

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, unscraped 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 *doggskór* 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 10 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 bronze.

List of Norwegian chapes				
Catalogue number	Location	Type	Picture	Literature
				Other info
not given	Steigen, Norland	2 (Paulsen type II:3A, after Hedenstierna-Jonson 2002)		<p>Johansen 1980; Hedenstierna-Jonson 2002.</p> <p>The photo of this chape can be seen here.</p>

B6983	Mele, Osterøy, Hordaland	3a		<p>Depicted and described in Paulsen 1953: 28, 32 (Abb. 30).</p> <p>Colour photos of this example can be seen here: front side, back side.</p>
T14082a	Øvre Forbord, Malvik, Sør-Trøndelag	3a		<p>Depicted and described in Paulsen 1953: 31, 32 (Abb. 31).</p> <p>The photo of this chape can be seen here.</p>
C37268: T2 5445	Tønsberg, Vestfold	3a		<p>The back side of this chape is broken, but fragments were found as well . Photos of this chape can be seen here and here.</p>
C31395b	Ringsaker prestegård, Hedmark	3b		<p>Photos of this chape can be seen here and here.</p>

T1503	Rørvik, Nærø, Nord-Trøndelag	3c		Probably the best known chape from Norway (R 516) It was described for example by Rygh (1885: 27–29) and Paulsen (1953:18). The photo of this chape can be seen here ; drawing here .
T2094	Buvarp/Kolnes, Namdalseid, Nord-Trøndelag	3c ("en dopsko af bronze med gjenembrudt arbeide")	not given (the object is damaged)	Paulsen 1953: 18.
Kbh. 739	Ballerud, Østre Bærum, Akershus	3c? (the type is unknown, but the decoration [gjenembrudt arbejde] and dimensions make this choice possible)	not given (the object was taken to Copanhagen in the 19th century)	Undset 1878: 31.
not given	Ringsaker, Hedmark	6a		Metal detecting find, discovered in 2013. Photos of this chape can be seen here and here . Here is a short video about the find. In personal discussion, Androshchuk compared this find with the example from Danilovka, Russia.

C27317b	Gjermundbu, Ringerike, Buskerud	6b		<p>Perfectly preserved chape. Described and depicted in Grieg (1947) and Paulsen (1953).</p> <p>Photos of this chape can be seen here and here.</p>
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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.

Find contexts	
Location	Contexts
Steigen	Found at a court site; no detail is known to me.
Mele	Stray find.
Øvre Forbord	Found in a probable boat grave with what could be a H/I type sword.
Tønsberg	Found under a 13th century monastery by Anne Marie Nordman and Gro A. Tjeldvoll in 1988.
Ringsaker prestegård	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, Androschuk agrees it could come from the Viking Age.

Rørvik	Found together with a spearhead, an oval brooch and a part of scales in bog.
Buvarp/Kolnes	Found in a mound together with a spearhead, a knife, a buckle and a X type sword.
Ballerud	Found in 1805 and stored in a personal collection in Copenhagen.
Ringsaker	Stray find found by metal detectorist Terje Roger Olsen on the bank of Mjøsa lake in 2013.
Gjermundbu	Found in the famous mound with war gear, including type S sword.

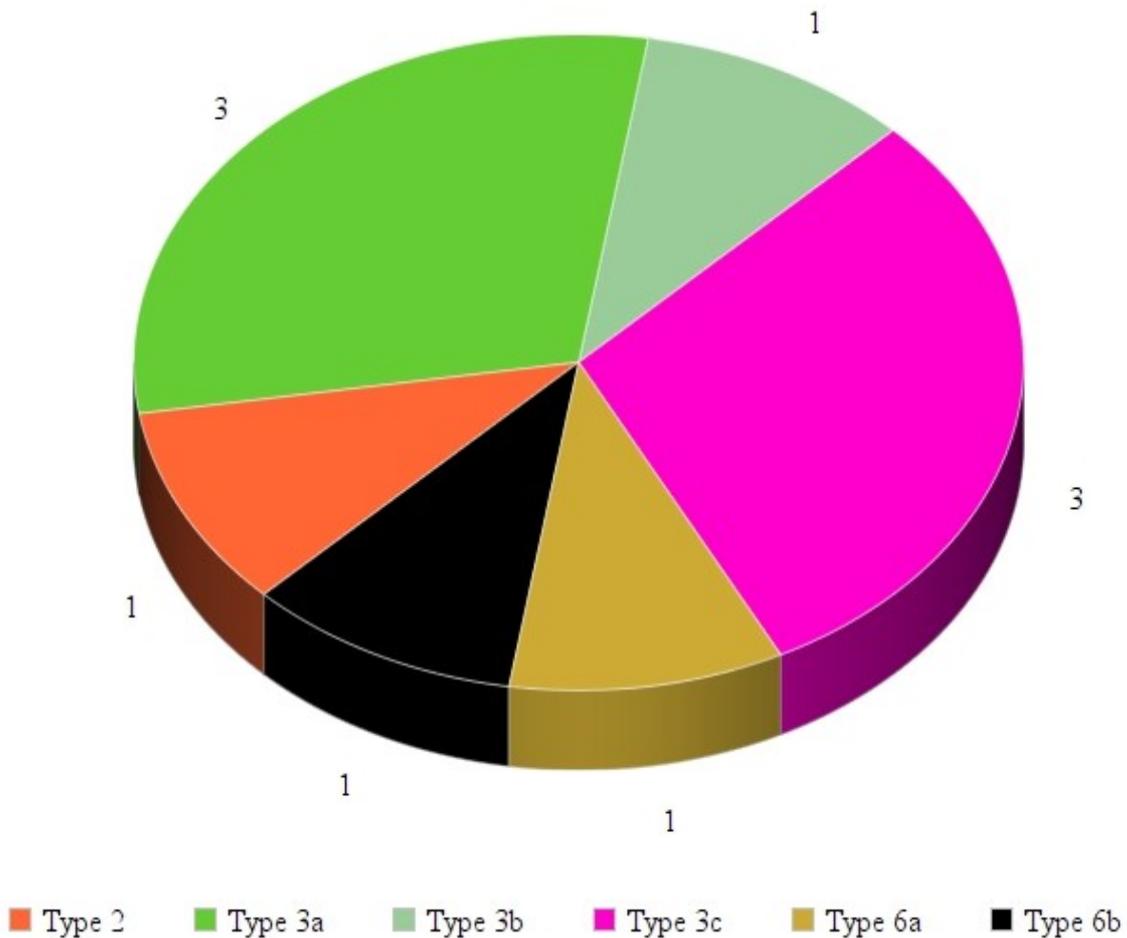
Sizes of chapes vary between ca. 3.5–8.5 cm in height and 3.4–4.5 cm in width:

Dimensions			
Location	Type	Height	Width
Steigen	2	ca. 6 cm	ca. 4.2 cm
Mele	3a	3.1 cm (partially damaged)	3.5 cm
Øvre Forbord	3a	6.1 cm	4 cm
Tønsberg	3a	6.4 cm	4.1 cm
Ringsaker prestegård	3b	3.7 cm	3.5 cm
Rørvik	3c	7 cm	4 cm
Buvarp/Kolnes	3c	7 cm	4 cm
Ballerud	3c?	7 cm	4 cm
Ringsaker	6a	ca. 7 cm in total	at least 3.4 cm
Gjermundbu	6b	8.2 cm	4.3 cm

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" (Androschuk 2014: 115).	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" (Androschuk 2014: 116).	ca. 10th century	Sweden: 7 Norway: 2 Finland: 1 Baltic countries: 17 Eastern Europe: 10

3b	"A bird with distinctly depicted head, wings and tail" (Androshchuk 2014: 116).	ca. 10th century	Sweden: 7 Norway: 1 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" (Androshchuk 2014: 116).	ca. 950–1000	Sweden: 8 Norway: 3 Denmark: 3 Iceland: 1 Baltic countries: 4 Eastern Europe: 3
6a	"One beast with an 8-shaped, double-contoured body filled with hatchings or billets. The complete specimens have a massive head with a short snout and large round eyes" (Androshchuk 2014: 117).	ca. 950–1000	Sweden: 10 Norway: 1 Denmark: 2 Iceland: 2 Finland: 4 Baltic countries: 3 Eastern Europe: 4
6b	"Two interlaced beasts with double-contoured bodies usually filled with hatchings or billets" (Androshchuk 2014: 117).		Sweden: 5 Norway: 1 Finland: 1 Baltic countries: 1



The number of individual chapes types within Norwegian material.

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