

ONE

ENTRY POINTS

ON THE THRESHOLD

Most of us take doors for granted. We pass through doorways tens of times each day, without reflection. The door is, however, a powerful feature of human mentality and life-practice. It controls access, provides a sense of security and privacy, and marks the boundary between differentiated spaces. The doorway is also the architectural element allowing passage from one space to the next. Crossing the threshold means abandoning one space and entering another, a bodily practice recognized both in ritual and language as a transition between social roles or situations. Doors and thresholds are thus closely linked with *rites de passage*, the word ‘liminality’ itself stemming from Latin *limen*, ‘threshold’. This does not imply that each and every crossing of a threshold constitutes a liminal ritual, but rather that passing through a doorway is an embodied, everyday experience prompting numerous social and metaphorical implications. A volume on thresholds in fiction asks why the threshold exercises such a riveting grasp on human imagination; why it is such a resonant space (Mukherji 2011:xvii). The characterization of the threshold as a resonant space precisely captures its affect. The threshold is evocative, a locus of heightened anticipation.

The seeds for this book were sown nearly a decade ago when, during data collection for my master’s thesis, I noticed a strange concurrence between two written sources related to the Viking Age. One text, ibn Fadlān’s *Risāla*, was

from the Arabic Caliphate, containing an eyewitness report of a ship burial of a Viking chieftain on the river Volga in 922 CE. The other was an episode from *Flateyjarbók*, a late Icelandic saga of which the oldest surviving copy dates to the fourteenth century, recounting a strange fertility ritual on a remote farm in Viking Age Norway.¹ Even though the texts were transcribed centuries apart and in vastly different geographical and cultural contexts, they both touched on the same, eerie topic: a woman being lifted – or asking to be lifted – above a doorframe, to enable her to *see* into a different realm.

This image took root in me; I started wondering if doors were related to ritual practices in the Viking Age. Simultaneously, I had started realizing the vast and largely untouched potential in considering the archaeological remains of the built environment of the period not only as functional-economic constructions but as social expressions, producers, and agents. Gradually, these two themes forged one question: How can an in-depth study of an everyday material object – the door – generate new knowledge of social, ritual, and affective experience of the Late Iron and Viking Ages? In answering that question, this book offers a fresh approach to the (pre)historic period often termed the Scandinavian Late Iron Age (c. 550–1050 CE); it is a social exploration of the houses and homes of the Vikings in a pivotal period of European history. The crux of the book is that it uses a highly charged architectural element as an entryway to explore the households, hierarchies, and rituals of the Viking Age.

NEW GATEWAYS TO THE VIKINGS

The Vikings are well known to us. We can conjure images in our minds without blinking – long-haired, bearded, frenzied warriors, swords in hand. And, equally obvious, the conjured image is to some extent false, or at the very least it is one-dimensional and stagnant. In a thought-provoking article, Neil Price points out that the Vikings we study today are very different from the ones under scrutiny twenty years ago – or even further back. ‘They have grown’, he writes, ‘they have gained more depth and resolution’ (Price 2015:7). To my mind, that is only partially true. In arenas such as religion and ritual, dress and gender, and especially mortuary practices, the Vikings have gained more depth. But in terms of everyday life, in the Vikings’ households, and their use and conceptualization of domestic space, I argue that there is still room to grow. In a recent assessment of Viking archaeology, Sarah Croix (2015) claims that Viking studies are to some extent regressing. After the last decades’ gender critique and a focus on Viking ritual, craft, and especially trade, an international exhibition launched in 2013 unapologetically focussed on the stereotypical Viking: the male raider and warrior (Williams et al. 2014). With the enormous popularity of the Vikings in mainstream

culture, Croix (2015:93) contends that the field of Viking studies is feeding the public what it expects, 'and repeating itself within a simplified and ever more narrowing frame'. In my opinion, while the perceptions of Vikings as warriors, traders, and colonists are in the forefront of public discourse, as well as the object of a substantial amount of research on the Viking Age, the domestic sphere is still perceived as an unproblematized, familiar, and somewhat trivial sphere.

In contrast, the empirical basis and the point of departure of this work are the fragmented remains of the doors, but also the dwellings, of the Vikings. Even though the door will be on centre stage in this study, it makes little sense to discuss entryways without considering the space to which they lead. I thus draw on the latent possibility in using architecture and the built environment to answer questions of social organization, architectural templates of movement, ideology, affect, and ritual behaviour. The question of how one particular material construction can elucidate the social fabric of the Viking Age relates to a broader attempt to develop more theoretically engaged perspectives in Viking archaeology. More important, though, is the question: How does the Viking Age look from the point of view of the house?

In recent years, developments in excavation technique have unearthed thousands of prehistoric houses in Scandinavia. This new dataset provides novel opportunities to examine the practice of dwelling through physical remains of architecture. This book draws on the generally unexploited potential embedded in the archaeological record of house remains from Late Iron Age Scandinavia, with a primary focus on Norway. The corpus, presented in the Appendix and referenced throughout, consists of 99 longhouses and 17 shorthouses, in total 116 buildings interpreted as dwellings, from 65 archaeological sites. Embedded in the corpus is a substantial archaeological material of doors and entrances, with a total number of 150 doors. The primary attention on Norway is a strategy to limit the scope of inquiry, and to present Norwegian settlements of the period into one publication, as this material has not been compiled previously. However, I will use settlement material from other parts of Scandinavia, mainly south Scandinavia (Denmark and Scania), and the Norse worlds comparatively, in order to explore differences and similarities between the south and central Scandinavian architectural expression. I will also briefly discuss other building types such as courtyard sites, cult buildings, and mortuary houses.

Research on Iron and Viking Age settlement has traditionally focused on functional, economic, and agricultural aspects of settlement. While these topics are clearly important, there are still unrealized possibilities in using the material remains of houses in discussions of the spatiality and social organization of dwellings. By drawing on the potential embedded in postholes, doors, and hearths, this study complements existing research by considering access and

entry to domestic space, the composition of the household, and the affective webs of the house. It investigates the ritualization of doors and thresholds in the Viking Age, the relationship between houses, doors, and the dead, and the significance of everyday, domestic life. Material objects are herein considered as more than economic commodities, status symbols, or, in the case of architecture, climate shelters; and are rather explored as social entities forming relational assemblages, in line with much of current archaeological thinking (e.g. Fowler 2013; Jones and Boivin 2010; Lucas 2012, 2016; B. Olsen 2010). I will repeatedly argue that Viking longhouses have forms of agency and vibrancy, that they can have social lives, and that the inhabitants' lives were very much entwined with that of the house. Significantly, I hope to map a more comprehensive universe of the Vikings, where the people of the Viking Age are fleshed out and embodied.

I therefore aspire to see the Vikings as more complete human beings *specifically through their relation to and use of social space*. This work cannot and will not be a complete social archaeology of the Viking Age; it does not consider for instance the Viking raids, colonization, or trade. The aim is rather to carve out, from the grey block often termed 'the domestic sphere', a higher-resolution picture of lived experience in Viking Age Norway. Everyday life is the foundation of this work; consumption, seating arrangements, sleeping patterns, everyday movement through domestic space. In some chapters, the slaves of the Vikings are considered, and their everyday life experience. Viking children, and women, and males of different status are brought into the picture. In other chapters, I consider rituals, and deposition, and the house as an active agent in the creation of a social world. I hope to portray the Vikings to a higher extent as *real people*, with desires and aversions, agendas and affects, anxieties and beliefs. I embed them within a physical, architectural frame that not only significantly shaped their movements, thoughts, and actions, but that was part of them and of which they were a part in turn. In short, the aim is to contribute to the development of a social archaeology of the Viking Age. And my gateway for doing so is through the door of the domestic house.

THE HOUSE: ORDERING SPACE, BODIES, AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

... the house we were born in is physically inscribed in us. It is a group of organic habits. After twenty years, in spite of all the other anonymous stairways; we could recapture the reflexes of "the first stairway", we would not stumble on that rather high step. ... The house we were born in is more than an embodiment of home, it is also an embodiment of dreams.

(Bachelard 1994 [1964]:14–15)

Whereas social anthropology, sociology, and several subfields of archaeology have long been interested in houses and households as analytical categories, as

well as the connections between the built environment and social organization, such issues have arguably received limited attention in Scandinavian Iron and Viking Age studies. People, and their everyday social, political, and ritual practices, are often more or less invisible in discussions of houses and settlements. Ruth Tringham's famous statement that the inhabitants of prehistoric houses are merely 'faceless blobs' (1991) rings no less true in the late 2010s than it did in the early 1990s.

The earliest studies of Iron and Viking Age settlement in Norway were rooted in a cultural-historical framework, and generally of a descriptive character (Grieg 1934; Hagen 1953; Petersen 1933, 1936). A particular research strand in Norwegian archaeology has been the tradition of using written records, cadastres, maps, and toponyms to chart Iron and Viking Age settlement, as historical farms are seen as the natural successors to postulated prehistoric farms (Gjerpe 2014; Pilø 2005). This relates partly to Norwegian archaeology's emergence in a national romanticist framework in the nineteenth century (see also Chapter 3).

Subsequent works in the second half of the twentieth century became increasingly attentive to questions of economy and subsistence, in line with the developing processual framework (e.g. Jacobsen 1984; Kaland 1987; Randers 1981). Publications primarily focus on calculations of produce, cultivation intensity, and the number of livestock, and rarely contain plans of the houses and settlements. In line with the predominant archaeological thinking of the day, this points to an underexplored analytical consideration of the house structures themselves. Yet, there were other voices in the settlement debate. Through several works, Bjørn Myhre considered the settlement of southwest Norway (1980, 1982a, 1982b, 1982c, 1983). Even though Myhre was influenced by the processual and functionalist way of thinking, he also pinpointed socially oriented questions of settlement and used models from social anthropology. Likewise, Trond Løken's work on the Bronze Age to Early Iron Age site Forsandmoen, Rogaland, incorporates more socially oriented questions springing from the architecture itself (Løken 1998).

Other works have taken a political angle, focusing on the development of estates and petty kingdoms, and the role land ownership played in state formation (Iversen 2008; Skre 1998). Especially the works of Dagfinn Skre (1997, 1998, 2001) significantly rejected the idealized egalitarian perception of Viking settlement and illuminated the role of freed dependants and slaves in large-scale settlement patterns. Skre opens for a debate of ideological and political aspects of settlement, where his focus is primarily on landholding, tenancy, and social economy explored mainly through burial material and written sources (Skre 2001). Yet, there is limited consideration of everyday, domestic life, or indeed the house structures themselves; the estates identified in later written sources are the important elements, as pawns in large-scale power plays.

In the same period the number of excavated settlements in Norway started to increase dramatically due to the methodology of excavating with mechanical diggers underneath cultivated land. However, accumulating a larger dataset of houses from the Iron Age did not in itself increase explorations of social aspects of space. In contrast, British prehistoric archaeology, especially during the peak of post-processualism, has offered cognitive takes on architecture, such as tracing symbolic spaces or viewing houses and monuments as cosmological expressions (e.g. Bender et al. 2007; Parker Pearson 1999b; Tilley 1994), yet, I would argue, again often at the cost of lived experience. Such approaches moreover rarely seeped into Scandinavian considerations of architecture and households, at least in Iron Age scholarship. In Scandinavia, limited consideration of the British-centred phenomenology of space has taken place, or the lived experience of architecture. I argue that there has been a tendency of a dichotomy between mortuary archaeologists focusing on ritual, social organization, and ideology; and settlement archaeologists – at least those working with non-elite settlements – concentrating on typology, economy, and function. As a result of this division of research agendas (and here I am painting with a broad brush), a picture emerges where the manner in which a past society handled their dead may provide knowledge of ideas, rituals, and ontology, while the built environment is reduced to a neutral backdrop to social practice.

In recent years, however, studies of built environments in Scandinavia and the wider Viking world that transcend a *homo economicus* perspective have started generating new knowledge in a range of areas: social and political process (Boyd 2013; Dommasnes et al. 2016; Hadley and Harkel 2013; Herschend 2009; Holst 2010), structure and practice (Webley 2008), ritualization (e.g. Carlie 2004; Eriksen 2015b; Kristensen 2010), the relationship between the living and the dead (Eriksen 2013, 2016, 2017; Thäte 2007), and gender relations (Croix 2014; Milek 2012). A key Scandinavian scholar has been Frands Herschend, who in a series of works has explored notions of ordered space and considered landscapes as social agents in the Iron Age (Herschend 1993, 1994, 1997, 1998, 2009).

It is also increasingly accepted that many, if not most, agrarian, economic practices, such as planting crops, ploughing, grinding, cooking, or weaving, had ritual and mythological overtones in the Iron Age world view (e.g. Fendin 2006; Gräslund 2001; Kristoffersen 2000; Welinder 1993). The house was also the central locus of many forms of feasts and seasonal celebrations, as well as *rites de passage*: burials, births, and weddings took place within the house. All deities in the Norse pantheon had their own, named hall buildings over which they ruled; when warriors died, they expected their bodies to go live in another house – *Valhøll* or *Fólkvangr*. Moreover, the world itself is in kennings and Eddic poetry likened to a hall or house, the sky as a roof, and so on (e.g.

Rígsþula, *Vǫluspá* 64). A foundation of this book is thus that the longhouse not only had ritual connotations, but was deeply entwined in the Late Iron Age ontology, and moreover, that social, ritual, and economical practices were interwoven into a tapestry that could not be unravelled (sensu Bradley 2005).

The built environment is an accumulated and influential assemblage of social practice, repeated actions, spatial ideals – in other words, of *lived space*. Architecture is always the result of past action (e.g. McFadyen 2013). The house and its *praxis* has been placed in the very centre of the social fabric of pre-industrial societies, as it has been argued that in cultures without literacy, inhabited space and the house constitute the primary objectifications of social schemes (Bourdieu 1977:89–90). The house is, in Bourdiean terms, both a *structuring and structured structure* – i.e. both a cause and effect of social process, and a primary field for inscribing the body with a specific habitus. However, John Robb suggests that instead of simplistically applying ideas such as habitus in prehistory or ‘look for agency’ in the archaeological record, we should rather understand action as *genres of behaviour*: ‘a set of institutionalized practices recognized as a distinct activity’ (Robb 2010:507). Feasting, warfare, mortuary rituals, or cultivation would constitute different *genres of behaviour*. Moreover, Robb stresses that agency is not necessarily embedded in disparate individuals but in *relationships*, and that these relationships are fundamentally material. Agency can thus be defined as ‘the socially reproductive quality of action’ within relationships among human and non-humans (Robb 2010:494). Houses create the contexts for many different fields of action and genres of behaviour. Moreover, the influence of the built environment is certainly part of a reciprocal relationship between the house and its inhabitants, and their daily, unreflected and embodied practices; the house as the product of the social choices of the builders and inhabitants, and a reification of past action, in turn affecting new generations emerging within the house.

To consider the lived experience of dwelling it is necessary, I argue, to consider bodies in space: bodies building space, using space, navigating space, and transforming space. Increased attention has been directed towards the senses and the body recently, within the Iron Age (e.g. Hedeager 2010; Lund 2013) and especially in European later prehistory at large (e.g. Borić and Robb 2008; Hamilakis 2013; Rebay-Salisbury et al. 2010; Robb and Harris 2013). Bodies are ambiguous, simultaneously objects and subjects, a site where both the self and the other are negotiated and performed. Bodies are places of desire, but also of violence, biological processes, abjection, and alienation. Embodiment can be defined as the way people engage with the world through their bodies. The way we experience the built environment, as the rest of the world, is through our corporeality (Bourdieu 1977; Merleau-Ponty 2012 [1958]). Mauss (1979) famously observed that the techniques of the body: the way we walk, sleep, dance, run, and make love, are all socio-cultural

idiosyncrasies. Children in particular are inscribed with, or rather, imitate, the adults' movements of the body, and thereby acquire sets of socially conditioned body movements that constitute culturally specific strategies for experiencing and mediating the world (Bourdieu 1977; Mauss 1979; Wilson 1988:153).

The perspective of bodily learnt practice and experience is highly relevant for a study of doors and dwellings. Movements through domestic space, seating arrangements, the order in which food is served, the room you are not supposed to enter, the threshold only some are allowed to cross – these small, household practices are both executed by and absorbed into the body, creating and recreating the social world. And as the social systems are institutionalized in the architecture, differentiated power structures are legitimized and euphemized (Bourdieu 1989). Harris and Robb (2013b:3) offer the useful working concept *body worlds*, which they define as 'the totality of bodily experiences, practices and representations in a specific place and time'. Emanating from embodiment, some scholars emphasize the performativity of architecture, of how it is only when bodies, architecture, and things come together that a space becomes a place (Kaye 2016). Other scholars stress that the built environment can be understood as a producer of affective fields (Harris and Sørensen 2010), engendering certain forms of emotional responses in its users (Harris 2016; Love 2016), or specific atmospheres (Sørensen 2015). I consider doors, doorways, and the house at large, not only as mediators of habitus, but as things which shape, move, and merge with people, in a process where houses and people together engage in an embodied process of dwelling.

TOWARDS A SOCIAL ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE VIKING AGE

Novel theoretical perspectives have opened the door to new questions and new answers in Viking archaeology. The eclectic internally conflicted wave of approaches hurtling forth from the beginning of the third millennium has been collectively termed 'new materialism' (Thomas 2015). Although controversial and provocative, this shift to relational thinking offers a vast range of new perspectives in archaeology. Among the perplexing strands of symmetrical archaeology (Olsen 2003; B. Olsen 2010; Witmore 2007), meshworks (Ingold 2007), Actor–Network Theory (Latour 2005), assemblages (Fowler 2013; Hamilakis and Jones 2017), entanglements (Hodder 2012), vibrancy (Bennett 2010), and the ontological turn (Alberti et al. 2011; Marshall and Alberti 2014) I wish to emphasize three points because they explicitly and implicitly cast the story of this work.

The first is that material culture, animals, landscapes, things, and people form *relational assemblages* (Bennett 2010; Fowler 2013, 2016; Hamilakis and Jones 2017; Lucas 2012); a wave of thinking in current archaeological discourse

that springs primarily from the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari (2013 [1987]) and the subsequent work by DeLanda (2006). While I argued that architecture is always the result of past action, it is certainly not merely the result of humans acting ‘upon’ dead materials. Rather, the Iron Age longhouse is an excellent example of an assemblage of builders, materials, landscapes, inhabitants, weather, guests, animals, things, practices, technologies (Eriksen 2016), all engaging in a process of perpetually becoming a house, at an intersection between construction and decay (e.g. Harris 2016; Jones 2007; Lucas 2013). A reductionist view of houses as merely the physical construction of the walls and posts; or only the (human) inhabitants; or the actions that take place within, becomes arguments *ad absurdum* – the house is the emerging aggregate of all these entities, inextricably entwined.

The second point is that *everyday things* have to some extent been overlooked in current discourse. However, everyday things are interwoven with human lives; they are aggregates of lived experience, and by studying mundane things we access other perspectives on the Viking Age than fine metal work, monumental burials, or warrior swords can allow. An implicit motivation for this study is thus to illuminate the mundane, the ordinary, the non-spectacular. For example, in a thought-provoking article about emotion and material culture, Harris and Sørensen (2010) argue that archaeology should engage with questions of emotion and affect. They contend that emotions are not only internal and immaterial phenomena, but occur in the encounter with a material world, and use the case study of a spectacular Late Neolithic monument, the henge at Mount Pleasant, to discuss the role of emotion in building and rebuilding such a site over an extended period of time. In her comment to the text, Åsa Berggren, however, points out that the enormous monument is an example where it is relatively simple to argue that materiality elicits emotional responses. She writes: ‘It would, for example, have been interesting to see [Harris and Sørensen] apply their ideas to some of the more mundane archaeological materials, from, for example, settlements that would be more explicitly connected to everyday life’ (Berggren 2010:164). The critique resonates with this project. Archaeologists have for a long time, through virtually all archaeological paradigms, favoured the *monumental*: the richest finds, the largest mounds, and the most elaborate monuments.

In a sense, this book starts where Nicole Boivin ends her stimulating *Material Cultures, Material Minds* (2008). Boivin lists a number of ‘... mundane, but powerful objects and environments that create us as we create them’, such as pots and pans, fishing hooks, pendants, carpets, parks, artworks, pacemakers, and yes, even doorways. She concludes by stating that we have only just begun to explore how ‘this mass of simple things has shaped and transformed our thoughts, emotions, bodies, and societies’ (2008:232). This study is intended as exactly that, an exploration of how an everyday material feature, the door,

shaped and transformed thoughts, emotions, bodies, and societies in a specific prehistoric period. It is, after all, everyday life that builds a social world.

Third, this work is intended as a contribution towards a *social archaeology* of the Viking Age. Some prominent thinkers in current discourse see a clear opposition between social archaeology and a materialist archaeology (Latour 1992, 2005; Webmoor 2007). The sharpest critique of social archaeology was presented by Webmoor and Witmore (2008), closely shadowing Latour, in arguing that the social has become ‘both the *explanandum* and the *explanans* for archaeological inquiry’, an invisible force that somehow is both cause and effect, with a significant anthropocentric bias (see also Webmoor 2007). It is largely proponents of Actor-Network Theory and symmetrical archaeology that are refuting the concept of social, because it in their view inherently describes relations between humans and other humans, upholding a Cartesian dichotomy between the ‘material’ and ‘social’ world. Although the critique has merit in criticizing the use of social as a universalist and a catch-all phrase, I still claim ‘social archaeology’ has significance. First because, as it has been argued against Latour, if ‘the social’ should be banished from our vocabulary, how can we continue to speak of equally ephemeral concepts such as ‘the economic’ or ‘the political’ (Rowland et al. 2011)? Second, Webmoor and Witmore (2008:55) imply that the social has superseded its role ‘as a corrective’ in archaeology. While that may or may not apply to the Anglophone world, there are large territories of archaeology where the post-processual wave did not become quite as ubiquitous as in, e.g. British prehistory (cf. Ribeiro 2016), and Viking studies is certainly among those lands. The use of social in this work is indeed intended as a corrective to traditional, largely economic perspectives on the Viking Age: a heuristic to shift the focus from agrarian practices to people, from trade relations to affective relations, from typology to agency. And third, social archaeology is herein understood as inherently relational, springing from the view that societies are formed not merely by humans, but by wider, heterogeneous agencies (Boivin 2008; Lucas 2012). In line with Gavin Lucas’ ‘new’ social archaeology (2012:258–265), the social emerges through networks and relationships among humans, animals, and things, rather than somehow existing ‘behind’ or ‘previous’ to them. We can expand on the old analogy referenced by Malafouris (2013:25), where the archaeologist searching for the social *behind* a stone axe (or indeed a long-house), can be compared with a visitor to Cambridge, who, after seeing the colleges, departments, and the library, asks to be shown the university.

Consequently, these building blocks – relational ontology, everyday materials, and social archaeology – form the foundation of the pages ahead. Instead of seeing material culture as a ‘representation’ of the world, materials *are* the world, physically and socially. Not only household things but also the house itself is inextricably entwined with human lives.

ARCHITECTURE OF THE ARGUMENT

Many pathways lead to a more socially grounded approach to the Viking Age; mine has been through *the door*. Or, to put it another way, I have chosen to place a specific architectural element under scrutiny – though not in isolation – and to let the doorways and entrances speak.

Some practical concerns and definitions should be clarified. This book addresses the time between 550 and 1050 CE. In Northern Europe, this timeframe has several chronological definitions and names (e.g. late Germanic, Merovingian, Vendel, Viking, Early Medieval), and a common chronological framework has not yet been developed. In Norwegian archaeology, this chronological scope consists of the *Merovingian period* (c. 550–800) and the *Viking Age* (c. 800–1050); the two periods are collectively termed the *Late Iron Age* and are regarded as belonging to prehistory. In this work, Late Iron Age and Viking Age are used as synonyms for the second half of the first millennium, i.e. sixth to eleventh centuries. At points where a more finely tuned chronology is of relevance, I will point out the dating in more explicit terms; however, as stated in the Appendix, many houses cannot be dated very precisely, and chronological development is therefore not at the forefront of this study. I have already stated that Norway constitutes the primary research area. Regarding geographical nomenclature, the modern nation-state Norway had of course not yet formed in the Late Iron Age. When ‘Norway’ and ‘Norwegian’ is used in this text, areas of modern-day Norway are implied.

At this juncture, I will also briefly state the book’s stance on using written, medieval sources to understand societies centuries older than the oldest surviving manuscripts. With the exception of short and formulaic inscriptions in the runic alphabet, Late Iron Age Scandinavia was a society without text. The first longer Scandinavian texts were written in the Latin alphabet after the consolidation of the State and the conversion to Christianity in the beginning of the second millennium. The relationship between medieval written sources concerning the Late Iron Age and the material record of the period has been subject to changing academic approaches since the emergence of Viking studies. From a somewhat uncritical reading of textual sources (e.g. Munch 1852) to a critical approach refuting almost any source value (Weibull 1911, 1918); most researchers today seem to aim at a middle ground (e.g. Andrén 2005, 2014; Hedeager 1999, 2004, 2011; Price 2002, 2010, 2014). In general, today’s scholars neither take medieval sagas and poetry at face value, nor disregard their insight into twelfth to fourteenth-century reflection and commemoration of a not-too-distant past. The written sources do reflect a high-medieval world view, but at a time where oral traditions stood strong. Late Iron Age Scandinavia is often understood as an oral culture where narratives and legal rule were remembered through formalized language (Andrén et al.

2006; Bertell 2006; Brink 2005a); and where society, in spite of the conversion and changing political organization, alluded to its recent pre-Christian past (Sørensen 1995). Moreover, several objects, such as rune stones, gold bracteates, picture stones, and hogback stones display scenes and narratives known from the later, written sources (e.g. Andréén 1993; Hauck 1981; Lang 1984). These resilient motifs are often mythological, such as Óðinn on his eight-legged horse Sleipnir, or Týr losing his hand to the Fenris wolf. Therefore, motifs shared between material culture from the Late Iron Age and texts from the medieval period must be older than the time of transcription of the texts, and moreover, the narratives must also have been remembered and related in a consistent manner centuries later.

Consequently, I use written sources, mainly Eddaic poetry, Icelandic Sagas, and early legal texts, sporadically in a complementary manner; aiming to critically use the Norse texts as tools for thought. Particularly, I use the strategy of identifying homologous motifs in the archaeological record and in the later texts, with particular regard to descriptions of households, architecture, or legal and ritual practices. This book thus aligns itself with scholarship utilizing the vast potential of working in a period of (pre)history that includes contemporary descriptions of Scandinavia, later written sources reflecting the social memory of the period, iconographical depictions on for example rune stones and metal objects, and the recent expansion of archaeological house material. Together, this eclectic material has the potential to create a high-resolution picture of the Viking Age.

In approaching the issues at hand, I have divided the book into three parts. The first part introduces the themes of the work, Part II tackles the houses, households, and landscapes of the Viking Age, while Part III develops the argument that doors and thresholds were perceived as ritual objects and ritual spaces in the Viking Age. Thus, having established the *raison d'être* of the study in the present chapter, the second chapter will introduce the main protagonist of the book: the door itself. In Chapter 2, I map the connection between architecture and affect, exploring how buildings can create certain bodily experienced reactions in its inhabitants. I also consider how and why the door is linked with ideas of liminality, transgression, and transformation.

Part II, consisting of Chapters 3–5, forms the very backbone of the book. Emanating from a fresh overview of Norwegian settlement material from the period, Part II takes the reader inside the Viking house to explore the household and the agency of architecture, and ends outside in the social landscape. Chapter 3 briefly maps the overall distribution of Late Iron Age settlements in Norway. The weight of Chapter 3, however, lies in analyses of social space and the Viking household. Chapter 4 brings the reader further inside the spatial and social matrix of the Scandinavian-style longhouse. Through the method of access analysis, the door's agency in facilitating or denying encounters within the

house; creating axes of movement and barriers of exclusion, is discussed. In Chapter 5, the reader will find herself outside the house. In this chapter, I shift perspective from the internal spatial order of the longhouse to its exterior, situating the house and the door in social, cosmological, and political landscapes, arguing that the idea of the house is shifting at this time. The house, as a mental and political institution, is under transformation.

Finally, Part III turns the reader's attention to the ritual significance of doors and entrances in Late Iron Age Scandinavia. Chapter 6 takes the links between the body and the house as its subject. It considers the associations between thresholds, sexual acts, and marriage rituals, and moreover, connects the links between houses and bodies with practices of deposition in domestic space, marking the social biographies of houses and people. Chapter 7 maps a connection between judicial practices and the door, before examining the relationship between the Viking house and the dead, and proposes that in the Viking Age, the domestic door was used as portal to the realm of the dead. The book concludes with Chapter 8.

I will end this introduction by charting the scope of this book. Readers hoping to find a comprehensive overview of door symbolism through the ages will surely be disappointed. And although the study provides the first overview of Viking Age settlement in Norway, it does not dwell on local architectural tradition, construction technique, or detailed chronological development. Moreover, it does not in any detail deal with subsistence practices, agricultural crops, pollen analyses, and the like. Even though the considerations listed are clearly topics of high significance, other scholars will be much better situated to write those books. This work has its own aims and aspirations. Most fundamentally, my objective has been to breathe life into the postholes and hearths archaeologists excavate. Springing from a social and relational approach to everyday material culture, the book aims to demonstrate how domestic life is always entangled both with large-scale social and political schemes, and at the same time, with small-scale, embodied, and affective experience. In the end, I can only hope that readers will feel a sense of resonance when reading it.