

PREFACE

This volume is the result of a number of seminars and workshops in 2015–2016, organized by the research group ECHO – Charismatic Objects – at the Museum of Cultural History in Oslo. Through the combined efforts of national and international researchers from the fields of conservation studies, archaeology and art history, the seminars explored the ongoing scholarly debate on the relationship between objects’ materiality, visual and emotional impact and social representativity. As humans, we understand and experience the objects and things around us through our senses: through seeing them, touching them, smelling them and maybe hearing them. Thus sense perception is our main access to the things surrounding us. But we also understand them on the basis of our cosmology and our perception of reality. When beliefs, norms and memories merge with the physical experience of the object, emotions are aroused. Extraordinary objects, things that express collective and conservation stories evoke extraordinary feelings. Both the physical characteristics of the objects and the myths surrounding them may increase their meaning, lending them an inherent power. The design, language of form, as well as the materials used are essential elements in creating the object’s charisma and in the stories that are told about them.

Although the concept of charisma has been widely discussed in sociological literature, concentrating mainly on personal leadership, charismatic *objects* are far less commonly discussed. Nevertheless, it is not difficult to find examples of such objects, since they have existed throughout history. In this volume, we will explore the material world of charismatic objects through nine papers focusing on historical

examples dating from the Roman Period to the late Middle Ages. The papers cover a continuous chronological timeline that allows us to follow certain long-lasting perceptions and beliefs surrounding charismatic objects. The chosen timeline highlights the fact that there exist both obvious similarities and important differences between the periods in question as to how such objects are perceived and the ritual practices in which they are embedded. This enables us to follow the phenomenon of how specific objects take on a special meaning and significance, and how they in certain contexts are infused with charismatic and magical properties. It also allows us to glimpse or follow certain patterns and perceptions that seem to have survived the Christianization of Scandinavia. Furthermore, examples from present day experiences of prehistoric objects or antiques as charismatic objects demonstrate how some objects possess specific qualities that seem to outlive their period of use and allow them to take on new meanings in different historical contexts.

We would like to express our heartfelt thanks to all colleagues who have contributed to engaging discussions and with their expertise during the seminars. The work of the ECHO group and the publication of the present volume have been made possible through generous funding from the Research Council at the Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo and the Archaeological Museum, University of Stavanger, and we are most grateful for their support and encouragement.

Oslo, August 30, 2018,

*Marianne Vedeler, Ingunn Marit Røstad,
Elna Siv Kristoffersen and Zanette Tsigaridas Glørstad*

