

CHAPTER 11

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A shoe, a trough and a tiny boat: a study of everyday objects from the medieval farm Vik, Ørland, central Norway

ABSTRACT

In this paper the author presents a new and unusual find from an 11th-13th century well at Vik, Ørland, central Norway. In this well archaeologists found several leather shoes, a miniature boat and a trough, the latter two made from wood. These are unusual finds outside of a city context. The purpose of this article is to present the finds and compare them to urban material from the nearby city of Trondheim and rural finds from central Norway. The author also discusses what the objects can tell us about the individuals at the medieval farm at Vik. The conclusion is that there are few rural parallels to the finds but several parallels in the urban material. None of the artefacts indicates excessive wealth, and the objects do not indicate any difference in material culture between rural and urban populations. The objects tell of everyday activities of the people at the farm, such as play and pastimes, and can be interpreted to indicate something about the social standing of their owners.

INTRODUCTION

During the excavation of the medieval farm at Vik, in Trøndelag, Norwegian archaeologists uncovered a well dated to 11th-13th century in a partly waterlogged condition (Fransson, Ch. 10). Objects found in this structure - several shoes, a trough and a miniature boat interpreted as a toy - resemble artefacts typically found in urban settings, only on a significantly smaller and more intimate scale. If they had been found in an urban context, these finds would have been described as relatively common. Since the finds stem from a rural context, however, they are in fact quite rare, if not unique, in a Norwegian setting.

I have only found one other reference to medieval shoes linked to a rural domestic dwelling in Scandinavia: a find of several shoes and other artefacts from Västannortjärn in Leksand, Sweden, mentioned by Per Lindquist in his thorough examination of the research on Scandinavian shoes. Lindquist reaches the conclusion that there are a few finds of shoes from medieval churches, cemeteries and fortresses in Scandinavia, but except for the find from Västannortjärn, none are linked to single farmsteads or village waste deposits (Lindqvist 2007:73).

Both leather and wooden objects require special conditions to survive in the ground. Cultural layers

built up in a medieval city create conditions that preserve organic materials, due to a high concentration of organic waste and compact moisture-rich layers, but smaller waste deposits on rural sites do not usually create these conditions, and organic material deteriorates faster. Cultural deposits on rural sites, such as medieval farm mounds, may contain wooden and leather artefacts if the soil type and moisture levels are favourable, but this is rarely the case (Martens 2016).

During the 11th-13th centuries, when the well was in use, rural dwellings were not in any way uncommon. It is likely that an overwhelming majority of the Norwegian population lived in the countryside at this time. According to the census conducted in Norway in the 1660s, more than 90% of the population lived in the countryside (Bakke & Mykland 1987:165), and this percentage stayed stable until the 19th century (Tveite 1975:1, 95).

Despite this, archaeologists rarely find and excavate rural medieval dwellings (Martens, 2009), while several urban sites have been thoroughly excavated and studied (Christophersen & Nordeide 1994; Hansen 2005; Brendalsmo & Molaug 2014). One reason for this may be that many farm buildings in this period were constructed in a way that leave fewer traces in the ground than earlier rural buildings, namely the cross-timber technique (Sauvage & Mokkelbost 2016:276, 283). Another explanation may be that present-day farms still occupy the same plots as their medieval predecessors, so that large-scale construction work that generates contract archaeology rarely impinges on these sites. (Martens, 2009:7). The medieval structures at Vik were found right next to the ruins of a 20th century farm, abandoned in the 1950s. There is however no continuity between the two. There are no signs of activity at the medieval farm after the 15th century, while the modern farm was built in the 19th century, leaving the plot uninhabited for about 400 years (Fransson, Ch. 10).

Most research on medieval rural settlements in Norway focuses on buildings and larger structures (Skevik 2004; Martens 2009). Artefacts do not get the same attention. There appears to be no conclusive answer to the question of whether the type and design of everyday objects differ between rural and urban contexts in medieval Norway.

The detailed examination of belongings from a single household may tell us something more personal about the people that produced and used them. Current trends in archaeology strive to emphasize the individual and to highlight the people behind the material culture. The development and implementation of aDNA techniques and other natural sciences in archaeology offer new possibilities to study individuals of the past. It may be possible, for example, to show the diversity amongst the common population in a medieval city as described by Suppersberger et al. (2017). Another way to trace the individuals connected to the archaeological materials is through the study of personal belongings. Everyday objects were made by, consumed by, and used by individuals and may tell a story of individuality and identity amongst ordinary people (Hansen, Ashby & Baug 2015).

The aim of this paper is to present the recent find of 11th – 13th century leather and wood artefacts from Vik and investigate how they compare to contemporary finds from the nearby medieval city of Trondheim and from rural sites in central Norway. I will also discuss what the study of these objects might tell about life at the medieval farm Vik. Central Norway is here defined as the geographic region spanning Nordmøre and Romsdal, Trøndelag and Nordland south of Salten.

METHODS

The organic finds from the well came from a water-logged context. This type of material is fragile and sensitive to changes in temperature and humidity. In order to secure the scientific value of the objects

from the well, they had to be conserved as soon as possible. Examination and documentation of the objects were carried out before conservation as the drying of the objects may cause some shrinkage and deformation. All sampling for C¹⁴ analysis was done prior to conservation. The shoe samples were taken from the inside of the uppers, the sample size being ca 1g of wet material. The sample from the toy boat consisted of 0.4g of wet material taken from a crack in the broken end of the object.

Finding parallels

The University museum at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) in Trondheim is responsible for cataloguing and curation all archaeological material from central Norway. Comparable material from rural and urban contexts in central Norway was found by searching the NTNU university museum's version of the MUSIT database. MUSIT, short for Museum IT, maintains the joint Norwegian archaeological collection databases used by all Norwegian university museums. In this article the letter T or N followed by a number refers to a database id.

The shoes were found using the key word “fottøy” (footwear). The database provided information about find locations, making it easy to distinguish between finds from rural and urban contexts. I examined all rural shoe finds in person.

A detailed search through the extensive urban shoe material, consisting of hundreds of posts, was more of a challenge. The database rarely mentions type, and, in most cases, there are no digital drawings or photographs. For this reason I decided to let the substantial and well-documented shoe finds from the excavations at Folkebibliotekstomten (the Trondheim public library site) represent the finds from urban Trondheim in this article. The excavation work at the Trondheim public library site in central Trondheim took place from 1973- 1985 and uncovered some of the earliest remains of the

medieval city (Christophersen & Nordeide 1994). Church buildings, graveyards, secular buildings and streets were found, along with large waste deposits containing well-preserved organic materials. Several hundred shoes were found during this excavation. The shoes have been analysed in detail by Marstein (1989).

Wooden troughs were located by using the key-word “trau”. The miniature boats are a bit harder to find in the database since there is no standard for cataloguing this type of object. Miniature boats can be catalogued as “båt”(boat), “lekebåt” (toy boat), “leketøy” (toy) etc. Two publications describe some of the toy boats in the collection (Fahre 1998, Sylvester 2004). Using the information from these publications and from different database searches I have found all wooden miniature boats in the collection that are in any way catalogued as such. Most of the database posts had sketches attached, and some had photographs. I have not studied any of the troughs or boats in person. The troughs and boats cannot be dated by type, and few are dated in the database. Many of the troughs and miniature boats were excavated at the Trondheim public library site and can be related to dated stratigraphic layers.

THE WELL

The principal finds from the well are a wooden trough, a wooden miniature boat, and several fragmented leather shoes. In Norway preserved organic artefacts are rare outside of the medieval cities, and the excavation team initially suspected the objects to be of a later date. Shoes from the 1940-50s had been discovered in the modern agricultural soil layer on the site, along with other 19th and 20th century objects. The top of the well contained glass and ceramics typical for the late 19th century, and the well was suspected to have gone out of use in this period. As the excavation proceeded, and carbon dating results arrived, it became clear that the well had gone out of use in the 12th or 13th century.

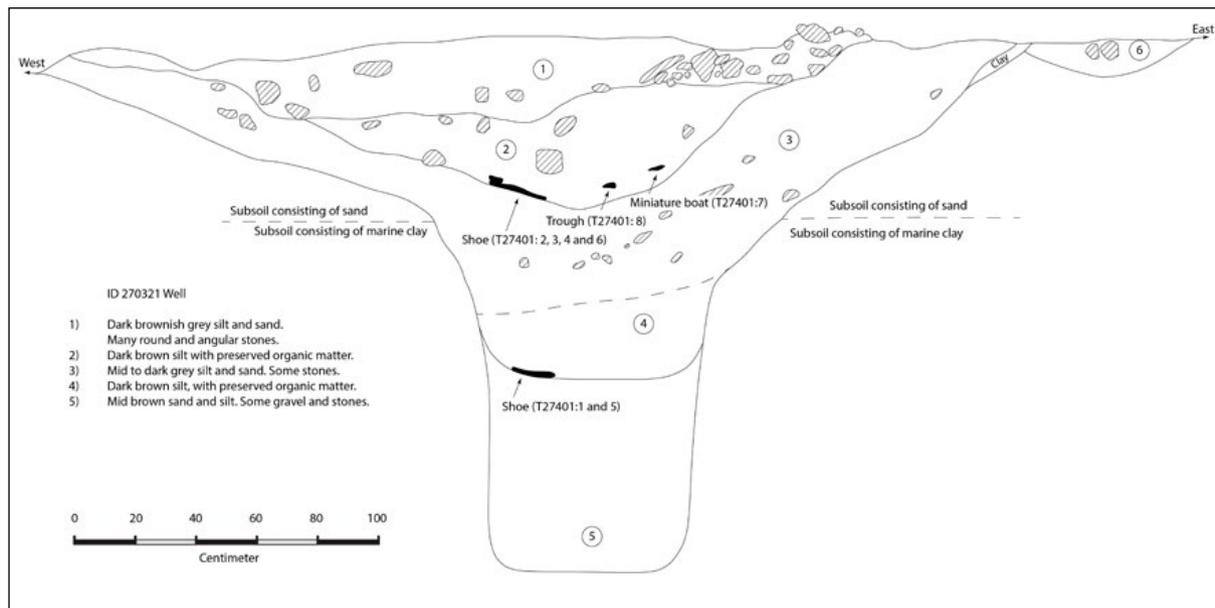


Figure 1. Cross section of the well id. 270321. Illustration: Magnar Mojaren Gran, NTNU University Museum.

The well appears to have been refilled during a short timespan, comprising a couple of months or even days. If one excludes the modern material in the surface layer, objects from the top and bottom can be dated to roughly the same period (Figure 1, Figure 2). Furthermore, only a few, hard-to-distinguish layers were recognisable during excavation. Use of the well as a garbage dump over time would probably have resulted in more layers and a broader

span in the C¹⁴ dating, so one or two refilling incidents are likely.

The well was located ca. 6 metres east of House 20 (Figure 3), an early medieval building. Two more wells of a similar date, a pit house, and some smaller waste deposits were located a few metres to the west of House 20. The pit house and waste deposits contained fragments of several soapstone artefacts –cooking vessels, griddle stones and a spindle whorl

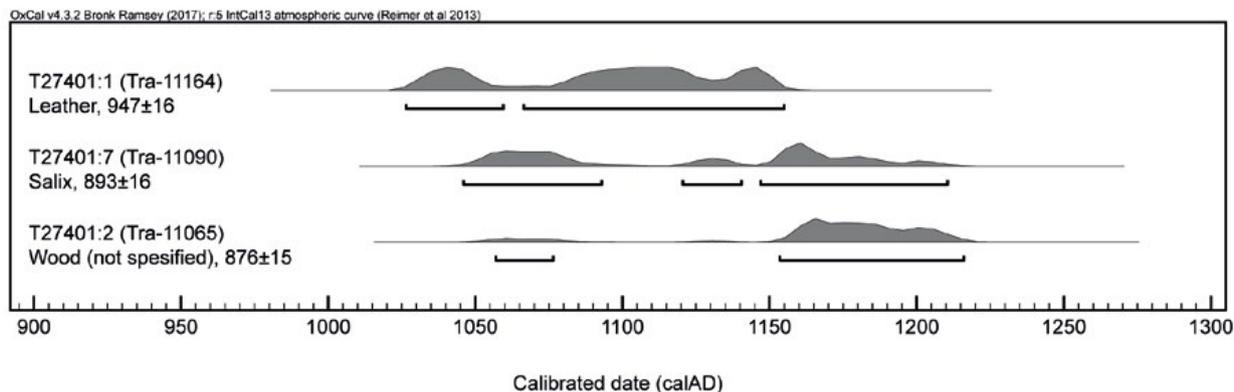


Figure 2. Radiocarbon dates. Illustration: Magnar Mojaren Gran, NTNU University Museum.



Figure 3. The location of well id. 270321 in relation to surrounding structures of the same date. Illustration: Magnar Mojaren Gran, NTNU University Museum.

(T27403) – in addition to fragments of pottery (T27403:18). One of the other wells (224093) had a preserved wooden structure made from repurposed planks and an assortment of woodchip and wooden plugs at the bottom. The planks, woodchip and plugs have been analysed for tool marks and other details, and the results are presented in the museum database (T27400) and excavation report (Ystgaard et.al. 2018).

Wooden objects

Whilst the study of footwear, calceology, is a well-established discipline within archaeology, the same cannot be said about the study of wooden miniature boats and troughs. They do appear to be present

on many medieval sites, but not in the same numbers as shoes, and there is no established typology comparable to that for shoes. While studying the miniature boat finds from central Norway in the MUSIT database I have observed that the shape of the stern may give a rough indication of age. Boats found in early medieval contexts often have a pointed stern, while boats that originate from a late medieval or modern context tend to have a flat stern. Unfortunately the late medieval examples in the database are not precisely dated, and my estimate of their age is only based on the type of object they were found with, according to the database. The early medieval ones can be more precisely dated, and all the complete examples have a pointed stern.

Detailed miniature boats may possibly be compared to full size ship types to get a more precise dating. Moving on to wooden troughs, dating according to typology is very difficult. Troughs do not appear to change in design over time, but the design may say something about the use of the object.

The miniature boat T27401:7

The miniature boat has been C¹⁴ dated to AD 1046-1210 (Figure 2). A small sample from the boat was analysed, and it was found to be made of pine. The boat is in a more complete state than the trough, but due to deterioration its surface has lost all traces of tool marks, and approximately 5 cm of the object's length is missing. The boat measured 20 cm in length, 5.5 cm in width, and 4 cm in height before conservation. It may initially have measured about 25 cm in length. There is a hole for a mast, and the shape of the keel resembles that of a real ship. At first glance the boat may appear to have a dramatically pointed bow, but when examined further it is apparent that the sides are noticeably deteriorated. What now appears to be the bow may originally just as likely have been the stern, as boats of the time often had a pointed stern. The miniature boat, in its deteriorated state, cannot with any certainty be classified according to its resemblance to full-size ships

Urban and rural parallels

The database search revealed 20 miniature boats in the NTNU museum collections. 15 stem from Trondheim: at least 10 of them, all from the Trondheim public library site, are medieval and dated to between AD 1050 and 1275, roughly the same time as the miniature boat from Vik. These medieval miniature boats from Trondheim range in style from simple versions with a V-shaped hull and no traces of sail, to detailed designs with a carefully carved keel, and holes for a mast and rigging. None of the miniature boats are identical to each other or to the boat from Vik. The ones that are complete share the feature of a pointed stem and stern. The five miniature boats from Trondheim that are not dated in the database can be presumed to be medieval or from a later date since they, in most cases, were found in association with clay pipes, pottery and glass of late medieval or early modern type. One of the miniature boats is broken, the others share the feature of a flat stern.

There are only three miniature boats from rural contexts in the collection. One (T20750:467) is dated to the 17th-18th century based on pottery from the same context; this miniature boat has a flat stern. The other two share some design features with the boat from Vik and early medieval miniature boats

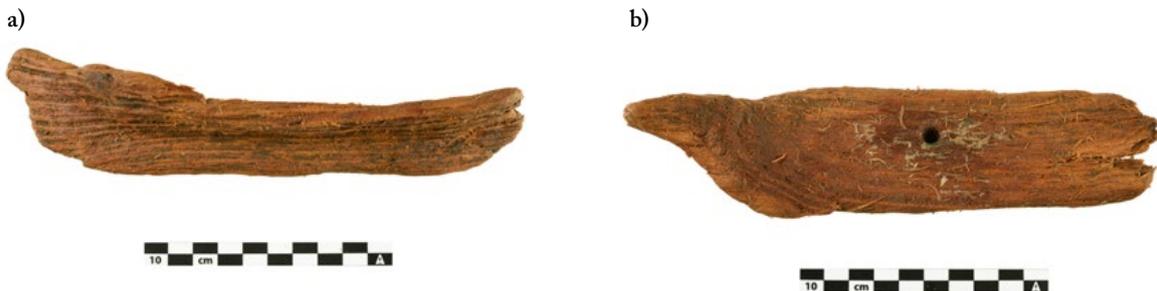


Figure 4a-b. Top and side views of the miniature boat before conservation. Photo: Ellen Wijgård Randerz, NTNU University Museum.

from Trondheim, and they may be of medieval or earlier date. One of them (T11808) was found in a bog on the island Tautra and given to the museum in 1914. It measures about 25 cm in length and strongly resembles some of the miniature boats from Trondheim. For the other one (T17740), a quite large and detailed miniature boat, has been suggested to date from around AD 1100 based on construction details (Sylvester 2004). This miniature boat was found in 1956 at a depth of 90 cm in a peatbog at Ryggaunet on Ørland, approximately 2km from Vik. The boat is large compared to most other finds, 62.5 cm long and 20.5 cm wide, and it has holes for rigging. The mast that was found with it is 43.4 cm long.

Sylvester (2004) mentions two additional boats found in bogs on the islands Tautra and Otterøya. These were only recorded in writing and are now lost. The boats are noted to have been 0.8 to 1 m long, which is significantly larger than most of the boats mentioned above. They may, as Sylvester (2004) suggests, have been made to be sacrificed rather than played with. Sylvester links this practice to pre-Christian traditions.

To summarize: there are three finds of miniature boats from rural contexts. Two of these may

be medieval, but none are C¹⁴ dated. The large boat from Ørland has been suggested to date from around AD 1100 based on construction details (Sylvester 2004). There are 11 miniature boats from medieval Trondheim that can be dated based on stratigraphic layers, some are of a similar shape and size to the one from Trondheim.

The trough T27401:8

The trough is a type of object that has remained unchanged for hundreds if not thousands of years. Thus, troughs are next to impossible to date typologically. The trough has not been C¹⁴ dated, but it was lying in the same layer and on the same level as the miniature boat, mentioned above, and it is assumed to be of the same age.

Only half of the trough remains, and the handles are in an especially bad condition. The trough is on the small side: it originally measured approximately 30 cm long, 20 cm wide and 10 cm deep. The rim of the “bowl” forms a soft curve where it meets the handle. The growth rings show that it was carved from half a log. Both the inside and the outside surface have been given a smooth finish. The trough is probably made from pine; microscopic wood analyses were not possible without damaging the object.



Figure 5. The trough T27401:8 before conservation. Photo: Ellen Wijgård Randerz, NTNU University Museum.

Urban and rural parallels

A search for “trau”, the Norwegian word for a trough, in the NTNU museum database yields 45 hits for wooden troughs. Out of these, 35 are from excavations in Trondheim. Nine were found in rural contexts, mainly in bogs, and one belongs to the ethnographic collection.

Two of the rural finds may be of medieval or earlier date but none of them can be dated with any certainty based on shape or context. Most of the rural finds of troughs are described as “of recent date”, which, in the museum database, usually means post-Reformation or later.

There are 35 troughs from the city of Trondheim. 28 are from the the Trondheim public library site excavation and can be dated by context. All but one of the dated troughs can be dated to between AD 1000 and 1300. The troughs come in different designs, with one or two handles, with traces of a lid or irregular shapes; some have a pointed side designed for scooping or pouring. A few troughs are too fragmented to estimate the original measurements, but most appear to have been quite large, several must have been over a metre long and up to half a metre wide. There is only one trough (N34073) about the size of the one from Vik. The archaeologists that catalogued the troughs occasionally interpreted the use of the objects, such as for feeding pigs, for baking or for cheese making, but they do not provide any argumentation or references to support these interpretations.

To summarize: there are no troughs from rural contexts dated to the medieval period. None of the rural finds are of a similar design to the trough from Vik. There are several troughs from Trondheim dated to roughly the same time as the one from Vik; none of them is identical in design, most are much larger, one is of similar size.

Shoes

The study of footwear, calceology, is a well-established practice within archaeology. Details in the

construction, choice of materials and signs of use of a shoe can provide clues about the technical process of medieval shoemaking as well as the physique and social status of the shoe's owner (Volken 2014:1-27).

There have been several attempts at establishing a typology for shoes, both nationally and internationally. In the last 40 years or so of the 20th century several researchers have attempted to establish a typology for the Norwegian shoe material, analysing material from Borgund in Sunnmøre (Larsen 1970), Mindets tomt in Oslo (Schia 1975), Bryggen in Bergen (Larsen 1992) and the Public Library site in Trondheim (Marstein 1989). The Scandinavian material has more recently been assessed by Lindquist (2007), who also discusses gender and social status as reflected in the archaeological shoe material. The most recent and probably most detailed holistic study of European archaeological footwear is Volken's work from 2014. All the researchers mentioned here observe how certain models peak in popularity for a couple of decades, only to then decline and disappear. Some types and design elements appear to be in production for several hundred years, whilst others go out of fashion in less than a century. A general conclusion is that the fashion of medieval shoes changed at such a pace that they can be used for dating if one can accept an uncertainty of more than 100 years, depending on type. There are regional variations and using a local typology will probably give the most accurate results.

The shoes examined in this article have been dated typologically using Marstein's publication from the public library site (Marstein 1989), and the table for stratigraphic layers at the Trondheim public library site in Christophersen & Nordeide (1994:35). I have supplemented Marstein's local type names with the terminology established by Volken (2014) where applicable. The definition of a shoe type is here written like this: “Marstein type”/“Volken type”, with “Marstein type” referring to the type catalogue and definitions in Marstein (1989) and “Volken type” referring to the type catalogue and definitions in Volken (2014).

Uppers

There are one nearly complete upper and two partially fragmented uppers. The nearly complete upper (T27401:1) will be referred to as “Shoe 1”. It was

found on the bottom of layer 4 (Figure 1) and ¹⁴C dated to AD 1026 -1155 (Figure 2).

Shoe 1 is, excluding the top band and lacing details, composed of three parts. The main part was cut

a)



b)



Figure 6a-b. Shoe 1. Photo and drawing before conservation. Photo and illustration: Ellen Wijgård Randerz, NTNU University Museum.

a)



b)

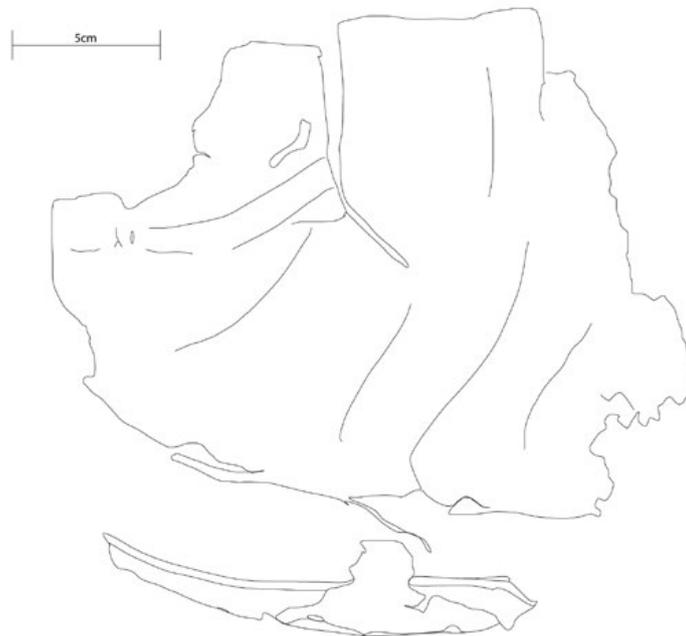


Figure 7a-b. Shoe 2. Photo and drawing before conservation. Photo and illustration: Ellen Wijgård Randerz, NTNU University Museum.

in the Z shape (Volken 2014:72), with two smaller pieces forming an insert at the instep that overlaps the front opening when the shoe is laced. There is a top band, now detached, that fits around the opening and one side of the instep. Leather strips are threaded through a row of six horizontal slits on each side of the shaft, forming loops for spiral lacing. The loops and a small part of the lace remain, the lace attaches to the overlapping insert through a small hole with a knot on the inside. There is also a small leather strip with pointed ends that may have served as a thung (figure 6b upper right corner). The top band consists of a folded piece of leather ca. 1 cm wide. Deformation of the leather, caused by stress during use, can be observed at the heel and in the seam between the inserts. The shoe measured approximately 16 cm in height, including the top band. The upper measured about 66 cm around the foot and 23 cm over the instep when laid flat. Shoe 1 is of the type “støvel 3” / “Parma (3 rows) -Z” (Figure 6a-b).

Figure 4. Shoe 2

The second, fragmented upper (T27401:2), “Shoe 2”, is only partially preserved: most of the front part and a little of the sides remain. There are traces of seams at the top, indicating a longer shaft. Shoe 2 appears to be a boot, like Shoe 1, but with a different type of lacing (Figure 7a-b). It measured 20 cm over the instep when laid flat. The height and measurement around the foot could not be measured due to its fragmented state but, judging from the width and the distance between toe and instep, it appears to be similar in size to Shoe 1.

On the last of the fragmented uppers (T27401:3), “Shoe 3”, pieces of leather have been cut from the instep and opening, most likely for reuse. This has removed any distinct diagnostic features. One can determine that the object is a shoe upper of adult size, but not the height, cutting pattern or fastening method (Figure 8). Judging from its size,

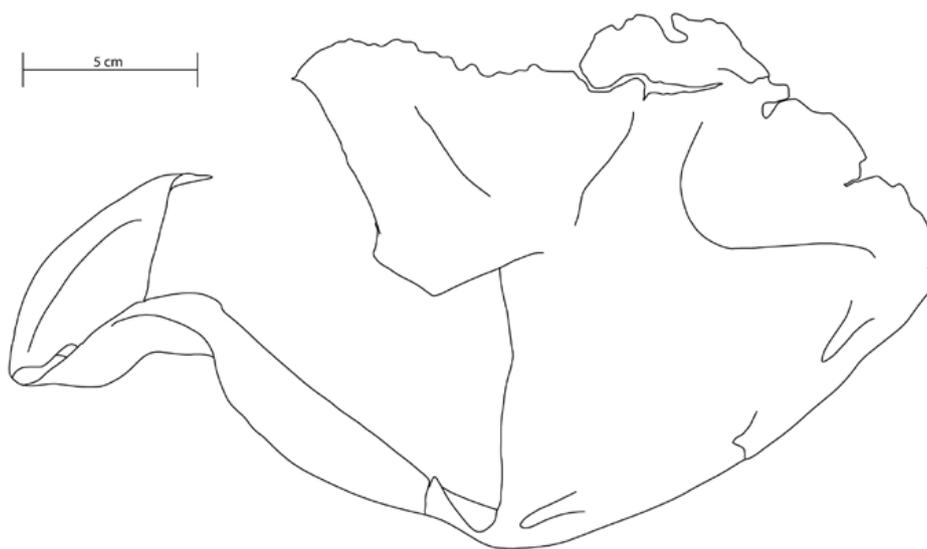


Figure 8. Fragmented upper with pieces cut off. Photo and illustration: Ellen Wijgård Randerz, NTNU University Museum.

this upper may originally have formed a pair with one of the others, but it lacks the details to prove it.

Soles

There are two larger sole fragments, one heel part from a two-piece sole, and one more complete sole. The seam holes in both pieces indicate an edge/flesh stitch attaching the sole to the upper. The larger sole fragment is in poor condition, missing sections of both the toe and heel part, possibly due to heavy wear in these areas. It is also delaminated and deformed by wear. Due to the thin and delicate nature of the object, it dried so quickly that it was already partially dry before it could be adequately packed and stored, causing additional deformation and shrinkage.

The heel part shows signs of heavy use and appears to be worn right through at one spot. It also has a seam line on the edge towards the front, where it was attached to the rest of the sole (Figure 9). This indicates that it was worn through in the same spot once before. Seams under the foot of soles like this are often interpreted as repairs rather than as the economic use of material. If it is a repair, it has been skilfully executed using thread and hogs bristle or needle. Repairs of this kind are often interpreted as the work of a professional, as opposed to crude repairs made with leather strips that can be found on shoes from the same time (Schia 1977:40-41, Lindqvist 2007:72).

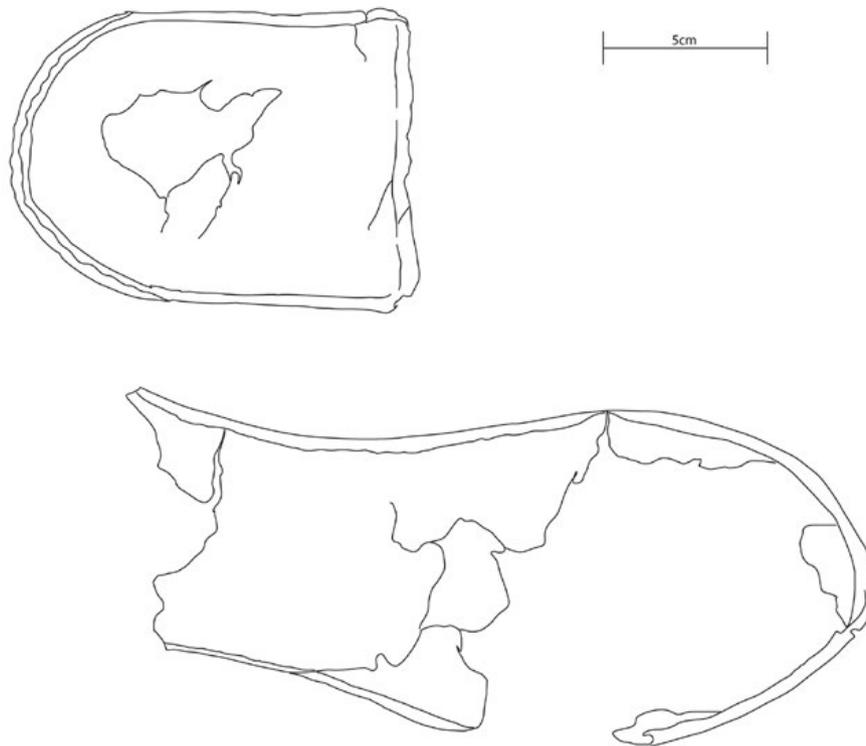


Figure 9. Fragments of soles. Photo and illustration: Ellen Wjgård Randerz, NTNU University Museum.

Fragments

The fragments include several small inserts, like those on Shoe 1, in addition to torn pieces of uppers and several rand fragments (Figure 10). The rand is a strip of leather placed in the seam connecting the soul to the upper – the rand seals and protects the seam from wear. All the fragments appear to originate from shoes. The fragments that do match larger pieces have been paired with these. It is likely that several of the remaining fragments originate from the more complete parts, but this cannot be confirmed.

Urban parallels

Marstein lists 80 finds of “støvel type 3” from the Trondheim public library site (Marstein 1989

p33,139 -140). Many of the shoes of this type have details such as top bands, heel stiffeners and rands, but only one of the “støvel type 3” shoes from the Trondheim public library site are decorated with embroidery (Marstein 1989:33, 139 -140). This is worth noting, as more than 30% of the 12th century shoes at this site have embroidery of some sort, and the same goes for shoes from Oslo and Bergen (Hansen 2015:46). There are few examples of children’s shoes in this style from the Trondheim public library site.

Rural parallels

While shoes are a common find in urban contexts, preserved shoes from rural areas are uncommon. There are no exact parallels to Shoe 1 from rural

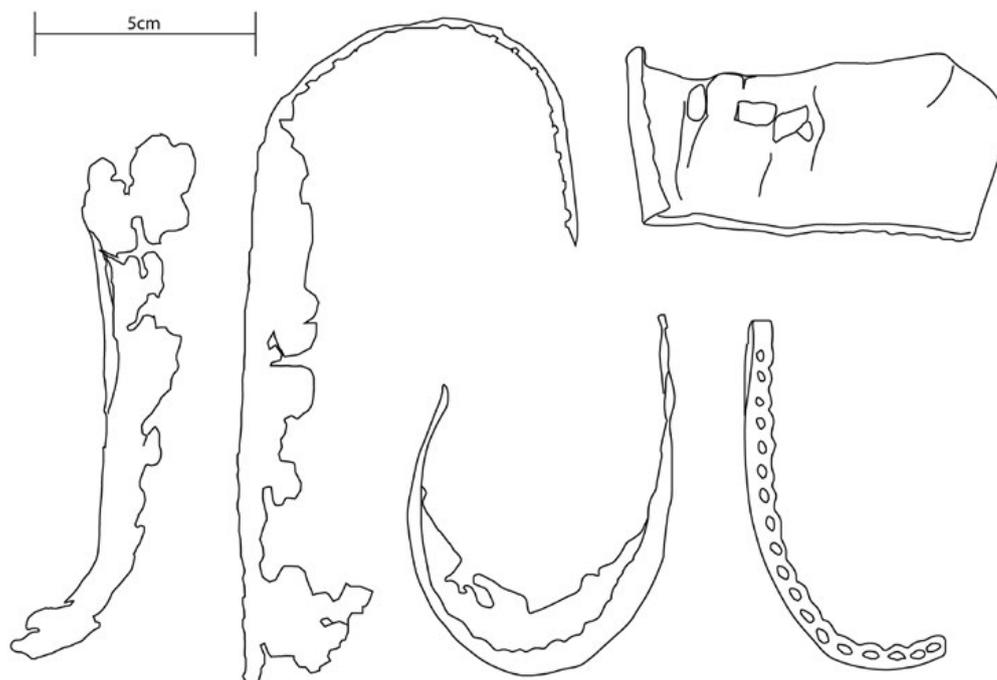


Figure 10. An example of the different types of fragments. From left to right: two upper fragments, one deformed sole fragment, one complete upper insert and one rand fragment. Photo and illustration: Ellen Wiggård Randerz, NTNU University Museum.

sites in central Norway, but there are a few finds that date to roughly the same time.

In 1907, a pair of low-cut drawstring shoes found in a bog in Midsund was added to the NTNU museum collection (T8203). The shoes are of the type “Vipperow -J”/“lav reim I” with a pointed heel dated ca. to AD 900 -1100. A year later, the priest H. Saxlund donated a similar shoe from a bog in Sandøy to the museum (T8650). This shoe is the “lav reim V”/ “Oslo-jf” type with a pointed heel, also dating to AD 900 -1100. The museum record from 1908 shows that this shoe was found in association with remnants of a small, collapsed building described as a “gamme”, constructed with peat blocks,

sticks and a stone floor. The shoe was found in two pieces and was later mounted for display. The sole appears to be too large for the upper, and the parts may originate from different shoes of a similar type. H. Saxlund, who supervised the excavation of the site in 1908, interpreted the building as a form of huntsman’s hut used for seasonal hunting, probably bird hunting, and fishing (Saxlund 1909). Lie (2011 p51-53) supports this interpretation.

The last pair of shoes found in a rural context to be considered here (T18842:208 -209) were found under the floor of Mære church during excavations in 1966-67. The shoes were found below two burials dating from the 17th-18th century, and the excavation

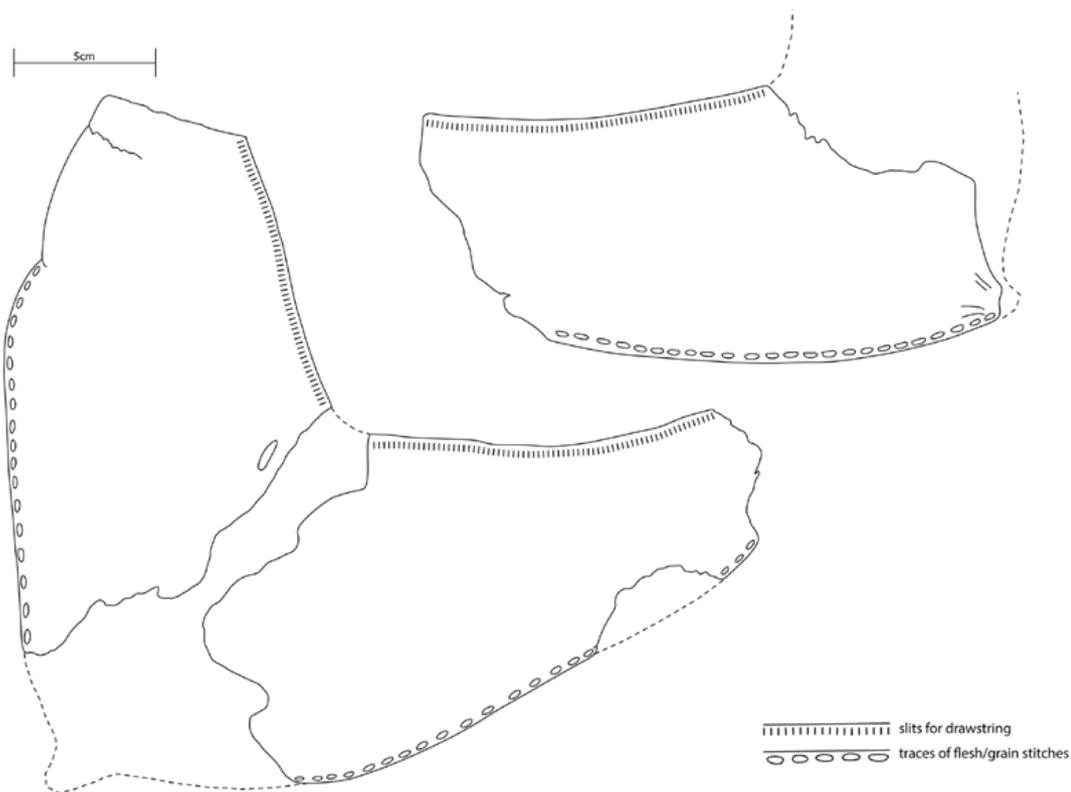


Figure 11. Reconstruction drawing of the Mære shoes, the smaller fragment showing deformation that indicates a pointed toe. The dotted lines represent the author’s interpretation of the original design. Illustration: Ellen Wijgård Randerz, NTNU University Museum.

supervisor interpreted the footwear as remnants of an older grave, probably related to the wooden church that predates the standing stone church (Lidén 1999:30). The shoes are too fragmented to provide a complete understanding of the original shape. They are low cut, with a pointed toe, and tiny slits around the wrist. This would put them in the “lav reim” category like the ones mentioned above. The slits around the wrist appear to be too close and narrow for functional lacing; they may have held a decorative lacing detail (Figure 11). I have not been able to find any Norwegian examples of similar decoration, although Larsen (1992:33) has some examples of decoration using a leather thong. It is not impossible that the slits were meant for functional lacing, and that the shrinkage of the material caused by uncontrolled drying of the deteriorated leather makes them appear too small for the purpose.

Even when finds dated later than the 13th century are included, the search for medieval shoes from rural contexts does not prove very fruitful. There are no rural finds that can be securely dated to the period AD 1200–1400 in central Norway. There is one larger find of shoes from Alstahaug church in Helgeland, built in the late 12th century. The church was excavated in 1967 by Håkon Christie (T18846). The shoe material contains two soles of the “kølle” type that dates to ca. AD 1225–1600 according to Marstein’s (1989:87) typology, and several fragments of later types common in the 15–1600s.

To summarize: the shoes from Midsund and Sandøy are variations of a type known from city contexts; there are direct parallels in Marstein’s and Volken’s publications. Just like Shoe 1 from the well, these shoes are common in urban contexts in Norway and several other European countries. Marstein lists 73 shoes of the “lav reim” type from the Trondheim public library site, and Volken lists several examples of the Oslo and Vipperow type from different locations in Europe.

The construction of the shoe from Mære point towards a “lav reim” type similar to early medieval shoes from Trondheim and other locations. The poor condition of the shoe makes it impossible to assign it to a subtype in this category. The pointed toe is partially broken or cut off, but it is likely to have been a small point around 2 cm long, something common on similar shoes from Trondheim.

This database survey shows that finds of early medieval shoes do occur in rural settings, but with only four finds registered during the last hundred years it is fair to say that they are rare. None of the finds relate to a farm or village context.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

There are few rural finds of miniature boats, troughs and shoes in central Norway and no direct parallels to any of the objects from Vik. There are two boats that may be of the same date, and one of them slightly resembles the boat from Vik in shape and size, while the other is larger and more detailed. There are no known troughs with a medieval dating found in rural contexts. Three rural shoe finds from central Norway, all variations of the “lav reim” type, date to roughly the same period as the shoes from Vik.

All the shoes from rural contexts, including the ones from Vik, have clear parallels in medieval Trondheim as well as in other Norwegian and European towns and cities. The shoes from Mære are incomplete and therefore hard to define typologically, but they have one decorative feature, the distinctly pointed toe, whilst the other examples appear in a more basic form.

What can this small assemblage of objects tell us about the people at Vik? First, we consider the shoes. The shoes may be well suited to explore this type of question, and indeed several recent articles have explored the topic of footwear with the individual in mind. Hansen (2015) and Andersen (2016) use footwear to explore different aspects of urban life, whilst

Mould (2015) investigates the simple one-piece shoe as a marker of social status in prehistoric and medieval society, with emphasis on the rural population.

The shoes from Vik date from AD 1125 – 1250 (Figure 2). During this period, a limited number of footwear designs were in use in Norwegian cities. The cut and closure of the shoes at the time seem to have been of similar design for both men and women, rich and poor. Indicators of gender or class may be found in the details, such as the skill of the craftsman, the quality of the leather, decorative elements and the presence or absence of repairs (Lindquist 2007, Hansen 2015). Shoes of the same type can have different extras added in the form of functional elements, such as reinforcements at the heel and around the top, or decorative elements such as extremely pointed toes, cut-out patterns and embroidery. Shoes with elaborate silk embroidery have been found in Trondheim, Bergen and Oslo. Hansen (2015) argues that they can be associated with the upper classes, based (in part) on calculations of cost for materials and labour.

The shoes from the medieval well at Vik appear to be skilfully made, with details such as top bands and rands. There are no noticeable differences between the shoes and fragments at Vik and shoes of the same type from Trondheim. Shoes of the same type are known from Bergen (Larsen 1992:20) and Oslo (Schia 1975: 103,107) as well as from several sites in Europe (Volken 2014:355; Grew & Neergaard 2001:14-15). The shoes from the well are of a type that seldom has embroidery or similar decorative elements. This type of shoe in urban contexts has been interpreted as an everyday work shoe. (Marstein 1989; Lindqvist 2007).

There is no indication of embroidery or other purely decorative elements on the shoes; this, however, does not prove that rural people did not use shoes with decorative elements. The footwear on its

own is not representative of the entire household at Vik – there are for example no children's shoes, although the find of a toy boat indicates the presence of children.

When it comes to the wooden trough, we note that there were several similar artefacts found in Trondheim, but no exact parallels. There was one trough of similar dimension that may have served a similar purpose, but the aesthetic features differ quite a lot. While the trough from Vik has a rounded shape, the one from Trondheim is rectangular with sharp angles. A trough is a versatile and useful utensil likely to serve a purpose in most household contexts. The shape and size of a trough may vary, in line with the purpose of the object and the personal taste and skill of the maker. Most styles of trough appear to have a continuity of hundreds if not thousands of years. The simple design of the object makes it hard to connect any size or shape with a particular use, although one may be able to narrow down the possibilities. A small carefully designed and carved trough, like the one from Vik, would not be suitable for feeding pigs, and the size would make it unpractical for baking. It may, for example, have been used for serving, preparing or storing smaller quantities of food.

The miniature boat from Vik resembles miniature boats from Trondheim, most of which have been interpreted as toys, both in the museum database and in the master thesis by Lena Fahre (1998) where she studies toys from the Trondheim public library site. Similar finds from Bergen are interpreted in the same way (Mygland 2007:36-38). None of the miniature boats are identical; they all differ slightly in size and shape, although they may have been based on the same type of ship. The differences in design are probably the result of the skill and effort of the individual carver, as well as the size and quality of available material. This makes every boat unique,

in contrast to a professionally made standardised item, like shoes.

The trough and miniature boat were found within 20 cm of each other in the upper part of the medieval layers in the well (Figure 2). Some of the shoes were found at the bottom of the same layer, while others lay further down. It is likely that the shoes were deposited together with other household waste and soil to fill the well after it went out of use. The boat and trough may have been deposited at the same time or as the result of later actions. The filling of the well appears to have left a slight depression in the ground and, given the wet conditions at the site, it was probably occasionally filled with water. This would have been a good place for a child to play with a toy boat, and the broken trough may also

have served as a toy. As described by Fahre (1998) children can turn anything into a toy, and parts of broken furniture or kitchen utensils may well have been given a new function in the hands of a child. Fahre argues that such artefacts found together with purposely made toys, like the miniature boat, can be considered as possible toys (ibid:18).

The trough, together with other medieval finds from the site – the soapstone artefacts, the ceramics, the woodchips and the reused planks – are traces of everyday activities such as cooking, textile craft and carpentry. None of the medieval structures or artefacts at the site show signs of excessive wealth or poverty. The shoes are so similar to finds from Trondheim that they may well have been bought on a trip there; they were made by a skilled craftsman working in the



Figure 12. Reconstruction of Shoe 1 made and photographed by Ellen Wiggård Randerz, NTNU University Museum.

style and technique of the time. The miniature boat closely resembles miniature boats from Trondheim, and it is likely inspired by the same type of ship.

It is problematic (in many aspects impossible?) to compare one small rural find with the numerous finds from large waste deposits formed in a city. The latter is obviously more diverse and more commonly excavated, enabling large-scale comparative studies. What one can say is that all the artefacts from the well at Vik are of the same type and quality as those found in the city. None of the artefacts indicate excessive wealth or poverty, and in this they are in line with the other medieval structures and finds on the site (Fransson, Ch. 10). The location of Vik at Ørland in relation to communication routes of the time meant that it was in no way a remote area, and, given beneficial preservation conditions, it should come as no surprise to find many of the same everyday artefacts in Trondheim.

To conclude: the finds show no indications of difference in material culture between the urban and the rural areas. It is true that the material from Vik shows less variation in type and style than the

material from Trondheim – this may primarily be due to the small number of artefacts, but it may also reflect the similarities in social standing amongst the population at a medieval farm in contrast to the diversity of a densely populated city.

There are limits to what we can interpret from this small amount of material. We cannot carry out the kind of statistical analysis that is possible with large urban deposits. However, this type of finds can still enable us to identify with the people of the time and spark our curiosity, hinting at activities that often remain hidden in the archaeological material. We can identify at least one adult, probably more, and one child in the material – a child that played with a toy boat and a broken trough in a puddle of water on this very spot 900 years ago. There was time for play at Vik and time to carve a nice toy for the child to play with.

We do not have any DNA or osteological material that enables us to reconstruct the faces of the people at Vik; the closest we get is the reconstruction of the shoe from the well which allows one the experience of walking in the shoes of the people of the past.

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