

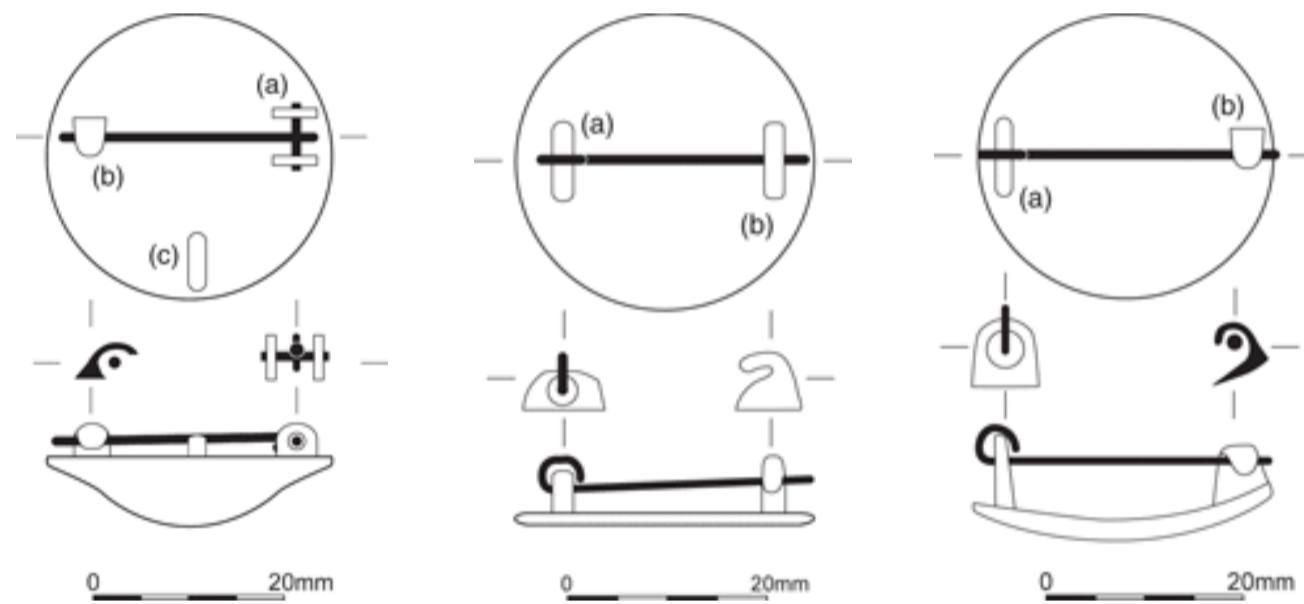
# Pinning Down Identities

Can later early-medieval brooches be identified as Scandinavian by their pin arrangements?

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## Introduction

When attributing a culture to early medieval brooch with damaged or worn fronts, scholars generally tend to base it on the pin fitting arrangement. This technique can be traced back to Jane Kershaw's *Viking Identities* (2013, 20–26), where she created three categories of fittings for the Anglo-Saxon, Scandinavian and Anglo-Scandinavian cultures (Fig. 1–3). Weetch (2014, 309–310) critiqued Kershaw's work by highlighting many outliers to these categories, but other than that, there has been very little work surrounding pin fittings. This undergraduate dissertation aimed to show if pin fittings conformed to Kershaw's system, or if they were as variable as other brooch attributes. The attachment loop, a rare feature found on Scandinavian brooches, is also known as a "sure sign of Scandinavian origin" (Margeson 1997, 21), so this belief was also tested.



## Methodology

This project used 141 brooches from the Portable Antiquities Scheme database, filtering for brooches created between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, with enough images to accurately identify the pin fittings. The brooches were also sorted by descending date of page creation to guarantee a good variety of brooch characteristics. Other data was also collected, including:

- Brooch type,
- Coordinates (when listed),
- Art styles
- Other surface decoration,
- Material

This data was compiled in Excel, and it was cross-referenced with the pin fittings to see if they both indicated the same culture. The coordinates were used to create GIS maps (Fig. 4), so that the distribution of each type of brooch could be analysed.

## References

Caswell, E. (2021) 'OXON-016894: AN EARLY MEDIEVAL BROOCH', Portable Antiquities Scheme. Available at: <https://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/1026259>

Coulthard, J. (2018) 'SWYOR-67198B: AN EARLY MEDIEVAL BROOCH', Portable Antiquities Scheme. Available at: <https://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/929700>

Kershaw, J. (2013) *Viking identities: Scandinavian jewellery in England*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199639526.001.0001>

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Rogerson, A. (2016) 'NMS-ED240D: AN EARLY MEDIEVAL BROOCH', Portable Antiquities Scheme. Available at: <https://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/815332>

Rogerson, A. (2019) 'NMS-999942: AN EARLY MEDIEVAL BROOCH', Portable Antiquities Scheme. Available at: <https://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/938254>

Scott, W. (2016) 'LEIC-53A198: AN EARLY MEDIEVAL BROOCH', Portable Antiquities Scheme. Available at: <https://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/793192>

Tyrrell, R. (2015) 'BUC-83AD38: AN EARLY MEDIEVAL BROOCH', Portable Antiquities Scheme. Available at: <https://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/740792>

Weetch, R. (2014). *Brooches in Late Anglo-Saxon England within a North West European Context A study of social identities between the eighth and eleventh centuries*. Unpublished PhD thesis. University of Reading.

## Results and Discussion

The results of this research identified eight brooches with fittings that did not match Kershaw's system. Findings showed that Anglo-Saxon brooches could have Scandinavian fittings (Fig. 5), Scandinavian brooches could have Anglo-Saxon fittings (Fig. 6), and both could have Anglo-Scandinavian fittings (Fig.7). There were also seventeen brooches which had the "correct" fittings, but they also had one or more attributes indicative of a different culture, casting further doubt on Kershaw's system. Despite Kershaw's beliefs that the series was exclusively Anglo-Scandinavian, this project's results indicated that ten brooches from her East Anglian type had Anglo-Saxon fittings. Further findings located three groups of brooches with anomalous fittings, which are all not acknowledged in Kershaw's system:

### Alternate Anglo-Scandinavian Fittings

- Seven brooches had Scandinavian lugs with an Anglo-Saxon catch-plate (Fig. 8). These are likely Anglo-Scandinavian fittings, but little is known about them.

### Fabric Lugs

- Three other brooches had two single lugs with lines between them (Fig. 9). This is likely an Anglo-Saxon design, and they likely would have had fabric strung between them to fasten the brooch to the outfit (Weetch 2014, 394).

### Parallel Anglo-Saxon Fittings

- Finally, two brooches had Anglo-Saxon pin lugs and catch-plates laid parallel to each other, such that a pin could not connect the two parts (Fig. 10).

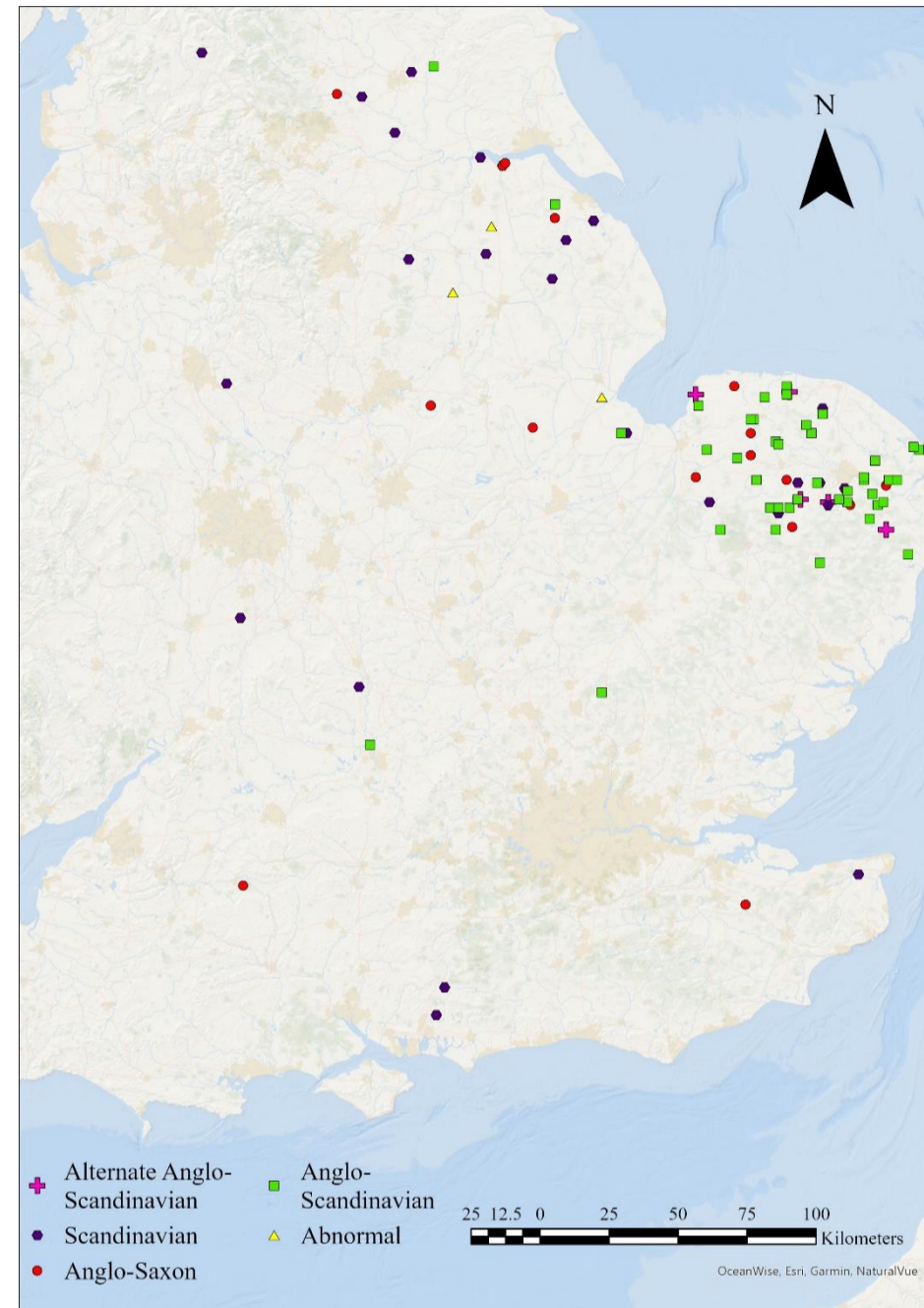


Fig. 4 (above): GIS map showing the distribution of each type of pin fitting arrangement (Created by the author)



Fig. 5 (above): Brooch SWYOR-7974C9, a tenth century Anglo-Saxon lead brooch with Scandinavian fittings (Coulthard 2018, PAS)

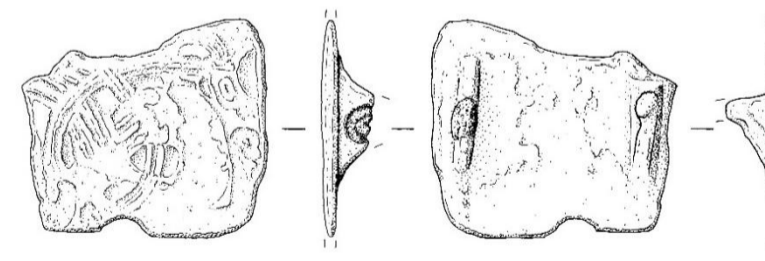


Fig. 6 (above): Brooch NMS-ED240D, which has Anglo-Saxon fittings and a Scandinavian decoration in the Mammen style (Rogerson 2016, PAS)



Fig. 7 (above): Brooch OXON-016894, a likely Anglo-Saxon brooch with Anglo-Scandinavian fittings (Caswell 2021, PAS)



Fig. 8 (above): Brooch NMS-999942, a Scandinavian trefoil brooch with Scandinavian pin lugs and an Anglo-Saxon catch-plate (Rogerson 2019, PAS)



Fig. 9 (above): Brooch LEIC-53A198, which has two single lugs with lines between them (Scott 2016, PAS)

Fig. 10 (above): Brooch BUC-83AD38. Note the abnormal orientation of the Anglo-Saxon pin fittings, as well as the casting line (Tyrrell 2015, PAS)

In total, 37 out of the initial 141 brooches, or over one quarter of the brooches analysed, do not conform to Kershaw's system. Although the sample size was limited, it still shows that this system is not completely accurate. The evidence above, and the evident uniqueness of each one, shows that brooches were personal objects and that experimentation with their traits was common. Therefore, perhaps the fittings were not a sign of identity, but instead reflective of personal preference.

## Conclusion

Attachment loops can be used to identify Scandinavian culture, as there was only one non-Scandinavian brooch which had one. However, the evidence suggests that other brooch pin fittings are just as variable as other brooch attributes. Since many brooches do not conform to Kershaw's three categories, pin fittings should not be used to assign brooches to a specific culture, as it could lead to accidental misattribution.

## Acknowledgements

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