

A Petersen Type ‘M’ Sword in the Naval Academy’s Collections: Viking History Meets the Modern Navy

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Sometime between 850-950 CE a 91cm single-edged sword was forged in Viking Age Norway. Eventually, that sword was placed in the earth, likely buried alongside its owner. Roughly 1,000 years later (in 1957), that sword was presented to the brigade of midshipmen at the United States Naval Academy by President Eisenhower. The artifact has the distinction of being the oldest weapon in the Naval Academy’s possession. This essay considers what forensic and archaeological evidence can tell us about the sword’s hitherto unknown history and also explores this artifact’s modern provenance and connection to US-Norwegian maritime relations in the mid-twentieth century.

Entre 850 et 950 EC, une épée à un tranchant de 91 cm a été forgée dans la Norvège de l’ère des Vikings, puis elle a été enterrée, probablement aux côtés de son propriétaire. Environ 1 000 ans plus tard (en 1957), le président Eisenhower a présenté l’épée à la brigade d’aspirants de marine à l’Académie navale des États-Unis. L’artéfact a la particularité d’être la plus ancienne arme en la possession de l’Académie navale. Le présent article traite de ce que les preuves médico-légales et archéologiques peuvent nous dire au sujet de l’histoire jusqu’ici inconnue de l’épée et examine la provenance moderne de cet artéfact ainsi que son rapport aux relations maritimes américano-norvégiennes au milieu du 20e siècle.

The United States Naval Academy (USNA) Museum (also known as Preble Hall) boasts a number of historical weapons including a variety of swords and firearms connected with maritime engagements that have taken place around the world. In many cases, the craftsmen, owners, and stories connected with those artifacts are known. But the item that holds the distinction of being the oldest weapon in the Academy's possession has a complex and shadowy past. That item is a Viking Age sword which came to Annapolis by an unlikely and circuitous route. Sometime in 1956, the Crown Prince of Norway, Olav V, acquired a broken sword in two fragments from the *Universitetets Oldsaksamling* in Oslo. Those fragments were reforged and the sword was then carefully set in velvet padding (the side with the obvious repair-line face down) and encased in glass. In December of that year, the sword embarked on a voyage that would take it to ports around the Atlantic Ocean, eventually to the Oval Office, and then to its current residence in Preble Hall.

This article considers three areas related to this artifact, about which virtually nothing – other than what I outline above – was known until fairly recently. First, I will discuss the pedagogical and forensic work my students and I undertook with the sword during Spring 2022. Secondly, I will assess the information we can piece together concerning the sword's medieval history and Viking Age context and argue that we can reasonably establish its status as a “grave good” likely buried with an owner who was a person of prominence. Finally, I will examine US-Norwegian military and political relations during the 1940s and 1950s. I suggest that the strong diplomatic ties established during and after World War II between Norway and the United States most likely prompted the transference of this item from the Norwegian government to the United States.

Unearthing Viking History with Midshipmen at the United States Naval Academy

I first became aware of the Viking sword's existence in 2021 after Educational Specialist Sondra Duplantis invited me over to Preble Hall to show me some of our oldest artifacts. The authentic Viking sword she had removed from storage, of course, caught my attention. Roughly a year later, I taught a capstone course called ‘Literature of the Vikings’ and, as a core part of this class, my students and I undertook a kind of “recovery” project wherein we tried to discern all we could about the sword's history and modern day provenance. To begin, my class held several sessions in Preble Hall with the sword under the guidance of Museum Director, Claude Berube. Through our collaborative efforts, we were able to retrace the sword's journey from Oslo to the United States and then to the Naval Academy.



C7629 at the United States Naval Academy. (Courtesy of the author)

In December 1956, the sword began its journey across the Atlantic from Oslo to New York aboard *Christian Radich*, a full-rigged Norwegian ship used as a training vessel. The ship's voyage was chronicled in a travelogue-style documentary called *Windjammer*, directed by Louis de Rochemont. Housed within the ship, the sword traveled from Oslo to Madeira to San Juan, Curacao, Trinidad, and then New York covering a total of 17,500 miles. Upon the *Radich*'s arrival in New York, the ship's captain, Yngvar Kjelstrup, along with four Norwegian naval cadets, accompanied the sword to Washington, DC, to present the artifact to President Eisenhower on behalf of now King Olav V of Norway. There was some controversy associated with the handover when Eisenhower's chief of staff, Sherman Adams, issued a statement indicating that Captain Kjelstrup would not be allowed to attend because of concerns over the commercial nature of *Radich*'s voyage. Mr. de Rochemont unsuccessfully appealed on Kjelstrup's behalf citing that the captain merely wished to pay his respects to Eisenhower, who would have been his war-time Supreme Commander during WWII, insisting that the sword was "a gesture of friendship on the part of the Norwegian people."¹ The sword was ultimately handed over to Eisenhower on 3 June 1957, during a ceremony in the Oval Office that included Norway's former Ambassador to the United States, Wilhelm de Morgenstjerne, and Midshipman David B. McGuigan, editor of the Naval Academy's yearbook, *The Lucky Bag*. The next day, President Eisenhower wrote to King Olav expressing his gratitude for a "priceless item of Norwegian antiquity" and his wish that "[the sword] find a home in one of the fine Museums in our country – perhaps the Naval Academy Museum."²

¹ Louis de Rochemont to Hon. Sherman Adams, 3 June 1957. There was subsequent correspondence on this topic, namely, Sherman Adams to Mr. Louis de Rochemont, 5 June 1957 and E. P. Aurand, Memorandum for the President, 4 June 1957, Eisenhower Presidential Library.

² Letter from the President to His Royal Highness Olav, Crown Prince of Norway, Oslo – thanking him for the Viking sword brought by Capt. Kjelstrup, Norwegian Merchant Marine, 4



President Eisenhower holding C7629 alongside Midshipman David B. McGuigan. (United Press Telephoto)



President Eisenhower presents the Viking sword to Brigade Commander, Charles R. Larson. (Photo courtesy of Mrs. Charles R. Larson)

Several months later, on 4 October 1957, President Eisenhower traveled to Thompson Stadium in Annapolis via helicopter during the halftime of the first Army-Navy sprint football game (known at the time as “lightweight” football). On the field, during halftime, he gave the sword to then brigade commander, Charles R. Larson, who would later rise to the rank of Admiral and be buried alongside Senator John McCain in the Naval Academy Cemetery. We uncovered further snippets of information at USNA’s Special Collections. Interestingly, in 1959, a Seattle News Station (KOMO-TV) politely requested that the sword be loaned to the Navy Museum in Bremerton, Washington.³ But this request was curtly denied by a Public Information Officer, Commander F. H. Lloyd, with the response: “the Naval Academy is a wonderful place to visit so why don’t you tell your Scandinavians to head east next summer and see the Viking Sword.”⁴

The most significant study we undertook in Spring 2022 occurred in one of USNA’s Biology labs. This forensic analysis yielded crucial details about the sword’s past. While the sword was out from its protective glass for the first time in six decades we made detailed measurements of the blade, guards, and grip yielding the following measurements:

June 1957, Eisenhower Presidential Library.

³ Edna K. Hanna, Sales Promotion Manager, KOMO-TV, to U. S. Naval Academy Public Relations Office, 19 October, 1959, United States Naval Academy Special Collections.

⁴ F. M. Lloyd, CDR USN, to Edna K. Hanna, 29 October 1959, United States Naval Academy Special Collections.

Overall length: 91 cm
Blade length: 79 cm
Blade width: 4.69 cm
Guard: 11.5 cm
Guard width: 1.46 cm
Grip: 9 cm
Hilt: 12 cm
Upper guard: 7.5 cm
Upper guard width: 1.26 cm

Over the many centuries in which the sword would have been buried, the richly peated ground caused rust, pitting, and corrosion along its surface. But with the assistance of Chemistry Professor Joseph Lomax and Chemistry Instructor Leah Duke, we were able to view details of the sword's original surface as well as the blade's chemical combination of iron and steel using a high-powered microscope. Pure iron breaks, but steel bends, and the microscope revealed these folds within the dents and divots along the blade. These serve as clear evidence of honing and use, all indicators that this sword had sustained blunt impacts. Occasionally, organic remnants can be found on ancient swords (evidence of a wooden scabbard, fleece, or leather particles), but we did not positively identify anything of this nature. However, a crucial discovery was made while examining minute features of the blade's surface when we noticed what appeared to be a fracture and subsequent repair line. When we turned the sword over, our team discovered two things: definitive evidence that a repair had been made in modern times (the repair line is inscribed with the year "1956") and an inventory number.

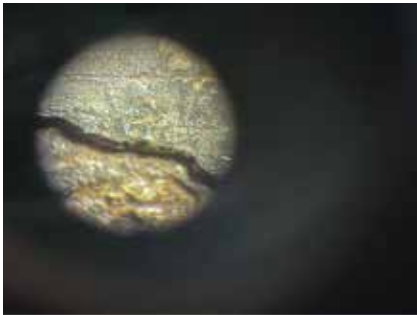


Image of C7629's microscopic breakage.
(Courtesy of Sondra Duplantis)

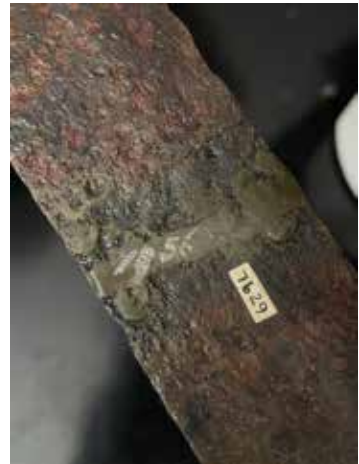


Image of C7629's breakage and repair line
(underside) with inscription of "1956." (Courtesy of the
author)

The sword's inventory number was registered with the Museum of Cultural History in Oslo as C7629 (I will henceforth refer to the Naval Academy's sword as C7629 for ease of reference). The repair line raised for us the possibility that the sword came out of the ground in two separate pieces and, as I will argue further on, confirms that we are likely dealing with a sword that was once a "grave good." But the story, the semester, and thus the trail essentially ended there for my students. To my mind, this pedagogical opportunity offered the midshipmen a unique and memorable learning experience. According to one of my students, Josh Carson, the experience was exciting because "it was entirely unknown." He added, "throughout my time at the Naval Academy, I have taken many courses that have problems with clear answers. Here, we had the opportunity to use all our resources and knowledge to rediscover history."⁵

Since then, I have worked to fill out a number of aspects concerning C7629 with the help of several world-leading archaeologists and a closer consideration of US-Norwegian military and diplomatic relations in the mid-twentieth century, especially within the context of the Nazi invasion and occupation of Norway which lasted from 1940-1945.

C7629's Viking Age Context

The study of ancient and medieval weapons, particularly swords, requires typological analysis or a determination of the "anatomy" of an artifact. In the case of swords, this involves a consideration of the hilt, pommel (if any), and dimensions to reveal a production date more accurate than carbon-dating. The typological classification system of Viking swords is based on a 1919 seminal study by Jan Petersen (*De norske vikingsverd*).⁶ Petersen's classification system has been modified and updated over the years, but based on the distinctive "I"-shaped hilt, our sword is definitively classed as a Petersen M type, one of the most commonly discovered varieties because its design proved to be one of the most pragmatic.

When scholars use the term "type" they mean the shape, but also the method of assembly and composite parts of the hilt.⁷ Petersen described M types as follows:

The guards are straight, of even height, sometimes slightly curved. The [longitudinal] cross-section is roughly of even width, often with straight-cut ends, more seldom rounded. The vertical sides are usually

⁵ Joshua Carson (midshipman) in discussion with the author, May 2021.

⁶ Jan Petersen, *De norske vikingsverd. En typologisk-kronologisk studie over vikingetidens vaaben* (Kristiania: Jacob Dybwad, 1919).

⁷ Fedir Androshchuk, *Viking Swords: Swords and Social Aspects of Weaponry in Viking Age Societies* (Stockholm: The Swedish History Museum, 2014), 31.

flat but can be slightly convex and in that case give a more foreign impression, but they are always without a ridge. There is no pommel, and there never seems to have been one on swords of this type. The guards are never decorated, neither with incised lines or metal coating.⁸

M types date to the period of 850-950 CE, though not all finds are concentrated in Norway. Viking swords, like the warriors who carried them, traveled extensively. Swords of this type have been discovered in a variety of regions throughout Scandinavia and Europe including ten from Sweden; four in Iceland; four in Great Britain; four in France; two in Denmark; three from



Image of C7629's hilt and guards. (Courtesy of the author)

Finland; one from Ireland; one from Germany; nine from the Baltic; two in Poland; and two from the Czech Republic (some of these specimens appear to have been locally forged, while others surely traveled with their owners). As Ian Pierce puts it, “These weapons got around.... They were [also] lost, captured in combat, given to a comrade, traded, or finally buried with a Viking who may have died on the shores of the Black Sea or in Africa, Spain, or Italy.”⁹ When Petersen published his 1919 study, he recorded 198 M types, but today Mikael Jakobsson registers 409 (and the number may be as high as 450)

⁸ Petersen, *De norske vikingesverd*, 69 and figs. 98-99 (translation by Androshchuk, *Viking Swords*, 117). For a history of sword classifications, see Ian Pierce, *Swords of the Viking Age* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2002), 15-16.

⁹ Pierce, *Swords of the Viking Age*, 3.

all dating from the latter half of the ninth century until beginning of the tenth.¹⁰ Only the Norwegians seemed to have had a preference for one-edged swords of this type.¹¹

The Old Norse language included a variety of terms for swords: *drengr*, *bróðir*, and *félagi*. There are also the Germanic words *sverð* and *sax* (in Old Norse poetic texts *hjorr* is sometimes used). Even more specifically, C7629, as it is a single-edged specimen, could have been referred to as a *mækir* or a slashing, “cutting and stabbing sword.”¹² Still, approximately eighty-five percent of the type M swords that have been discovered are double-edged variants, which makes this single-edged find noteworthy. Single-edged blades, according to Pierce, may have “evolved locally ... by stages from the knife length *scramasax*.”¹³ Often a little longer than double-edged blades they “rarely [exceed] 90cm,” meaning that our sword is especially long for its unique type.

While some sword hilts were ornate and could be decorated with precious stones, M types are typically unadorned and their hilts made from plain iron. Length of the grips can also vary considerably. Generally, according to Fedir Androshchuk, most Viking Age swords “have grips of 8.5-9.5 cm long, which could be estimated as the average width of a human palm. However, there are also other lengths of grip, which evidently means that sword hilts were assembled with taking into account the physical data of the customers.”¹⁴ Vegard Vike adds that M types were “pragmatic sword[s], probably worn with pride ... simple and unpretentious.”¹⁵ Despite their austerity, M types were still prestigious, associated with those of the highest social status.

The most crucial detection that we made in the lab, as I mentioned, was the discovery of a fracture and repair line. Our sword’s repair line has 1956 engraved on it, which led me to theorize and later confirm that it came into *Universitetets Oldsaksamling* possession in two pieces. Upon discovery of this detail, I began correspondence with Dr. Hanne Lovise Aannestad at the *Kulturhistoriskmuseum* (Museum of Cultural History) at the University of Oslo, a leading-expert on Viking swords, especially swords that were intentionally bent or broken prior to burial. Many Viking swords show evidence of being broken or bent before being deposited in the earth. Aannestad suspects that our sword’s breakage point accords with other intentionally broken swords in their collection. The bending and breaking of C7629 (*sverð*) is described in the

¹⁰ Mikael Jakobsson, *Krigarideologi och vikingtida svärdstypologi* (Stockholm: Stockholms Universitet, 1992), 222 and 210-211.

¹¹ Pierce, *Swords of the Viking Age*, 3.

¹² Androshchuk, *Viking Swords*, 29.

¹³ Pierce, *Swords of the Viking Age*, 21.

¹⁴ Androshchuk, *Viking Swords*, 105.

¹⁵ Vegard Vike, *A Viking Sword from Lesja* (UiO Museum of Cultural History: Oslo, 2017).

museum’s earliest record:

Gjenstandsbeskrivelse: Eneget Sværd af Jern fra yngre Jernalder. Har været sammenbøiet, hvorved Klingen er brudt tvertover; det yderste af Odden mangler. Klingen er temmelig tynd og har stærkt krummet Eg henimod Odden.

Item description: Single-edge sword of iron from the younger Iron Age. Has been bent over, whereby the blade was broken across; the outmost part of the head is missing. The blade is rather thin and has a strongly curved edge towards the point.¹⁶

But why would a sword be broken or bent before being deposited in the earth? One obvious answer is that it would deter would-be grave robbers. But Aannestad and others argue for a further purpose: that in bending, twisting, or breaking a sword it ritually dies alongside its deceased owner, an important part of funerary rituals. She writes, “the destruction of weapons in Viking Age graves is often linked to the idea of a ‘killing’ of the sword so that it could follow the deceased into the afterlife.”¹⁷ During the Viking Age, the practice of bending, coiling, or breaking swords seems to have been widespread. In some cases, “blades are bent and broken, and the edges have severe cuts and traces of violent handling.”¹⁸ Old Norse texts describe swords as “a marker of social status and prestige, but they also tell stories of swords with distinct powers: swords of beauty, swords with names and personal biographies, swords of magic and mystery.”¹⁹ This logic of identification carried over to funerary rituals. Martin Carver, Howard Williams, and Neil Price have all argued that “early medieval funerals were ritual dramas which – similarly to poetry – were endowed with multiple layers of meaning intended to evoke and/or (re)create memories about the dead.”²⁰

But how common is bending and breaking? Of the 1,598 swords in the Oslo collection a number of them are bent or broken entirely. Intentional damage or twisting, Aannestad suspects, appears on sixteen percent of the swords in the collection though “it is in many cases not possible to determine whether

¹⁶ Museum of Cultural History (KHM), Oslo <unimus.no/portal/#/>. The oldest record I could locate which accounts for the sword (and possible companion items) can be found in *Foreningen til Norske Fortidsminde-merkers Bevaring Aarsberetning for 1876* (Werner and Komp: Kristiania, 1877), 63-64.

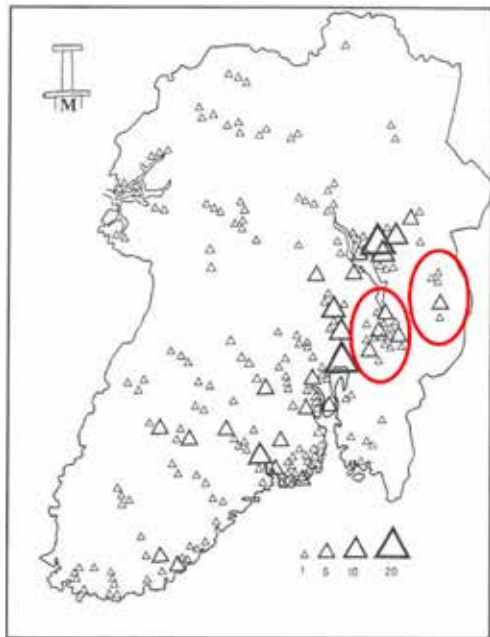
¹⁷ Hanne Lovise Aannestad, “Charisma, Violence and Weapons: The Broken Swords of the Vikings,” in *Charismatic Objects: From Roman Times to the Middle Ages*, eds. M. Vedeler, I. M. Røstad, E. S. Kristoffersen, and Z. T. Glørstad (Cappelen Damm AS: Oslo, 2018), 149.

¹⁸ Aannestad, “Charisma, Violence and Weapons,” 148.

¹⁹ Aannestad, “Charisma, Violence and Weapons,” 150.

²⁰ Leszek Gardela, *Amazons of the North: Women and Weapons in the Viking World* (Philadelphia and Oxford: Casemate, 2021), 60.

the damage was done prior to burial, or it if is a result of post-depositional damage and poor preservation conditions.”²¹ She argues that alterations and breaks occur across all types: both among the most ornate swords as well as the plainest specimens suggesting that the practice was not restricted to a particular social class or class of weapon. The purposeful bending or coiling would have been “a laborious practice.”²² We might also think of the practice in terms of circulation: “The act of destruction [becomes] a way of preventing



Type M Distribution in Eastern Norway and Sogn. (Figure from Charlotte Blindheim, B. Heredahl-Larsen, and Anne S. Ingstad. *Kaupang-funnene. Bind II. Gravplassene i Bjørholbergene/Lamøya: Undersøkelsene 1950-1957*. Del A. Gravskikk, Oslo, 1999 with data from Per Hernæs. *De østnorske sverdfunn fra yngre jernalder: en geografisk analyse*. Mastergradsavhandling i nordisk arkeologi, Oslo: Universitetet i Oslo, 1985)

the re-use of [the object’s] ... charismatic, dangerous, and non-transferrable characteristics.”²³

C7629’s breakage strongly suggests that it was once a grave good (rather than a sword that was simply lost or abandoned) and its owner a person of prominence whose funeral was accompanied by ritual wherein their weapon became “equipment for the hereafter.”²⁴ According to Leszek Gardela “objects buried with the dead were intended to be used by them in the otherworld and/or on the journey that led there.”²⁵ All this tells us something about the way that medieval swords were invested with their own kind of identity. And, as Sue

²¹ Aannestad, “Charisma, Violence and Weapons,” 154.

²² Gardela, *Women and Weapons in the Viking World*, 87.

²³ Aannestad, “Charisma, Violence and Weapons,” 164.

²⁴ Heinrich Härke, “Grave Goods in Early Medieval Burials: Messages and Meanings,” *Mortality: Promoting the Interdisciplinary Study of Death and Dying* 19 (2014): 41-60 (45).

²⁵ Gardela, *Women and Weapons*, 7.

Brunning observes, “the connection between warriors and their “person-like” swords may indeed have been similar to comradeship, involving the type of reliance and mutual understanding that exists between two human warriors.”²⁶ With this, it is intriguing to wonder, not just what the name of the warrior who carried this sword would have been, but what C7629’s name could have been as well.

Data-sets indicating the distribution of discovered M types in Norway can tell us even more. The image above has a circle to the left around the region where I think our sword may have been buried (I will outline my rationale for this shortly) and a further circle to the east where a comparable type M sword of similar proportions was found in Nordre Kjølén (this grave is famous because osteological analysis of the accompanying human remains – namely the pelvic bone – confirms that the grave belonged to an adult female).

The Nordre Kjølén find is relevant because we cannot limit our imagination of the sword’s owner to a single gender.²⁷ Women were commonly buried with weapons and in some cases swords though the “presence of these weapons can be interpreted in a variety of ways.”²⁸ While there are roughly thirty-one Scandinavian burials with weapons that, on the basis of DNA analysis, osteological analysis, or grave good assessments, are thought to be female, there are three prominent female graves wherein swords and caches of other weapons were recovered. The first Viking warrior grave that turned out to be that of a woman’s was discovered over 120 years ago.²⁹ In 1900, the son of a farmer from Nordre Kjølén in Åsnes, Solør, Hedmark, Norway excavated a mound located near their home. This amateur activity turned up an impressive collection of weapons: sword, axehead, arrowheads, spearhead, bones, and the remains of a horse. Unfortunately, the farmer’s son made no outline or drawings. When professionals arrived everything was already out of place and out of the earth, but an M type with a comparable anatomy to C7629 had been recovered.³⁰ According to Gardela, “The sword from Nordre Kjølén is heavily corroded and the lower part of its blade is broken off,” but surviving

²⁶ Sue Brunning, *The Sword in Early Medieval Northern Europe: Experience, Identity, Representation* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2019), 155.

²⁷ See especially Judy Jesch, *Women in the Viking Age* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1991). A passage from Saxo Grammaticus’ *Gesta Danorum* (History of Denmark) describes women who “preferred conflicts instead of kisses, tasted blood not lips” and “sought the clash of arms rather than the arm’s embrace.” See Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum*, Book VII, edited by Karsten Friis-Jensen and translated by Peter Fisher (Oxford: Clarendon, 2015), 476-478.

²⁸ Gardela, *Women and Weapons*, 93-94.

²⁹ The other two finds with swords in female graves are Grave Bj. 581 from Birka, Uppland, Sweden, a female grave with weapons known as the “Birka Warrior” (this find constitutes one of the most impressive of all Viking burials) and Aunvollen, Trøndelag, Norway.

³⁰ Gardela, *Women and Weapons*, 22.

portions of the blade measure 87cm (slightly longer than C7629); cross guard: 12.5cm (close to C7629); upper guard: 7.5cm (exact match), and a grip length just slightly smaller than C7629. Anecdotally, in 1982 a stone inscription was erected: “Grave mound in which on 1 August 1900 a woman’s skeleton from 900 AD with male objects was found.”³¹ Some 60 km away, in the Akershus region, a few decades prior or after, I suspect that C7629 was buried in another Viking Age grave. And there it lay, undisturbed for many centuries.

Nineteenth Century Collectors, Collections, and Probable Companion Grave Goods

As mentioned, I suspect that C7629 was buried in the Akershus region (the Eidsvoll municipality more specifically) and that it was very likely unearthed sometime in the nineteenth century. Records of C7629 first occur in an 1876 annual report for Norwegian Historical *Fortidnminnesme* (“monuments of the past”), shortly after it was donated by Lars and Maurits Sundt, who had inherited it from their father, Eilert Sundt (1817-1875), one year after his death. Eilert Sundt was (and still is considered) a famous Norwegian theologian and sociologist who lived in the Eidsvoll province of Norway. The index notes that nothing is known about this specimen’s excavation or *Findestederne* (or “find spots”), but the entry does reveal that four additional items were given to the museum by the Sundt brothers along with C7629:

C7630 *øxeblad* (axehead)

C7631 *spydspiss* (spearhead)

C7632 *ringspenne* (ring buckle)

C7633 *knivblad* (knife blade)

While the record does not say that these items came from the same find, I think it would be reasonable based on their diversity to assume that they could have. In the case of Nordre Kjølén, the warrior woman was buried with a sword, an axehead, a spear tip, and a cache of arrows. Let us assume for a moment that C7629-C7633 represent a unified set: this would mean that its owner was buried with a sword, an axehead, a spearhead, a knife blade, and a penannular brooch or ring buckle, the full complement of grave goods that typically turn up in Viking Age grave excavations.

Although the items were donated by the sons of Eilert Sundt, the 1876 registry implies an even earlier owner that preceded Sundt: Provost Hans Peter Krag (1759-1855). Krag was Sundt’s predecessor as priest at Eidsvoll (from 1849-1855). This location stands in excellent proximity with the discovery

³¹ Gardela, *Women and Weapons*, 58. See also P. Hernæs, “C22541 a-g. Et gammelt funn folks på ny,” *Nicolay* 43 (1984): 31-36.



C7630 øxeblad (axehead)



C7631 spydspiss (spearhead)



C7632 ringspenne (ring buckle)



C7633 knivblad (knife blade)

(Museum of Cultural History (KHM), Oslo)

of many M type swords. The record also states that Krag started a small *Oldsagsamling* or “collection of antiques” at the Eidsvoll parish schoolhouse during his six years (before Sundt arrived in 1869).³² Thus, by my estimates, 1849-1855 is the likeliest time frame for his antiquity collection (and possibly the discovery of C7629-C7633). We know nothing about when or how Krag acquired the sword for his collection. The sword likely came out of the ground before archaeological reports were common. Even trained nineteenth-century excavators were often mostly concerned with “portable items alone, [their] documentation usually contains little else than just lists of grave goods.”³³ These items, in all likelihood, were discovered by someone who lacked archeological experience since no *in situ* documentation was made (at least none that we know of).

Yet if the sword is from the Eidsvoll region we can postulate further about its Viking Age context. Eidsvoll rose to prominence a few decades after our sword and became the site of the eastern court or assembly in the later Viking Age. Further, we know that inland swords are more commonly bent and broken than coastal specimens. If the sword is from Eidsvoll, this would be consistent. Roughly twenty percent (27 of 133) of the swords recovered

³² See *Foreningen til Norske Fortidsmindesterkere*, 64. Interestingly, Eidsvoll is where the Norwegian constitution was ratified in 1814.

³³ Gardela, *Women and Weapons*, 67.

from Akershus show signs of having been broken, making it the region with the second highest rate of funerary breaking and suggesting a distinctly “local, regional, and cultural” taste for the practice.³⁴

If we accept these items as part of a single find, one of C7629’s companion items can help us establish an even more textured profile for the warrior who may have carried it. C7632 is a ring-buckle or penannular brooch which, upon close inspection, reveals small but intricate zoomorphic dragon heads for lobed terminals. It has a diameter of 7.8cm and its needle is 16.7cm. C7632 is made of iron rather than gold, silver, or bronze, the precious metals characteristic of the most ornate penannulars of the medieval world such as the exquisite Tara Brooch and Hunterston Brooch of seventh- and eighth-century Ireland.³⁵ Beginning with the first Viking raids in Ireland in the ninth century, the penannular brooch style was popularized and later copied in Scandinavian contexts. According to Jane Kershaw, in the “mid-ninth century...[the] adoption of the cloak and associated metalwork by high-ranking males in Norway is likely to have been a conscious move designed to foster connections with the Irish Sea.”³⁶ The mid-ninth-century dating fits exceptionally well with the dating of C7629 lending further evidence to the possibility that these items were part of a single find.

In Ireland, it is well-attested that such brooches formed an integral part of the regalia of the elite aristocracy and carried both sacred and secular valences as Ireland’s secular rulers had powerful ecclesiastical ties. Was C7632 imported or locally made? Zanette Glørstad postulates that eighty percent of brooch finds come from burials and that imported Insular brooches came to be placed in female burials, while locally-made ones are typically associated with male burials.³⁷ C7632 is ornate, but not lavish, which leads me to suspect that ours was locally made, sometime within 850-950 CE – a solid contemporary of C7629 – and born out of contact between Vikings and the Irish Sea. This piece of material culture tells us something about how westward contact became a part of the display of power in Norway where the cloak and brooch “would have been a distinctive part of the wearer’s appearance ... a sign of status and

³⁴ Aannestad, “Charisma, Violence and Weapons,” 158.

³⁵ See H. E. Kilbride-Jones, *Zoomorphic Penannular Brooches* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980). On the Tara Brooch specifically, see Naimh Whitfield, “The ‘Tara’ Brooch: An Irish Emblem of Status in Its European Context,” in *From Ireland Coming: Irish Art from the Early Christian to the Late Gothic Period and Its European Context*, ed. Colum Hourihane (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 211-247.

³⁶ Jane Kershaw, *Viking Identities: Scandinavian Jewellery in England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 125.

³⁷ Kershaw, *Viking Identities*, 36.

role where dress and political symbolism ran parallel.”³⁸

Glørstad’s study suggests that these dress clasps are generally associated with Viking-Age male graves in Norway.³⁹ Moreover, burials with penannulars are customarily unearthened with an exceptionally “high occurrence of swords and spears...of a full weaponry set (consisting of sword, spear, axe.”⁴⁰ This tiny treasure thus indicates that the five items donated by the Sundt sons could very well represent a full complement of grave furnishings (sword, spearhead, axe, knife, brooch). With this, I think we can establish something of a profile for the person who bore these items: likely male, familiar with battle, well-regarded enough to possess all the items associated with a respected warrior class. He may have been someone who travelled to the Irish Sea or British Isles and was well-acquainted with the nautical world of the North Sea. He may have been given the brooch as a gift, a symbol tying him to a local lord. When he would have worn the brooch, all would have known that twinned beast heads (the two dragon head terminals) served as a protective symbol (such iconography frequently appears as an apotropaic motif on weaponry).⁴¹ And, upon this person’s death, their sword was fractured so that it would travel with him in the afterlife.

The Nazi Vision for a “New” Norway and US-Norwegian Alliances and Naval Relations

Still a further mystery associated with C7629 is the modern one: why did Prince Olav wish to present the sword to the United States in the first place? One possibility is that the sword was intended as a gesture to recall the connection fostered by the two countries during WWII or the post-war period. In 1940, Norway fell to a swift and devastating Nazi invasion. In the aftermath, Norway – Narvik and the nearby water way of Ofotfjord, in particular – became a key strategic site for the transport of iron ore which saw two major naval engagements between the British Royal Navy and the *Kriegsmarine*. Following this, the Norwegian royal family was divided with Crown Princess Märtha and her children fleeing to the United States (eventually residing in an estate atop Pook’s Hill in Bethesda, Maryland) and Prince Olav and his

³⁸ Zanelle Tsigaridas Glørstad, “Signs of the Times? The Transfer and Transformation of Penannular Brooches in Viking-Age Norway,” *Norwegian Archaeological Review* 45 (2012): 30-51 (33).

³⁹ Glørstad, “Transfer and Transformation of Penannular Brooches,” 33; Kershaw, *Viking Identities*, 172.

⁴⁰ Kershaw, *Viking Identities*, 42.

⁴¹ On this point, see Leslie Webster, “Encrypted Visions: Style and Sense in Anglo-Saxon Minor Arts, a.d. 400-900,” in *Anglo-Saxon Styles*, eds. Catherine E. Karkov and George Hardin Brown (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 2003), 18.

father, King Haakon VII, exiling to London to help mobilize Allied efforts against the Nazis. The contested story of Norway in the 1940s is one that encompasses the dangerous romanticizing of the North by the Nazis and their racialized propaganda surrounding the *real* Norway, Hitler's naval ambitions for a "superfleet" at the port city (and medieval capital) of Trondheim, as well as US-Norwegian naval relations during and post-World War II to which I now turn.

The Nazi occupation of Norway (which lasted from April 1940-May 1945) was propelled by several factors: racial mythologies propagated by Hitler and Nazism; German iron ore supplies; and Hitler's vision for a new Norwegian capital city that would allow for the bolstering of the *Kriegsmarine*. Prior to World War II, Norway was a country committed to, according to Geirr Haarr, "neutrality and pacifism" as part of the prevailing national and military mindset.⁴² In 1940, Churchill began to mobilize efforts to disrupt German iron ore traffic from Sweden. Perceiving this threat, Hitler and his circle initiated Operation *Weserübung* (literally the 'Weser (River) Exercise'), codenamed after a river in northern Germany. The operation had been in the planning stages for many years, possibly as early as 1934. That year, Hitler had been advised by Admiral Erich Raeder and Hermann Göring that the protection of iron ore shipments from Scandinavia would necessitate a major expansion of the German navy.⁴³ By 1938, "Germany had imported a total of 22 million tons of ore" with roughly half from Sweden and some ore (deemed of poorer quality) coming from Norway by way of Narvik. According to Green and Massignani, "on the eve and in the opening months of the war German domestic iron-ore production increased substantially. But Germany's expanding war industry demanded more iron ore than ever before."⁴⁴

In 1939, Raeder briefed Hitler on intelligence concerning the British intention to disrupt ore shipments and, again, proposed that a naval base at Trondheim (where he estimated a presence of 48,500 naval and civilian personnel) in order to greatly "improve the German strategic position."⁴⁵ Several months later, fearing for their safety, King Haakon and Prince Olav went into exile to Britain on 12 December 1940.⁴⁶ In the process, they ordered

⁴² Geirr Haarr, *The German Invasion of Norway: April 1940* (Annapolis: Naval Institute, 2009), 4.

⁴³ Jack Green and Alessandro Massignani, *Hitler Strikes North: The Nazi Invasion of Norway and Denmark, 9 April 1940* (Barnsley, S. Yorkshire: Frontline, 2013), 8.

⁴⁴ Green and Massignani, *Hitler Strikes North*, 9.

⁴⁵ According to Green and Massignani, "Raeder would become a driving force for the invasion of Norway, something he would later deny after the war at the Nuremberg Trials" (11).

⁴⁶ Amanda Johnson, *Norway: Her Invasion and Occupation* (Decatur, GA: Bowen, 1948), 107.

eighty percent of the Norwegian naval fleet to make for neutral ports to help support the allied effort.⁴⁷ However, this meant that the German invasion and occupation of Norway was swift and nearly complete by April: the cities of Oslo, Stavanger, Bergen, Trondheim and Narvik were occupied with the Battle of Narvik underway. The surface warship losses incurred by the Allied navies in the campaign for Norway were substantial, especially when one of the Royal Navy's aircraft carriers, the *Glorious*, was sunk. With the royal family in exile, the Germans made overtures to convince the Norwegians that their king "had deserted them."⁴⁸

There was, of course, a heavy racial element to Nazi ambitions in Norway in addition to a naval one. According to Nazi propagandist, Wilhelm Brepohl, the Norwegian people had over the course of several decades grown estranged from continental Europe and Germany in particular. Brepohl argued that Norway (especially the city of Oslo) had come to fetishize the United States and England alienating themselves from their heroic past replete with Norse gods and Viking warriors. He wrote that texts such as the poetic Edda with its stories of Sigurd the dragon-slayer had come to be, in his words, "considered completely foreign, and the Vikings are regarded as pirates and so judged ... Oslo is not Norway."⁴⁹ There was a further prevailing attitude that the women of Oslo were especially influenced by Americanism and that the youth of Norway could be similarly corrupted without German intervention. Despina Stratigakos observes that the idea of the "racial and cultural purity of the countryside had been a central trope in prewar Nazi journalism."⁵⁰ The Nazis mapped this trope across Norway as well viewing the countryside as a portal to the *real* Norway with its commanding fjords, timber stave churches, and picturesque farms. In turn, cities such as Oslo came to be viewed as places of depravity needing to be wrested from American and English decadence.⁵¹

But what would C7629's fate have been during the years of Nazi occupation? Prior to 1940, it would have been in the *Universitetets Oldsaksamling*. Just before the invasion, many of the most prized items were crated up and quietly moved to secret hiding places for the duration of the occupation. We know that the Nazis inquired about items at the *Oldsaksamling* and on occasion rifled through the collections (one sword in particular, which was sought after by Heinrich Himmler, had been carefully hidden away before the outbreak of

⁴⁷ Despina Stratigakos, *Hitler's Northern Utopia: Building the New Order in Occupied Norway* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022), 30.

⁴⁸ Johnson, *Norway: Her Invasion and Occupation*, 111.

⁴⁹ Wilhelm Brepohl, "Die Hauptstadt als Schmetztiegel: Ist Oslo Norwegen?" *Deutsche Monatshefte in Norwegen* 3, no. 6 (1942): 13-14.

⁵⁰ Stratigakos, *Hitler's Northern Utopia*, 24.

⁵¹ Stratigakos, *Hitler's Northern Utopia*, 24.

war).⁵² In the years of occupation, many members of the staff including the museum's director, Anton Wilhelm Brøgger, were arrested. Brøgger, famed for his research on the Oseberg Ship, was eventually imprisoned at the Grini concentration camp for suspected antifascism. Either C7629 spent those years of occupation somewhere hidden or very likely at the *Oldsaksamling* where it and the other treasures would have been ransacked by the SS.

Thus, the Nazis undertook a program to rebrand both the countryside and urban centers and establish a new and powerful capital at Trondheim ("New Trondheim"), which would also house their northern naval fleet because of its access to the most strategic northern waterways. Trondheim was once the medieval capital of Norway and the seat of its medieval kings until 1217. The Nazis regarded Trondheim as the most "authentic" version of the north and hailed its potential as Norway's finest city, the bulwark of a vast northern empire with historic Viking origins. At the city's heart was the impressive Nidaros Cathedral, which awed German writers and architects alike.⁵³ According to Stratigakos, the very name "New Trondheim implied that the once exalted capital of Vikings and kings, now a sleepy town, would arise again under the Nazi empire."⁵⁴ The planning and construction of New Trondheim advanced in 1941, and so did the German navy's plan "to dominate the world's oceans."⁵⁵

The Nazi quest to rediscover and reconquer the authentic North led them to conceptualize themselves as the "new Vikings." In SS racial ideology, Norwegians were perceived as superior even to the Germans themselves.⁵⁶ Stratigakos suggests that the Nazis "envied...[Norway's] Viking origins. As fellow Nordic brothers, the Norwegians were to be treated differently from other conquered nations."⁵⁷ Adolf Hitler is on record as having once said "You will give me no greater pleasure than by making a friend of these people."⁵⁸ Heinrich Himmler is quoted as once saying, "I do indeed have the intention, wherever I can, to fetch, rob, and steal Germanic blood from all over the world. The Regiment Germania has not been given its name for nothing."⁵⁹

⁵² Jorunn Sem Fure, *Universitetet i kamp 1940-1945* (Oslo: Vidarforlaget, 2007), 83-87.

⁵³ Stratigakos, *Hitler's Northern Utopia*, 211.

⁵⁴ Stratigakos, *Hitler's Northern Utopia*, 214.

⁵⁵ Stratigakos, *Hitler's Northern Utopia*, 204.

⁵⁶ Terje Emberland, "Pure-Blooded Vikings and Peasants: Norwegians in the Racial Ideology of the SS," in *Racial Science in Hitler's New Europe 1938-1945*, eds. Anton Weiss-Wendt and Rory Yeomans (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), 110.

⁵⁷ Stratigakos, *Hitler's Northern Utopia*, 8.

⁵⁸ Hermann Boehm, "Die politische Entwicklung in Norwegen der Zeit seit der Besetzung 1940 bis zum Frühjahr 1943," undated position paper, Handmaterial Ob.d.M., Denkschrift Gen. Adm. Boehm (Norwegen 1940-1943), RM 6/89, Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv Freiburg, Germany. Translation from Stratigakos, *Hitler's Northern Utopia*, 8.

⁵⁹ "Rede vor den ss-Gruppenführern," 8 November 1938. Quoted in Bradley F. Smith and

The invasion and occupation of Norway, in this regard, came to be seen by its aggressors, as not simply a powerplay for iron-ore or a grand naval base, but a rescue operation meant to salvage what was left of the Viking spirit which had been tainted by decadence, pacifism, and Americanism and Anglophilia. As one propagandistic newspaper (*Wacht Im Norden*) for those German soldiers who were stationed in Norway put it: “English money and English propaganda was to blame for turning the Norwegians away from Germany ... [they] had repressed their natural Germanic impulses and grown egotistical, spoiled, and undisciplined ... [bearing] little resemblance to their battle-tested Viking ancestors.”⁶⁰ In other words, “Norway had to be brought back from the brink” in the warped ideological mindset of their Nazi invaders.⁶¹

These would have been the prevailing propagandistic ideologies that the Norwegian royal family needed their nation to combat during the five years of occupation and their precarious exile. Amid it all, Norway effectively lost their navy. Many Norwegian pilots, however, continued their efforts in “American and British units for the duration, flying spitfire fighters in the RAF” especially throughout France.⁶² American support would eventually help rebuild Norwegian naval losses both during and in the years following the war. On 16 September 1942 President Franklin Roosevelt commissioned the 173-foot steel sub-chaser named the *King Haakon VII* at the Washington Navy Yard, where it was accepted by Crown Princess Märtha on behalf of the Royal Norwegian Navy. They also received four destroyers.⁶³

After the war, Norway did not return to its long-held posture of neutrality, but became a charter member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). It is here that the story of Crown Prince Olav’s gift of an ancient sword to President Eisenhower intersects with world affairs. The sword symbolized Norway’s wish to establish collective security and alliances, especially with the rise of the Cold War necessitating a shift away from the Soviet Union.⁶⁴ The earliest phases of the Cold War (1945-1965) witnessed overtures from the Soviet Union threatening coastal targets in northern Norway. From 1949 onward, Norway received steady economic and military aid from the Royal Navy and other entities due to the perception that northern Norwegian waterways would be a critical maritime theater in the event of war

Agnes Peterson, *Heinrich Himmler. Geheimreden 1933 bis 1945 und andere Ansprachen*, (Frankfurt, 1974), 38.

⁶⁰ “Warum manche Norweger nicht verstehen,” *Wacht im Norden*, 16 August 1941. Translation from Stratigakos, *Hitler’s Northern Utopia*, 27.

⁶¹ Stratigakos, *Hitler’s Northern Utopia*, 174.

⁶² Johnson, *Norway: Her Invasion and Occupation*, 323.

⁶³ Johnson, *Norway: Her Invasion and Occupation*, 325.

⁶⁴ Stratigakos, *Hitler’s Northern Utopia*, 232.

with the Soviet Union. In 1952, Allied Forces Northern Europe (AFNORTH) was established in Kolsås, Norway.⁶⁵ But attitudes towards Norway's strategic importance appear to have diminished somewhat in the mid-1950s. The Royal Navy and NATO began to shift towards ambivalence about contributing to the Norwegian defense effort. Olav's gesture towards the United States in the form of a cultural heirloom could have been driven by his concern over this waning international interest in Norwegian defenses or a sense of Soviet escalation.

Moreover, in 1957, the year that C7629 was given over to the brigade of midshipmen by Eisenhower, there were numerous threats issued from the Soviet Union that they would unleash their nuclear arsenal if further foreign military bases were established in Norway. Thus, while much of the sword's story remains shrouded in mystery, likely forever, the last chapter in the chronicle of C7629 ultimately represents a rejection of the Nazi's romanticized version of what Vikings stood for. It is instead a story more consistent with an important element of the medieval story of the people we refer to as Vikings: that these were individuals who were globally minded and masters of cross-cultural interconnectedness. C7629 tells us something about the re-forging of a fractured time and the mutual exchange between two national leaders whose relationship would come to be built on generosity, friendship, and cooperation.

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⁶⁵ In the event of war with the Soviet Union, AFNORTH would assume the role of supreme command of Allied forces in northern Europe.