

# Scabbard Chapes From Viking Age Norway

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A scabbard chape is a U-shaped metal fitting at the bottom of a scabbard. The function of such an object is both decorative and protective, since the fitting keeps the end of the scabbard unfrayed, unscrapped and dry. It is suggested these objects were connected to a rank or to unknown magical purposes (*Strömberg 1951*). In Old Norse, the chape is called *dǫggskór* or *sverðskór* ("bedewed shoe" or "sword shoe").

All scholars from the 19th century up to now have noticed that chapes were rather rare in the Viking Age (see for example *Rygh 1885: 28–29*; *Shetelig 1937: 212*; *Grieg 1947: 31–34*; *Strömberg 1951*; *Hedenstierna-Jonson 2002: 108–109*; *Androshchuk 2014: 121ff.*). Fedir Androshchuk has collected 154 examples of Scandinavian scabbard chapes (*Androshchuk 2014: 121*). The dominant metal of chapes is bronze, gilding occurs rarely (*Sikora 2013: 363*). In addition, some silver examples are known from Baltic lands (*Janowski 2006*). Most examples come from Sweden (49 finds), Eastern Europe (38 examples), Baltic countries (29 examples) and Finland (11 examples); western part of Scandinavia (Iceland, Norway and Denmark) counts less than 25 examples in total (*Androshchuk 2014: 124*). This and the fact that the chape production is attested in Sweden are the reason why we should think Sweden has been "responsible for the distribution of chapes in Scandinavia and in other areas of Europe" (*Androshchuk 2014: 122*). Other authors seem to hold this opinion in the past as well, for example *Shetelig (1937: 213)* or *Grieg (1947: 32)*. On the other hand, several scholars suggested there were more locations of their production, like *Arne (1913: 377)* or *Paulsen (1953)*.

There are at least two major typologies of scabbard chapes (for example, less known were constructed by *Grieg* or *Kazakevičius*). The traditional one was made by *Peter Paulsen (1953)* and it counts 7 types divided by their decoration and geographical distribution. A more recent typology was set by *Fedir Androshchuk*, that also includes 7 types divided by artistic and chronological differences. In this work, I will use *Androshchuk's* typology.

I was able to collect information about 12 examples from Norway. To compare, there are another 8 examples from Denmark and 6 examples from Iceland (*Androshchuk 2014: 124*). It is probable that Icelandic finds were imported via Norway. All Norwegian examples are made from copper alloy.

**List of Norwegian Viking Age chapes**

Location	Catalogue number	Type	Picture	Context	Literature	Other info	Height	Width
Vollmoen, Steigen, Norland	-	2 (Paulsen II:3A)		Found at the court site of Vollmoen.	<i>Johansen 1980; Bjerck 1993; Hedenstierna-Jonson 2002.</i>	The photo of this chape can be seen <a href="#">here</a> .	ca. 6 cm	ca. 4.2 cm
Mele, Osterøy, Hordaland	B6983	3a		Stray find.	<i>Paulsen 1953: 28, 32, Abb. 30.</i>	Colour photos of this example can be seen here: <a href="#">front side</a> , <a href="#">back side</a> .	at least 3.1 cm	3.5 cm
Øvre Forbord, Malvik, Sør-Trøndelag	T14082a	3a		Found in a probable boat grave with what could be a H/I type sword.	<i>Paulsen 1953: 31, 32, Abb. 31.</i>	The photo of this chape can be seen <a href="#">here</a> .	6.1 cm	4 cm
Tønsberg	C37268	3a		Found in the grave K156 with a sword in 1987–91.	<i>Lie 2016.</i>	-	-	-
Ringsaker prestegård, Hedmark	C31395b	3b		The chape was found by archaeologists Lange and Sæther in Ringsaker Church (built in around 1150) in 1962/63.	-	Despite the fact the collection dates to Middle Age, Androshchuk agrees it could come from the Viking Age. Photos of this chape can be seen <a href="#">here</a> and <a href="#">here</a> .	3.7 cm	3.5 cm
Benningstad Store, Løten	C36462	3b		A grave find, found together with a spear and a bead.	-	The photo of this chape can be seen <a href="#">here</a> .	5 cm	4 cm
Rørvik, Nærø, Nord-Trøndelag	T1503	3c		Found together with a spearhead, an oval brooch and a part of scales in bog.	<i>Rygh 1885: 27–29; Paulsen 1953: 18.</i>	Probably the best known chape from Norway (R 516). The photo of this chape can be seen <a href="#">here</a> ; drawing <a href="#">here</a> .	7.5 cm	4 cm
Buvarp/Kolnes, Namdalseid, Nord-Trøndelag	T2094	3c ("en dopsko af bronze med gjennembrudt arbeide")	not given (the object is damaged)	Found in a mound together with a spearhead, a knife, a buckle and a X type sword.	<i>Paulsen 1953: 18.</i>	-	7.5 cm	4 cm
Ballerud, Østre Bærum, Akershus	Kbh. 739	3c? (the type is unknown, but the decoration [gjennembrudt arbeide] and dimensions make this choice possible)	not given (the object was taken to Copanhattan in the 19th century)	Found in 1805 and stored in a personal collection in Copenhagen.	<i>Undset 1878: 31.</i>	-	7 cm	4 cm
Ringsaker, Hedmark	-	6a		Stray find found by metal detectorist Kenny Hansen on the bank of Mjøsa lake in April 2013. Pieces were found ca. 30 meters from each other.	-	Metal detecting find, discovered in 2013. Photos of this chape can be seen <a href="#">here</a> , <a href="#">here</a> and <a href="#">here</a> . <a href="#">Here</a> is a short video about the find. In personal discussion, Androshchuk compared this find with the example from Danilovka, Russia	ca. 7 cm in total	at least 3.4 cm
Gjermundbu, Ringerike, Buskerud	C27317b	6b		Found in the famous mound with war gear, including type S sword.	<i>Grieg 1947: Pl. III; Paulsen 1953: 45-6.</i>	Perfectly preserved chape. Photos of this chape can be seen <a href="#">here</a> and <a href="#">here</a> .	8.2 cm	4.3 cm
Åsnes kommune, Innlandet	-	6b		Stray find found by metal detectorist Ola Andreas Vestby Sandlie somewhere in Åsnes kommune on August 9 2020.	-	Metal detecting find, discovered in 2013. Photos of this chape can be seen <a href="#">here</a> .	at least 5.9 cm	at least 3.7 cm

It has to be noted that most chapes are stray finds or parts of hoards, with no information about possible owner. Two special areas (Viken area + Hedmark, Trøndelag) can be distinguished, each with 3 or more finds and at least 1 sword with scabbard chape discovered in graves. This fact could be connected with the fact that these regions were areas of royal power in the 10th century, when scabbard chapes were dominating.

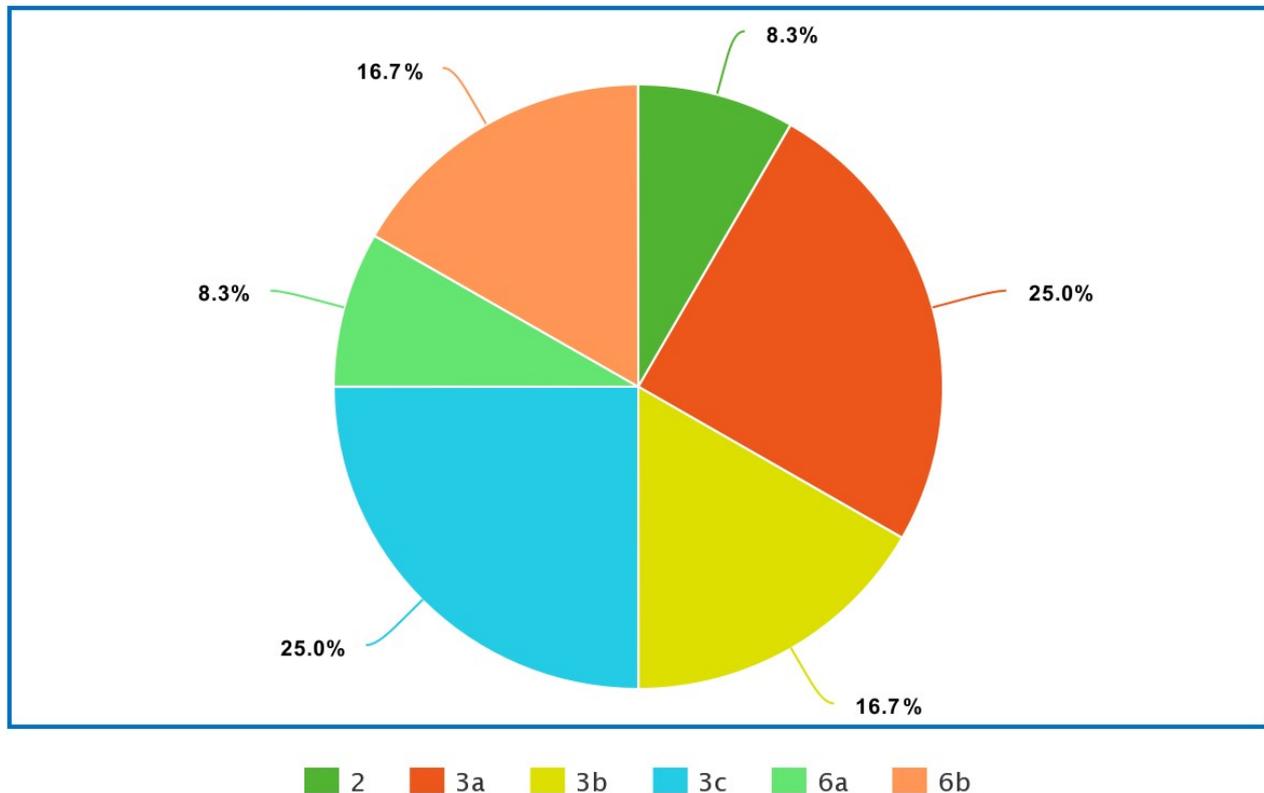


Distribution of Norwegian finds.

Link to the full map: <https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=1ZPb6QfrCo257ztTR1nJmip-ED6L8Dudu&usp=sharing>

In total, we know at least 3 types of Norwegian chapes with 6 subtypes. The most common type is Type 3, with subtypes 3a and 3c:

Types			
Type	Decoration	Dating	Distribution
2	"A motif of a beast in the Borre style with an intertwined body and a mask of a beast or human in the centre" ( <i>Androshchuk 2014: 115</i> ).	ca. 970–990	Sweden: 6 Norway: 1 Denmark: 3 Iceland: 2 Finland: 1 Baltic countries: 3 Eastern Europe: 4
3a	"A schematically depicted bird, sometimes with the addition of dotted circles" ( <i>Androshchuk 2014: 116</i> ).	ca. 10th century	Sweden: 7 Norway: 3 Finland: 1 Baltic countries: 17 Eastern Europe: 10
3b	"A bird with distinctly depicted head, wings and tail" ( <i>Androshchuk 2014: 116</i> ).	ca. 10th century	Sweden: 7 Norway: 2 Finland: 1 Baltic countries: 2 Eastern Europe: 13
3c	"A 'bird-beast' in the Borre/Jellinge/Mammen style with an interlaced, double-contoured body, the wider parts filled with hatchings or billets, the paws and wings spread out" ( <i>Androshchuk 2014: 116</i> )	ca. 950–1000	Sweden: 8 Norway: 3 Denmark: 3 Iceland: 1 Baltic countries: 4 Eastern Europe: 3
6a	"One beast with an 8-shaped, doublecontoured body filled with hatchings or billets. The complete specimens have a massive head with a short snout and large round eyes" ( <i>Androshchuk 2014: 117</i> )	ca. 950–1000	Sweden: 10 Norway: 1 Denmark: 2 Iceland: 2 Finland: 4 Baltic countries: 3 Eastern Europe: 4
6b	"Two interlaced beasts with doublecontoured bodies usually filled with hatchings or billets" ( <i>Androshchuk 2014: 117</i> )		Sweden: 5 Norway: 1 Finland: 1 Baltic countries: 1



The number of individual chapes types within Norwegian material.

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