

FOREWORD

It has often been said that prehistory serves as a mirror in which we look for some degree of affirmation of ourselves today (Diaz-Andreu and Lucy 2005:9–11; Eriksen 2002:74–5, 92–3; Olsen 1997:266–8). According to this view, archaeological research is concerned first and foremost with what we are able to recognize from the standpoint of our own reality, while whatever differs from our own time will not be so readily grasped and is therefore not so likely to become a focus of research. This approach to prehistory is not, however, quite so restrictive as it might appear at first glance, because the viewpoint represented in the history of scholarship will be constantly changing – as society develops, the cultural context of research will be shifting continuously and the cultural baggage will vary. To put this another way, different cultural starting points will mean that the prehistoric reality which we see in the mirror is endlessly changing. Consequently scholarship will always be provided with something new: new aspects, new questions and new answers.

This book discusses the use of jewellery to communicate cultural and ethnic identity in the Migration Period and the early Merovingian Period.¹ Based initially upon dress-accessories as surviving remains of a costume, I attempt to infer how the phenomenon of *ethnicity* functioned in this period. In the case of scholarship concerned with the subject of ethnicity, our contemporary perceptions influence how research into this topic in prehistory is conducted, and the interpretations which result can often be considered as reproducing social relations of the present (Eriksen 2002:92–3). A commonly cited example is how the Viking Period was presented as the origin of the Norwegian nation in the period of state building in the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries. Studies of the Viking Period were actively used in the establishment of the Norwegian nation state, and the representation of the Viking Period as the root of a *shared* Norwegian prehistory was seen as being of central importance to the state-formation project in order to provide legitimacy for the contention that the Norwegian population had a right to form an independent state (Eriksen 2002:68–9; Myhre 1994:76–94; Olsen 1986; 1997:271–2; Opedahl 1998:35–7).

The depiction of a common and uniform ethnically ‘Norwegian’ prehistory remained to a high degree

the dominant view in the aftermath of the period of nation-building, and so contributed to the frequent under-representation or avoidance of evidence of a multi-cultural prehistory (Myhre 1994:76–94; Olsen 1986; Opedahl 1998:35–7). The Norwegian Saami, for instance, were long portrayed as a people with no prehistory, a foreign element in the context of Norway, with the presence of Saami in Norway being seen as relatively recent (Hansen and Olsen 2004:10–13, 25–7; Olsen 1986; 1997:263–6). This view in academia of Saami culture and prehistory can be linked to the general tendency in public life and politics, from the second half of the 19th century to the end of the 1960s, to reinforce the idea of a homogeneous and predominantly ‘Norwegian’ form of culture in Norwegian society. In this period there was also a conventional view that integration would relatively quickly lead to the assimilation of Saami identity, a view that was reflected in government policy, attempting to enforce integration. However, through influence from, amongst other sources, the American civil rights movements, ‘back-to-the roots’ movements, and political campaigns in the 1950s, 60s and 70s, understanding of ethnic identity was turned around (see, e.g., Eriksen 2002:19–20). In the American context, this change was often referred to as the shift ‘from melting pot to salad bowl’ (Moen 2009:84–96) – recognition of the fact that cultural and ethnic contacts do not lead automatically to assimilation or the hybridization of cultures (perhaps most often perceived as a result of the minority cultures adopting the form of culture of the majority and of those in power), but that ethnic dividing lines may persist with distinct ethnic groups co-existing in a multicultural society. In Norway, the Alta conflict in the 1970s, when demonstrators supporting Saami and environmental interests tried to stop the building of a dam in northern Norway, may well have had the same sort of effect (Eriksen 2002:126). The phenomenon of ethnicity became an object of scientific research (Diaz-Andreu and Lucy 2005:6; Eriksen 2002:2–10; Jones 1997:28–9, 51–5; Lucy 2005:88–91), and in Norwegian archaeology scholarship on Saami identity and prehistory has gradually become an established field (see, e.g., Bergstøl 2008; Gjerde 2009; 2010; Hansen and Olsen 2004:13–14; Odner 1983; Olsen

1 This book is based on my doctoral thesis *Smykkenes språk. Smykker og identitetsforhandlinger i Skandinavia ca. 400–650/700 e.Kr.* (2016).

1984; Olsen and Kobiński 1991:10; Schanche 1989; 2000; Spangen 2005).

In the course of the 1980s and 1990s, Norway has developed from what was commonly regarded as a bicultural society (Norwegians and Saami) to a multicultural one with a minority population of multiple ethnic and cultural backgrounds. This transformation in our own time influences the understanding of 'Norwegian' prehistory, and we are beginning to search for a new prehistoric mirror-image of our multicultural daily reality (cf. Diaz-Andreu and Lucy 2005:10–11). This can be seen as a positive step, because research into multicultural prehistoric societies has been somewhat neglected in archaeology (Insoll 2007:11). We have come to realize that Norwegian history and prehistory contain both a Saami component (Hansen and Olsen 2004; Olsen 1997:265) and 'creole' or hybrid Saami-Norwegian identities (Bergstøl 2004; 2008; Spangen 2005), and it is now perhaps the time to turn the spotlight on periods and areas of prehistory which have been dominated by an even greater range of social and ethnic groupings. I argue in this book that the Migration Period and early Merovingian Period formed such a period in the prehistory of Norway and Scandinavia – a period in which it is not simply a matter of the communication of 'Norwegian'/'Germanic'/'Norse' versus 'Saami' identity, but of the presence of several different 'Germanic' groups.

Another trend which is now having an impact and which is therefore also affecting research into prehistoric identity is to see Norway and Scandinavia as an integrated social and political part of Europe (Eriksen 2002:74–5; Olsen 1997:273). In earlier archaeological scholarship it was conventional to present Norway and Scandinavia from the viewpoint of 'the great ancient cultures' or 'the cradle of civilization', in relation to which the cultures of the North were largely isolated and 'sufficient unto themselves'. We do not now accept that Norway is 'a society far distanced from the great centres of culture' (Marstrand 1956:33). We are preoccupied with being an active part of Europe, a member of the collective European community, and we choose to focus upon the fact

that contacts between the Continent and Scandinavia have been in existence as long as there has been a human population in these areas. In the period this book discusses, the signs of such contact are strong, and some of the material which is examined in this study is common to Scandinavia and other parts of Europe (see, e.g., Hines 1984; 1993a; 1993b; 1997; Meyer 1935; 1941; Reichstein 1975). One theme discussed in this project, is varying levels of shared, supra-regional identities, and the actualization of this theme can hardly be purely coincidental: in a period in which western and central Europe are to a great extent marked by a common culture, we find echoes and mirror-images of our cultural self-perception in prehistoric cultural links.

Two apparently contradictory tendencies which can be claimed to be dominant in contemporary society, ethnic diversity and a common European identity, are thus both present as research themes in the present project. In keeping with more recent theories concerning the phenomenon of ethnicity, these tendencies can be regarded as representing different levels of social identity which determine the self-identification of many who live in Norway and Scandinavia today. We are Norwegians, Swedes or Danes with Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, Saami, Pakistani or some other cultural background, and at the same time we are Scandinavians, Europeans, part of the culture of the West, and so on. By finding comparable levels of identity in prehistory, the ethnic patterns, including their diversity, of our own age are to some extent reproduced. As archaeologists, however, we cannot allow ourselves to be blinded by this mirror-effect to the extent that we look for continuity and *direct connections* between the ethnocultural groupings of prehistory and today (Eriksen 2002:95; Insoll 2007:4). Neither must we ignore or avoid what to us appears different, contrastive, unfamiliar or foreign. The archaeological evidence has to form the starting point, with the limitations and opportunities it provides for the development of valid theories and interpretations. Otherwise we risk the situation in which only 'empty shells are created' (Insoll 2007:4).