

1. The scabbard's hidden protectors

Do you see the “birdman”? This beautiful gold mount sat at the top of a scabbard that held a chieftain's sword. Hidden in the complex designs are two fabulous birds turned toward each other. Both have pronounced eyes and beaks, and their droplet-shaped bodies are filled with small beads of gold. But if we shift our glance, we see that the birds also form a man's face with eyes, nose and a moustache.

This “birdman” shows how animals and humans were intermixed to create new figures. Hybrid figures like these made the patterns more powerful, so that the scabbard could better protect the sword it held.

In the case

1. Scabbard mount of gold. Date: early 500's
Egge søndre, Vestre Slidre, Innlandet (Oppland). C992

