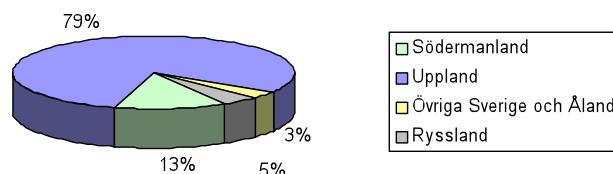


Thorshammerrings

Thorshammerrings consist of an iron ring with one or several pendants in shape of a hammer or axe. The iron rod forming the ring is generally around 50 cm long and 0,4 cm wide and often twisted. However pendants and diameter of the rings vary, rings and spirals are also common as pendants. Thorshammerrings differ from single thorshammer pendants both regarding construction and context. Thorshammerrings, both ring and pendants, are with no exceptions forged of iron and they are primarily found in graves. They are mainly found in cremation burials and the finds are limited to Sweden, with a concentration to the Mälars Valley, with the exception of a few examples found in Åland and Russia. The areas with thorshammerrings are connected to areas of trade, workshops like smithies and areas of iron distribution. The appearance of the artefact is also coinciding with the emerging knowledge of the use of iron. The thorshammer pendants are associated with Thors hammer, Mjölmir, known through Viking art, mythology and sagas.



Sketch: J. Lyman. After exhibited artefact in Historiska Museet, display case 32. Findplace: Björkö, Adelsö sn Up



Distribution of thorshammerrings, in percent (Lyman 2007:12).

The thorshammerrings have been interpreted by various archaeologists as neck rings, amulet rings, parts of a death ritual and more. This paper presents all previous works in the subject including my own which provides significant new information.

The main sources for information about thorshammerrings are the information presented in the web catalogues of the Swedish Historical Museum, Krister Ström's unpublished thesis *Om fynden av torshammarringar* from 1970 and reports from excavations in the areas with finds of thorshammerrings. The problem with those sources is that they are old and that a couple of hundreds thorshammerrings have been found the last ten years that have not yet been registered (Gunnar Andersson, oral information 2006-03-14). Through conversation with archaeologists working in the find areas I have received information that show that the contexts of the new finds has not changed compared to the known examples. Regarding the material from Åland and Russia the works of Ella Kivikoski (1963;1964;1980) and Galina Novikova (1992) are the main sources. Also Evgenij N Nosov (1992) and Wladyslaw Duczko (2004) describe Russian finds of thorshammerrings shortly. Contacted museums in Russia have not bothered to answer any questions about this artifact group. Regarding mythological aspects of burials and the symbols presented on the thorshammerrings some medieval texts, mainly the poetic Edda, are also of interest.

Montelius names the year 700 to the later half of the 12th century *Vikingatiden* or *Den yngre jernalderna* (1873:76), this is the definition I use regarding the Viking Age of Middle Sweden.

Yxan är helt klart en av de mer betydande symboler vi har, genom hela historien writes Leif Karlenby in his thesis about the bronze axe as object and thought. Karlenby means that the sacral and profane is the base of any society and that the axe symbol had a role in all parts of the society (2002:95ff). Thorshammers, axes, rings and other cult symbols have been studied by many scientists of different sciences and comparisons have been made with for Sámi and Finnish or Greek and Egyptian material (e.g. Maths Bertell 2003). Also this non-archaeological material shows the significance of those symbols. Thorshammers are a part of the Heathen axe symbolism which is known from the Stone Age and onwards. The axe/hammer symbol is connected to thoughts about fertility and welfare. In rock art we see various forms of axes,



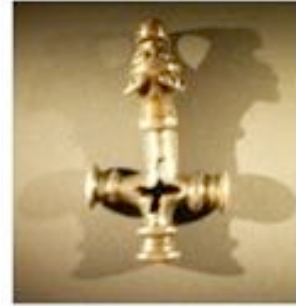
Sketch by J. Lyman after Stolpe, in Hallström 1913 Pl. II

often at phallic figures, which clearly show the axes connection to fertility (Ström 1997:121). Many people have investigated the role of the axe in prehistoric societies. *Välbekant är förekomsten af små yxformiga hängprydnader från vår stenålder och hammarformiga, de s.k. Torshammarna, från vikingatiden* writes Oscar Almgren in *Fornvännen* 1909. Almgren talks about miniature axes from the Iron Age, mainly of amber, where two Gotlandic example are dated to the 7th century (1909:38). During the Iron Age in the Nordic countries the axe symbolism is mainly seen in the thorshammer. Oscar Montelius first interpreted

the thorshammer as an anchor shaped pendant but later saw it as a Heathen symbol worn by Heathens in the same way as crosses worn by Christians to show their religious view (1873:107; 1919:392). 1898 Montelius wrote *Solgudens yxa och Tors hammare* where the thorshammer is compared to similar symbols in other cultures. Hans Hildebrand and Helge Ljungberg also did similar comparisons. Thor was for example associated to Indra (Hildebrand 1872; Ljungberg 1947). Hildebrand, in the 1870s, connected the hammer symbol with Mjöltnir mentioned in the Eddas (1872) and Montelius later wrote that hammer formed pendants without doubt depicted Thors hammer (1873:107) and that this form was derived from the axe of the sun god which during the later Heathen period in the Nordic countries was replaced with a hammer which can also be compared to a double axe. Ljungberg regarded thorshammers as amulets or marks of magical significance (1947:133). The Norwegian archaeologist Sigurd Grieg believed that the thorshammer was connected to the older Nordic tradition: *Allting tyder imidlertid på at Torshammeren som symbol og amulett er adskillig eldre enn krusifikset og brytningstiden mellem hedenskap og kristendom. Jeg er derfor snarest tilbøielig til å se forholdet omvendt og si at når vi i 11. århundre finner krusifikser i enkelte sene sølvfund, så er det fordi man tidligere hade brukt å bære Tors-hamrer sammen med sølvringene* (1929:305). The notes and sketches of Hjalmar Stolpe from the beginning of the 20th century show various descriptions of thorshammers from Björkö. From Björkö's grave fields are finds like the thorshammerring below (Hallström 1913:32f). Birgit Arrhenius wrote about Viking Age miniatures in *TOR* 1961: *De här behandlade miniatyrföremålen utmärkas av att de än äro tillverkade såsom eleganta smyckeliknande hängen i ädelmetall, än som enkla, ofta*

grova järnföremål, vilka uppenbarligen aldrig burits såsom smycken. Detta antyder att föremålen ej kunna betraktas enbart som berlocker, utan att de med all sannolikhet ha en djupare, symbolisk betydelse (1961:150).

Arrhenius then wrote about votive rings and pendants and believed that thorshammerrings should not be regarded as a separate group. Other studies with relation to thorshammers have been made by for example Michael Müller-Wille who studied chamber graves with wagons used as coffins. Some of those wagons had rings with thorshammer pendants attached (1976: Tafel 23 and 31). Those rings are the base of Jörn Staeckers type 3. Wagon graves are most common in Denmark and are often interpreted as a way of getting to the other world and they often contain religious symbols (Randsborg 1980:131). Egon Wamers suggested that the thorshammer is a praefiguratio of the cross and that missionaries changed Thor fighting the Midgårdserpent to Christ fighting the Devil in form of a serpent which would make Thor the praefiguratio of Christ (Staecker 1999a:214; 1999b:90,99; Lager 2002:205-220). The thorshammer has its origin in the axe which is a much older symbol than the Christian cross. Regarding single thorshammer pendants and their relation to the Christianisation Jörn Staeckers thesis *Rex regum et dominus dominorum: die wikingzeitlichen Kreuz- und Kruzifixanhänger als Ausdruck der Mission in Altdänemark und Schweden* from 1999 is of importance. It contains maps, typology and chronology over mainly cross forms but also thorshammers. The form of Staeckers type 3 is similar to the thorshammerrings but the context and material is not the same. In Staeckers article *Thor's Hammer – Symbol of Christianization and Political Delusion* the author suggests that the thorshammerrings show an awareness of the progress of society and as a materialization of the narrative structure comparable to the Gotlandic picturestones (1999:93). Staecker also discusses this subject in *The Cross Goes North* where Christian symbols in mainly female graves are suggested as a sign of an earlier Christian influence from the British Isles and as a sign of a bigger acceptance of the new religion amongst females. Staecker also sees the single thorshammer pendants as a Heathen reaction against Christianity (1997, 2003:468). Thorshammers as pendants worn around the neck, made of silver, gold, copper alloys, amber or bone are younger than the thorshammerrings and they are found in graves, hoards and as stray finds. Various forms of thorshammers have been found in Scandinavia, Finland, Åland, Poland, Russia, Ireland and England. Towards the end of the Viking age thorshammers were no longer common and various cross forms were introduced. After the introduction of Christianity some mixed forms also occurred, those are pendants that have both cross and hammer/axe features. When Christian belief became prevalent the cross formed pendants appear to have taken the place of the thorshammer (Roesdahl 1998:150). Cross pendants are known from graves and hoards from all over the Nordic countries also in Sámi settlements (Gräslund 1992:190). At Björkö the first crosses occur from the 10th century (Gräslund 2001:58) the oldest one from a female grave which is regarded as the oldest representation of Christ in Scandinavia (Batey 1994:86; Gräslund 1992:191). Christian objects are otherwise, according to Ambrosiani, rare in the Björkö graves (1996:55). Crosses occur in different



Thorshammer from Fossi, Iceland.
Photo: J.Lyman

forms; crucifix, palmetto, encolpia, in silver, bronze, gold, tin, iron, lead, decorated with for example filigree ornaments and with different types of arms. Both thorshammers and crosses were according to Linn Lager used for personal protection (2002:224). In 1999 there were 121 known thorshammer pendants from 86 places around Europe (Staecker 1999:94). The majority of thorshammer pendants are found in Denmark and Southeast Sweden, mostly in hoards. Around 50 examples are molded and of silver, they are from silver hoards dated to 900/1000 (Gräslund 1992; Staecker 1999:94).

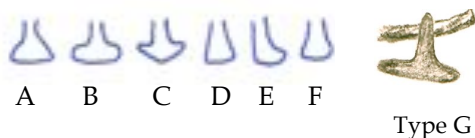
Distribution and context of single thorshammer pendants (Staecker 1999:94)

Context	DK	S	N	IS	GB	IRL	RUS	PL
Grave	16	10	2	1	1	-	1	-
Hoard	20	11	3	-	2	-	-	3
Settlement	22	7	-	-	1	1	-	3
Stray finds	12	2	2	-	-	-	-	1
Total number	70	30	7	1	4	1	1	7

Considering this small amount of single thorshammer pendants (the numbers above are not entirely correct though, considering the Icelandic thorshammers for example, I have seen at least two examples at the National Museum in Reykjavík) it is notable that thorshammerrings are not mentioned more often in discussions about thorshammers in general. In my study of thorshammerrings I registered 794 examples. This could be connected to the limited distribution of the finds or perhaps the “non elegant” design as Arrhenius mentioned above.

Krister Ström was the first one to classify and systemise the thorshammerrings. He presented an extensive report where pendants and ring forms from 400 finds were separated in different types. Ström’s *Om fynden av torshammerringar* is an important source but was never published in its original form. Shorter versions are to be found in the articles *Thorshammerringe und andere Gegenstände des heidnischen Kults* published in *Birka 11:1 Systematische Analysen der Gräberfunde*, *Kulturhistoriskt lexikon för nordisk medeltid* and in *Västmanlands fornminnesförenings årsskrift 50-54*. Ström’s material analysis is not concise, one example is that he excludes rings with an diameter under 10,5 in some statistics but includes an example from Berga with an diameter of 6,5 cm and one from Öland with a rod length of only 3 cm (1970:2,6).

Ström divided the hammer/axe pendants in six groups, from A to F. A rather

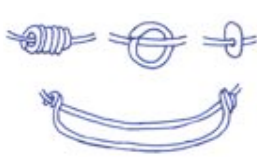


Ströms pendant typology.
Sketch: J.Lyman after Ström 1984

common pendant type, seen beside, with longer blades than Ström’s type B could be added to the list. I call it group G. Otherwise I see no need for new typologies regarding thorshammerrings, the variation is too big to make more specific classifications and the preservation conditions of iron is rather

bad which often makes the original form of the thorshammerring hard to define. Corrosion also continues in storerooms or display cases. Ström also illustrated different types of circular pendants and closing constructions. The pendants are sometimes attached to a separate rod or ring fastened to the

larger ring. More than half of the studied thorshammerring rods were twisted (1984:127). Torsion is also common on the circular pendants. Pendants of thorshammers are often constructed from the same material as the main ring (Ström 1970:3f,10).

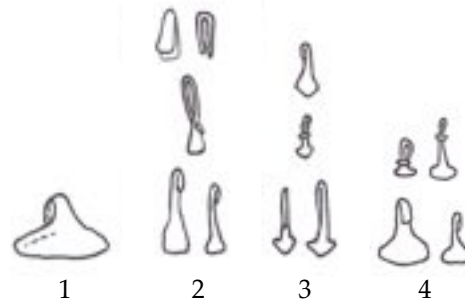


Ströms classification of non hammer pendants and closing constructions. Sketch: J.Lyman after Ström 1984:128

Ström regarded the thorshammerrings to be neck rings because of the size and closing construction and he left the interpretations of the artefact with its symbols to the theologians.

A similar study of the thorshammerrings found in Russia was made by Galina L. Novikova who classified the types into four groups, 1 to 4, and separated them also by the suspend method.

Novikovas text lacks a clear definition of the described material. The author does not think it is right to treat rings with pendants and rings without pendants as a single group but often does so anyway (1992:74).



Novikovas typology. Sketch: J.Lyman after Novikova 1992

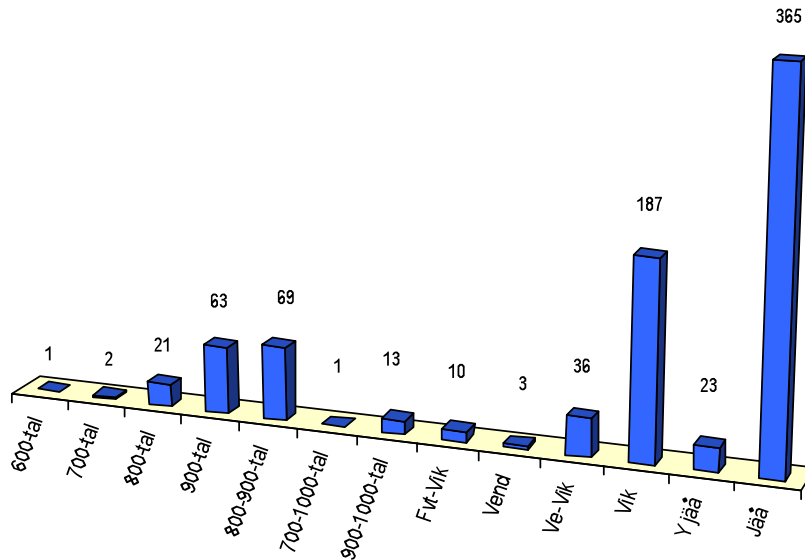
Like Ström, Novikova gives a functionalistic explanation of the thorshammerrings as neckrings. This interpretation is based on the place of thorshammerrings in some urn graves where it is placed on the shoulder of the urn: *a rite symbolising the new dwelling of the dead person "risen" from the ashes*, with the neck-ring in its original place as a neck-ornament (1992:85). The cases where the ring is placed inside an urn is by Novikova regarded as proof that the rings were not made for the funeral but worn in daily life, because the diameter of the ring is smaller than the diameter of the urn. Another argument used by the author for the use of thorshammerrings in daily life is the settlement finds. In this study also iron neck rings with traces of silver or bronze are counted in and connected to a theory of the iron just being the core of the rings. The endings of the thorshammerring are, in contrast to Ström, of no importance in Novikova's study, they are often broken or very fragmented (Novikova 1992:79). Novikova's work is largely based on M.V. Fechner's survey of the Russian neckrings, *grivna*, their cross sections and way of construction. Fechner also interprets the Scandinavian thorshammerrings as neckrings and as a reaction against Christianity. According to Fechner thorshammerrings occur in 23 Russian areas, in 45 mounds, of which 32 were cremation graves and 13, mainly female inhumation graves (1967:62f). Those numbers do not correspond with Novikova's study and I have only taken the 36 finds of iron rings with thorshammer pendants to account in my own study.

Gunnar Nilsén wrote a paper about thorshammerrings in 1992, based on Ström's och Novikova's material. Nilsén compared two separate gravefield contexts. Through a comparative analysis of material from Björkö and Spånga Nilsén saw ideological dualism during the 9th-10th centuries. Nilsén considered Ström's functionalistic explanation of the thorshammerrings as too simple and regarding Novikova recognized a will to move Russia closer to the Scandinavian culture (1992:6). Nilsén regard the thorshammerrings as a common symbol for the "svear" activated under ideological and social stress (1992:35), like the runestones a reaction against something changing and against outer threats which brings forward thoughts about affinity and group belonging (1992:8). This explanation is not correct, far from all svear were buried with thorshammerrings, however Nilsén's thought of the thorshammerrings as symbols of eternal life and rebirth are significant (1992:9). Nilsén does not represent any new information about the material.

Gunnar Andersson has written about thorshammerrings in excavation reports, in his thesis *Gravspråk som religiös strategi* and in the volume *Dealing with the dead*. In the thesis two Swedish grave fields, Valsta and Skälby, are studied to see how the perceptions of the world were changing during the end of the Viking Age and beginning of the Medieval period. Andersson comments on the insufficient dating of thorshammerrings and suggests that they should be postponed with a main period during the 11th century. The author is also questioning the prevailing relation between the thorshammerrings and Thor. An interesting connection made by Andersson is the relation between thorshammerrings and Freya symbolism. The pendant from Hagebyhöga is used as an example, depicting a pregnant female protected by a ring. Andersson also points to the likeness between the single thorshammer pendants on the larger thorshammerrings and the Tau cross, a symbol within the Greek-orthodox church. Andersson has interpreted the increasing use of the thorshammer as an activation of Heathen tradition against the Christianization (1998:44). This theory of opposition, also in a higher degree presented by Nilsén and Staecker, is according to Ström incorrect. Ström makes clear that the explanation of the use of thorshammerrings must be sought somewhere else because the tradition of thorshammerrings is older than the Christian mission. To date the thorshammerrings on the basis of the Christian mission, as for example Lindqvist did in 1915, is highly problematic. To date them on the basis of the Birka- or Lovö chronologies is also not entirely safe for the reason that they are based on a specific area and cannot be used generally for all of middle Sweden. From my study of thorshammerring it is clear that the thorshammerrings are older than the Christian mission to Scandinavia and that the tradition was performed till the end of the Viking period.



Pendant from Hagebyhöga.
Drawing: J. Lyman, after artefact placed in Historiska Museet, display case 32



Dating of thorshammerrings (Lyman 2007:24).

I see a clear connection to the hammer symbol in the thorshammerrings. In many ways this could be connected to Thor. To see the role of the thunder god I here look at some other representations of Thor or thorshammers.

The Åbystone, the Stenkvistastone and the Gårdstångastone, all from Sweden, are examples where thorshammers are carved onto the stone (Wilson 1995:139; Näsström 2001:276). Of Södermanlands ca 400 runestones three are connected to Thor, from Västergötland we have runestones with the texts *Tor vige* and *må Tor helga* and one with a thorshammer, also the Danish Glavendrup stone has a message to Thor and at the Virring stone the words *Tor vige detta kummel* can be read (Roesdahl 1980:182; Ström 1997:123; Gräslund 2001:41). At picturestones for example in Gotland and Altuna in Sweden, Thy in Denmark and Gosfort in England there is a scene often connected to the Edda poem of Hymer where Thor is said to be fishing for the midgard serpent (Roesdahl 1980:184,242; 1994:172; 1998:151; Wilson 1995:178; Ström 1997:127; Sawyer 1997:213; Gräslund 2001:55).

The figurine from Eyrarland in Iceland is another representation of Thor. It is moulded in bronze and 6,7 cm high, depicting a man sitting on a chair holding his beard which at the end are formed like a hammer (Eldjárn 1956:362f). A couple of similar figurines are known, they are grabbing their beard in the same way and are often interpreted as amulets or gaming pieces with connection to Thor. Examples are the little amber figure from Fedet in Sydöstsjylland (Almgren 1968:140). Miniatures were according to Ström and Almgren meant for personal cult (Ström 1997:122; Almgren 1968:145).



The Eyrarland Thorfigurine. Painted by J.Lyman, after artefact exhibited in the National Museum, Reykjavík.

Coins with carved thorshammers have been found, for example two Danish coins found in England and four Arabic coins found in Gotlandic silver hoards (Wall 1999:11). There is also one known loom weight with a thorshammer carved onto it. It was found in 1932 in the barn of the Greenlandic farm Brattahlid which presumably belonged to Erik the Red

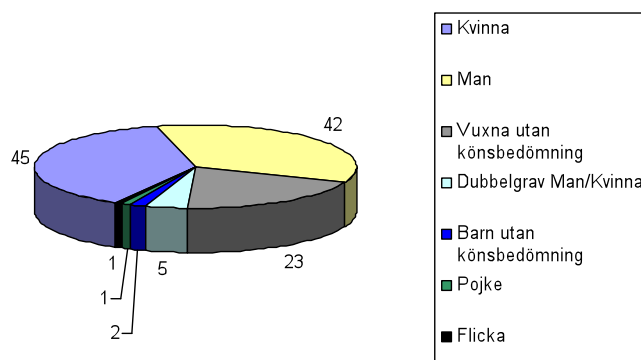
(Roesdahl 1992:315; 1994:296; Batey 1994:175). A carved thorshammer is also visible on the bottom of a silver bowl, a bronze mount from Solberga, Östergötland, might depict Thor fishing and a copper plate from Kvinneby, Öland, shows a rune text where one readable part says: "Må Tor skydde honom med den hammare som..." (Wilson 1995:139; Wall 1999:11). Textiles are rarely preserved; a tapestry from Skog in Hälsingland, from the 13th century depicts three figures often interpreted as Thor, Odin and Frey. Among theoforic place names Thor is the most common, also personal names often refer to Thor, for example in the Landnámabók. Torsåker is common in Sweden, Torsager in Denmark and Thorsmörk is an example from Iceland. Åke Hyenstrand presented a list of place names in *Lejonet, draken och korset* where he compared the names Tor, Fröja, Oden, Frö, Njord and Ull. Tor had the leading position with 42% followed by Fröja with 30% (1996:124). The name of the weekday Thursday is still used, Montelius and Schön writes that Thursday evening was celebrated until the 19th century; it was the best day for performing rites. January was once called Thorsmonth (Montelius 1919:392; Schön 2004:225f). Areas outside the Nordic countries where affected by the presence of Vikings which in Ireland where called *Muintir Thomair*, Thors people or Thors clan, in Dublin there was a temple and an oak alley raised for Thor called *Coill Tomar* (Ström 1997:122). In England we find for example Thursstable in Essex. Moulding forms are also a category of thorshammer finds, in some cases those show forms for both thorshammer and cross (Roesdahl 1980:200). Stone age axes found in the ground where in Swedish folklore believed to be Thors thunderbolts and farmers often kept them in their home to protect them from strokes of lightning, trolls and other bad things (Näsström 2001:276; Schön 2004:216f).

Obviously the thundergod, during the Viking Age called Thor was very popular for a long time. The forn sidr did not use texts or rulebooks like the Bible, therefore scientists often turn to secondary sources. The poetic Edda is an important source with *Hávamál* and *Völuspá* describing the creation myth and moral of the heathen world. Within Nordic mythology the hammer called *Mjölhnir* is Thors most important sign. According to the Eddas Thor is the son of Jord and Odin, and the father of Magne who is going to rule the world after Ragnarök (Edda 2004:70,99; Snorra Edda 1999:109). In *Gylfaginning* it is said that Thor is the strongest amongst gods and humans, his attributes are a hammer, a belt and a couple of iron gloves (Snorra Edda 1999:51). In the Icelandic tradition Thor is described as the god of seafarers (Näsström 2001:79) and Thor is often described as the protector of humans. Amongst the first ones to mention Thor in Latin language was Adam of Bremen who describes Thor as a central figure (Mester Adam 1978:29f [1718]). Olaus Magnus wrote in his *Historia om de nordiska folken* that Thor was called for in situations of epidemics or hunger and that he ruled the sky and created thunder, lightning, rain and wind. Olaus Magnus as well as Adam of Bremen compared Thor to Jupiter. Olaus Magnus wrote:

Vidare dyrkade de [Götarna] sina gudar med så stor nit, att de, så snart buller och dån hördes i molnen, avsköto pilar från sina bågar upp i luften, därmed givande till känna att de ville hjälpa sina gudar, vilka de trodde blivit anfallna av andra. Men de nöjde sig ej med denna enfaldiga vidskepelse, utan använde i samma syfte väldiga och ovanligt tunga kopparhammare, som de kallade Jupitershammare (Torshammare) och höllo i stor vördnad. Dessa begagnade de till att efterlikna tordönet i himlen, vilket de trodde åstadkommas genom hammare, och ansågo det som ett synnerligen fromt verk att så deltaga i striden på sina gudars sida [...]. Denna användning av

Jupitershramrarna fortfor ända till år 1130 e.kr., då Magnus, götarnas konung, /.../ kände det såsom en helig plikt att både beröva templet dess helgd och guden Jupiter hans utmärkelsetecken (Olaus Magnus/Hagberg 1963:49 [1555])

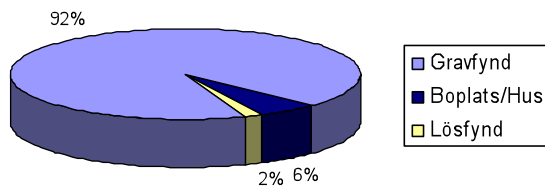
Mjölfnir was created by a master smith, a dwarf, who made six gifts to the gods. The hammer always struck its goal and then returned to Thors hand. It could also shrink so Thor could wear it around his neck (Snorra Edda 1999:141). The name has been compared to the Icelandic words *mala* (grind) and *mölva* (to cross), Russian *molnija* (lightning) and Walesic *mellt* (lightning) (Ström F. 1997:121; Näsström, 2001:349). With the hammer Thor sacred the grave of Balder and resurrected his goats (Snorra Edda 1999:70). At weddings, with connection to the story in Trymskvida, the symbol was used in folklore where a hammer was placed under the bed of the newly weds (Ström 1997:123; Schön 2004:221). My interpretation of the thorshammerring is connected to the powers of Thor and his hammer, and to thoughts of eternal life and reproduction, but the thorshammerrings are more than that. They are a multifaceted artefact also connected with thoughts regarding the characteristics of iron as well as an amulet ring with essential significance in the burial ceremony. The connection to iron is an important aspect also brought forward by Gunnar Andersson and also Mats Burström (1990). The significance of the magical characteristics of iron and steel and its connections to funerals is the base of my interpretation of the artifact. The main sources mentioned here have not brought forward a complete interpretation of thorshammerrings. Ström created a base for further studies but did not go further, Novikova gave a functionalistic and simple explanation largely based on Ström and other older sources. Nilsén, Staecker and Andersson used Ström's old statistics and interpreted thorshammerring as some kind of reaction against Christianity. The main problem with all those texts is that they all use Ström's statistics from 1970. This has for example led to the notion that thorshammerrings are connected to females in a higher degree than males; the number used is 60% respectively 40% (1970:27). This is also connected to the older interpretation of thorshammerrings as neckrings and jewelry as female artifacts. My study showed that the occurrence of thorshammerrings is not connected to sex or age. Of 118 graves with osteological and/or archaeological sex estimation 42 thorshammerrings belonged to males and 44 plus one uncertain to females.



Distribution in terms of sex, number of defined bodies (Lyman 2007:22).

The neckring theory is not used in any of the newer interpretations. The rings are normally deposited in cremation graves, a few examples are known from inhumation graves where they are almost never placed near the head. With a diameter sometimes around 15 centimeters and with a closing construction

the rings could have been placed on a head in some cases. But this explanation is unlikely due to the form and material of the rings which diameter varies from a few centimeters to two decimeters and because of the twisted iron ring which could not be comfortable to wear in comparison to the known wearable neckrings in gold, silver and bronze. The rings are usually never burned along with the corpse and its personal belongings; it is placed on the bones after they are positioned in the grave, often in or on top of an urn which clearly shows its connection to funerals. According to my numbers 86,2% of the grave finds are cremation graves and the grave constructions are typically Scandinavian and Pagan in all find areas. Furthermore the practice does not in any studies seem to be related to social status, though the buried people in a central area like the Mälars Valley



Distribution of thorshammerrings in graves, settlements/houses and as stray finds, in percent (Lyman 2007:13)

probably belonged to an important part of the society. The thorshammerrings are found in both rich and poor graves, both regarding to quantity and quality estimations. Why the custom of placing thorshammerrings in graves was limited to the Mälars area has been explained in means of a tradition of all svear, which is

people from all over middle Sweden. The finds are too limited and spread for this to be correct. My theory is that it was a custom connected to a group of people involved in the trade and logistics in this particular area. This theory is strengthened by the finds of thorshammerrings in Scandinavian graves in Russia. Those graves belong to individuals from the central parts of Sweden who were in Russia for different purposes which for example could involve trade, military service or marriage. Furthermore I think that the thorshammerrings are connected with smiths and their families. This is confirmed by the numerous workshops excavated in connection with thorshammerring finds, both in Sweden and Russia.

Christianity was a tool for the Scandinavian rulers in the formation of states and the incorporation with the rest of Europe; yet it played no part in the use of thorshammerrings. However the mode of wearing cross amulets around the neck could have influenced the use of single neck jewelry amulets formed as thorshammers, made in gold, bronze and silver as some persons wore around the eleventh century.

In art and early Scandinavian literature rings and hammers/axes are portrayed in various occasions. We have the Nordic mythology with Thors hammer Mjölner and Odens ring Draupnir, or Icelandic texts like Gragas and epics like Beowulf where rings of honor and of economic value are described.

My research has shown that the thorshammerring is a complex artifact with a main purpose as a symbol of reproduction and protection used in grave ceremonies by people connected to the handling of iron.

Extract from the Master thesis *Thorshammerrings – a new interpretation* by Jasmine Lyman