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The front page: Amber nuggets and semi-finished amber beads and pendants from pit-house 7/91 in Biskupice, Poland.

Photo: Marcin Woźniak.

The back page: Suspension loop for gold bracteate S12625, from Hå on Jæren, Rogaland. Photo: Annette G. Øvrelid.

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On the iconography of the gold foil figures from Hauge

SIGMUND OEHL

Sigmund Oehrl 2025. **On the iconography of the gold foil figures from Hauge.** *AmS-Skrifter* 29, 161–170, Stavanger, ISSN 0800-0816, ISBN 978-82-7760-205-9.

The 16 gold foil figures from Hauge depict a man and a woman embracing each other. This scene is very common on Scandinavian gold foils of the Merovingian Period and often is interpreted as a pair of gods or as a wedding rite. What particularly distinguishes the find from Hauge is a staff or plant stem that the woman seems to be holding in her hand. In this paper, I will explore the meaning of this plant, which can also be seen on other Iron- and Viking-age pictorial representations and, against the background of a very rich literary and runic tradition, can be understood as an *allium* plant, a leek. Since antiquity as well as in the north, this plant has been attributed magical powers and healing properties and was associated with fertility and sexuality.

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Key words: Gold foil figures, *gullgubber*, leek, runes, bracteates, Hauge, Tinghaug, Norway

Introduction

On the occasion of the 74th Sachsensymposion, the former logo of the Museum of Archaeology, Stavanger, a human couple with a plant-like object, adopted from the gold foil figures from nearby Hauge, was chosen by the organising committee as conference logo. Consequently, it seemed appropriate to take a closer look at the meaning of this motif. In this paper, I will explore the meaning of the depicted plant, which can also be seen in other Iron- and Viking-age pictorial representations and, against the background of a very rich literary and runic tradition, can be understood as an *allium* plant, a leek.

The gold foil figures were found at the famous Iron-age grave mound complex of Hauge farm (*Tinghaugplataæt*) in the district of Jæren, Klepp municipality, in Norway, about 25km south of Stavanger. This extraordinary complex (Kristoffersen et al. 2014) includes the well-known *Krosshaug* Migration-period burial mound, a court site (*tunanlegg*), and other monuments. According to Gabriel Gustafson (1900, 1), who presented the find in 1899, the gold foils were discovered in 1897, in close proximity to *Tinghaugen*, during cultivation work by the farmer of this land, since then, they have been kept at the University Museum of Bergen (B5392). In total, 16 gold foils from

eight different stamps have been found. They all depict the same motif – a man and a woman standing face to face and touching each other with their hands. These are the only gold foil figures known from the county of Rogaland so far (Oehrl 2024; Tangen 2010, 30–32, 108–13).

Scandinavian gold foil figures – the couple motif

The tiny gold foil figures (*gullgubber*) are found only in Scandinavia, about 3600 pieces from about 50 different locations (Hauck 1992; Pesch and Helmbrecht 2019). Most of them come from Denmark, with over 2600 from Sorte Muld on Bornholm alone. There are only relatively few finds from Norway, about 50 from a handful of places. The majority of gold foil figures probably originate from the Merovingian Period (ca. 500–700s AD) and come from Iron-age central places, often from hall buildings. It is likely that the Tinghaug complex in Hauge must also be regarded as such a local centre of power (Grimm 2010, 138–39; Kristoffersen et al. 2014; Sundqvist 2014). In the halls, the *gullgubber* presumably were deposited ritually and used as a kind of sacrificial money or temple currency – like votive plaques in temples in the

Roman Empire (Hauck 1992, 529–30, 1994, 1998; Sundqvist 2019, 372–75; Watt 1992, 224). Some scholars have even pointed out possible iconographic parallels between the gold foil figures and Roman votive plaques, which depict the Roman deities they were offered to (Hauck 1993, 1994, 1998; Oehrl 2019a).

Common motifs on the gold foil figures are men in caftan-like robes and women in dresses and cloaks, occasionally holding staffs or drinking vessels, and human couples, probably lovers embracing each other. This latter motif is associated by many scholars with Old Norse mythology (Oehrl 2019a; Sundqvist 2019) and interpreted as the fertility god Freyr and his marriage to the giantess Gerðr. In the 13th century, both Snorri Sturluson (*Gylfaginning* ch. 37; Faulkes 2005, 30–31; transl. of Snorri's *Edda*: Faulkes 1987) and the *Edda* poem *Skírnismál* (Neckel and Kuhn 1985, 69–76; transl. of the *Poetic Edda*: Dronke 1969–2011) give a detailed account of this myth. It is unclear, however, how old this story is and whether or not the Old Icelandic texts have an ancient origin, preserving a pre-Christian myth. There are good reasons to assume that *Skírnismál* was influenced by continental courtly love poetry and composed only around AD 1200 (Bibire 1986, 38; von See et al. 1997, 61–65, 67). Anne Heinrichs (1997) regards *Skírnismál* as a Christian mockery that ridicules the pagan god Freyr as a lovesick fool. Thus, the common interpretation of the couple motif as Freyr and Gerðr remains uncertain. More likely it depicts the marriage between the twins and fertility gods Freyr and Freyja, a myth that is not known in detail, but seems to have ancient origins (Hauck 1998, 322; von See et al. 1997, 61).

The Hauge motif and its parallels

There are hundreds of gold foil figures depicting a human couple. What is special about the iconography of the Hauge figures is that on five of them, the woman holds a staff in her hand that resembles a plant (Figure 1). Three further examples of this motive are kept in the National Museum Copenhagen in Denmark (NM8680–8681; Tangen 2010, 124, nos. 1–3), which appear to be identical to those from Hauge, including the plant in the woman's hand. It is likely that they originally are from Norway as well (Tinghaug?). A detail on a fragment from Hov (Vingrom, Lillehammer, Innlandet county) possibly also corresponds to the plant-like staff from Hauge; here, the woman herself is not preserved, only her male counterpart, and of the plant only one of its drooping leaves is discernible (C38680; Tangen 2010, 106, no. 2).

The object in the woman's hand has been described as a (magic) staff, a twig, a branch, or a kind of plant



Figure 1. Gold foil figure from Hauge. After Gustafson 1900.

(Gardela 2016, 125; Helmbrecht 2011, 126–27; Oehrl 2019a, 399; Tangen 2010, 72; Watt 2012, 242), and even as a dragon or serpent (Johansen 1996, 86). The long stem, which bends slightly at the bottom, ends in a stump-like or bulbous thickening directly below the woman's hand. At the top, the stem splits into two curling, tendril-like projections that hang down on both sides. The most obvious assumption is that the image represents a stylised plant with bulb, stem, and longish leaves. What kind of plant we are dealing with and what significance it has is hard to say. However, we can approach an interpretation by including iconographic parallels on the one hand and Old Norse plant lore on the other.

The Mammen Horse Collar

Of particular note is the horse collar from the rich 10th-century chamber grave in Mammen in Jutland, Denmark (Iversen et al. 1991). It is richly decorated with gold platelets (Schmidt-Lornsen 1986; 1991) that include the depiction of a woman in a long dress holding a staff in her hand (Figure 2a), which has been interpreted as a kind of rod, the magic staff of a sorceress (*völva*), a bishop's crosier, or a plant (Gardela 2016, 132; Graham-Campbell 1980, 146; Helmbrecht 2011, 126–27; Klindt-Jensen and Wilson 1980, 100; Oehrl 2019a, 399; Schmidt-Lornsen 1986, 301–2; Watt 2012, 242). It has a long stem with leaves that stick out and hang down from the top and a tuber or bulb at its bottom; even the small root hairs hanging from the tuber are depicted. The plant, obviously the same as depicted on the gold foil figures, looks much like a member of the onion family (*allium*).

This was already observed by Jutta Schmidt-Lornsen (1986, 300–2, 1991, 265; cf. Oehrl 2019a, 399), who pointed



Figure 2. a) Gold mount from the Mammen horse collar. After Schmidt-Lornsen 1986. b) Stone cross fragment in Kirk Michael, Isle of Man. After Kermode 1994.

out the special significance accorded to onion plants in Old Norse mythology (*laukr*), where it was considered a powerful healing plant and symbol of regeneration. The gold mount right next to the woman shows a snake-like monster swallowing a humanoid figure, which, according to Schmidt-Lornsen, refers to the death of Óðinn, who was devoured by the wolf Fenrir at *ragnarøk*r (Schmidt-Lornsen 1986, 300, cf. 1994, 176–78). The woman with the plant indicates, Schmidt-Lornsen suggested, the return of life after the catastrophe. This appears plausible as the apocalyptic vision of *Völuspá* (stanza 4; Neckel and Kuhn 1985, 1) praises the “green leek” (*grænom lauki*) as the first life to be growing in the newly created world. Margrethe Watt (2012, 242–43) also recognised the connection between Hauge and Mammen and suggested that the mythical *laukr* could be depicted on the gold foil figures from Hauge as well – an approach that I intend to develop further here.

The Jurby Stone Cross

The same plant occurs on two 10th-century carved stone slabs from the Isle of Man. These memorial stones are of-

ten decorated with figurative representations and go back to local traditions, but are strongly influenced by Scandinavian art (Kermode 1994; Wilson 2018). In addition to numerous Christian motifs and hunting scenes, there are a few figures that are connected to Old Norse mythology (Margeson 1983; Steinforth 2021).

The Jurby fragment MM 125 shows a long-haired woman in a long trailing dress, who is holding in her hand a plant with a long stem, two curling leaves hanging down from the top, and “hairs” at the stem’s lower end that look like roots (Figure 2b) (Kermode 1994, appendix B, 18–19; Wilson 2018, 115–17, 163). A similar woman is carved on a stone fragment in Kirk Michael, also in the Isle of Man (MM 123; Kermode 1994, 185–87, pl. XLVIII), but both the woman’s head and the upper part of the plant are broken off. The latter was interpreted as a rod, a magic staff, an uprooted sapling, a branch, or a small tree (Gardeła 2016, 132; Kermode 1994, appendix B, 18; Wilson 2018, 116). However, it appears obvious that it represents the same *allium* plant as that on the gold foils from Hauge and the Mammen horse collar. The same plant symbolism is present here, and the stones in

the Isle of Man strongly indicate that the plant belongs to the female sphere.

The Auzon Casket

The famous, richly decorated walrus ivory casket from Auzon (Dép. Haute-Loire, France) was produced in the early 8th century or around AD 700 in an ecclesiastical setting in North England as a receptacle for jewellery, books, or relics. Apart from carvings depicting the story of Wayland the Smith and the Adoration of the Magi on the front side and a story about Wayland's brother, the master archer Egill, on the lid, there also are runic inscriptions and images of the Roman foundation fathers Romulus and Remus on the left panel as well as Titus' conquest of Jerusalem on the back (see e.g. Becker 1973; Schwab 2009; Webster 2012).

The right panel is kept in the Bargello, Florence, Italy, and while several suggestions have been presented, its mysterious images and inscriptions remain enigmatic in many respects (references: Oehrl 2021, fn. 3). Of interest in the present context is the figure on the left edge of the panel, sitting on a small hill or stone (Figure 3a). It has a human body but small wings and a long neck with a horse's head, and it is holding an elongated object in its hand. A warrior with shield, helmet, and lance stands in front of this creature, as if being welcomed by it. The object in the creature's hand looks like a plant with a long, slightly curved stem that terminates in a thickening at the bottom and several oblong, hanging leaves at the top, almost reminiscent of a palm tree. It resembles the plants of Hauge, Mammen, and Jurby and therefore can tentatively be interpreted as an *allium* plant. It has been suggested that the armed man might be understood as a fallen warrior who is received in the afterlife by the seated, otherworldly hybrid being (Becker 1973, 39–41; Krause 1959). Its plant could then be understood as a powerful healing plant and a symbol of regeneration and resurrection.

The Tjängvide Picture Stone and the Medallions from Aneby and Inderøy

That a plant plays a role in the welcome of the fallen heroes could be confirmed by the Gotland picture stones. The journey to the afterlife is the central topic in the iconography of the stones (Oehrl 2020). Since the 8th century, these monuments frequently depict the ship of the dead and, according to stories told in 9th-century skaldic poetry, the fallen hero approaching *Valhöll* on horseback and being welcomed by a valkyrie with a drinking vessel.

The stone GP 5 Alskog Tjängvide I shows the dead hero on the eight-legged steed *Sleipnir*, i.e. the horse of



Figure 3. a) Detail of the right panel of Franks casket. After Becker 1973. b) Detail of the picture stone Alskog Tjängvide I. After Lindqvist 1941–42.

his host, the god Óðinn, father of the slain. He heads towards a simplified hall building, i.e. *Valhöll*. A corpse is depicted above, a dog is running ahead of him, and directly in front of the hall, there is a valkyrie receiving a warrior and handing over a drinking ladle. The horseman himself is greeted by another valkyrie who is holding a drinking horn from which liquid spills out, and an elongated object with two branch-like extensions (Figure 3b). The overflowing horn is a common motif in Roman art (*cornucopia*) and represents exuberant abundance and vitality. In Old Norse poetry, providing the dead with drink seems to be central to their postmortal existence, as if it was only the drink that brought them back to life (Weber 1973; Zimmermann 2006).



Figure 4. a) Gold medallion from Aneby. After Hauck et al. 1985–89. b) Gold medallion from Inderøy. After Hauck et al. 1985–89.

The other object in the valkyrie’s hand is difficult to determine; Sune Lindqvist (1941–42 vol. II, 16) thought it was a key, while others see it as a plant, a twig, or a branch (Oehrl 2019b, 20, 2020, 128; Watt 2012, 241). Since the overflowing horn has Roman models, it seems plausible that this object traces back to depictions of palm branches in depictions of the emperor’s welcome (*adventus*) in the Roman Empire. This adoption seems to have taken place early on, as suggested by Migration-period imitations of gold medallions that depict a figure welcoming a man with a twig-like plant (IK 14 Aneby-M and IK 86 Inderøy-M/Vika) (Figures 4a–b).

A plant in the valkyrie’s hand could conclusively be harmonised with both the iconographic context and the literary record – valkyries know the healing powers of plants. In the *Edda* poem *Sigrdrífumál* (stanza 8; Neckel and Kuhn 1985, 191), composed in the 12th century, the valkyrie Sigrdrífa teaches the hero Sigurðr to use leek (*laukr*) as an antidote for poisoned drinks. As Gunter Müller (1976) pointed out, valkyries have not only ordinary medical knowledge, including the use of botanical remedies, but also the ability to heal mortal wounds and bring the fallen back to life.

This is particularly evident in the myth of the everlasting battle *Hjaðningavíg*, where Hildr brings the fallen back to life again and again. The 9th-century *Ragnarsdrápa* (stanza 9) calls Hildr *bæti-Þrúðr dreyrugra benja* – “Thrud [a valkyrie’s name] who heals bloody wounds” (Faulkes 1998, 73 [251]). Saxo Grammaticus writes in *Gesta Danorum* (V, 9) that she awakens the fallen with magic songs (Olrik and Ræder 1931, 134). In the Eddic poem *Helgakviða Hundingsbana* II, stanza 29 (Neckel and Kuhn 1985, 155), the valkyrie Sigrun says to Helgi “I would gladly call the dead back to life with magic if I could rest in your arms.”

Thus, it seems plausible that the valkyrie on the Tjängvide stone is holding both a horn of plenty containing the vitalising drink and a healing plant (*laukr*), not only to greet the dead man, but to heal his deadly wounds and awaken him. This already might have been the idea behind the *adventus* imitations from Aneby and Inderøy.

There may also be a sexual component in the Tjängvide motif. Gro Steinsland (1994a, 147–49, 1997, 104–9) and Lotte Hedeager (2011, 109–12) stated that the horseman’s upright triangular sword pommel is reminiscent of a phallus (critical: Oehrl 2019b, 29–30). A phallic representation actually fits in well with the context of the *cornucopia* and the healing plant as symbols of regeneration. In fact, in skaldic poetry, *sverð* can mean both “sword” or “penis” (Fritzner 1886–1973, s. v. *sverð* 2), and the idea that erotic activities take place in the afterlife is attested in Old Norse literature (Steinsland 1994a, 144). With this notion, another perspective becomes apparent – the plants of the *allium* family are not only regarded as healing plants, but also, like hardly any other plant, as aphrodisiac and sexual symbols (see below).

The Uppåkra Patrix

Remarkably, a woman very similar to the one on the picture stone from Gotland appears on a patrix for the production of gold foil figures at Uppåkra (U 4469; Watt 1999, 180–81, 186–87, figs. 3:17, 5, 6, 2004, fig. 36, 2012, 238–41). The patrix depicts a woman holding an overflowing drinking horn in one hand and a two-fingered, branch-like object in the other (Figure 5). Are those gold foil figures to be regarded as representations of valkyries as well, equipped with the symbols of her vitalising and death-defeating powers? Should therefore the woman with the *allium* plant on the gold foil figures from Hauge also be addressed as a valkyrie, who receives a dead man,

embraces him lovingly, and offers him the symbols of eternal life and eternal lust? It is possible that this is the idea behind the couple motifs on the Scandinavian gold foil figures in general.

The power of the leek – literary tradition

It is not least the extraordinary significance of *laukr* in Old Norse tradition that favours my interpretations and should therefore be outlined here – mainly based on the work of Wilhelm Heizmann (1987, 1992, 1993, 1995, 2011, 2021, 2023). There is a general philological consensus that the Old Norse term *laukr* refers to *allium* plants (like leek, onion, and garlic) in general. According to Jens Heimdahl (2022), however, *laukr* might also refer to a wider spectrum of other plants with onion-like bulbs and tubers, such as tuber oatgrass and dropwort, which have a well-known record of being used in burials. However, there is also archaeological evidence of the use of leeks – in a Late-Roman woman’s grave in Vellensby on Bornholm, where an amulet capsule was discovered that contained pieces of a wild species of *allium*, probably sand leek (Karg et al. 2014); another amulet capsule containing leek was found in a woman’s grave from about AD 650 in Nørre Sandegård, Bornholm (Hald et al. 2015).

Of the many ideas associated with plants of the *allium* family in different cultures from ancient to modern periods, some main areas can be identified: firstly, *allium* plants are among the most important *apotropaia* of all; they are used to ward off demons and serve as protection against evil forces and diseases of all kinds. Secondly, they always have been associated with sexuality and virility and seen as promoting female fertility and stimulating libido in both sexes. Lastly, *allium* has been regarded as having healing properties. The practice of using leek as remedy for poisonings can be traced back throughout medieval and ancient medicine to the famous Greek physician Pedanios Dioscorides in the 1st century AD (Wellmann 1907, 152). Even the most famous of all magical herbs, Homer’s *moly* – which was given to Odysseus by the god Mercury and protected him from the sorcery of Kirke, and which is praised by Pliny as the most potent protection against magic and all poisons – has been interpreted as a type of leek. This interpretation already occurs in antiquity and appears in medieval botanical literature as well as the Norwegian *svartebøker*. The medical efficaciousness of *allium* has even been proven scientifically (Heizmann 2011, 123, 572–73).

These complexes are also well documented in Old Norse tradition (Olsen 1917, 660–62; Olsen and Shetelig 1909), and no plant is mentioned more often in Old Norse literature than *laukr* (Heizmann 2021, 109–11). Several



Figure 5.
Bronze
patrix from
Uppåkra.
After Watt
1999.

texts claim, for example, that *laukr* is a kind of “wonder food” that can keep a person alive without any other nourishment (e.g. *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* and *Dámusta saga* – Heizmann 2021, 125). In skaldic poetry, *laukr* can designate a man as strong, firm, tall, and aggressive. It symbolises male virility and sexuality, almost as a penis metaphor (Heizmann 2023; Meissner 1921, 266, 268).

The preservative power of *laukr* and its strong sexual aspect are combined in the *Vølsa þáttr* in *Flateyjarbók* (14th century). It tells about a severed horse penis called *Vølsi* that was preserved with “leek and linen” and worshipped on a farm in northern Norway (Faulkes 2007, 49–61; see also Düwel and Heizmann 2021, 1–29). The penis is passed around the members of the household, and everyone recites a verse about it, with the lady of the house saying: “You are enlarged, *Vølsi*, and taken up, provided with linen and supported by leek. May Maurnir [god of the household] receive this offering!” Klaus Düwel argued that this story does not preserve pagan cult practice, but rather ridicules it from a Christian perspective. Heizmann, however, refers to a series of well-documented, astonishingly similar cults from other cultures that match the *Vølsi* cult and thus makes it appear authentic.

As mentioned above, in the 10th-century poem *Vøluspá*, the “green leek” is praised as the first plant to grow on the new earth, as representative of the mythical beginning of all life. It therefore seems that an inherent potency of primordial growth was ascribed to this plant. These ideas also carried over into Christian tradition – in *Pétrsdrápa* (stanza 8; David McDougall in Clunies Ross

2008, 803), a 14th-century skaldic song of praise to the apostle Peter, the hymn is said to be “widely coated with leek of life” (*laukr lífs*).

Interestingly, *laukr* is closely associated with the female sphere, as well. It is the women who have knowledge of the power of plants, a feature that was seen as so characteristic that a number of *kenningar* for “woman” is constructed with the term *laukr*, e.g. *lofðungr lauks* “the lord of the leek” and *Lofn lauka* “the Lofn [goddess] of leeks” (Meissner 1929, 401, 418).

The immense significance of leek in Old Norse tradition supports the interpretations of the iconographic material presented above. Its strong sexual connotation and its connection to the domain of women, the “goddesses of the leek”, fit in perfectly with the Hauge motif. However, I have to mention that Steinsland (1994a–b; 1997), in the context of her thesis of the holy wedding (*hieros gamos*) as a central part of ancient Scandinavian ruler ideology and afterlife religion, has interpreted the plant on the Hauge foils as *angelica*. She points out that in the 13th-century *Olafs saga Tryggvasonar*, the king gives his wife an *angelica* stem as a (little-appreciated) gift. In my opinion, this interpretation is less convincing – *angelica* looks very different from leek, and the significance of *angelica* in Old Norse literature is not comparable to that of *laukr*. The episode in *Olafs saga* does not seem to refer to an ancient tradition. But can the Old Norse ideas of *laukr* be transferred to earlier periods? That this is indeed the case is proven by runic tradition.

The older runic tradition

The inscription on a 4th-century meat knife made of bone from Fløksand in Nordhordland, Vestland county, Norway (KJ 37; Heizmann 1992, 1995, 2021, 91–104; Olsen and Shetelig 1909) – **linalaukaRf lina laukaR** (followed by an f-rune) – probably proves that the ideas connected with leek and linen as mentioned in the *Vǫlsa þáttr* played a role much earlier.

A number of inscriptions on Migration-period gold bracteates (ca. AD 450–550) contain the sequence **laukaR**, as for instance on IK 26 Børringe-C (Denmark). Bracteates can be regarded as amulets, similar to Greco-Roman amulets with magic inscriptions (Düwel in Heizmann and Axboe 2011, 475–523). There are various kinds of magical words on bracteates that invoke divine powers for protection (Heizmann 2011). The most common is **alu** “defence” (or “beer”?), others are **ota** “terror” and **laþu** “invocation”. The **laukaR** inscriptions are to be understood in this sense – as a magical formula that protects the amulet’s wearer against demons, illness, and other harm, and promises prosperity. A conclusive exam-

ple is IK 166 Skrydstrup-B (Denmark), where the word **laukaR** not only is placed next to the word **alu** and the depiction of a god overcoming a predator, but also next to a deer trampling down two serpents – an ancient symbol of regeneration and resurrection (Heizmann 2011, 563–67).

If we follow Karl Hauck’s interpretation, the complex of healing and regeneration is the main theme in the iconography of the C-bracteates (Hauck in Heizmann and Axboe 2011; Heizmann 2007, 2011, 561–71, 2012). In Hauck’s view, the god Odin/Wodan can be seen depicted on them, healing the injured horse of his son Baldr, as recorded in the Carolingian-period *Second Merseburg Charm*. The role of Odin as a divine healer who knows the properties of plants is well documented, e.g. in the Old English *Nine Herbs Charm*. As Hauck and Heizmann show convincingly, based on an almost overwhelming wealth of evidence, leeks have played an outstanding role in horse medicine since antiquity, through the Middle Ages and into modern times. It can therefore be no coincidence that the sequence **laukaR** frequently appears on the C-bracteates, often in close connection with the horse image.

There also are inscriptions, such as IK 249 Unknown Find Spot-C (Denmark), that merely repeat the l-rune several times in a row. The inscription on the 5th-century meat knife from Gjersvik in Sunnhordland, Vestland county, Norway (KJ 38), contains a row of ten l-runes (Heizmann 2021). For the understanding of such inscriptions, it is important to know that each runic character had not only a phonetic value, but also a name and a corresponding conceptual value, which in the case of the l-rune was *laukaR*. It is likely that such a series of leek runes had a magical function with the purpose of potentiating the word’s power.

Conclusion

The fact that an *allium* plant is depicted on the gold foils from Hauge opens up new possibilities for the interpretation of the couple motif. Perhaps the divine couple Freyr and Freyja is depicted, with the “leek” as their attribute and insignia, symbolising their power to grant or withhold fertility; and it is possible that people sacrificed the gold foils in order to ask these gods for fertility, perhaps on the occasion of a wedding. Otherwise, the human couples themselves could be depicted, performing a wedding ritual to increase sexual desire and fertility. Or does the couple represent a dead man who is awakened by a valkyrie, greeted as a lover in the afterlife, and received with the healing, aphrodisiac leek? Were those gold foils usually sacrificed on the occasion of a death and prayers

offered to the gods for a good and pleasurable reception in the afterlife and the resurrection of the deceased? I do not dare decide in favour of one option. Much remains in the dark. However, the iconographic sources discussed in this paper provide an important contribution to the interpretation of the couple motif, to the iconography of the gold foil figures in general, and not least to the study of the leek phenomenon in Early-medieval northern Europe.

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Abbreviations

GP + no. = *Gotlandic Picture Stones. The Online Edition.*

<https://www.gotlandicpicturestones.se/>

IK + no. = Hauck et al. 1985–1989

KJ + no. = Krause and Jankuhn 1966