strong control

over emotions. These objects are carriers of collective narratives that help to stabilize, maintain and create community and relationships of power.

According to Weber, an important characteristic of charismatic objects is that their power is transferable from one person or group to another, and this therefore makes it possible to control and strengthen feelings for a long time, even through generations. There are several examples of this from the Medieval Period. But in a cosmos where objects are considered to be animated, there might also be cases where the force is not transferable but remains only within the object.

The collective stories that are associated with charismatic objects are important, and myths about their origins often help to reinforce their power. These narrative characteristics are closely intertwined with the object's materiality. Handicraft, design and the language of form, as well as the materials used are essential elements in the object's charisma and in the stories that are told about them. In the end, these things affect their power as individual actors in an animated cosmos.

Figure 7. A Sword with silver and gold inlay from Langeid in Norway, dating to the 10th century. The sword is decorated with an unreadable inscription as well as a small hand holding a cross, a symbol of God's blessing. The sword (C58882) was found during an archaeological excavation of a heathen grave mound in 2011. Photo: © Ellen C. Holte, Museum of Cultural History, UiO.



