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# Iron Age Myth and Materiality: An Archaeology of Scandinavia AD 400-1000

By Lotte Hedeager



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*Iron Age Myth and Materiality: an Archaeology of Scandinavia AD 400-1000* considers the relationship between myth and materiality in Scandinavia from the beginning of the post-Roman era and the European Migrations up until the coming of Christianity. It pursues an interdisciplinary interpretation of text and material culture and examines how the documentation of an oral past relates to its material embodiment.

While the material evidence is from the Iron Age, most Old Norse texts were written down in the thirteenth century or even later. With a time lag of 300 to 900 years from the archaeological evidence, the textual material has until recently been ruled out as a usable source for any study of the pagan past. However, Hedeager argues that this is true regarding any study of a society's short-term history, but it should not be the crucial requirement for defining the sources relevant for studying long-term structures of the *longue durée*, or their potential contributions to a theoretical understanding of cultural changes and transformation. In Iron Age Scandinavia we are dealing with persistent and slow-changing structures of worldviews and ideologies over a wavelength of nearly a millennium. Furthermore, iconography can often date the arrival of new mythical themes anchoring written narratives in a much older archaeological context.

Old Norse myths are explored with particular attention to one of the central mythical narratives of the Old Norse canon, the mythic cycle of Odin, king of the Norse pantheon. In addition, contemporaneous historical sources from late Antiquity and the early European Middle Age - the narratives of Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, and Paul the Deacon in particular - will be explored. No other study provides such a broad ranging and authoritative study of the relationship of myth to the archaeology of Scandinavia.



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#### **Review**

"These theories can breathe new life into ancient myths and this book should appeal to anyone either with an interest in northern mythology or in material culture - or both." - Minerva Magazine

#### **About the Author**

**Lotte Hedeager** is Professor of Archaeology and Head of the Department of Archaeology, Conservation and History at the University of Oslo, Norway.

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