

TWO

THE POWER OF THE DOOR

There are things known, and there are things unknown, and between are the doors
– Jim Morrison of legendary rock band *The Doors*, stealing the line from
Aldous Huxley's *The Doors of Perception*

ARCHITECTURE AND AFFECT

The door is the protagonist of this book; therefore, it seems only reasonable to give it a proper introduction. Doors are ubiquitous and mundane things in most human lives – they are everyday objects. We pass through doorways tens, or even hundreds, of times every day without much contemplation. And yet, the door serves a range of functional and social purposes, today and in the past. It is a commanding architectural archetype. The power of the door has been used consciously throughout history. According to architectural philosopher Simon Unwin (2007), the doorway is one of the most effective and affective instruments available to the architect, capable of influencing perception, movement, and relationships between people. The definition of all architecture is, in Unwin's words (2009:25–34), to *identify a place*. The exceptional thing about a doorway is that it is simultaneously a place and a non-place. The door stands between spaces, but also connects them.

A door consists of several elements. The main components are the door itself and the doorframe. The doorframe consists of two vertical doorposts or jambs, and two horizontal pieces, the threshold and the lintel. The opening of the

door is the doorway. The etymology of *door* and *threshold* implies something of their history. *Door*, Norwegian *dør*, Old Norse *dyrr*, Old English *dúru*: the root of the word is interpreted to be Indo-Iranian **dhwer/*dhwor,*dhur*. The root is often stated in plural, implying that the door was viewed as something consisting of several parts. An archaic adverbial form of *door* exists in languages such as Latin, Greek, and Armenian, literally meaning ‘out, outside’. The door was thus viewed from inside the house, ‘. . . and for the person inside the house **dhwer-*, **dhur-* marks the boundary of the inner space of the house’ (Bjorvand and Lindeman 2007:208–209, my translation).

Threshold, on the other hand, Norwegian *terskel* or *troskel*, Old Norse *þreskǫldr*, Old English *þrescold*, goes back to Germanic **þreskan*, to tread, trample. The Norwegian etymological dictionary finds the etymology unclear (Bjorvand and Lindeman 2007:1141), whereas Unwin (2007:79) states that the threshold originally was a construction of timber boards placed transversely across opposing doorways of a barn during threshing, used to keep the grains inside the barn. If correct, the etymology of threshold implies that the structure is closely connected with agriculture, but also with the body and embodied practice, in the sense of treading, trampling.

The Door and Access

Doors have arguably, in some form, existed as long as the human species. The need to draw a boundary between *us* and *them*, between dwelling and landscape, between outside and inside runs deep. It is impossible to state what constitutes the first door. Is a tent opening a door? A cave opening? Mobile hunter/gatherer groups may have strong ideas and taboos regarding the opening to their dwellings, even though these are not permanent (e.g. Grøn and Kuznetsov 2003; Yates 1989). Yet, it was plausibly when people became sedentary after neolithization that the deep symbolic and psychological idea about *the house* – and thereby the door – was cemented. According to Peter Wilson’s (1988) classic *The Domestication of the Human Species*, the innovation of the house generated a range of social consequences. Among these were a proliferation of material culture; a novel instrument to conceive (and manipulate) the social and cosmological structure of the world; and, important in this context, delimiting settlements in space provided *boundary analogies* for defining a community or household (Wilson 1988:58–60). The house and its boundaries hence generated new templates and instruments for social negotiation; and new forms of relationality between architectural structures, materials, ideas, and human and non-human agents.

The primary function of the door is to provide or deny access to rooms, spaces, and buildings. A room without doors is not a room at all, but a *tomb* (Unwin 2007:193). The door is thus an access control point, where the person in

control of the door invites someone in or shuts someone out (Hillier and Hanson 1984:18–19). Connected to its function as a spatial control point, the door provides a sense of security to the spaces it guards. The door's agency in controlling access extends not only to entrances but also to internal doors within a building. Other functional features of doors are their ability to provide light and ventilation, and their strategic use to enhance insulation and keep warm air circulating within the house (Schultze 2010). However, inseparably forged with its functional purposes, the door has strong social communicative power.

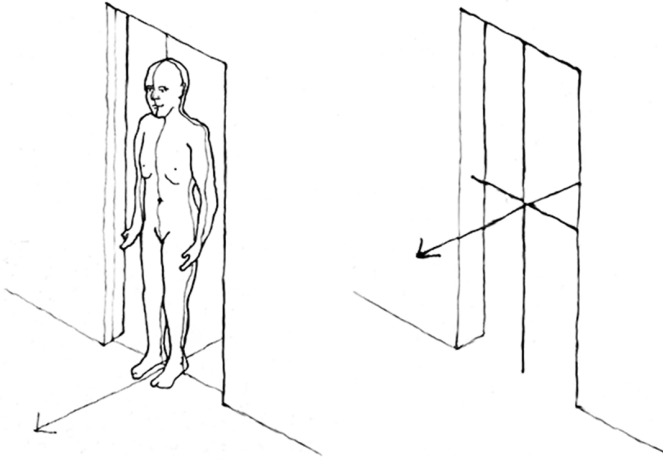
A telling quote has been attributed to Madeline Albright during the Middle East peace negotiations in 2000: 'Shut the gate! Don't let Arafat out' (Unwin 2007:156). Doors are, by nature, including or excluding; they physically create division and differentiation. An open or closed door can communicate whether the occupant is available or busy, whether a guest is welcome or unwelcome (Hall 1966:135–136). Closed doors can send strong signals about hierarchy and exclusion. When the U.S. Secretary of State yells that someone should shut the gate to stop Yasser Arafat from leaving peace negotiations, she is (presumably) not keeping him there by force. She is rather drawing on the significant, non-verbal social statement a closed door can make – in this instance, to keep Arafat from escaping a particularly charged social and political situation. And anyone who has ever had a door shut in their face will know that this is a very effective way of inducing shame, confusion, and anger in the person on the receiving end.

The Door and the Body

Architecture, like all human experience, is experienced through the body and all its senses: through vision, smell, sounds, movement, and touch (Merleau-Ponty 2012 [1958]; Unwin 2009). In recent years, the focus on the sensual aspects of archaeology has increased (e.g. Hamilakis 2013), leading to investigations of 'soundscapes' and olfactory environments, but also to considerations of how the material world can elicit emotional responses in human beings (Fleisher and Norman 2016b; Harris and Sørensen 2010; Tarlow 2000). A seminal scholar who approached the house through perspectives rooted in phenomenology and affect is the philosopher Gaston Bachelard (1994 [1964]). In his work *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard explores – in a modern context – why the house is such a crucial element of human lives. He connects the door with transformation, with freedom and dreams:

How concrete everything becomes in the world of the spirit when an object, a mere door, can give images of hesitation, temptation, desire, security, welcome and respect. If one were to give an account of all the doors one has closed and opened, of all the doors one would like to re-open, one would have to tell the story of one's entire life.

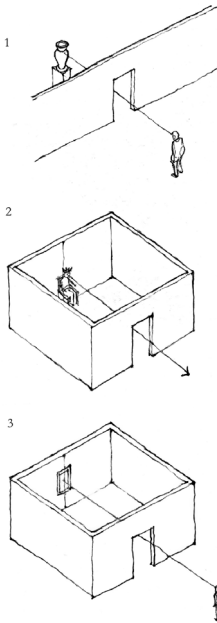
(Bachelard 1994[1964]:224)



2.1 The door reproduces the axial symmetry of the bodies. Ill: Unwin 2007:38.

The philosopher Georg Simmel links the door with the very nature of human beings. Contrasting the door with the bridge, another liminal passageway, Simmel finds the door to be more significant. The door is, he writes, ‘a linkage between the space of human beings and everything that remains outside it, it transcends the separation between the inner and the outer’ (Simmel 1994:7). Simmel stresses that the door allows us to leave the spaces we have created, and in this way, it ensures *freedom*. Bachelard similarly relates the door with daydreams, yet, as the end of his quote suggests, he emphasizes how doors punctuate life experiences – which doors did we choose to open over our lifetime, and which did we close?

The sketch by Unwin (Figure 2.1) demonstrates how doorways reflect human form and movement, which is directed forwards both by sight and orientation of body. Doorways reproduce the axial symmetry of the body, and manipulate perception and gaze, as well as movement. Doors funnel people in a certain direction and lead them into certain spaces (Fisher 2009). Yet, it is worth noting that Unwin’s sketch is not universally applicable. The medieval vernacular doors from Norway, which are discussed later in this chapter, did not reflect the human form, and led to the development of idiosyncratic, bodily learnt movement patterns. Still, because of its connection with the body, the door can be used as a conscious tool when constructing buildings. The architect can use the placement of the door to manipulate movement and vision lines throughout the house (Fisher 2009; Unwin 2007). The door can be placed so that it draws the eyes of the beholder, creates a picture frame, or crafts linkages between what can be seen from the door of the outside world. It can simultaneously draw the gaze and direct movement to a person, object, or architectural feature inside



2.2 Three ways the door can create vision lines, manipulating the perception of space and objects. Ill: Unwin 2007:39.

(Figure 2.2). Architecture has thus been described as ‘inherently a totalitarian activity’ because when designing a space ‘you are also designing people’s behaviour in space’ (Acconci quoted in Kaye 2016:303).

An important point to bear in mind, however, is that the influence architecture has over the body is not one-way. Architecture certainly propels movement through specific spatial trajectories and places the body in vast spaces or claustrophobic ones, influencing the gaze and direction of the person. Yet at the same time, the movement of the body alters the very nature of the space through which it moves. A place becomes a place only when the architecture, things, and human body come together to produce a particular spatiality – a process of becoming that is never finished in a final form (Harris 2016; Kaye 2016; Sørensen 2015). Imagine, for instance, a theatrical stage without any humans ever appearing, or a house without inhabitants going through the daily motions, creating and recreating their home again and again, day after day. Bodily movement, architecture, and material culture co-produce the very characteristics of a certain space through place-making.

Finally, emotion has been defined as ‘the act of being moved’ (Harris and Sørensen 2010:149). This definition has an interesting double entendre for the topic at hand: doors certainly move us on a physical level, but they have the capacity to move us on an emotional level as well (and can the two ever be fully separated?). Unwin (2009:214) argues that architectural transitions such as doors can influence our emotions, our behaviour, and even our self-perception. I have already discussed the strong feeling of exclusion a closed door can create. Another example is how doors used in sacral architecture can be over-dimensioned compared to the human body, to elicit a sensation of the sacral and the minuteness of the human being. The idea that built environments can elicit emotional responses in humans has been increasingly argued in archaeology in recent years (Harris and Sørensen 2010; Love 2016; Pétursdóttir 2016; Sørensen 2015). Harris and Sørensen state that while the topic of emotion has largely been viewed as speculative in archaeology, it is possible to explore how human engagement with the material world is inherently affective. In line with other attempts to collapse the dichotomy between mind and matter (e.g. Boivin 2004), they suggest that emotion is not a passively experienced sensation seen from an internal mind somehow separate from the world, but rather that emotions are created in the encounter between people, things, and the material surroundings.

Unwin identifies three emotional experiences the door generates in its users. *Threshold shock* is the sensation we may experience ‘when we propel ourselves,

too quickly for our brains to keep up, into a new and different situation' (Unwin 2007:9). He uses examples such as the shock of going from a bright beach into a dark tent, or from a crowded street into the sanctuary of a church. *Threshold hesitation* is the social behaviour where someone about to enter a home or an office will hesitate outside the door, waiting for confirmation before crossing the threshold (Unwin 2007:80). The hesitation is arguably about recognizing, spatially and bodily, that you are entering someone else's domain (cf. Hall 1966). Finally, Unwin vividly describes the shudder we can experience upon *passing through*. Referencing a photograph of a doorway from an Italian *palazzo*, he asks the reader to imagine how it would feel to go through the door. The doorway is large enough for comfortable passage, no need to turn sideways or brush against the walls. 'And yet', Unwin writes, 'you sense that *frisson* as you go in. You know it is safe to enter but you are not quite sure what you will find inside. It is a sensation we all experience so often that, until reminded of it, we hardly acknowledge it' (Unwin 2007:76).

Doors are material structures to be engaged with, through human gaze, touch, and, especially, movement. Therefore, phenomenological and affective perspectives of the door may be valuable. Yet, critique of phenomenological perspectives needs to be acknowledged. Obviously, we cannot as twenty-first-century researchers replace a past body with our own and thereby generate the same practices, body techniques, or world views as people in the past – because all embodied engagement is historically constituted (e.g. Brück 2005). Embodied experience of space and place is moreover not standardized within a historical context, but influenced by, for example, gender, age, health, personal life history, and social identity. Nonetheless, Harris and Robb (2013a:214) have addressed the tension between body universality and historical context by highlighting that although all bodies are produced by specific conditions, all societies must cope with 'body challenges' such as hunger, childbirth, or death. Along the same lines, perspectives rooted in phenomenology and affect have the potential of generating great insights on houses and architecture because of the close association between built environment and body. The affect of the door, the relationship between doorway and body, and the social meanings that connection generates, will neither have been static nor universal throughout human history. However, the built environment and the door have an affective potential that is worth exploring also in prehistoric contexts.

BETWIXT AND BETWEEN

Arnold van Gennep famously pointed out that *rites de passage* such as initiation rites, marriage rites and mortuary rituals consist of three stages: *separation*, *limen*, and *aggregation* (1960 [1909]). After being separated from her social group, the

subject enters a phase of liminality, an ambiguous state where she does not belong to any social group or realm. In the last state, the transformation is constituted and the subject re-enters the group in a new social position. Turner (1977), of course, developed the notion of rites of passage further. He emphasized the liminal or threshold phase, the 'betwixt and between', where social structures are dissolved and the subject belongs neither here nor there.

Doorways and thresholds are inextricably linked with liminality, even lending the concept its name. The door may entail transformational powers – a person can be perceived as altered and transformed when she crosses the threshold and enters another space. Doors and entrances allow us to transport ourselves from one space to another, between rooms and areas, between situations, and even between social roles. The built environment orders space into meaningful entities that reflect – even unfold – ourselves, as well as the order of social relations. The door is the mediator and portal between spaces and situations. From the number of adages and metaphors concerning doors, entrances, and thresholds, it is clear that European, Western mentality embeds a symbolic meaning to this motif. 'Close a door and a window opens', 'On the threshold to a new life', 'A portal to another world', 'Door-opener', and so on. Yet, not only metaphors but also liminal *practices* have centred on the threshold.

Van Gennep stressed the physical, embodied movement during rites of passage where the ritual subjects change spatial location. In other words, the door allows people to change their location in space and through that transform their social positions. Thus, the link between the door and transformational rituals lays in the fact that the door is the border between inside and outside. It is the physical and social boundary between spaces, and transcending the threshold means abandoning one space and entering another. This fact may seem self-evident, yet it has deep implications. The threshold is by nature both a static boundary and transitive, as it is made to be crossed. The transcendental qualities of doorways and thresholds will be reprised in several parts of this work.

Ritualization of the Door

Ritualization of the door and threshold is cross-cultural and near-universal. From the Korean threshold god Munshin to the sacred back door of the circumpolar Saami, the door seems to be deeply embedded in human minds as a liminal space and ritual instrument. Theologian H. Clay Trumbull collected beliefs concerning thresholds at the end of the nineteenth century (1896). He found that the threshold and doorway were used in ritual practices in nearly all corners of the world. Subsequent researchers from a range of disciplines have noted the ritual importance of the door (Eliade 2002 [1957]; Lefebvre 1991; van Gennep 1960 [1909]). It falls outside the scope of this book

to systematically collect all occurrences of ritualization of door and threshold, but a brief exploration shows that ritual use of the door is known in some form from all continents, and at least through the last four millennia – possibly longer. For instance, Hodder (1990:119–122, 130 ff.) discusses how doorways become increasingly important in the earlier Neolithic of central Europe, partly based on ritual deposits connected with entrances. He interprets the increased emphasis on the boundaries of the house as linked with increased social competition in the form of feasting. In the Roman Republic, the door of the domestic house would be ritually opened every dawn by the janitorial servant, marking the beginning of a new day and the ‘salutatio’, the ritualized greeting between patron and client (Knights 1994). The door, particularly the main entrance, can also work as a representation of the house and household. The Batammaliba people of West Africa, upon initiating a new house, pour beer on the threshold as a libation ritual and a sacrifice to the house itself (Blier 1987:27).

The oldest textual evidence for a ritual, metaphorical understanding of the door that I am aware of is the Sumerian/Babylonian legend of the goddess of sexuality and warfare Ishtar entering the underworld. As Ishtar descends into the netherworld, possibly to retrieve her brother/lover Tammuz, she goes through seven gates, the doorkeeper removing one of her attributes each time until she reaches the underworld. In the Babylonian version, Ishtar, who has lent her name to one of the gates of Babylon, is quite aggressive when reaching the door (Hooke 2004:39–40):

O gatekeeper, open thy gate,
Open thy gate that I may enter!
If thou openest not the gate so that I cannot enter,
I will smash the door, I will shatter the bolt,
I will smash the doorpost, I will move the doors,
I will raise up the dead, eating the living,
So that the dead will outnumber the living

It was argued a few pages ago that doors have the ability to lead movement and draw the gaze. Yet, they can also be used to obstruct passage or to confuse through, for example, false doors, hidden passages, and labyrinths. Ancient Egypt is known for the false doors from burial chambers (Figure 2.3). The door’s function was to allow passage for the dead person’s spirit, or *ka*, to come forth and accept the sacrifices left on the altar (Frankfort 1941). On the other hand, the famous Greek myth of the Minotaur – the oxen-headed monster waiting inside the labyrinth on Crete – reflects the claustrophobic fear of being locked in, of not finding a way out.

Judeo-Christian mythology is ripe with door rituals and door symbolism. A striking example is the narrative of the first Passover, god’s revenge on the Egyptian people after the mistreatment of the Israelites. The text states that



2.3 False door from an Egyptian tomb, exhibited at the British Museum. Ill: Marianne Hem Eriksen.

each man should sacrifice a year-old sheep or goat on behalf of his household: ‘Then they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it’ (Exodus 12:7). In other words, the Israelites smeared the doorframe with blood to strengthen the boundary to the house and signal their origin to the avenging angels. The sacrifice and the ritual sprinkling of blood ensure that the Angel of Death passes over houses belonging to the Israelites during the divine slaughter. The pearly gate, on the other hand, is an example of how the door’s concrete function as a controlling element, allowing or denying entry, is elevated to a mythological level. St. Peter is the gatekeeper to Paradise, allowing only those who are free of sin and have accepted Christ to pass through the gates. Moreover, the most important individual in Christianity likens himself to a door: ‘I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture’ (John 10:9).

We continue to use the door as a material articulation of liminality and transformation. When exploring ritual usages of the door in Part III of this book, I am therefore not arguing that the idea of the door as an architectural element with ritual qualities is exclusive to the Late Iron Age. The ritualization of the door is ancient and widespread in space and time. Rather, the fact that door rituals are so widespread may reflect an inherent potential in this

particular architectural element, generated by the door's affective resonance. Thus, the door is an everyday object and technology, and from its everyday function a number of connotations emerge, a point of departure I find significant when exploring the resonance and affect that material culture can evoke across time and space.

A Note on Doors and Structuralism

With a topic such as the door, it is easy to fall into the well-known structuralist scheme of binary oppositions, e.g. *inside – outside*, *male – female*, *wild – tame*, *pure – impure*. When structuralism was first applied in post-processual archaeology, it was part of an effort to develop a less functionalistic and more interpretative archaeology. However, in the words of Rachel Pope (2007:222), 'Rather than moving on from functionalism, structuralism merely re-packages much of the processual methodology, with the continuing neglect of the individual in the past'. Bourdieu was likewise criticized for being influenced by structuralism in his work with the Kabyle houses (Bourdieu 1979). He was later self-critical about this point, stating that he wanted to 'abandon the cavalier point of view of the anthropologist who draws up plans, maps, diagrams and genealogies' (Bourdieu 1990:20). Models of pre-Christian cosmology have similarly been constructed with a set of binary oppositions, clearly structuralist in nature (Gurevich 1985; Hastrup 1985; Parker Pearson 1999b) and have rightly been critiqued on those grounds (e.g. Brink 2004; Pope 2007).

I do not follow a rigid, structuralist framework in this book. However, it is impossible to ignore that a fundamental aspect of the door is its placement *between* opposing spaces, between the outside and inside. Moreover, it is conceivable that a divide between settled and unsettled land was pivotal in Iron Age mentalities, due to the importance of the house (Chapter 5). However, rather than mapping out binary opposites onto dynamic and shifting landscapes, my aim is to transcend simplistic structuralist models and rather focus on human agency and material culture as intertwined: constituting dynamic fields of tension and potential.

VIKING DOORS

Doors are not only affective structures embedded with ritualized connotations; they are also everyday material technologies, and these two capacities of the door are inextricably linked. Turning now from the atmospheric and affective to the concrete and mundane material, the question I want to ask before we embark on Part II of the book is: What do we actually know of these everyday constructions in the Scandinavian Late Iron Age? Because houses from the

period are often excavated in the plough zone, as well as the fact that preservation conditions for wood and other organic material are poor, limited material on the door constructions themselves exists from this period. Doors are usually observable in the archaeological record only as negative imprints in the form of post holes or gaps in wall trenches. Chapter 4 will use these ‘shadow-doors’, i.e. door posts, openings in wall trenches, or paved entrances, to explore physical parameters such as the size and number of doorways in the Norwegian corpus, and subsequently consider how these entryways generated movement and encounters within the house. The intent of this section, however, is to synthesize other sources that provide insights into the technology, appearance, and affective aspects of the Viking door to provide a status quo before Chapter 4’s presentation of doors from the corpus of dwellings from Norway. By comparing the few preserved doors that have been unearthed, and by including in brief doors from iconography and later medieval doors, we can attain a fairly detailed picture of the technology and appearance of the door in the Late Iron Age.

Scholarship on doors from Iron Age and medieval Scandinavia has occurred sporadically, but is in general descriptive (Gjærder 1952; Grieg 1958). Although rarely cited, a symbolically oriented article by Monsen (1970) foreshadows some of the material on the ritualization of the door that is referenced in the present work. Other researchers have also noted, albeit usually briefly, how doors may have been ritualized in Late Iron Age Scandinavia. Birgit Arrhenius (1970) and Anders Andrén (1989, 1993) have discussed how Gotlandic picture stones may be representations of doors, as detailed later. Several scholars have briefly noted a concurrence between the two texts mentioned in the introduction to this book, ibn Fadlān’s *Risāla* and the episode from *Flateyjarbók* (see ch. 6), yet without going into detail (Andrén 1989; Price 2002:168, 218–219; Steinsland and Vogt 1981). Hedeager (2011:131) also briefly connects ibn Fadlān’s reported door ritual with figural gold foils deposited in postholes of high status settlements, and with the general liminal nature of doorframes. A recent study is the unpublished thesis of Anna Beck (2010) and two subsequent articles (2011, 2014), which consider entrances in certain regions of south Scandinavia; Beck’s work is used comparatively in Chapter 4 in particular.

The Archaeological Material: Reconstructing the Door

Seven doors and one doorframe have been preserved from Late Iron Age contexts in Scandinavia, in addition to one Early Iron Age door. Most of the preserved doors and door remains are from early urban sites. This may bias the material – doors from urban sites, which are potentially seasonal, may differ from permanent, rural doors. The doors are constructed in generally similar ways. The oldest door, from Nørre Fjand (second century BCE to second

century CE), was composed of two planks of oak joined by means of two curved inlets. The door was probably hinged from a wood-peg, as one of the corners of the plank door was carved into a tenon (Hatt 1957:61–63). From Gotland, a sixth-century door was found collapsed immediately inside the threshold of a longhouse. The door consisted of three pine planks with two transverse crossbeams nailing the three planks together (Stenberger 1940). One door is preserved from Kaupang, the Viking proto-urban centre in Vestfold.¹ This door was reused as framing in a wood-framed well or latrine. It had a rounded shape, and originally consisted of four planks with a transverse beam nailing the planks together with five wooden nails. The door is composed of several types of wood: The planks were pine, oak, and fir. This may indicate that the door was crafted from available wood sources, and thus not particularly planned or meticulously crafted (Figure 2.4).

Two doors and a doorframe have been preserved from Hedeby (Schietzel and Zippelius 1969). The first door consisted of three wooden planks, again fastened together with two transverse crossbeams, of a rectangular shape. The door had a sliding bolt on the upper part, which could be used to lock the door from the inside. The second door was only half a metre wide, and consisted of two wooden boards nailed together by two transverse pieces of wood (Schultze 2010). Both doors must have opened inwards towards the interior, due to the placement of the sliding bolt and the hinges. In addition to the two preserved doors, parts of a doorframe with a rounded lintel were also unearthed at Hedeby (Rudolph 1939). Figure 2.5 displays a reconstruction drawing of the completely preserved Hedeby door, showing the technology of the construction.

Finally, door constructions are also known from the Viking diaspora, from the hybrid architectural traditions of Dublin. A timber plank door probably swung outwards, based on the placement of its tenon. A second door was made of wattle, making it more portable than a plank door (Wallace 1992:29–30). In addition to the doors, on Fishamble Street an ornamented ship's prow was found to have been reused as a rather beautiful threshold (Lang 1988:9).

Depictions of Doors

Iconographical depictions of doors can be relevant to the study of both the technical aspects of doors and how doors were perceived in Viking mentalities. A handful of iconographical depictions of houses and doorways survive from the Late Iron Age. I will begin with a compelling artefact type directly linked with the door itself. Circa 450 picture stones are known from the island of Gotland in the Baltic Sea. Type C stones, dated to 800–1000 CE, are traditionally interpreted as memorial stones in honour of the dead (Andrén 1993).



2.4 Preserved door from the Viking town of Kaupang, Norway. Photo: Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo, photograph by Ellen C. Holte.

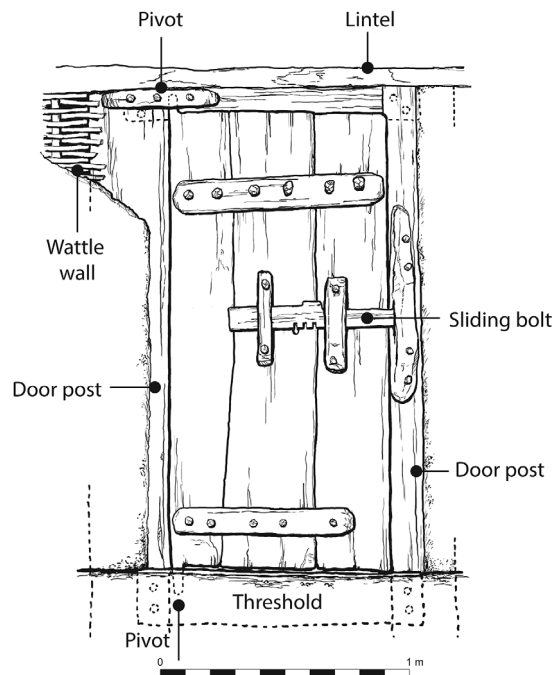
However, recent excavations reveal that they can also function as highly striking burial markers (Andreeff 2012). The stones' ornamentation frequently includes scenes of ships, animals, battles, armed riders, and women with drinking horns. The type C stones are also particularly shaped, sometimes referred to as mushroom-

or keyhole-shaped (Figure 2.6). This form has been interpreted as phallic; however, Arrhenius (1970) connected the shape with another famous artefact from the Viking Age: the Urnes stave church portal (see Figure 2.10). The close parallel between the keyhole shape of the Urnes portal and the Gotlandic picture stones, as well as their placement in boundary zones, and their mythologically charged iconography, has led to an interpretation of the stones as ‘doors to other worlds’ (Andrén 1993). I will return to the Gotlandic picture stones repeatedly as the book unfolds.

The Sparlösa rune stone, from Västergötland, Sweden, is dated to c. 800 CE (Nordén 1961). The runic inscription carved on the stone is debated amongst runologists and will not be discussed here. However, the upper part of the stone displays a depiction of a small, decorated building with a large, accentuated door-ring placed on a rectangular portal (Figure 2.7a). The building does not resemble buildings intended for dwelling, and may depict a king’s hall or a *hov*, a separate cult building.

Furthermore, a silver coin from Birka, an urban settlement in southern Sweden, has a depiction of a small monumental building carved on the adverse (Lindqvist 1926). A loop is attached to the coin, indicating that it hung on a cord and was worn, perhaps, on the body. The coin was found in an early ninth-century burial, and similar finds have been interpreted as amulets (Audy 2011). The building, reminiscent of the house depicted on the Sparlösa rune stone, has two animal heads attached to the gables. The roof is curved and the walls seem to be convex – a prototype Viking house. The door is centrally placed and rectangular (Figure 2.7b).

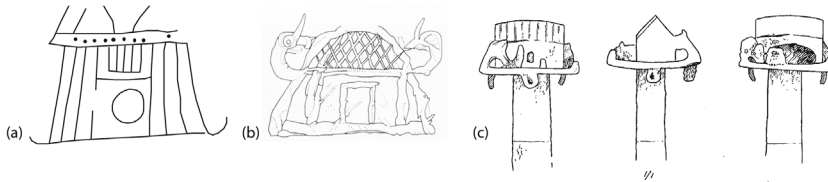
Another somewhat charged object is the Klinta staff, discovered in a cremation grave on Öland in 1957. The iron staff is c. 80 cm long, with a broken end. On top of a flat bronze plate, a miniature house of bronze is formed, probably of a Trelleborg-like type (Figure 2.7c). Each of the two longwalls has a centrally placed door. Originally, four animals were attached to the corners of the bronze plate, surrounding the house, but only one animal was preserved at the time of excavation (Andersson 2007). The staff has been



2.5 Reconstruction drawing of the complete door found in Hedeby. Ill: After Schultze (2010:91), translation from German by Marianne Hem Eriksen.



2.6 Picture stone from Lillbjärs, Gotland, Sweden, 'keyhole' shaped. Ill: The Swedish History Museum, photo by Gabriel Hildebrand. For color, see the color plate section between pp. 146 and 147.



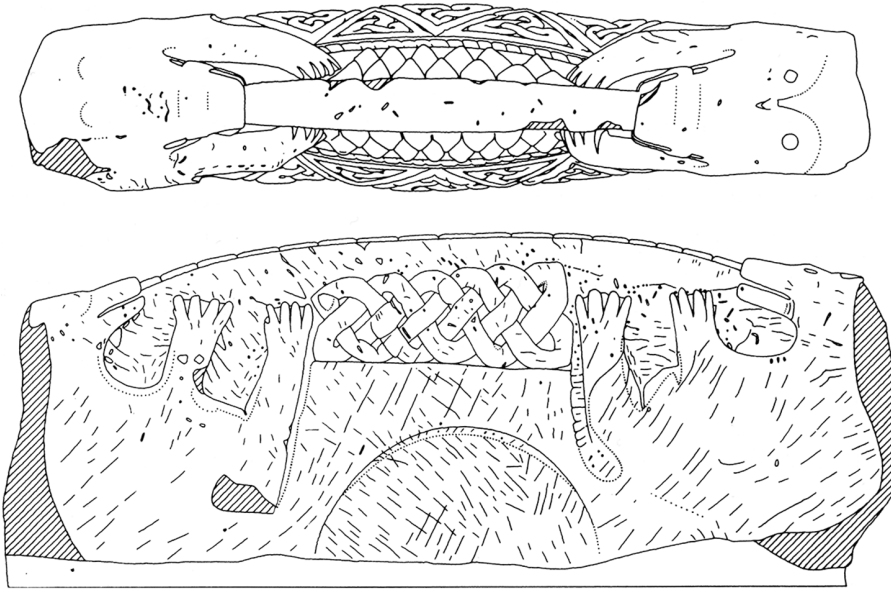
2.7 (a). Building with rectangular door and large door ring depicted on Sparlösa runestone. (b) Small building with rectangular door depicted on the Birka coin. (c) On top of what has been interpreted as a magical practitioner's staff, a small bronze house has been attached. Ill: a. Redrawn by Marianne Hem Eriksen after photograph from the Swedish National Heritage Board database, b. after Schmidt (1999:157), and c. after illustration from The Swedish History Museum.

interpreted as an attribute of a *völva* – a religious specialist or sorceress (Price 2002). I find it intriguing that *the house* should be used as ornamentation on a magical practitioner's staff.

Finally, the hogback stones of the British Isles constitute an intriguing group of artefacts (Figure 2.8). Memorial monuments, probably originally used as burial markers, they are mainly found in northern England and central parts of Scotland – roughly in the area that constituted Northumbria in the medieval period – with additional single finds in Ireland, Wales, and southwestern England (Lang 1984). The name 'hogback' alludes to the convex shape of the roofline of the stones, making the stones resemble animal bodies. However, they are simultaneously shaped in such a way that they are meant to evoke Scandinavian-style longhouses or halls. The hogbacks belong to a short time-span in the tenth century when they became immensely popular for a limited period, perhaps as little as fifty years (Lang 1984:97). Many of the hogbacks have two beasts, seemingly bears, holding onto (or attacking) the short-ends of the longhouse-shape, underlining a link with the animal realm. Intriguingly, this is somewhat reminiscent of the two animals used as gable end heads on the Birka coin, and the four animals originally surrounding the Klinta house. Five stones may be interpreted to display stylized rounded doorways. All stones in this group have two end-beasts grasping the gables, and usually three panels of knots and interlace above the niche. As grave markers, the hogbacks probably constituted metaphorical and material houses for the dead – an 'inhabited mortuary space' (Williams 2016).

Medieval Doors

When studying the Viking door, it is relevant to look to the succeeding era, the medieval period, from which wooden architecture has been preserved. Many still-standing buildings from the medieval period, built in corner-timbering technique, are preserved in Norway's open-air museums. A fascinating trait of the medieval doors known from standing, vernacular buildings is that they are



2.8 The hogbacks allude to Scandinavian longhouses. Some, such as Brompton 7, display a stylised rounded doorway. Ill: After Schmidt (1999:165).

generally much lower in size than modern-day doors. Medieval doors often tended towards the square, their size usually 90–125 cm wide and 110–115 cm high (Gjærder 1952:32). In other words, they do not mirror the human body. According to Gjærder, the low doors of the medieval period led to a distinct strategy for entering or exiting the house. People would enter or exit with their body doubled over, and move sideways through the door to avoid an uncomfortable bump in the head from crashing with the lintel – an idiosyncratic, repetitive movement pattern induced by the architecture. Two explanations are usually offered for the small doorways. Either the doors are low to keep the warm air circulating within the house (Schultze 2010), or there is a constructional explanation which may be more convincing: The doorway would need to be built low to minimize the risk of shifting or displacing the wooden logs in buildings of corner-built technique (Gjærder 1952:32).

Medieval doors, particularly from Norway, are known for their ornamentation and visual design. Both church portals and doors from vernacular buildings could be wood-carved in a range of ways. When narratives are depicted on medieval portals, they are almost exclusively from pre-Christian mythology. In particular, the motif of Sigurd the Dragonslayer from the *Völsunga saga* was immensely popular. It is somewhat unexpected that figures and stories from pre-Christian myths were used as ornamentation on Christian church portals, and Gjærder (1952:39–41) argues that the motifs were transferred from the cult buildings of the Viking period to the stave churches in the middle ages. Whether the iconography

was translated into Christian concepts, retained its pagan meaning, or was reduced to a simple decorative element is debated (Ødeby 2013).

Medieval doors can display faint traces of colouring: ochre yellow, reddish-brown, black, and white (Gjærder 1952:31). The polychrome effect may have been used to highlight different aspects of the interlaced animal ornamentation. It has been argued that much of the ornamentation of the medieval portals, such as crosses, animal ornamentation, knots, and inscriptions, originally emerged as apotropaic symbolism to ward off dark forces (Karlsson 1988:308–309). The door was not only a passage for humans and animals, but also for supernatural beings, and numerous cultures see the door as a point where liminal powers could enter (Karlsson 1988:252–253). Traditions of apotropaic ornamentation being carved on doors to byres, stables, and outhouses have survived in remote areas of the Norwegian landscape. The most common apotropaic figures were circles and concentric circles. The wheel cross and the bow cross, both of which date back at least to the Bronze Age, were also common, while Christian crosses, such as the Mantua cross and the St. Georg cross, were much rarer (Gjærder 1952:36). An indication of these symbols having a social and ritual function rather than being purely decorative is that the symbols, especially when used on the doors of byres and economical buildings, were rather crudely done with little embellishment or artistic composition. The symbols could be repeated several times on the same surface (Figure 2.9). The ornamentation may have been carved and re-carved at particular times of the yearly cycle, when the threat from or contact with the otherworlds were at their peak. This may particularly have been the time around *jól* (Christmas), when the belief was that the dead could come back to visit the living (Näsström 2001b:219–221). In medieval folklore, this is preserved as the myth of *Ásgårdsreia* – a flying flock of dead corpses that came to haunt the living. The best precaution was to make the cross sign and paint the cross on *all doors* (Bø 2013). Crosses were painted with tar, blood, or charcoal on the doors, a tradition that continued into the modern period (Hodne 1999:81). Whether practices of repeatedly painting or marking symbols on doors occurred also in the Viking Age is impossible to state with certainty, but, for instance, concentric circles are a common motif on portable artefacts from the Viking Age, and it is at minimum possible that variations of these traditions existed in the Iron and Viking Ages.

In contrast to the vernacular portals of medieval Norway, the stave church portals were not wide and low, but often rather tall. The stave church portals, at least in terms of ornamentation, may be the closest analogy to how portals of feasting halls or cult buildings may have appeared. The oldest surviving stave church portal is the aforementioned portal from Urnes in Sogn (Figure 2.10), dated to a few decades after the end of the Viking Age (Krogh 2011). The door opening of the northern portal at Urnes is the only known medieval door from Norway without vertical doorjambs, and may reflect an older custom. The doorframe has animal carving in a style named after the church, and the Urnes



2.9 The door from twelfth-century Stålekleivsloftet, Norway, with repeatedly painted and carved crosses and ornamentation, exhibited at Vest-Telemark Museum. Photo: Vest-Telemark Museum.



2.10 Urnes stave church portal with its characteristic keyhole shape. Photo: Marianne Hem Eriksen. For color, see the color plate section between pp. 146 and 147.

style is generally understood as the last animal style in Scandinavia (Karlsson 1983). Central to this animal style is 'the great beast', an animal on the left lower panel. The animal on the Urnes portal is interpreted to be a stylized lion biting a curling snake (Fuglesang 1981:99), perhaps symbolizing Christ battling evil. However, the use of stylized animals also points back to pagan mythology and its use of animals (Karlsson 1983:80).

The Technology of Entry

The experience of the door was, and is, generated through the embodied experience of it: pulling the door, hearing it creak, stepping over a tall threshold, and sliding the lock in place. 'Technology is not only the material means to making artefacts, but a dynamic cultural phenomenon embedded in social action, world views, and social reproduction', argue Dobres and Hoffman (1994:211). Although some questions remain unanswered, the way the door was created, used, and experienced was inherently and inextricably embedded in the Late Iron Age social world.

According to Unwin (2007:25), doors generally tend towards the rectangular because constructing a rounded doorway is more sophisticated, demanding an arch or rounded lintel above the doorway. However, the Kaupang door, the Hedeby doorframe, and several depictions of doors underpin that in Late Iron Age Scandinavia, doors could be either rounded or rectangular. The preserved doors have an average door width of c. 80 cm, and the Hedeby doorways averaged 80–90 cm. An average-sized adult can pass through a door of 60 cm width without problems (Fisher 2009:445). The width of the doors could therefore easily encompass the passage of an adult, and were perhaps somewhat wider than a typical entrance today.

The height of the door is more difficult to assess. It is sometimes presumed in the literature that prehistoric doorways must have been small, perhaps due to insulation issues (Schultze 2010) or based on the size of standing medieval buildings from Norway (Beck 2010:60). However, climatic solutions are rarely a sole determining factor when building houses (Rapoport 1969), and the medieval-period standing houses are built with an entirely different technology. Four of the preserved doors have complete height measurements. The sixth-century door from Gotland and the ninth-century door from Hedeby are of the same height: 180 cm. The older door from Nørre Fjand is substantially smaller, with a height of 115 cm. The height of the Hedeby doorframe is 165 cm. Meanwhile, anthropological studies have found the average stature in the Viking Age to be 164 cm for females and 174 cm for males (Sellevold et al. 1984:225–226). Hence, based on the albeit small number of preserved doors, and excluding the exceptionally low door from Nørre Fjand, the door height seems to be a woman's height or somewhat taller.

The nature of the archaeological record denies us a very detailed picture of the technology of the door (see Chapter 4). Potential wattle doors hinged with withes are implied by the etymology of Old Norse *hurð* and the medieval term *vendredør* (Gjærder 1958b:463), both meaning doors hung on withes. However, wattle constructions hinged with withes would leave little archaeological trace. Iron hinges are attested in medieval doors and stave church portals (Gjærder 1958a) but are almost unknown in prehistoric archaeological contexts (Beck 2010:61–62). From the material at hand, the most probable technological solution for longhouse doors seems to be pivoting from a wood peg or tenons carved out of the door itself (Norw. *tapphengt dreiedør*). The Dublin doors had tenons on the bottom corner, from which the door would pivot. The tenon would be placed in wooden spuds, which from the high number of spuds identified were rapidly worn and replaced (Wallace 1992:29–30). The Hedeby doors were hung in a similar manner. The tenon could also be placed on flat stones, which would after a while show wear marks from the rotation on the stone. The doors from Dublin were both out- and inward swinging, and Rebecca Boyd (2012:71) suggests that the size of the house could determine which way the door would open. Traditionally, outhouses and ancillary buildings in Norway should have outward-swinging doors, while dwelling doors should swing inwards (Gjærder 1958b:462). Possibly, then, the function of the building would decide which way the door would open.

Wooden brackets for fastening doors use a mechanism known to this day, a variation of the same principle as the sliding bolt on the Hedeby door. Five such brackets for door fastenings were found in Viking York (Morris 2000:2361). The brackets were made of oak, filed maple round wood, and birch. Finding sliding locks and bolts underpins a social need for access control, safety, and privacy. Whether this was a purely urban phenomenon in the Viking Age or if it reflects a need for access control also in the rural areas is difficult to state,² but it is conceivable that the need for locks emerged in urban centres as new ways of living in close quarters developed.

Finally, medieval portal ornamentation did not, presumably, spring to shape fully formed with the Urnes portal in the eleventh century. It is highly probable that cult buildings and elite residences, but also more average longhouses of the Viking Age, were ornamented with wood-carvings of different kinds. When narratives were displayed in woodwork ornamentation, we can assume that scenes from Norse mythology were prominent, because they still were prominent in the earliest Christian period. Apotropaic ornaments rooted in Indo-European cosmology were potentially a regular sight on doors, both entrances to dwellings and perhaps also to doors leading to byres to protect animals.

This chapter has journeyed from the affective and ephemeral to the concrete and tangible. The main points I hope the reader takes with her as the book

begins to properly unfold are these: The door has several forms of power and affect that are important to this study. Doors order space. They allow or deny access. They communicate strong social signals of welcome, exclusion, or differentiation. Doors demarcate boundaries to territories. They can be used to propel movement and draw vision lines through the built environment. Doors can be approached psychologically and phenomenologically. I have introduced in this chapter their affective ability to evoke emotions such as *threshold shock*, *threshold hesitation*, and *frisson*. Doors can be understood as transitive and transformational spaces with ritual connotations. Finally, regarding Viking doors, we have some knowledge of their technology; we can argue that a social need for locks and bolts had developed by this time in urban areas, that they reflected human form and body proportions. Based on the earliest church portals, I suggest that, in particular, portals to ritualized spaces may also in the Viking Age have been intricately carved and decorated, likely with scenes from the world of myths and heroes. Even mundane doors of outhouses and byres may have been treated as between-spaces, as thresholds to other worlds and beings.

In this chapter I have therefore chartered the existing landscape but also introduced major topics that will run as currents and undercurrents through the pages that follow. This book seeks to explore the power of the door – its *resonance* – in a holistic manner: spatially, ritually, and socially. The next chapter begins this exploration by considering the space to which the door leads: the Viking house.

