

Abstract

Zanette T. Glørstad

Insular harness mounts in Norway, Denmark and England: New perspectives on cultural integration and networks across the North Sea.

Amateur metal detecting, combined with targeted outreach work by museums and cultural heritage institutions, has resulted in a surge of finds of fine metalwork from Ireland and Britain in Scandinavian contexts being made available for research. The new objects partly conform to existing patterns of variants and reuse, but they also offer new insights into the quantity and distribution of insular objects. Despite the fact that many such metal detecting finds lack contextual information, they contribute to a more informed appreciation of the circulation and adaptation of insular metalwork in Scandinavian communities on both sides of the North Sea. Traditional interpretations of these items as status objects largely acquired from looting expeditions still hold sway, but recent research also suggests that insular copper-alloy objects could have had a commodity value, related to increasing demand for base metals and metalwork in general during the 9th century CE.

This paper demonstrates the research potential of this expanded corpus, and of adopting a more targeted approach to the insular material, through an examination of Hiberno-Saxon bridle mounts. This constitutes the largest single category of secular insular items in Norse contexts, yet it has not been scrutinised from an interregional perspective, and no comprehensive overview of the material exists. Existing reviews of insular harness mounts encompass around 50 finds with c. 85 separate fittings. At present, about 130 individual mounts are known, from England, Denmark and Norway, of which many recent finds are unpublished. The paper argues that a broader geographical scope is necessary in order to consider the imported finds in Scandinavia in light of current debates on concepts of value, appropriation and exchange networks in the early Viking Age.