

## **Oseberg: Crafting communities and expressive objects**

The carved objects from the Oseberg ship burial in Vestfold provide glimpses into a beautiful Viking world otherwise mostly lost. The carved items in animal art clearly demonstrate that motives typically playing out in small-scale in the preserved archaeological record had their counterparts in large-scale, at least in an elite setting. The expressive carved objects in Oseberg provide a unique opportunity to explore crafting communities intimately linked to the uppermost elite in the Viking-age society. Through an investigation of both style and technology this paper will study the use of various style elements and techniques, with a particular emphasis on the major shift in ways of modelling already established by earlier studies. It is argued that such a shift reflect some highly conscious choices made by the craftspeople within a wider societal setting. I will explore the effect the visual aspects had on both observers and on the objects themselves, building on research that emphasis the active role of material culture, animal-object relations and craft as an activity that not merely makes object, but creates the world. The animal art is seen as a means of communication that holds the potential to provide insight both on world-views and power relations. The thought-provoking animal-headed posts will be highlighted as they seem to suggest that the carved animals were active at several levels. As carved decorative elements are found on a broad range of items, from the ship itself and other larger items like the wagon down to smaller kitchen utensils they seem to imbue the ship burial. The overall aim of the paper is to explore why expressive objects play such a prominent role in Oseberg. Can the crafted items hold a key to explain the role of the two females buried in the Oseberg ship burial in AD834?