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ARCHAEOLOGY AFTER INTERPRETATION

RETURNING MATERIALS TO ARCHAEOLOGICAL THEORY



**BENJAMIN ALBERTI
ANDREW MEIRION JONES
JOSHUA POLLARD**
Editors

Archaeology After Interpretation

Returning Materials to Archaeological Theory

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Materials of Affect.

Miniatures in the Scandinavian Late Iron Age (AD 550–1050)

Ing-Marie Back Danielsson

Introduction

This paper discusses Scandinavian gold foil figures – small human-like figures hammered or cut out of thin foil – from the early part of the Scandinavian Late Iron Age (AD 550–1050) from a relational perspective. Earlier interpretations largely approach them as symbols and representations, which downplays a practice or performative role, and results in static or embalmed objects. In this paper the affective dimensions of the figures are discussed as well as some of the myriad rhizomatic relations that were generated through processes of making, manipulation and visual encounter. It is argued that during the Late Iron Age in Scandinavia certain human beings and gold foil figures were ontological equivalents. It is further argued that ontological equivalence also included other spheres; these were considered equivalent because the same desirable properties of wealth and regeneration were seemingly produced by different technical processes with different materials. Hence the processes of formation were primary, not states of matter. Seen this way gold foil figures go far beyond our contemporary understanding of representations.

Theoretical considerations – from representation to practice

Like other archaeological materials that come in miniature form, gold foil figures are commonly interpreted as symbols and representations of different sorts. Since they also come in human/oid form, they are equally interpreted as representations of specific gods, known through later, medieval written sources. However, such interpretations are problematic. One of the most problematic is the disregard of the variety of bodily manipulations the figures have undergone. That is, the practices and the events in which the figures partook are neglected, which in extension also excludes understandings of the figures in terms of affect. I argue, following, Harrison (2000), Thrift (2000) and Whatmore (2002), that interpretations that focus on representation and meaning tend to downplay practice to the extent that the objects, or events, of study become more or less embalmed, ‘drained for the sake of orders, mechanisms, structures and processes’ (Dewsbury et al. 2002:438).

When we consider an object as a representation the lived present is ignored and more importantly is not considered ‘...an open-ended and generative process...’ (Harrison 2000:499). Instead we need to understand what Anderson and Harrison (2010:10) describe as things taking place; we need to recognize the movement and change of things and how an increased focus on practices and events result in discovering “new potentialities for being, doing and thinking”. From a feminist point of view the focus on the lived present as an open-ended and generative process is attractive (see for instance Harding 1987; 1993; Longino 1994:483). Feminists in archaeology have long since pointed to the delimiting ontological and epistemic norms that underlie and prefigure archaeological practice in all forms. These norms include the impulse to seek closure and equally to reduce ambiguity and complexity (Wylie 2007:212-213 with references), which I consider to be characteristic traits of theories that are exclusively devoted to representation and meaning. Thus, the criticism against representational theories, that is nascent in some disciplines, such as archaeology, and more or less established in others, such as geography, is not revolutionary or new to feminists. The critique is often labelled as non-representational theories, while others, especially in response to feminist concerns, prefer the somewhat more nuanced concept ‘more-than-representational’ (Cadman 2009:7; see also Dewsbury et al 2002:438 and Lorimer 2005).

The shift in focus has also resulted in the elaboration of different methodologies, striving to “co-produce” the world (Thrift 2000, cf. Latour 1991; Dewsbury et al. 2002; Keane 2003; Meskell 2006). One such method Dewsbury (2003) describes as witnessing, which has as its purpose to present descriptions ‘that are infused with a certain fidelity to what they describe’ (Latham 2003:1903). This means that the leap towards an overarching meaning, interpretation and/or representation is avoided. In the following paper Scandinavian Late Iron Age gold foil figures will be discussed through the means of witnessing. An effort is made to unfold the different practices these figures were involved in and perhaps, instigators of. Necessarily, it further involves discussions of the ontological status of these crafted things as well as of the different sets of relationships that produced their being and becoming. Whereas witnessing may be perceived as a passive, unreflexive, and irresponsible practice the witnessing conducted in this paper does not strive to be modest, unaccountable or unreflexive. Thereby concerns raised that non-representational theories neglect, and perhaps deny, power relations as well as bodily differences (Colls 2011 with references) are hopefully dealt with. The figures are examined, or witnessed, from two different but interrelated perspectives; *materials* and *relations*.

My approach to materials is influenced by the recent work of Conneller (2011), who has advocated a processual understanding of materials. ‘Raw’ materials need not necessarily be understood using contemporary physical or chemical descriptions (such as through the use of the Periodic Table of Elements). Instead Conneller argues that materials are best understood through what they do, rather than what they are. This approach to materials can be followed by tracing ‘the processes by which the properties of past materials emerge reveals configurations of past worlds; particular articulations of the cultural, the natural and the supernatural’ (2011:125). I examine relations in two ways. Firstly by paying attention to the material of the figures, and equally highlighting how they worked as materials of affect. Secondly, by examining the different relationships prompted and produced by the figures are discussed in terms of the different scales and power plays they affect. It is worth pointing out that these two witnessing perspectives at times naturally intersect.

Materials

The figures

Gold foil figures are thin stamped, or cut-out foil figures in very small sizes known only from Scandinavia (Figure. 1). They are mainly attributed the Vendel Period (AD 550--800) although their chronological span might begin in the Migration Period (AD 400--550) and end in the Viking Age (AD 800--1050) (Lamm 2004:130).



Fig. 1. Map of Scandinavia with the geographical locations of patrices and gold foil figures. (After Watt 2004:168 fig. 1).

The figures have a length of c. 1-2.5cm, and weigh less than one gram, commonly c. 0.1-0.15 gram (Gullman 2004). Despite their small size, the figures are usually very detailed in their execution. The thin gold foils may show human-like single figures, pairs, and at times also animals (Figures 2-5). A few may further be highly stylized (Figure. 6).

The majority of the figures are stamped with the use of patrices of bronze whereas others may be cut-out of a very thin gold foil (Lamm 2004:109). While a matrix has a depression into

which the material at hand is pressed, a patrix has a raised motif over which thin material, in this case thin gold foil, is pressed or moulded. A solid bronze patrix produced the gold foil figure with a positive image in relief. Occasionally patrices found have been equipped with a helping handle (Lamm 2004:105). The most frequent place of recovery of the figures has been in connection to special buildings or workshops (e.g. Helgö, Slöinge, Borg, Uppåkra, Svintuna, Vä, Husby), some of them considered to be aristocratic halls. The figures have also been recovered in a bog (Tørring), seemingly secondary placed within burials (Bolmsö, Visingsö, Ulltuna) and in or as components of hoards (Hög Edsten, Nørre Hvam) (Andréasson 1995; Lamm 2004).



Fig. 2. Gold foil figures from Bornholm, Denmark. (Photo: René Laursen, Bornholm Museum).

Commonly, efforts are made by archaeologists to sex the figures as well as to attribute them to divine identities found in later medieval written sources (e.g. Hauck 1992; 1993a; Watt 2001). Seemingly, almost every archaeological publication presenting and discussing gold foil figures, or any figure for that matter, concentrates on the figures per se and their possible identities, almost as if they were contemporary photographs (e.g. Hauck 1992; 1993a; Watt

2001; see also criticism of this in for instance Bailey 2005:12--13 and Back Danielsson 2012). Further, a prevailing interpretation of the gold foil figures is that they represent gods and heroes, and that the figures worked as temple coins, a way of paying for ritual services (e.g. Hauck 1994:302; Watt 1992; 2004:216).

Gold

When we turn our attention instead to the material itself, and a witnessing stance is adopted, the following traceable events are unfolded. Through analysis of the gold in the foil figures it has been shown that the gold used for the figures had been smelted many times and was of diverse origin (Gullman 2004:113). Already here it is pertinent to notice the motility of gold as a material; the gold has been transformed in a variety of circumstances to become a variety of objects, which in turn were used for a number of transformational purposes in both human and supernatural worlds. As we shall see below, the processes by which the gold was transformed is interrelated to other technical processes which emphasized properties of wealth and regeneration.

The smith or artisan would make the figures by first melting small quantities of gold (alloy) with a flame and blow-pipe (Gullman 2004). Although gold is ductile, its casting requires the use of bellows or another air source for the furnace; pure gold melts at 1064 degrees Celsius (Jørgensen and Vang Petersen 1998:29). In order to work a drop of gold into thin foil, repeated heating and steeping is demanded; if this is not done, the metal is easily fractured (Gullman 2004:113). Since the copper content of the foil may oxidise, the artisan must put the foil into some kind of a cleansing bath, perhaps of fruit juice, to avoid this problem (Gullman 2004:113). When this was accomplished, patrices were employed to give birth to the figures. Bodily senses participate in these processes through seeing, hearing, sensuous touch and perhaps even through smelling and tasting. Touch and taste are known to have been used in order to distinguish different qualities of ore used for iron production (Lindeberg 2009: 59).

The gold content of gold foil figures has been scientifically measured, and it has been conclusively shown that the people who manufactured and used the foils showed very little, if any, concern with the gold content (Gullman 2004:112-113). Gold foils within one and the same context demonstrate a great variety as regards the purity of the gold. Even die-identical

figural foils from the same place may differ in gold content, such as gold foil numbers 737 and 1860 from Helgö, Sweden, containing 63% and 88.6% gold respectively (Gullman 2004:113). From this it can be concluded that other features of the foils were deemed significant and important, such as the detailed production and formation of the figures themselves, the metal's shiny quality and its overall visual impression. This was what was sought after and considered important– not concerns for the purity of gold. This argument for the aesthetic significance of gold is further supported by the fact that figures were also occasionally made of other shining metals, such as silver and bronze (cf. Conneller on skeumorphs in this volume).

When gold foil figures were produced gold was perceived to be the metal of gods to the extent that the words golden and godly/divine were used interchangeably (Jørgensen & Vang Petersen 1998: 82). The ancient Swedish/Scandinavian word for gold was *gul* or *gull*. Gold consequently translates as 'the yellow metal' (Hellquist 1980). The word gold (*Sw. guld*) is thus etymologically related to the colour adjective yellow (*Sw. gul*). Conclusively, gold ultimately expressed a co-emergence of colour-and-thing/metal and indeed divinity (cf. Casson 1997).



Fig. 3. Gold foil figure from Bornholm, Denmark. (Photo: René Laursen, Bornholm Museum).

The gold foil figures – materials of affect

In previous analyses (Back Danielsson 2012) I have described the manipulations that gold foil figures have undergone as *incorporated* and *added* manipulations. Incorporated manipulations are made when the figure itself is produced. These include the exaggerations or abbreviations (manipulations) of bodily attributes of the figure is part of the patrix used to make the foil figure. The most common exaggerations are those of the eyes, the nose and jewellery. Since it is known that jewellery carried significant details in pivotal stories or ceremonies (e.g. Magnus 2001) it is not surprising to find these elements in larger sizes.

It is only the artisan/smith that can make these incorporated manipulations, since this person is likely to be the one making the patrix. On the other hand, added manipulations are made after the birth or manufacture of the figure, and may consist of adding details to it. A great variety of added manipulations could have been made by the artisan but importantly added manipulations could also be made by other people during a single or multiple performances over the life of the figures.

The *incorporated manipulations* may be summarized as follows (Back Danielsson 2007 with references):

- Protuberant eyes -- suggesting far sightedness?
- Exaggerated nose; focus on smelling/breathing?
- Drinking from horns -- suggestive of transcending experiences?
- Pointed chin, which does not have to be a beard (see also Watt 2004:201), but rather could imply a leaning back position as in trance, where the chin is lifted up.
- Lips -- visible when couple is eating. (gold foil from Helgö, Sweden)
- Vocal production (Eketorp, Sweden)
- Kissing (Helgö, Sweden)
- Moving legs and feet (e.g. Ravlunda, Sweden).
- Seated postures -- may additionally be linked to sitting in the high seat, having political, religious and legal significance (e.g. Bolmsö, Sweden).
- Touching by arms and hands (e.g. Slöinge, Sweden).
- Wearing an assortment of garments -- some in the form of wings of birds, or animals furs (e.g. Tørring, Denmark and Eketorp, Sweden)



Fig. 4. Gold foil couple from Östergötland, Sweden. (Photo: National Historical Museum, Sweden).

The added manipulations, conducted by one person or several people in one or multiple performances, may be summarized as (Back Danielsson 2007 with references):

- Piercing of vital organs (e.g. Uppåkra)
- Cutting the figures (e.g. Uppåkra)
- Equipping the figures with props, such as necklaces (e.g. Bornholm and Uppåkra), belts (Bornholm and Uppåkra), and manoeuvrable phalluses (Uppåkra).
- Crumpling up the figures (several locations)
- Turning the foil into a cylinder, then tread among beads on a necklace (Tørring)
- Folding the figure (e.g. Bornholm, Denmark and Lillehammer, Norway)
- Ripping the figure apart (e.g. Bornholm)
- Folding the figures together with other golden items/strips into small packages (Bornholm)
- Adding loops enabling figures to be hung (several locations)



Fig. 5. Figure from Uppåkra, Sweden, “dressed” with golden necklace. (After Watt 2004:172, fig. 3a).



Fig. 6. Figure from Uppåkra, seemingly stabbed by a golden item in its abdomen. (After Watt 2004:200).

Overall, pricks, scratches and punctures can be observed on specific body parts on both gold foil figures and some gold bracteates (Back Danielsson 2007:124--127, see also Williams and Nugent 2012). They are seen on specific bodily locations such as head, heart and genitalia. It must further be noted that eyes and eyesight are prominent, multi-faceted narrative features expressed through material culture in the Scandinavian Late Iron Age (Nordbladh 2012). In fact, it has been suggested that reduced visual capacity (but in other respects enhanced) was desirable, illustrating a body normativity that differs from that in contemporary society.

The multiple actions and events described above speak against a description of the figures as simple representations. The miniscule bodies need to be taken seriously and their visual potency introduces phenomenological registers that exceed the simple notion of representation (cf. Cochrane 2005; 2008; 2009; Jones 2006). While Mitchell (1996; 2005) recognizes that images make demands, awake desires, repulsions, etc., and as such may be apprehended as living entities, it is important to understand that images, in this case figures, are only living because of our apprehensions of them. Indeed the living image is a metaphor, a meta-picture, 'a secondary, reflexive image of images' (Mitchell 2005:10), highlighting the relationality of image and beholder.

In the case of the gold foil figures both the manufactured figure and the wearer or handler and the person who gazed at these figures seemingly had to do things. It is as if the figures/images (or rather the meta-things or meta-pictures) evoked certain actions that were dictated by the images themselves. A human-like figure engaged in different activities, perhaps experienced as divine, godly, uncanny, human as well as animal-like or even vegetal-like -- perhaps all aspects at the same time -- resulted in the person doing things to the artefact. In the following, I will delve deeper into the relations between different bodies, makers and manipulators and further consider how the ontological status of the figures in their animated states had its equivalence among certain human beings.

Relations

Size and Affect

Gold foil figures are small. However, this does not mean that they are miniatures (in which case they would be representations in a smaller scale of something larger). I would contend that using the word miniature is delimiting. It implies a certain distance, or rather a specific

relation, between beholder and figure. For one thing, it automatically implies that something is *represented*. Secondly, what is represented is found materially or immaterially, for real, elsewhere. Such reasoning does indeed downplay practice and silences, or embalms, the object of study (see also Alberti this volume on miniatures).

The choice of size brings with it certain desirable and perhaps also unintended effects. Small figures or bodies may evoke emotions within the handler or viewer, such as wonder, awe and/or empowerment (see Bailey 2005:29, 33). But equally, encountering something small, a reminder of human-like, or god-like, bodies (gold foil figures) may engender feelings of humbleness, that is, the small, tiny entity/living being needs you to take care of it. Thus these figures may not only have protected you (if they did), but may have also required protection.

Making things/entities in smaller sizes requires expertise, and very often certain characteristics of the body are abbreviated. Abbreviation commonly holds that certain marks or elements are only considered necessary (Proschan 1983:14). This abbreviation invites disparate *significata* which opens them up to interpretational plurality (Tonkin 1979:245). With such techniques, paradox and power is manifested and exerted, inviting and generating a possible array of mixed and, importantly, enhanced feelings, such as fear, relief, anxiety and joy. To be able to relate to such *significata* is to be powerful (Tonkin 1979:245). This, I would argue, is especially pertinent in the case of stylized gold foil figures. These luminous, crudely and abbreviated figures would for an uninitiated person be hard to relate to in intended or desired ways.

Ontological equivalents

Gold had a mythological origin during the Iron Age in Scandinavia and thereby also magical powers (Holtmark 1960). It is thus possible to describe the gold foil figures as divine miniature beings with luminous properties that also attracted a numinous presence (Back Danielsson 2010). The divine miniature beings were probably dressed up by the artisan either through incorporation of the jewellery already in the patris, or later by the smith or another person/people through adding, for instance, golden necklaces. The artisan making gold foil figures was also responsible for giving divine powers to certain human beings by equipping them with arm-rings, disc-on-bow brooches and necklaces – all with luminous properties.

Consequently the artisan furnished both humans and divine beings with paraphernalia necessary for performing certain ceremonies, such as weddings, prophesy making or initiations rituals. What is more, the artisan was also so powerful and in possession of such specific knowledge as to produce and deliver the miniature gods. This is indeed in agreement with the Norse anthropogenic myth *Voluspà*, which recounts that gods created smiths or artisans that in turn made *manlikon*, human or human-like beings in the shape of statues or something similar (Steinsland 1983:85). This accentuates the special position and role the artisan held during this period. Only through the expertise of the smith/artisan could certain human bodies and divine bodies receive the correct bodily treatment/paraphernalia that were required for them to perform in intended, and, perhaps, unintended ways. Both figures and humans could through the artisan's acts perform in required ways to create, explain and protect the then current world and cosmos. For instance, specific gold foil figures deposited in certain post-holes in connection to the inauguration of special buildings could work as protective forces (Back Danielsson 2010), and further, certain human beings would require certain paraphernalia and bodily treatments to be able perform prophesy making (*sejdr*) (e.g. Price 2002). This suggests that the gold foil figures and (certain) human bodies were ontological equivalents. Such equivalency is known from other prehistoric societies, such as the Early Formative Candelaria in Northwest Argentina where bodies and ceramic pots are considered ontological equivalents (Alberti 2012, cf. Alberti and Bray 2009; Alberti et al. 2011).

Ontological relations

The artisan making the gold foil figures (and other objects) had extraordinary skills in transforming metals into objects. However this knowledge also entailed the possession, or rather control, of magical powers (e.g., Haaland et al. 2002; Hedeager 2002:7; Herbert 1984; 1993). As reiterated above, we know that the luminous gold metal was considered endowed with numinous and divine qualities, so the person who was able to transform this heavenly metal would have been special, perhaps even imbued with supernatural powers (Helms 1993:19; Källén 2004:192; Lindeberg 2009:59--60). Indeed, in Late Iron Age Scandinavia gods were considered artisans or craftsmen, a trait Scandinavia shares with many other cultures (Hed Jakobsson 2003:144, see also Eliade 1971 and Helms 1993).

The fact that the garments and jewellery of the figures had their counterparts among human beings (Mannerling 2004: 212) underscores the specialized knowledge of the artisan who would have had close encounters with these clothes and the ceremonies in which they participated. The gold foil figures point to the Late Iron Age materialization of something for us immaterial, a divine being. Gold in whatever form indicated a numinous presence, and the artisan possessed the expertise with which to transform gold in a variety of executions. The figures worked as performing objects that were manipulated in different ways in performances or stories. The smith/artisan was the creator of this being with agency. Without the artisan's abilities, expertise and intimate knowledge of human and divine ceremonies, performances and bodily practices there would be no gold foil figures.

The contexts where the figures have been recovered have been suggested to be associated with specific aristocratic networks (Söderberg 2005:181), perhaps specifically the work shop locations. At these places there is extensive evidence of workshop activities, often highly advanced. Necessarily, this means that smiths/artisans and their products were prominent features in these places, not only because of their role manufacturing gold foil figures but also because of manufacturing a variety of precious metal goods. Importantly, these same contexts are also associated with other transformational changes or processes - those connected to crops, harvesting and grinding. During the Scandinavian Iron Age significantly different activities such as smithing and the preparation of food are argued to have been analogues (Hed Jakobsson 2003:173). The same was true for finished products and prepared food: they were kennings for one another. A kenning is a particular kind of common imagery in language, particularly distinguishing the Norse poetry (Marold 1983); a descriptive term that embodies a kind of affect. For instance, blood could be named "the river of the sword", or "wound-sea" and a shield could be named "headland of swords" (Faulkes 1997:24). Food, jewellery, and presumably gold foil figures circulated in the relationships among human beings and other beings/entities (cf. Hed Jakobsson 2003:116). To be able to assist in such transformations, becomings, and expanding relationships was to be powerful, and it also meant that you possessed certain abilities, and consequently were able to produce wealth and in return offer regeneration and reproduction. Leading families and rulers were connected to such processes and as a result were considered producers of wealth (Hed Jakobsson 2003:116).

The foregoing discussion of gold foil figures in the Scandinavian Late Iron Age suggests that it is thus the processes of formation that are primary, not the states of matter. The substances involved are not in focus here, but rather the relations that they produce. In Ingold's terms (2010:92), we are looking at an ontology of relations not of substances (cf. Latour 1999; 2005; Barad 2003; 2007; Alberti and Bray 2009 on alternatives to an ontology of substances).

Conclusions – gold foil figures beyond representation

In this paper I have adopted a witnessing stance to describe the lives of Scandinavian Late Iron Age gold foil figures. This was done to question the prevailing approach to archaeological interpretations. The archaeological study of material culture and its overemphasis on representation tends to be primarily concerned with representational meanings. Such approaches to the study of archaeological materials tend to downplay practice, to the extent that the lives and loves of the figures (paraphrasing Mitchell's (2005) work on images) are not considered – and are in fact obliterated. This is evident in earlier interpretations of the gold foil figures as representations of gods known from later, written medieval sources, or of the figures as a sort of temple coins. Equally, their small sizes frequently lure the interpretive archaeologist to thoughts of representation – the figures are miniatures – that is, representations of something else, something materially or indeed immaterially greater/other. Here I contend that rather than thinking of them as miniatures their bodies instead need to be taken seriously, in their own rights.

A focus on practice also highlights the importance of recognizing the human body, and the manipulations it has made and experienced, as a central device for relating to the ongoing nature of the world. The processes of becoming of which the figures are a part do not involve transformations into easily identifiable Western categories such as, for instance, male and female. For example, Denmark has produced thousands of gold foil figures (mainly from the island of Bornholm). Of these less than ten per cent of the figures could be categorized as being of either of the sexes and having corresponding clothes (Mannering 2006:42--43). In Sweden's c. 40% of the gold foil figures could be categorized by sex. The material begs for other understandings. Garments, bodily characteristic and other paraphernalia instead invite other realms, for instance those connected to the animal and vegetal world but also to constant movement and transformation. This resonates well with ideas presented within the history of

religion on the ways of living in the Late Iron Age in Scandinavia. For instance, all human beings had a *hugr*, a dimension of their soul, which under certain conditions could act on its own (Steinsland 1990:62). Frequently, it would materialize itself in the form of an animal. Gifted humans could practice this form of shape shifting. Another dimension of the soul was represented by the *fylgja*, which could be observed either in a female or in an animal shape (Price 2002: 59). The *fylgja* as an animal gestalt has been interpreted as reflecting a genuinely Nordic perception of the soul, and it was born with the human and functioned like his/her alter ego (Steinsland 1990:62–3).

Another way to approach what I would describe as a discrepancy between material and interpretation is to think through practice and bodies by considering Viveiros de Castro's perspectivism (e.g. 1998; 2004). Described as a bomb by Bruno Latour (2009), designed to shatter Western philosophy and specifically Kantian ideals, perspectivism was developed by Viveiros de Castro in his studies of Amerindians in Amazonia. Here human culture is something that binds all beings, including animals, plants but also other things/phenomena together. What separates them from one another are their bodies, resulting in different perspectives. Such an approach makes a nonsense of traditional divisions such as nature versus culture. Returning to the gold foil figures, I have argued that it is the transformation per se, that is important, and the transformation (or rather the change of on-going relations) is enabled only through different bodily practices/processes. Gold foil figures are figures in action – they are not static and do not stand still – they are meant to be in constant movement. They are not about fixity, durability and universality, but instead figures in flux; fickle and distinctive (Back Danielsson 2012). As such, they share central characteristics with other beings in constant motion– humans. The activities the figures partook in, and perhaps instigated, were also experienced by certain humans -- presumably those that visited the 'transit' halls and workshops where the foils were deposited - an upper class stratum of society. They ate, met, feasted, drunk, ruled, participated in weddings, initiation rituals, etc. A being of the Late Iron Age upper class in Scandinavia was far different from our modern sense of an individual, where this being had different relations and engagements with material and immaterial worlds. Gold foil figures and humans also shared the same characteristics and paraphernalia, which was provided to them by artisans/smiths. In this paper I have argued that the figures and certain humans were ontologically equivalent. This ontological equivalence is not restricted only to the aristocratic transit hall visitors, but presumably also extended to other people, since it has been suggested that Iron Age ritual specialists in Norway played the

role of transformers and were involved in both the cremation of people and the melting of iron (Goldhahn and Østigård 2007). However, the ontological equivalence does not stop there. It also encompasses, for instance, the preparation of products and food. The creation of crops and the manufacture of things are seen as ontologically equivalent. These for use disparate activities were not seen as such -- both processes resulted in finished products and edible food, where the processes engaged revealed desirable and attractive properties of the materials: wealth and regeneration.

Changes in perspectives, from a representational mode of thinking to a more-than-representational mode of thinking, from understanding materials as substances to a processual understanding of the affects of materials inevitably results in the conclusion that gold foil figures are much more than simple representations.

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