

## ARCHITECTURE, SOCIETY, AND RITUAL IN VIKING AGE SCANDINAVIA

In this book, Marianne Hem Eriksen explores the social organization of Viking Age Scandinavia through a study of domestic architecture, and in particular the doorway. A highly charged architectural element, the door is not merely a practical, constructional solution. Doors control access, generate movement, and demark boundaries, yet also serve as potent ritual objects. For this study, Eriksen analyzes and interprets the archaeological data of house remains from Viking Age Norway, which are here synthesized for the first time. Using social approaches to architecture, she demonstrates how the domestic space of the Viking household, which could include masters and slaves, wives and mistresses, children and cattle, was not neutral. Quotidian and ritual interactions with, through, and orchestrated by doorways prove to be central to the production of a social world in the Viking Age. Eriksen's book challenges the male-dominated focus of research on the Vikings and expands research questions beyond topics of seaborne warriors, trade, and craft.

Marianne Hem Eriksen is Associate Professor of Archaeology at the University of Oslo. From 2017 to 2019 she was a Research Fellow at the University of Cambridge. An elected member of the Young Researchers of Norway under the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters, she was awarded His Majesty the King's Gold Medal for Younger Scholars of Excellence in 2016.

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ARCHITECTURE,  
SOCIETY, AND RITUAL  
IN VIKING AGE  
SCANDINAVIA

DOORS, DWELLINGS,  
AND DOMESTIC SPACE

MARIANNE HEM ERIKSEN

University of Oslo



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We are never real historians, but always near poets, and our emotion is perhaps nothing but an expression of a poetry that was lost

– Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*

*For Lotte Hedeager*

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## PREFACE

As is so often the case, this book has been a long time in the making. Some of the ideas argued herein were conceived nearly a decade ago now, while others are relatively recent developments, as my knowledge has expanded and my thinking has moved. If we are to accept Chris Fowler's (2013) argument that archaeological theories and interpretations are actants in producing the past *en par* with humans, material objects, structures, and so on, this book is the result of what has been a dynamic aggregate of input and inspiration from texts, lectures, encounters with wonderful and generous individuals, random conversations, places visited, and thresholds crossed.

Hence, a great number of people have contributed in material and immaterial ways towards writing this book. For their support and encouragement I want to especially extend my gratitude to Lotte Hedeager, Neil Price, and Runar Hilleren Lie. For their generosity in reading and critiquing chapters at various stages of completion I warmly thank Lotte Hedeager, Richard Bradley, Rebecca Cannell, Kevin Kay, Frands Herschend, Howard Williams, Vibeke Viestad, Unn Pedersen, Karianne Aamdal Lundgaard, Elise Naumann, and two anonymous reviewers.

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During parts of the revision stage, I have been placed in the Material Culture Lab at the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, University of Cambridge. Many thanks to the McDonald Institute, especially to Marie Louise Stig Sørensen and James Barrett, and the great group of postdocs, staff, and PhD students I have encountered there, for making me feel welcome, and for pushing me intellectually. I also warmly thank my college, Clare Hall, where I held a Research Fellowship while in Cambridge.

Some of the ideas making up this book have been published previously. Chapters 1–6 have never been published. Chapter 7 is a revised and reworked compilation of two previously published articles: ‘The Power of the Ring: Door Rings, Oath Rings and the Sacral Place’, published in an edited volume by Oxbow (Eriksen et al. 2015), and ‘Doors to the Dead: The Power of Doorways and Thresholds in Viking Age Scandinavia’, published in *Archaeological Dialogues* in 2013. I am grateful for the publishers granting permission to publish reworked versions here.

I would also like to thank everyone at Cambridge University Press, and especially my editor, Beatrice Rehl, for bringing this book to life in its best possible iteration.

No woman is an island. From the side lines colleagues, friends, and family have cheered me on, and I extend my deepest gratitude. However, there is one person I would like to thank in particular. I came late into Lotte Hedeager’s career as professor, Chair of Prehistoric Archaeology, supervisor *extraordinaire*, and colleague. Since 2013, however, Lotte has read pretty much every word I have written. She responds to e-mails faster than I can check my social media accounts. She tells me in no uncertain terms when article drafts are poor, ideas faulty, and arguments weak. She once, after a fifty-page thesis chapter groaning under the weight of its own bulky analyses, had a single concluding remark: “Putin!” It took me a while to figure out how Vladimir fit into the picture, but needless to say, he did.

Lotte has encouraged me when I needed support, shown compassion when life got in the way, and laughed with me through many a meeting. I am honoured to be among those that can call her mentor, and for all these reasons I dedicate this book to Lotte Hedeager, *force of nature*.