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PIECES OF THE PAST, FRAGMENTS FOR THE FUTURE – BROKEN METALWORK IN NORDIC LATE BRONZE AGE HOARDS AS MEMORABILIA?

Anna Sörman

Introduction

Fragmentation of valuable metalwork was a widespread practice in Late Bronze Age Europe (e.g. Rezi 2011; Hansen 2016; Milcent 2017; Knight 2022). Broken bronze objects are found in various contexts, but primarily in hoards – assemblages of mixed metalwork intentionally placed in the ground. Depositions containing a large proportion of fragments have traditionally been termed ‘scrap hoards’ or ‘smith’s hoards’, which hints at the most common archaeological explanation of this phenomenon: as scrap for recycling or trade (e.g. Oldeberg 1928; Levy 1982; Weiler 1996). It has largely been assumed to be the smith’s hidden stock of raw material, and that the fragments of commodified metal would thus eventually be transformed into proper objects again. The idea of ‘scrap’ is clearly influenced by modern, western concepts where the incomplete and damaged were dismissed as refuse – a view that cannot be assumed to be valid for prehistory (Chapman 2000; Chapman & Gaydarska 2007; Brück 2016).

Over the last decades, new readings of these hoards have demonstrated patterns that cannot easily be explained as simple scrapping. Instead, case studies from across Europe indicate that fragmentation and hoarding of ‘scrap’ followed different norms and patterns across time and space (e.g. Gabillot 2004; Gabillot & Lagarde 2008; Rezi 2011; Dietrich 2014; Brück 2016; Hansen 2016; Knight 2022, this volume). Various and simultaneous motives for breaking bronze objects have been proposed and attested: to facilitate commodification and exchange (e.g. Milcent 2017; Brandherm 2018; Ialongo & Lago 2021), but also to enable the use of fragments in depositions and transactions for more symbolic ends. Such interpretations include observations of *pars pro toto* sacrifices, curated fragments as relics or

heirlooms and their partition and structured deposition as a means to create real and symbolic links – enchainments (Chapman 2000; Brück & Fontijn 2013:212; Dietrich 2014; Brück 2016, this volume; Hansen 2016). These insights begin to reveal the complexity behind this widespread and characteristic LBA practice.

This paper aims to contribute to the understanding of this phenomenon in a Nordic Bronze Age (BA) context by studying a selection of ‘scrap’ hoards from modern-day Sweden. What do the buried fragments look like, what object types are represented, which fragments were included and which are ‘missing’? While only scratching the surface, this study provides a basic characterization, indicating questions for future studies on a phenomenon that has remained largely unstudied in Scandinavia since the beginning of the 20th century. These observations will be used to discuss the question of the potential purposes of the broken objects in the Nordic LBA ‘scrap hoards’. What were the economic, social and possibly symbolic values of different metalwork parts? In this chapter, I elaborate on the idea that the fragments in ‘scrap’ hoards were carefully chosen and curated, and one of the keys to the fragmented hoard assemblages in dry (retrievable) places is that the individual pieces would remain recognizable over time. This has implications

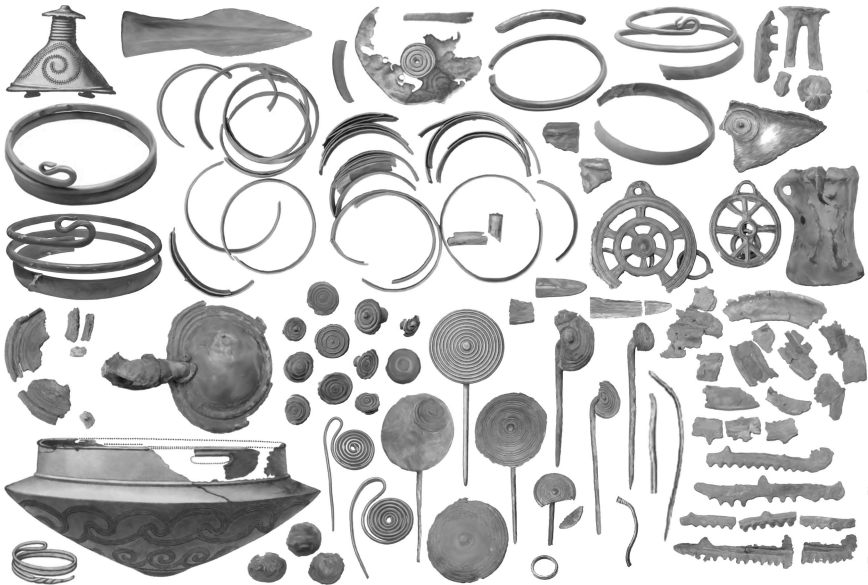


FIGURE 16.1 Parts of the Late Bronze Age hoard from Härnevi in central Sweden, containing a large portion of incomplete objects and often interpreted as a ‘scrap hoard’. Note that not all breaks are ancient (illustration by Magdalena Forsgren, reprinted with kind permission).

for interpreting the values, use and reuse of fragments in this region, as well as for understanding the ‘scrap’ hoard phenomenon and the people behind these depositions.

Bronze and hoarding in Late Bronze Age southern Scandinavia

Bronze in LBA Scandinavia was a highly valued and exotic material acquired from areas abroad via gifts and exchange (e.g. Levy 1999; Ling et al. 2014). From a rather limited repertoire of axes, weapons and ornaments in the Early Bronze Age (c. 1700–1100 BCE), the production of bronze metalwork intensified and diversified in the LBA (c. 1100–500 BCE). The range of objects conceived in the sun-glowing alloy now included weapons, personal ornaments, toilet equipment, dress fittings, large costume attributes, various tools and a large range of rare cult objects such as figurines, ceremonial helmets, horse and wagon decorations and even extravagant musical instruments in the form of bronze lures (e.g. Baudou 1960; Levy 1999). Many tools were made of flint, stone and bone, while bronze tools only represented a fraction of the toolkit. I agree with the notion that the Nordic BA metalwork was dominated by ritual, prestigious and socially valuable objects, while its involvement in the productive economy through tools was quite limited compared to other areas in BA Europe (e.g. Thrane 1975:247; Bradley 1990:143).

Landscape depositions of bronze metalwork occurred throughout the Nordic BA. In southern Scandinavia, like elsewhere, depositions have often been categorised as either sacrificial or profane based on their find contexts and retrievability (e.g. Levy 1982; Bodilsen 1986; Rundkvist 2015). This classification partly rests on the premise that wet contexts are less likely to have been revisited and therefore were meant as final resting places, while dry contexts, at least theoretically, facilitate revisits and retrieval (see Brück 2016). BA depositions in southern Scandinavia are predominantly found in or in direct association with water, such as lakes, bogs, rivers and sea inlets (Levy 1982; Fredengren 2011; Rundkvist 2015).

Dry-land locations (such as hillsides, under large boulders or in rock crevices) also appear and are more common for hoards with a large degree of fragmentation. In addition, hoards with a high fragmentation rate more often include material associated with bronze casting, another argument traditionally raised in favour of a ‘profane’ interpretation. A previous study estimated 13% of the circa 125 LBA hoards in Sweden as being ‘scrap hoards’, then defined by the inclusion of ‘raw stuff or ingots’, such as casting refuse, unfinished metal rods and/or fragmented tools (Weiler 1996:21). To summarise, fragmented bronze objects are *mostly but not only* found in dry-land hoards, and casting debris is *mostly but not only* found with fragmented objects. Hoards with broken versus complete objects, as well as in wet versus dry

depositional contexts, are variations on the same theme rather than opposite categories.

Approaching fragmented bronze in Late Bronze Age Scandinavia

Fragmented metalwork in the Nordic BA largely remains unexplored. Hoard studies have often focused on depositions in wet contexts, where fragmentation is less frequent. The typo-chronological studies dominating previous research have also meant a primary interest in the most complete and well-preserved objects. Fragmented metalwork and ‘scrap hoards’ have been the topic of a few minor studies focusing on technical (Oldeberg 1927, 1928, 1929, 1934) and economic (Weiler 1996) aspects. This situation reflects the much-critiqued division of ‘scrap hoards’ as economical and pragmatic in contrast to the ritualistically or religiously explained ‘sacrificial hoards’, a division seen throughout the academic history of this subject (for critique, see e.g. Brück & Fontijn 2013:210–212; Brück 2016; Fontijn 2019). This paper works from the premise that fragmentation, curation and reuse of ‘scraps’ must be studied as culturally as well as economically meaningful.

Fragmented BA metalwork is not only known from hoards, but finds from different contexts have not yet been synthesised or compared. LBA burials sometimes contain metalwork, often small and incomplete objects (e.g. Bodilsen 1986:6; Röst 2016; Hornstrup 2018). Fragmented bronzes are also known from settlement contexts but are often regarded as waste or accidentally lost objects (Eriksson & Grandin 2008). So far, there are a few known cases where bronze fragments were subjected to intentional secondary use. One particularly interesting example is from a Swedish burial ground where two fragments, seemingly from the same neck ring, were found in two different graves (Röst 2016:220, 238). Fragments were sometimes also reused by being converted into new objects or integrated as part of repairs or modifications (e.g. Hornstrup 2018; Ojala & Sörman this volume). Thus fragments evidently had various uses ‘after the break’: circulated, curated, converted, possibly re-melted and deposited. The ‘scrap hoard’ phenomenon appears to be only the tip of the fragmentation iceberg when considering how much broken metalwork was once in circulation.

Fragmenting something does not strip it of its value but transforms it (e.g. Chapman 2000; Chapman & Gaydarska 2007; Dietrich 2014). Multiple new parts with changed properties are created, which are available for continued use. Scrap hoards from various parts of BA Europe have been characterised as ‘codified’; objects and fragments give an impression of selection and repeated patterns, hinting at local and regional norms (e.g. Gabillot 2004; Bradley 2005:152–153; Rezi 2011; Hansen 2016; Milcent 2017; Bordas & Boulud-Gazo 2018:25–31; Brandherm 2018; Dietrich & Mörtz 2019; Knight 2022). For example, Richard Bradley has noted that sword hilts are more

represented than blades in many European LBA ‘scrap hoards’; considering the proportion of the hilt compared with the whole object, this relationship should be inverted (Bradley 2005:152–153, as referenced in Brück & Fontijn 2013:200). Trying to characterise these assemblages and identify patterns, the sample of Swedish ‘scrap hoards’ will here be evaluated based on the following questions:

- What object types in these hoards are fragmented more often versus more rarely?
- To what extent can the original object type be identified from the fragments?

Studying a selection of Swedish ‘scrap hoards’

Five metalwork hoards from present-day central and southern Sweden have been included in this study: hoards from Bräckan, Härnevi, Hjärpetan, Nya Åsle and Ystad (Table 16.1). All but one are from dry-land contexts, found under large stones (2. Härnevi, 3. Hjärpetan and 5. Ystad). One of these (3. Hjärpetan) was found in a small stone-cist construction under a large stone on the terrace of a rocky hillside. One was found in a ceramic vessel on a sandy slope, but the exact circumstances are unknown (1. Bräckan). Finally, one differed from the rest by being found under a large boulder in a bog, thus in what can be considered a wet context (4. Nya Åsle).

These hoards were chosen for two main reasons: Firstly, because of their high fragmentation rates and because they have all previously been discussed as ‘scrap hoards’ (e.g. Oldeberg 1927, 1928, 1929, 1934; Weiler 1996). Secondly, the documentation available is of relatively high quality and detail. The finds are described either in museum catalogue entries or in publications dedicated to individual hoards. This is crucial, as this study relies on previous observations rather than primary empirical work, with the exception of the Härnevi hoard (Figure 16.1), which was studied and recorded first-hand at the Swedish History Museum (SHM), Stockholm.

Information about the appearance of objects, fragments and breakage of objects in all hoards except Härnevi is based on notes, photographs and drawings. Four of the hoards have been published by Andreas Oldeberg (1927, 1928, 1929, 1934), an antiquarian at the SHM in the first half of the 20th century, who was specially interested in ancient metalworking techniques and the BA. His detailed accounts include systematic recordings of fresh versus old breakage based on patina and information from the people who discovered the hoards. Such information is invaluable and facilitates the discussion on LBA fragmentation. Nevertheless, it should be emphasised that renewed empirical studies could lead to revisions of the results. A detailed database cataloguing the finds in each hoard can be found in a digital repository (Sörman 2023).

TABLE 16.1 The Late Bronze Age hoards included in this study, with fragmentation rates (*number of fragments in relation to the total number of items except casting debris, omitting breaks considered recent) ranging from about 50% to almost 90%

| No | Find spot [museum identifier] | Typological dating | Total number of object pieces (casting debris excluded) | Fragmentation rate (based on quantity*) | Casting debris |
|----|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 | Bräckan [SHM 1995] | Period IV (c. 1100– 900 BCE) | 80 (61) | (54) 89% | Yes |
| 2 | Härnevi [SHM 11635 & 1612] | Period IV–VI (c. 1100–500 BCE) | 143 (139) | (79) 57% | Yes |
| 3 | Hjärpetan [SHM 17093 & 17143] | Period V (c. 900–700 BCE) | 37 (36) | (23) 64% | Yes (+ lead ingot) |
| 4 | Nya Åsle [SHM 4127] | Period V (c. 900–700 BCE) | 145 (136) | (71) 52 % | Yes |
| 5 | Ystad [YM 1388–1415] | Period V (c. 900–700 BCE) | 29 (25) | (19) 76% | Yes |

All five hoards were recovered before 1930, none of them by archaeologists. Hence, there is a range of source-critical problems regarding the objects, retrieval and recording. In particular, smaller fragments were presumably overlooked or remained undiscovered to a certain extent, considering that the discoveries predate the use of metal detectors and occurred in times when complete objects were generally seen as more valuable and therefore perhaps prioritised. These conditions mean that the hoards are probably incomplete, which impacts the accuracy of the calculated rates for fragmentation as well as the number of identifiable fragments. Regardless of this potential error margin, the fragmentation rates for these assemblages are staggeringly high (Table 16.1). Considering that smaller fragments were potentially overlooked, the fragmentation rates can be seen as a *minimum*. Although the number of unidentifiable pieces might initially have been slightly lower if smaller fragments were left out at discovery, the recognisability of the remaining fragments, including the smallest ones recovered, indicates that unrecognisable fragments in these hoards were rare.

Chronology, fragmentation rate and general composition

The hoards all contain object types typologically dated to the LBA. It is interesting to note that the age span represented in these assemblages is approximately limited to single typologically defined BA periods, each of which is

around 200 years. In the Period V hoards of Hjärpetan and Nya Åsle, the presence of some older objects from Period IV or 'early' Period V (Oldeberg 1928:324, 343–344; Oldeberg 1934:17) indicate that the assemblages have a certain time depth and was compiled throughout the period. In the Härnevi hoard, there are objects from LBA Periods V and VI and possibly even from late Period IV (Jensen 1997:180). This also hints at a wider chronological span and indicates that this practice sometimes continued throughout several stylistic horizons. Such a circumstance supports the impression that these assemblages were accumulated over time, within one or two Nordic BA periods (or even three, in the case of Härnevi). Consequently, this raises the question of whether the objects would have been accumulated and curated somewhere else before being deposited in the ground or whether the depositional place was also the storage location to which items were gradually added.

A majority (c. 50%–89%) of the items in these hoards are fragments or incomplete pieces when calculated according to quantity rather than weight, casting debris excluded (Table 16.1; Sörman 2023). Four out of five hoards also contain some form of metalworking debris, such as casting sprues or lumps of bronze. Of a total of c. 440 items from the five hoards, 34 pieces are recorded as having signs of additional, voluntary damage, such as cases of bending, crushing/flattening or stuffed sockets (Sörman 2023). Regarding represented object types, the assemblages are heterogenous, containing a broad variety of objects. All hoards contain objects or object fragments from all the traditional categories of weapons, tools and dress/body ornaments. Most of the hoards include at least one object of non-local type (Oldeberg 1927, 1928, 1934), but a clear majority of the objects appear to have been produced in the Nordic area.

Objects types

There are indications of selection and disproportion among the objects chosen for fragmentation. The hoards do not contain all known object types in circulation, nor does the content reflect the approximate ratios between various groups of objects (for example, socketed axes are believed to have been much more common than swords). Some types often end up in these assemblages, while others are rare or almost missing completely.

In the Swedish hoards studied here, commonly fragmented objects are: swords, arm rings, sickles, spearheads and axes. Although present in four out of five hoards, no swords are found intact. Object types that were fragmented but rarer are neck rings, fibulas, dress pins, double buttons, knives, punches and chisels. All spectacle fibulas and neck rings are incomplete. The same is true for some of the large, rare items such as lures and bronze vessels. The most unique items correspond to what probably also constituted rarer objects at the time, such as decorative wheel pendants (Härnevi), fish hooks

(Bräckan), bronze vessels (Nya Åsle) and lures (Hjärpetan, Nya Åsle). Less surprisingly, some highly unusual object types, such as bronze combs and belt hooks, are missing from these assemblages. Objects that appear both complete and incomplete in these hoards include spearheads, axes, dress pins, double buttons, arm rings, sickles and knives. With some exceptions, we lack several fragments or the rest of the object. This means that most pieces of the objects represented by the fragments are missing.

There are also object types that are conspicuously absent in these assemblages. The least frequent items in the scrap hoards are the ones from the toilet set. The 'toilet set' is here defined as including a razor and tweezers, and sometimes also a knife and double button, which formed a set of small, personal items. Only one razor is present in this dataset: an intact, decorated specimen from the Hjärpetan hoard (Oldeberg 1928:331). Tweezers have not been found in any of the five hoards. Pieces of such small, flat objects might be harder to recognise in the form of small fragments, but their trapezoid shape, specific dimensions, and occasional ornamentation would have enabled identification, and they are recognised as fragments when found in burials. Razors and tweezers are also largely missing from the depositions in wet contexts (Baudou 1960; Levy 1982; Rundkvist 2015). However, they appear in some LBA burials, where they are sometimes fragmentary (e.g. Baudou 1960; Hornstrup 2018). Razors and tweezers were thus mostly considered inappropriate for landscape deposition.

Finally, a note about the difference in neck rings: while simple and twisted neck rings are present in all five hoards, more elaborate neck ring pieces are absent. LBA elaborate neck ring designs, such as various heftier neck rings with ornamentation, spiral-formed end-plates, etc., are generally missing. Two fragments from the Ystad hoard and two fragments from the Nya Åsle hoard might originate from such rings, but the pieces represented are from the simple, twisted part rather than the extravagant end-plates (Oldeberg 1927:109, 1934:25).

Hence, we sense a mutually exclusive pattern of deposition where certain small personal items are never (tweezers) or rarely (razors) included in these assemblages, but instead appear in other contexts, notably burials. The same is true for the elaborate neck rings, which, in contrast to the often fragmented simple and twisted neck rings, only appear in other hoard configurations. All other frequent forms of LBA metalwork are represented. This means that the person(s) who collected, curated and deposited these assemblages followed specific norms about what to include rather than adding fragments from all types in circulation.

Recognisability

An absolute majority of the pieces found in scrap hoards can be determined by which object type they once belonged to. Even the smallest recovered

fragments are identifiable to a high degree because of particular traits. Very small fragments are often possible to identify due to their curvature (lure fragments), shape and thickness (bronze vessels), or preserved details such as handles, decorative elements, rims, cutting edges or other particularities (Figure 16.2). The unidentified or uncertain fragments in relation to the total number of fragments for each hoard are 6% (3 fragments) for Bräckan, 1% (1 fragment) for Härnevi, 0% (0 fragments) for Hjärpetan, 8% (6 fragments) for Nya Åsle and 0% (0 fragments) for Ystad (Table 16.1).

In most cases, the unidentifiable pieces have a broken edge on several or all sides. Characteristics occurring on several of the unidentifiable fragments, such as a rim, an angle or a decoration (e.g. Oldeberg 1928:333; SHM 1995 no 791:32; Figure 16.2), would probably have made them distinguishable by the people who had seen the original object. We should here consider that rare objects, such as pieces of large hammered vessels, were potentially more easily recognisable in the past. Since no such items were produced locally and there were fewer of these objects in circulation, fragments from these objects would have been more unique in the local community. Interestingly, fragments from large bronze vessels – objects with large surface areas that would break into many fragments – are still only represented by very few pieces (e.g. SHM 7994 and Nya Åsle), another fact indicating a selection process behind the composition of these hoards.

To sum up, a vast majority of the fragments are identifiable as to the original object type. Many of the pieces that we cannot identify today were probably still recognisable to people who were familiar with them when they were in use or because they were pieces of rarity (such as vessels of hammered bronze or larger, decorated objects). Even considering the source-critical



1 cm

FIGURE 16.2 Fragment of an unidentified object from the Härnevi hoard (photo by the author).

factor of small and less recognisable fragments potentially having been left out or overlooked by 19th and 20th-century finders or museum workers, the recognisable fragments form such a dominant proportion that keeping identifiable pieces must have been a significant factor in this hoarding practice.

Fragments as memorabilia?

In all Swedish hoards studied here, there is a high recognisability of the fragments included in the assemblages. Even if we consider the possibility that dozens of small, unrecognisable fragments were overlooked by the finders, the large part of these hoards was made up of bits and pieces that are large enough to be identified by us (archaeologists familiar with the BA metalwork repertoire) and then probably also by people in the BA. Recognisability relates to the fragments' visual form. Fragmenting in relation to certain shapes and attributes, as well as the fragment size, dictates if the pieces are recognisable or not. There are no marks or any other additions to the fragments that would have allowed the identification of each piece. Objects in hoards might have been divided into various organic containers, allowing for physically separating or grouping certain bits and pieces. Unfortunately, such information is not possible to assess for the findings studied here. We can probably assume that they, like us, primarily relied on the shape of fragments for general or precise identification.

If each object included in a hoard assemblage embodied the histories of its previous users and owners, hoards upheld a multitude of past narratives (Chapman 2000:117). The first question we must ask is: did the histories and relations of these fragments matter, or had broken pieces been commodified as raw material and thereby deprived of their previous functions, values and meanings? The inclusion of fragments with high recognisability was certainly not done with the intention of making life easier for future archaeologists. So why were not (to our knowledge) smaller and less obvious pieces included? Perhaps less emblematic pieces were used in other contexts where the preserved form was less important, such as for finite deposition or immediate re-melting into a new object? Contrastingly, in hoarded collections where people would successively add or withdraw fragments, their history would be of continual importance. Selecting pieces where their original function remained visible/tangible allowed for these curated items to continue to be associated with their original owner or use history. Supposing that incomplete objects, and even small pieces, were still recognised with reference to their original whole, a 'scrap hoard' would have involved as many associations with past 'wholes' as they contained fragments.

As initially highlighted in the works of John Chapman (2000), the fragment's recognisability *vis-à-vis* the original whole is a key to the potential link between fragmentation and memory, along with the capacity to transmit

references to the ‘original’. This allows for the link to memories to be upheld and thus relates to the archaeological key questions regarding the role of material culture in creating, maintaining and manipulating the collective and individual memories of people in the past (e.g. Bradley 2002; Jones 2007). What was thought of these objects from the recent past during the LBA? In his discussion of memorabilia and heirlooms, Chris Caple has made a useful distinction between ‘ancestral objects’, as items with known history and perhaps even a genealogy of ownership, versus ‘venerable artefacts’, detached from direct experience, and part of a more distant, mythical or socially defined and agreed past (Caple 2010:307). Many bronze objects in the scrap hoards, such as weapons and dress items, were personal attributes dating from within one or two chronological periods of the Nordic BA and would have been intimately linked to individuals or institutions. Consequently, we can assume that these assemblages represented ancestral memories of known histories and persons. They were also object types that continued to be produced, rather than old, abandoned object forms. They would probably have been assembled and curated by people from the same community, or at least from the same tradition. Various studies have shown that objects in LBA hoards show signs of wear and use (e.g. Kristiansen 2016 [1974]). These were objects that, before their deposition, had generally been used, worn and displayed in society.

Finally, the relatively limited size of these assemblages (ranging roughly between c. 30 and 150 pieces) means that the fragments were identifiable not only in terms of type but potentially also as to *which exact object* they once belonged to. This has two major consequences: not only could it facilitate the mnemonic link back to their previous owners, users, histories, and deeds, if locally made, this identification could also link back to the object’s production, meaning local metalworkers might have even been able to recall or at least understand the conditions for its composition and production. In this regard, these ‘scrap hoards’ are set apart both by size (and weight) and by fragment size compared to some of their LBA counterparts in Europe (e.g. Bordas 2019; Dietrich & Mörtz 2019:281; Knight 2022:156). In contrast to collections with tens or hundreds of kilograms and hundreds or thousands of objects, the Nordic LBA ‘scrap hoards’ were small caches of identifiable object parts that facilitated recognisability and commemoration. The fact that these had value as memorabilia has to be considered for at least parts of this material.

Scrap hoards and depositions with a high degree of fragmented objects in Scandinavia have previously been linked to crafting or trade (Oldeberg 1927; Weiler 1996), but they have also been suggested to represent a form of local or regional ‘settlement deposits’ [Swe. *bygddepåer*], functioning as a centralised storage of wealth for a larger kin group (Thedéen 2004:72–74). Considering their possible association with the specialised metalworkers, they have also been suggested to function as a socio-politically charged source

for valuable, reusable or recyclable metals and relics curated by the smith (Goldhahn 2007:219; see also Fregni 2014). I agree with this and have previously pointed to ethnographic examples of relic hoards curated by smiths (Sörman 2018:186–187). It is not likely that all hoards with fragments were ‘scrap hoards’, nor that all fragments in such hoards served the same purpose or were assembled and deposited for the same reason. However, it seems likely that the majority of the so-called ‘scrap hoards’ were accumulated over time and that they were, at least in part, linked to memory work.

Final reflections

Metalwork assemblages with large proportions of fragmented objects deposited in the landscape – known as ‘scrap hoards’ – consist mainly of pieces with shapes or characteristics that make them recognisable. This raises questions regarding the strategies for making, using and conceptualising fragments: Were fragments created or selected with the intention of keeping the visual reference to the original object? Were different pieces of objects treated differently? Were some parts – such as edges, tips, handles and rims – more or less likely to be chosen for inclusion in ‘scrap hoards’ than others? Fragmenting Scandinavian LBA metalwork resulted in a variety of pieces with different qualities. We should therefore also be sensitive to how specific object categories with distinctive forms and decorations lend themselves to fragmentation (Chapman 2000:65). An issue to consider in further studies of fragmented metalwork is whether pieces of different shapes and visual properties, but also of different qualities such as portability, size, weight and shape, affected the ways different fragments were circulated, reused and deposited. Understanding this variation is a challenge, but it is also one of the great creative potentials of bronze objects as fragmented matter. While opening more questions than it answers, it is proposed that origins and commemoration were central to the value of these hoards.

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Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this chapter are openly available in the research data repository of the Swedish National Data Service at <https://doi.org/10.58141/5x6w-mx80> (Sörman 2023).

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