The Rape of the Lock
Or a Comparison between Miniature Images of the Eighth and Eighteenth Centuries
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Abstract This paper discusses Scandinavian gold foil figures from the early part of the Scandinavian Late Iron Age (AD 550-1050) as well as miniature portrait pendants of the eighteenth century. The paper examines the possibility of comparing the two categories of objects, and what may be gained by contrasting historic and prehistoric images. The comparison is made through using Mitchell's concept meta-picture as a theoretical tool. It is highlighted that the relationality between image and beholder is decisive for how respective objects were comprehended and treated. However, despite the fact that the two analyzed materials were part of different scopic regimes and regimes of practice, they share vitalistic and/or animistic characteristics.

Introduction
This paper discusses two different kinds of images and makes a comparison between the two. The first type of image is miniature portrait pendants from the eighteenth century and the second is small gold foil figures from eighth-century Scandinavia. They may be described as miniatures and they are both concerned with human/oid bodies. Further, they have received various bodily treatments. Miniature portraits of the eighteenth century may be equipped with locks of hair of the portrayed, kept on the reverse side of the miniature portrait pendant. Gold foil figures, on the other hand, may at times be pierced in vital organs, dressed with necklaces or belts, or they may have possible phallic features added to them.

Of course, the main title of this paper is taken from Alexander Pope’s (1688-1744) famous mock-epic poem ‘The Rape of the Lock’. The poem was written in the eighteenth century when miniature portraits became more popular and widespread among the elite. In Pope’s poem a lock of beautiful Belinda’s hair is raped, or stolen, by the Baron. It was written in response to an actual incident where a lock of hair was cut off without permission, resulting in a breach between two aristocratic families. The poem was meant to make a satire of the follies and vanities of the upper stratum of
society. It also proves how body parts of different genders and classes were perceived as having certain powers and significance, and manipulating, removing or violating these expressed relations of power (see for instance Pollack 1981; Kristeva 1995; Singh 1990). Body parts of gold foil figures have also been manipulated in some instances, and the violating of these might also be seen as an expression of power relations, albeit different from those of the eighteenth century. It must be pointed out here that the word “rape” is used to describe actions that are violent and not, as is frequently the case today, necessarily connected to sexual acts. Despite the thousand years that separates the two materials, this paper forms an experiment in contrasting them with each other. The theoretical tool employed to enable the comparison is Mitchell’s concept of the meta-picture (2005). It is thereby demonstrated how the relationality between image and beholder results in different, and sometimes similar, understandings and treatments of them. When contrasted it becomes clear that eighth-century gold foil figures are not identifiable, still portraits of Late Iron Age Scandinavian divinities. On the other hand, miniature portrait pendants of the eighteenth century are indeed meant to be static, still portraits. However, the evaluation equally allows reflecting on these pendants as non-static items. As meta-pictures both materials share vitalistic and/or animistic characteristics, perhaps evoking feelings of uncanniness.

Image as meta-picture and materiality as meta-thing

For archaeologists, material culture is the prime departure of analysis, for any questions or query they might have about humans in the past. Needless to say pictures are a part of material culture, although it has been claimed that prehistoric imagery is overlooked by archaeologists (Cochrane & Jones 2012). Are there differences between images and other forms of material culture? If so, what do these consist of? Do images exert special powers or, rather, do we endow them with special powers? Were images always like this? What would the definition of an image be? W. J. T. Mitchell (e.g. 1996; 2005) has discussed these questions and matters at length. According to Mitchell images are ‘any likeness, figure, motif, or form that appears in some medium or other’ and is taken for a picture (Mitchell 2005:xiii-xiv). In addition, pictures are understood as ‘complex assemblages of virtual, material, and symbolic elements’ (Mitchell 2005:xiii).

While Mitchell recognizes that images make demands, awaken desires, repulsions, etc., and as such may be perceived as living entities, it is important to understand that images are only living through our perceptions of them. Indeed the living image is a metaphor, a meta-picture, ‘a secondary, reflexive image of images’ (Mitchell 2005:10), highlighting the relationality of image and beholder. This is where the meta-picture becomes relevant for archaeologists who focus on the materiality of things. Materiality also places an emphasis on the relational aspect between human beings and things, which Meskell (2006) has described as co-presence, and Keane (2003) as bundling; Latour (1991) has also described things as co-producers in, for instance, arts and styles.
When turning the relationality of image (or thing) and beholder into our focus of interest, it is pertinent to ask whether this relationality would be the same throughout history and prehistory, and indeed the same for all human beings. Of course, it is not, for a number of reasons. Our present day societies place an emphasis on the visual, partly a result of us living in a literate context (e.g. Ong 1982; Classen 1993). For us eyes and sight are conventional and focal vehicles of identity – our semiotics of identity (Pollock 1995:590). A modern Western example of this would be a piece of material covering the eyes (for instance opaque sun-glasses), working as a way of hiding and transforming one’s identity. An equally sized piece of material covering your knee or part of your cheek simply would not have the same effect.

Whereas it may be suggested that the relationality is universal, the manner of relating is different throughout history and prehistory. Is it the case that a literate society gains a specific relation to images or pictures, due to vision being its semiotics of identity and equally its constant focus on ‘reading’ and producing such images (that is, writing words)? Research has proved that there are major differences between literate societies and societies with oral literacy. These differences manifest themselves in a variety of ways, especially in terms of how the body and society remembers, creates, structures and perceives the world (Ong 1982; Classen 1993; Pollock 1995). Again, whereas literate societies place an emphasis on the visual, other societies may use other forms of bodily senses as their focal vehicles of identity. How may the bodily senses and organs have been used to structure the world, and to remember? Was there a reliance on the oral and aural, as with the Kulina in South America (Pollock 1995), or the olfactory, as with the Ongee of the Andaman Islands (Classen 1993), or on temperature, as with the Totzil of Mexico (Classen 1993; cf. Haaland 2004)? On colours, as with the Colombian Desana (Classen 1993) or on luminosity (cf. Herbert 1984)? Ultimately, what I am arguing here is that Western societies tend to read images, pictures, material culture, and indeed people, as if they were texts, waiting to be read. This means that the phenomenon of study is actually grasped only through the lens of specific Western images, ‘text-images’. In so doing, ‘the dominance and priority of visual perception in Western epistemology’ is maintained (Bassi 2011:43).

Borrowing from Jay (1988; 1993), this ocularcentrism prioritizes discussions related to reading and writing. By reading material remnants, we fail to see them. Although admitting it is perhaps a far stretch, Bassi argues that ‘the archaeologist “reads” what these pre-literate humans would have written about their monuments had they been able to do so…the figure of reading the past resists the fading of its object in the interest of fixity, durability, and universality’ (Bassi 2011:44). This kind of reading of past remains is also found in archaeological works using a materiality perspective (see Bassi 2011 for examples). Using Mitchell’s argument that the living image is a metaphor, materiality corresponds to the meta-picture, or rather a meta-thing, a reflexive image of things. This secondary image needs to take the relationship between picture/thing and beholder into consideration, since it is this relationship
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that creates the meta-picture or meta-thing – it is not the picture or the thing itself that does this. Mitchell (2005) elegantly demonstrates the many ways in which the relationality between image and beholder may be expressed. But, importantly, he also underscores that images or pictures need not only involve analogues with human attributes. Instead pictures may also connect to ‘features of vitality, animation, and desire (at minimum, appetite)’ that emanates from the vegetal and animal kingdom (Grønstad & Vågnes 2006). It cannot be assumed that an image or picture ‘thinks like us’; they may have inhuman qualities (Grønstad & Vågnes 2006). With this in mind, two seemingly unrelated and incongruent image types will be explored and discussed.

Miniature portraits of the eighteenth century

At the turn of the eighteenth century it was popular for society’s upper crust – the nobility and bourgeoisie – to own miniature portrait pendants. By the mid eighteenth century the taste for miniature portraits had also spread to the upper middle class. The art of miniature portraits, however, evolved far earlier than this. In Britain it started in the first half of the sixteenth century, with migrating book painters from Flanders (Coombs 1998; Walker 1998). They were at that time only connected to royal circles. The earliest miniature portraits looked more like stylized icons than real portraits, and they sometimes had inscriptions in Latin (Walker 1998).

The first known portrait miniature is of Henry VIII (1491-1547), and it is dated to the years 1524-6. The miniature is painted in watercolour on vellum in the same technique as the richly decorative initial letters in medieval book paintings. The watercolour or gouache technique was also used on ivory to produce miniature portraits. Such portraits were normally covered by glass and set within a frame or a capsule (Rönnerstam 2000), as in the example of Otto Carl von Fieandt (1758-1825) presented below (Fig. 1). The framing was of utmost importance for keeping the portrait intact. Without protection the surface of the watercolour painting could easily be damaged, since the portrait miniatures were usually worn or carried around (Frondelius 2010).

The tradition of portrait miniatures steadily declined in the nineteenth century with the invention of the camera. The photographic image took the place of portrait miniatures (Rönnerstam 2000). During a period of transition, portrait miniature artists were engaged to colour black-and-white photographs. Portrait miniature artists also tried to paint portraits in a manner imitating that of the camera. John Tagg (1988) has thoroughly discussed the ways in which the photograph was used to create truths, where the invention of the machine, the camera, was pivotal in the process. Through the machine, it was believed that a neutral device did the observing, catching moments of truths. Of course, the spread and use of photography came to be very different from that of miniature portraits (for more on photography see for instance Tagg 1988; 2009).
Here we begin to note how the concept miniature is avoided when photographs of people (or any other thing) are discussed. This is in some respects remarkable, since both portraits of photographic quality and portraits in other materials could be, and were, carried around as mementos of dear ones. They served in this respect the same purpose. Then why the rejection of the concept miniature? Why are not photographs miniatures? Perhaps this hints at the limitations the concept ‘miniature’ has? (cf. Alberti, forthcoming). Miniature is in itself a fairly modern word, coming from the Latin word minium, meaning red lead which was used to colour the initial letter in medieval books. Or can it be suggested that the usage of the word miniature implies a certain distance, or a specific relation, between beholder and object? The choice of calling something a miniature could be an expression of different relationalities. Photos are persuasive and authoritative (again, see Tagg 1988), and are frequently referred to as living entities. This is evident in phrases such as: ‘- This is my house...’; ‘- These are the Rocky Mountains...’; ‘This is me as a kid’ when looking at photos. A man who wanted his wife’s portrait painted by Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) showed Pablo a photo of her with the words ‘-This is my wife’ which allegedly received the reply: ‘- Well, isn’t she small’. His reply highlights how our relation to photographs is saturated with a belief that photos are truthful, they are the reality. Ultimately, this demonstrates the importance of taking the relationality between what we today choose to call object and person into consideration, if we are to understand prehistoric, and present, ways of living and being.

Portraits and locks of hair as tokens of love and affection

Many portraits in miniature – with locks of hair – have survived to the present day. They are kept by collectors and may also be seen at museums in Europe and North America. The Swedish National Museum has the largest collection in the world, with over 5,300 miniature portraits. For comparison, the National Museum of Finland only has some 250 miniature portraits. Portraits were commissioned to celebrate both family and romantic love, and they were also exchanged (Zohn 2011). As already mentioned only the upper class could afford having portraits made. Both miniature portraits and locks of hair – at times joined in a pendant – worked as tokens of love and affection that could be – and were – carried around.

Although locks of hair were popular in elaborate lockets in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, often hidden from view, such hair locks were made more visible during the eighteenth century both as elements of jewellery or pendants, and as singular items in themselves in the form of bracelets or fob chains (Cooper 1971; Walker 1998).
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Added and incorporated manipulations – analytical tools

While not denying that miniature portrait pendants of the time show slight variations in the shape of the pendants, painting fashion, how hair locks are worked into specific patterns, or even show lack of locks, they have one thing in common: the painting (and hair work) is protected by glass. You are meant to look at the portrait, and carry it with you. The portrait/body and body parts/hair locks are to remain intact, undisturbed by touch and time. This, I argue, is a central quality of the miniature portrait. Once manufactured it was not to be manipulated or crumpled up, but to be looked at and admired from a certain distance – portrait and hair remaining the same, untouched and untouchable.

The painting and hair locks of the miniature pendant were of course portrayed in the then current upper-class fashion. This means that the portrayal from a modern perspective has certain specific traits, which for us may seem more or less natural and perhaps less in agreement with how the painted person must have looked in real life. For analytical reasons I refer to this practice as producing objects with incorporated manipulations. Incorporated manipulations are made at the same time as the object itself is made, and this practice is typical for miniature portrait pendants as well as gold foil figures. The second kind of manipulation is referred to as added manipulations. Added manipulations are, as far as I have been able to find, only connected to certain gold foil figures. Added manipulations are made after the birth of the object, and may consist of adding details to it, piercing the object, or crumpling it up. Many gold foil figures, but not all, have received such treatments.

In the following I will describe one specific miniature portrait pendant in some greater detail with regard to its incorporated manipulations. This pendant has been chosen since museum experts claim it to be typical and representative of the miniature portrait pendants that were popular among the elite in the late eighteenth century.

Otto’s looks and locks – incorporated manipulations

The miniature portrait to be discussed in some detail here is of Otto Carl von Fieandt (1758-1825) and from the year 1791 (Fig. 1). von Fieandt was from Finland, and he worked for the King Gustav III (1746-1792) of Sweden due to his expertise in drawing military maps. He was sent to France by the Swedish king to map the route of travel of the French army. When Otto was in Paris, he had his portrait painted by the Swede Jacob Axel Gillberg (1769-1845). However, the different parts of the pendant were made by several artisans each being an expert in the details of his/her crafts. von Fieandt came from the parish of St Michel in Finland, and the pendant was bought by the Finnish National Heritage Board from the very same parish in 1921 (Frondelius 2010). This indicates that Otto brought the pendant back with him, to Finland, after his mission abroad.
The painting of Otto is protected by glass, as noted earlier. On the backside of the pendant a lock of Fieandt’s hair has been plaited into a symmetrical pattern. The plaited lock is also protected by glass. The golden frame with the bow on top of the pendant is typical of the portrait miniatures of the time.

![Miniature Portrait of Otto Carl von Fieandt](image)

Fig. 1. Miniature portrait of Otto Carl von Fieandt – front to the left, back to the right. The miniature is 3.8 cm high and has a width of 3.1 cm. Photo: Museiverket/Jan Lindroth. Source: The National Board of Antiquities, Finland.

Although the portrait probably would be reminiscent of how Otto looked in real life, his appearance is portrayed or manipulated in certain, specific ways. Otto's face is that of a middle aged man. He is well-dressed and has a fashionable and aristocratic wig in a greyish off-white colour, typical of the time (Fig. 1). Only the skin of the face is visible to the viewer. His skin tone is portrayed as pale, although the cheeks are contrastingly rosy looking, perhaps indicating a healthy or a blushing appearance? Otto probably had side-burns – one is shown on his left cheek that seemingly is both greyish and in his natural hair colour (brown). The darker hue beneath the nose and on his chin indicates that Otto would have had a covering beard and moustache, was it not for the fact that he had shaved properly.

Otto looks at you with rather large, friendly and/or affectionate eyes and the lips of his mouth are slightly turned upwards, indicating a smile. Despite the fact that Otto's clothes look formal and uniform-like, his outer garment is unbuttoned at the top, although a white scarf (?) prevents you from any further encounters with skin.
His friendly and/or affectionate appearance suggests a certain degree of intimacy with the viewer of the portrait. Its smallness, too, forcing you to take a closer look, makes it a private affair. You are meant to look at Otto, and Otto looks back at you, in a presumably known, intimate fashion.

Otto’s looks and locks are protected by glass, underlining the visual as the primary sense to experience the pendant. By placing the plaited lock on the reverse of the pendant an illusory three-dimensional effect was accomplished. The face is up front, shown to you and others in your proximity, and the back side of Otto’s head, the hair, is closest to your body, invisible to others but known to you. The backside is also connected to intimacy since it revealed Otto’s true hair colour beneath the wig. The pendant is meant for someone close to Otto, someone who knew him as someone dear. Despite the intimacy and the visual focus, bodily engagement with the pendant would also have meant caressing or kissing a hard, cold surface (glass), rendering the portrait of Otto and his hair lock unchanged in appearance.

In contrast to the miniature portrait pendants, I will now discuss the miniature images from the eighth century AD. Although these miniatures, too, were meant to be looked at, their variety of both incorporated and added manipulations suggests that they must have been approached differently to modern miniatures; that is, they imply a different relationality.

An overview of gold foil figures

Gold foil figures are known from Denmark, Sweden and Norway, and are generally dated to the Vendel Period (AD 550-800). They are tiny and have a length of c. 1-2.5cm, and weigh less than one gram, commonly c. 0.1-0.15 g (Gullman 2004). These thin gold foils may show human-like single figures, pairs, and at times also animals (Figs. 3-5). A few may be highly stylized, and may also have loops, indicating that they have been worn as pendants, just as the pendant of Otto.

The majority of the figures are stamped with the use of bronze patrices whereas others may be cut from very thin gold foil (Lamm 2004:109). Depictions of gold foil figures are known in literature from the eighteenth century (e.g. Sperling 1700; Sjöborg 1791). Only through archaeological excavations in the twentieth century were the circumstances and contexts in which gold foil figures were recovered recorded in more detail. The most frequent place of recovery for the figures has been in connection to special buildings or workshops (e.g. Helgö, Slöinge, Borg, Uppåkra, Svintuna, Vä, Husby; see Fig. 2). However, they have also been recovered in a bog (Tørring), secondary within burials (Bolmsö, Visingsö, Ulltuna) and in or as hoards (e.g. Hög Edsten, Nörre Hvam) (Andréasson 1995; Back Danielsson 2007:194-195). More than 2,800 gold foil figures have been recovered on the island of Bornholm, Denmark (Lamm 2004: 125), but other places have produced anything from a few to several hundred figures.
Whereas, of course, there are a great number of topics that can be, and have been, discussed with regard to gold foil figures (Watt 1991; 1992; 2004; Hauck 1994; Lamm 2004; Back Danielsson 1999; 2007; 2010), I will in the following concentrate on the bodily manipulations the figures have undergone. The find circumstances of the figures have not provided the opportunity to date them more closely (see Lamm 2004 for dating discussions), which means that it is not possible, unfortunately, to suggest that certain gold foil figures appear at certain times.

Fig. 2. Map of Scandinavia with the geographical locations of patrices and gold foil figures, Borg and Kongsvik, Norway, not included. (After Watt 2004:168, figure 1.)

Despite the fact that gold foil figures may seem great in number, it must be emphasized that they have not been retrieved from the normal, average, everyday settlement/area. The locations, as well as the metal itself and the painstaking ways it has been manipulated, speak of specialized knowledge and an upper stratum of society. The same is true for the miniature portraits, described above.
Gold foil figures – manipulations of bodies

What manipulations have the gold foil figures undergone? As mentioned earlier, two kinds of manipulations may be noted. The first consists of incorporated manipulations made at the same time as the figure itself, that is, the exaggeration or abbreviation (manipulation) is part of the patrix used to make the foil figure. The second kind of manipulation was made after the figure was stamped, or occasionally cut out of a foil. These include dressing the figures with necklaces (Fig. 3c) or belts, piercing the figures, adding possible phallic features (Fig. 5), bending the lower part/legs of the figures implying a seated posture (Fig. 5), and the like.

Incorporated manipulations

Incorporated manipulations of the figures mainly include manipulations of features of the head, hands and/or arms, and jewellery. Starting with the head most of the figures have enlarged eyes and noses (Figs. 3 a-c). It must be pointed out that the enlarged or bulbous eyes and enlarged or rolling-pin-like noses are not restricted to gold foil figures, but can be found on other Late Iron objects such as figures, for instance, on a mounting, a yoke finial, a runestone, and on pendants over an extended period of time (Back Danielsson 2007:123-134). Elsewhere, I have argued that these features ultimately signalled the time and occasion for imminent transformations, the purposes of which was most probably to perform certain ceremonies relating to marriage, death, prophesy-making (the Norse sjødr), and/or birth (Back Danielsson 2007:135, 205 and cited references, cf. Skre 1996).

Lips and ears of the face are seldom specifically marked or enlarged. Despite the absence of lips, gold foil couples are commonly described as kissing and as being in love (see elaborate discussion of this in Back Danielsson 2007, Part One). Enlarged lips are only known in one case to my knowledge, and here two opposing figures seem to be engaged in the consumption of food (Back Danielsson 2007, fig. 10; see also Lamm 2004:81). Apart from manipulations of the head, hands and/or arms may be exaggerated. This may be because their position was important, as in gestures or as in placing emphasis on hands holding things, where these things might be enlarged as well (as in drinking goblets, for instance). The importance of gestures in non-literate or oral societies has been noted by many researchers (e.g. Ratke & Simek 2006; Watt 1992; 2004). A few gestures are similar to those shown on Christian figures on a variety of objects from continental Europe (Watt 2004:204-209), others are seemingly entirely Scandinavian phenomena.

The jewellery of the figures, in the form of arm-rings, brooches (such as disc-on-bow brooches) and necklaces, is also enlarged. Since it is known that jewellery carried significant details in pivotal stories or ceremonies (e.g. Magnus 2001) it is not surprising to find these elements exaggerated.
Added manipulations

Stamped figures, as well as cut figures, have occasionally been dressed up with golden necklaces and/or golden belts (Fig. 3c; see also Watt 2004, figures 14 and 18). A few examples of crudely executed figures have been further equipped with possible phalluses (Fig. 5), and/or appear to have been stabbed by golden items (see figure 31, b-e, in Watt 2004:200). Importantly, the added-on jewellery or paraphernalia – the golden strips – when separated from the figures would probably be interpreted by archaeologists as an artisan’s or smith’s waste, and therefore considered of lesser importance. However, since this so-called waste – in the form of foil fragments – was recovered in the same positions as most of the foil figures in the case of Uppåkra, for instance (Larsson & Lenntorp 2004:25), it is possible to conceive of these strips or fragments as important as a variety of props for divine and miniature beings. Or, indeed, they were like highly stylized and crudely executed divine beings themselves (see figure 18, g-k, in Larsson & Lenntorp 2004:26).

Fig. 3a (left) A gold foil couple from Svintuna, Östergötland, Sweden. Couples are prominent at locations such as at Helgö, Slöinge and Borg (The National Historical Museum). 3b (middle) This figure from Uppåkra has the characteristically rolling-pin-like nose and carries a lance/sceptre (Watt 2004: 177 fig. 9). 3c (right) An Uppåkra figure with caftan clothes, dressed with an added golden collar? The figure carries a short pointed sword as well. Other figures – not only of gold foil – are known to have been dressed in golden collars, and such collars also adorned human beings (Watt 2004: 172 fig. 3a).

Uppåkra – the rape of the foil

A few gold foil figures, cut out of a thick gold foil and recovered within a special building in Uppåkra, Sweden, show traces of carved patterns (Fig. 4). Their at times crude cutting opens up for experiencing the figurines as other-than, or more-than, human entities. In figure 4 it is notable that figure e has been bent in the middle, perhaps in order to remind one of a seated posture. Its face has also suffered two
blows with a sharp pointed object. These marks might equally be interpreted as the 
making of bulbous eyes, indicating trance and far sightedness (see Back Danielsson 
2007). Figure a has also been cut in the arms and in the feet. Do these marks add 
animalistic qualities to the figure, such as wings on the arms, and the figure’s feet an 
animal’s cloven hoofs? (cf. the gold foil figure from Eketorp, Sweden, with tightly held ‘invisible’ arms in a tip-toe position and with a possible feathered or fur-like garment).

Consider further figure 5, where additional foil figures from Uppåkra are shown. 
Some of these are strip-like figures that have golden features added to them. These 
attachments have been interpreted as phalluses (Watt 2004:199-200). It is equally 
possible, however, that the piercing of the figures indicates and facilitates a penetrating 
movement. For the second figure from the left, this could have taken the form of an 
ongoing intercourse with a loose phallus which the caretaker could manoeuvre and
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direct. The third figure from the left could apparently be stabbed repeatedly in the heart-region. Also note that these strips are bent, possibly symbolizing a seated posture.

Fig. 5. Gold foil strips from Uppåkra (although the one on the left is from Bornholm). There are also noticeable similarities between the above strips and gold foil figures recovered on Bornholm, though these had loop holes enabling them to be worn/hung. Enlarged. Photo: Bengt Almgren. Source: Watt (2004:200).

Comparison: similarities and differences between the two materials

**Material, manufacture and manipulation:** One of the most obvious similarities of the two materials is that they are material expressions of a particular stratum of society – the upper class. Gold foil figures were made of gold and miniature portrait pendants were partly made of gold too. Gold can be seen as everlasting – it preserves its surface intact for centuries, constantly glittering and shimmering, providing normal atmospheric conditions prevail (Back Danielsson 2007:187 with references). The glass of the miniature pendant is hard and protects the appearance of the portrait and
Hair. Glass may of course break, but perhaps the small size of the miniature pendants made the breaking of glass less likely compared to larger items in glass (think of how seldom a watch crystal is broken). These durable, and in some respects everlasting, objects thus transcend the passage of time; they are in the present while at the same time referring to the past and the future.

Eighteenth-century miniature portrait pendants were made with great care, and it took a long time to finish one portrait (Frondelius 2010). The portraits expressed and reinforced certain specific looks (and locks) as appropriate and fashionable for the upper class. It is likely that the portraits were reminiscent of how the portrayed looked in real life. Although, with our Western eyes, the gold foil figures of the eighth century AD may seem less human-like, perhaps best described as humanoids, they were made this way purposely. The jewellery of the figures, in the form of arm-rings, brooches (such as disc-on-bow brooches) and necklaces were commonly enlarged on the figures, emphasizing their importance. As stated earlier, the jewellery carried significant details in stories or ceremonies (e.g. Magnus 2001). It must also be pointed out that this very jewellery was in fact manufactured by the artisans who were also responsible for giving birth to the gold foil figure (Back Danielsson 2010 with references). Enlarging these items may thus also mean enlarging the meaning of the artisan. Miniature portrait pendants of the eighteenth century, on the other hand, required many different artists, where for the most part only the portrait painter seems to be remembered or recognized today. This implies that the portrait, at least today, is the most important aspect of the pendant, and equally highlights the significance and status of the painter.

At the time of gold foil figures, gold was perceived to be the metal of gods to the extent that the words golden and godly/divine were used interchangeably (Jørgensen & Vang Petersen 1998:82). Gold had a mythological origin during the Iron Age in Scandinavia and thereby was also imbued with magical powers (Holtsmark 1960). It is thus possible to describe the gold foil figures as divine miniature beings with luminous properties that also attracted a numinous presence (Back Danielsson 2007:186-188). The divine miniature beings were probably dressed up by the artisan either through incorporation of the jewellery already in the patrix, or later through adding, for instance, golden necklaces. The artisan making gold foil figures was also responsible for giving divine numen to certain human beings by producing and equipping them with arm-rings, disc-on-bow brooches and necklaces. Consequently the artisan acted as a medium between the divine and the mundane worlds, furnishing both humans and divine beings with paraphernalia necessary for performing certain ceremonies. What is more, the artisan was also so powerful and in possession of such specific knowledge as to produce and deliver the miniature gods. This is indeed in agreement with the Norse anthropogenic myth in Voluspà, which recounts that gods created smiths or artisans that in turn made manlikon, human or human-like beings
in the shape of statues or something similar (Steinsland 1983:85). This accentuates the special position and role the artisan held at the time in question. Only through the expertise of the smith/artisan could certain human bodies and divine bodies receive the correct treatment/paraphernalia that were required for them to perform in intended and, perhaps, unintended ways. Following Alberti (this volume), gold foil figures and human bodies were ontological equivalents.

Miniature portrait pendants only have incorporated manipulations – that is manipulations made at the time of the portrait making. They include taking locks of hair from the portrayed and painting the person in certain, specific and perceived fashionable ways. Gold foil figures, on the other hand, have both incorporated and added manipulations. The added manipulations, in the form of stabbing, piercing, crumpling and ‘dressing’ them up, speak of lives that differed from those of the portrait pendants.

*Gazing versus doing*: A major difference between the materials involves two agential verbs: gazing and doing. The miniature portrait pendants are, despite the bodily manipulations, very much reliant on seeing. The portrayed looks at you and you look back at this person. Since the portrayed seemingly knows that someone close will be looking back at him/her, the look of the portrayed has an air of intimacy. You are not meant to manipulate the portrait. The visual is the prime sense with which to engage with the miniature.

If miniature portrait pendants are mostly connected with seeing, gold foil figures are connected with doing. The figures are seemingly doing things, such as standing in a tip-toe position, sitting, kissing, drinking, etc. Their appearance has equally required action of the person handling and gazing at the figure. At times the figures have been stabbed, crumpled up, dressed up, etc. Both the manufactured figure and the handling person seemingly had to do things. Whereas gazing versus doing can be said to be a major difference between the materials, it can equally be declared to be a similarity. It is as if both images (or rather the meta-things or meta-pictures) brought with them certain actions that were dictated by the images themselves. A person looking at you results in you looking back at the person. A human-like figure engaged in different activities, perhaps experienced as divine, godly, uncanny, human as well as animal-like or vegetal-like – perhaps all aspects at the same time – could have resulted in you doing things to the artefact.

*Size*: Both materials share the property of being rather small. However, this does not have to mean that they are miniatures – that they are representations in a smaller form of something bigger. The two materials discussed are far more independent, elusive and enigmatic than that. However, that does not mean that size is unimportant. The choice of size brings with it certain desirable and perhaps also unintended effects.
Small figures or bodies may evoke emotions within the handler or viewer, such as wonder, awe and/or empowerment (see Bailey 2005:29, 33). But equally, I would argue, encountering something small, reminiscent of human-like, or god-like, bodies (gold foil figures) or someone you know (portrait pendants) may give you feelings of humbleness and empathy, that is the small, tiny entity/living being needs you to take care of it.

Making things/entities in smaller sizes requires expertise, and furthermore very often that certain characteristic of the body is abbreviated. Abbreviation commonly holds that certain marks or elements are only considered necessary in a specific context (Proschan 1983:14). This abbreviation invites disparate significata which opens them up to interpretational plurality (Tonkin 1979:245). With such techniques, paradox and power is manifested and exerted, inviting and generating a possible array of mixed and enhanced feelings. To be able to relate to such significata is to be powerful (Tonkin 1979:245). This, I would argue, is especially pertinent in the case of stylized gold foil figures, at times worn as pendants. These luminous, crudely and abbreviated figures were for an uninitiated person hard to relate to in intended or desired ways. A miniature portrait of Otto, on the other hand, probably would have been recognizable as a portrait of someone known in certain circles.

Conclusions

The era during which miniature portraits were most popular belongs to the Enlightenment, a period connected to major changes in society. This time also saw the invention and growth of a number of regulating institutions, the result of intensified categorizations and taxonomies of existences in the world (for instance Foucault 1977). It is also the time of the birth of the individual, a person alone responsible for his/her actions before the law (e.g. Jones 2007:28 with references). The increased emphasis on the visual – the gazing – is connected to the panopticon (see more in Foucault 1979). The eighteenth century also saw the emergence of the concept of good taste, and efforts were made to theorize all the sensuous opinions of the modern subject – the aesthetics (e.g. Holmgaard 1996). In literature of the time, the behaviours and ideas came to be commented upon, and at times criticised. I have already mentioned Pope’s ‘The Rape of the Lock’, but it is also appropriate to mention Jonathan Swift’s (1667-1745) novel, Gulliver’s Travels. Gulliver’s travels took him both to the land of Lilliput and to Brobdingnag, the country of giants. In a context where criticism of society was under surveillance, different phenomena were made evident through satirical exaggerations, enabled by the manipulation of sizes relating to the human body of Gulliver himself. However, the satires cannot only be seen as critical comments on society. They may also be regarded as creating space for negotiating people’s identity and positions in several axes of power, both on an
individual level as well as on a collective one. Both the miniature portraits and the gold foil figures may be scrutinized with such recognitions in mind. In Jane Austen’s (1775-1817) novel *Sense and Sensibility* it is demonstrated that portrait miniatures are important characters and in the plot they serve as both truthful and deceitful agents in matters of love and loyalty (Hardy 1976), thus implying agency of the portraits.

The people of the eighth century had very different relations to images, divinities, living entities, animality, humanity, not least themselves and their own body and being in the world. Probably, gold foil figures not only involved humans, but also divinities as well as the vegetable and animal kingdom. As per usual, the figures have been categorized and also at times identified as gods, where the later Norse literature has acted as key. Be that as it may, many figures cannot be categorized or identified into such a matrix. In this context it must also be pointed out that gold foil figures rarely wear clothes that are portrayed in such a way that they may be used to identify the male or female sex/gender, the way in which we today stereotypically categorize human beings. In her study of garments in the Late Iron Age, Mannering (2006:42-43) could only categorize less than ten percent of the Danish gold foil figures as being of either sex and having corresponding clothes, and c. 40% of the Swedish gold foil figures. Since the bulk of the figures may not be attributed to the male or female sex/gender, this way of categorizing does not seem to have been relevant. The clothes of some figures, when discernible, have in some instances been found to represent real clothes, since elements from the garments have been retrieved archaeologically from burial contexts (Mannering 2004:72). This implies that certain garments are connected to specific transitional circumstances such as those between the world of the living and that of the dead. Other non-gendered garments, such as feather-like attire, have likewise been suggested to be connected to other transitional activities such as prophesy making (e.g. Fischer 1974). The fact that the garments and jewellery of the figures have their counterparts in real life or life among human beings (Mannering 2004:212) underscores the specialized knowledge of the artisan who would have had close encounters with these clothes and the ceremonies in which they participated. The gold foil figures point to the Late Iron Age materialization of something for us immaterial, a divine being. Gold in whatever form indicated a numinous presence, and the artisan possessed the expertise with which to transform gold in a variety of executions. The figures worked as performing objects that were manipulated in different ways in performances or stories. When made and engaged, the figures were transformed into subjects that obliterated our modern boundary between living and static dead matter. The smith/artisan was the creator of this being with agency. Without the artisan’s abilities, expertise and intimate knowledge of human and divine ceremonies, performances and bodily practices there would be no gold foil figures. The gold foil figures were instrumental in creating, explaining, and protecting the then current world and cosmos.
Both the miniature portrait pendants and the gold foil figures illustrate how the relativity between image and beholder create a specific meta-picture or meta-thing, where this relativity is dependent on a number of issues, some of which are accounted for above. What, then, can be gained by comparing two materials that are so far apart in time? In this case I chose one object from the eighteenth century, as described above a century whose societal changes had great impact on, and created, the sensuous person. By contrasting the two materials it was easier to understand how the gold foil figures should not be considered figures that can be identified. They are simply not still portraits of Late Iron Age divinities. Instead I pointed to the importance of acts of doing – figures doing things, and artisans/humans doing things to the figures, and of course artisans doing things to humans (dressing them up, for instance, in jewellery). Returning to Bassi’s criticism of ocularcentrism and archaeologists preferred methodology to read the past, gold foil figures are not about fixity, durability and universality. They are instead figures in flux, fickle and distinctive.

The comparison has also revealed that the disparate materials have a few things in common despite different scopic regimes, practices and ontologies. Their small size, manipulations and luminous appearances could have aroused both desire and repulsion and may also have created haunting images, evoking the other-worldly side of things and life.

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Archives