This is the published version of a paper published in *Journal of Northern Studies*.

Citation for the original published paper (version of record):

Martin Ježek, Archaeology of Touchstones. An introduction based on finds from Birka, Sweden, Leiden: Sidestone Press 2017
*Journal of Northern Studies, 12(2): 120-124*

Access to the published version may require subscription.

N.B. When citing this work, cite the original published paper.

Permanent link to this version:
http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:umu:diva-167121
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They are thus reliable guides to the subject. The introductory chapter draws the picture of philology in the nineteenth century and the Norwegian writing on language history at the time. It is quite correctly pointed out that the seven scholars that are closely depicted here are not an entirely self-evident selection; there are other scholars that could equally well have been focused on, such as Ivar Aasen, Johan Storm, Trygve Knudsen and Vemund Skar, to mention just a few. The account of the research partners Hjalmar Falk and Alf Torp is interesting, and describes, for example, the book *Dansknorskens lydhistorie* (1898) and the problems the two authors had to grapple with. Didrik Arup Seip and his work on language history are then discussed. For example, judgements he made in his *Norsk språkhistorie til omkring 1370* (with two editions 1931 and 1955) are related to Seip’s position on language policy. In one chapter, we get to know Marius Hægstad and Gustav Indrebø, and, more briefly, Sigurd Kolsrud and Torleiv Hannaas. The elucidation of Indrebø’s *Norsk Målsoga* (posthumously published in 1951) is fascinating. Several of the scholars mentioned hold strong views on matters involving language policy, which clearly distinguishes them from Per Nyquist Grotvedt and Egil Pettersen, who are also portrayed in the book. Interesting perspectives on East Norwegian language are presented in Grotvedt’s *Skrift og tale i mellomnorske diplomer fra Folden-området 1350–1450*, and Pettersen’s studies *Språkbrytning i Vest-Norge 1450–1550* (I–II) are important. But neither Grotvedt nor Pettersen use their research to legitimise their language policy positions. With great merit, this book places a number of Norwegian works on language history in an ideological context.

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With his work *Archaeology of Touchstones*, Martin Ježek presents an extensive and exemplary analysis of an often misinterpreted group of artifacts known as touchstones. His analysis is based on the findings from the Viking Age trading place of Birka, Sweden, and demonstrates by means of these touchstones the often far too naïve and unidimensional interpretation of grave goods, even in today’s archaeology.
Touchstones denominate testing stones made from schist (silt), that were used to examine the composition and purity of (precious) metals through abrasion, which leaves specific traces on these touchstones. Despite its significant importance for the craft and trade of metals, this group of artifacts was almost absent in academic discourse, except for some case studies by the author of the present book. This was mainly due to the misinterpretation of touchstones as whetstones in a long row of publications, based on low knowledge of the archaeologic material or missing detailed studies of the concrete artifacts. When correctly identified as touchstones, these artifacts are normally regarded within the context of metallurgy and—similar to Ježek’s extensively discussed example of blacksmithing tools (see Müller-Wille 1983)—are often seen as evidence for the deceased’s profession. However, the findings given by Ježek illustrate quite clearly, that touchstones—in most cultural contexts—can neither be ascribed only to a specific gender or age group nor coercively to the social elite, and even an association of the touchstones with metal-working tools as grave goods is often missing.

Martin Ježek presents a highly relevant but often misinterpreted or misidentified group of objects that serves as his starting point for an exemplary and partially even harsh criticism and deconstruction of the traditional interpretation of graves as “mirrors of life” (Härke 1997: 25), which still appears in modern archaeology. His convincing—albeit partially hypercritical—argumentation against the often far too simplistic and naïve patterns of interpretation within traditional burial archaeology are only affected by the book’s central weakness, the slightly vague structuring of the single chapters. And even his skepticism appears to be partially exaggerated or at least not stringent. He postulates several times that grave goods were exclusively deposited because of their symbolic value for the relatives and definitely not because of their potential use by the dead in the afterlife:

Regardless of what Europeans in prehistoric times and the Early Middle Ages thought about the afterlife, it must have been clear to them that the deceased would not need tools, weapons, jewellery, horses, dogs or even other people. (p. 66)

While on the following page he gives an identical interpretation for Christian grave goods as “rosaries, prayer books and pilgrimage tokens“ (p. 67), he still mentions the historical tradition to place coins in the graves so that the dead can purchase food in the afterlife only some lines below. By this, he foils his own hypercritical view on the function and meaning of grave goods.
The book is separated into 15 not further subdivided chapters, acknowledgements, an introduction as well as references and an index of places.

After a short introduction about the chosen material, function and meaning of touchstones as well as the differentiation between touchstones and whetstones, the book provides an overview of the appearance and occurrence of touchstones in prehistory with two more detailed case studies on touchstones in Mesopotamic burials and graves of La Tène culture. This is followed by several chapters dealing with an extensive discussion about the symbolism of grave goods and the interpretation of burials as “mirrors” and “hall of mirrors of life,” respectively—always with recourse to the artifact group of touchstones. A stringent structure of the single chapters in relation to each other as well as to the book’s overall structure of argumentation is sometimes difficult to identify. The particular chapters partly merge seamlessly into each other taking up aspects that already have been mentioned before and lacking a final conclusion at the end, which occasionally makes it difficult to follow the argumentation.

The actual topic of the book—the analysis of the touchstones from the burials in Birka—is not presented until the second half of the book. After a classical evaluation of the distribution of touchstones in the burials and their association with other artifacts, the analysis of the material by means of a scanning electron microscope (SEM) to search for signs of abrasion of (precious) metals represents the central aspect of Ježek’s research, with a short catalogue of the investigated material. A separate chapter is dedicated to the surprisingly scarce evidence of nickel on the touchstones from Birka, followed by a short discussion about problems and limits of SEM analysis. With a short account of investigations of touchstones from two spots from Polen, Ostrów Lednicki and Dziekanowice, Ježek presents on the one hand another interesting corpus of touchstones and allows on the other hand a better contextualization for the findings from Birka. Even if the final chapter is entitled Conclusio, it does not serve as the eagerly expected concrete summary of the overall results, but more or less as an enlarged discussion about the meaning of artifacts within the sphere of metallurgy and their symbolic value in burial contexts, referring to the argumentation from the book’s first chapters.

An investigation of the petrographic quality of the touchstones from Birka as well as tables with the results from SEM and chemical microanalysis, microscope photos and spectra of metal traces on some selected touchstones from Birka are attached as appendices.
The present study submitted by Martin Ježek convinces with its methodologically and interpretatively cogent analysis of the corpus of touchstones from Birka. His results provide proof for the significant importance of this artifact group for a silver-based bullion-economy as well as for craft and trade of (precious) metals. Furthermore, they cast new light upon metallurgy in Viking Age society in Scandinavia—e.g. by the astonishingly frequent proof of traces of base metals, especially lead.

In addition, by illustrating the symbolic meaning and function of touchstones in funerary contexts, used for the presentation or construction of social identities, which have to be seen entirely detached from the social status or profession of the deceased in reality (see Toplak 2017), his results are an excellent example of the problematic identification of professions in burials (see Staecker 2009: 479–482), as well as of the general discrepancy between this world and the afterlife and graves as “mirrors of life” (Härke 1994; 1997).

In this methodologically and theoretically convincing case study which provides further proof for the traditional simplicity in the interpretation of burials, as well as prehistoric features in general based on antiquated doctrines and insufficient classification of archaeological material, lies the central strength of Ježek’s work, which will be an interesting and inspiring tool for scholars of metallurgy and economy in Viking Age society as well as for more theoretical approaches towards death and burial. The only weak point—beside some minor errors such as the outdated interpretation of Gudingsåkrarna as a ritual hoard (p. 125, 128; see Carlsson 2011)—is the not entirely clearly arranged structure of the single chapters, the lack of concise summaries, and the partially digressive argumentation due to the constant reference to the material corpus of touchstones. A tightening of the first few chapters concerning the historic background of the touchstones and the constant criticism of a traditional and often far too naïve interpretation of burials, as well as a more articulated structure would have been advantageous and would have highlighted the central results and their importance for Viking Age materiality and the theory of burial archaeology.

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In the National Archives in Oslo, there is a manuscript signed AM 329 a fol. The manuscript appears to consist of copies of copies and it is obvious that the scribe or scribes have not always been careful in their work (p. xxiv) and as a result, it can sometimes be difficult to interpret details in the text. This manuscript, popularly known as Bergens kalvskinn (‘Bergen’s calfskin’), is a land register or a register of church estates in the diocese of Bergen in the middle of the fourteenth century. Since Bergens kalvskinn contains more than 1,800 names of farms, it is a valuable source of toponyms in Western Norway. In the preface, the editor rightly characterises the text as a window to economic, legal and social conditions in the late Middle Ages. There is an earlier edition of the source text, compiled in 1843 by P. A Munch, but there is an obvious need for this modern edition. In the introduction, Ole-Jørgen Johannessen