

Hofmann · Kamp · Wemhoff (Hg.)  
Die Wikinger und das Fränkische Reich

# MITTELALTERSTUDIEN

des Instituts zur Interdisziplinären Erforschung des Mittelalters  
und seines Nachwirkens, Paderborn

Herausgegeben von  
KERSTIN P. HOFMANN, HERMANN KAMP  
und MATTHIAS WEMHOFF

Schriftleitung:  
NICOLA KARTHAUS

Band 29

Paderborn 2014

Kerstin P. Hofmann · Hermann Kamp ·  
Matthias Wemhoff (Hg.)

# Die Wikinger und das Fränkische Reich

Identitäten zwischen  
Konfrontation und Annäherung

unter Mitarbeit von Nicola Karthaus

Wilhelm Fink

Gedruckt mit Unterstützung des Exzellenzclusters 264 „Topoi“.



Umschlagabbildung:  
Der große Runenstein König Harald Blauzahns in Jelling.  
Foto: Anne Pedersen.

#### Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek

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(Wilhelm Fink GmbH & Co. Verlags-KG, Jühenplatz 1, D-33098 Paderborn)

Internet: [www.fink.de](http://www.fink.de)

Satz: Thomas Eifler, Berlin  
Einbandgestaltung: Evelyn Ziegler, München  
Herstellung: Ferdinand Schöningh GmbH & Co. KG, Paderborn

ISBN 978-3-7705-5850-6

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## Norse Religion and Ritual Sites in Scandinavia in the 6th–11th Century

Over time the Norse mythology we know from the Old Norse Eddic poetry and the sagas has provided a framework for a fascinating picture of the Norse religion in the time before Christianity. The pre-Christian religion in the North in the Late Iron Age and Viking era, however, consists of much more than just myths and legends about the anthropomorphic figures of the period. In the time shortly before the beginning of our era there was probably a change in the religious convictions and activities of the people of the past. Names of Greek and Roman gods gradually begin to appear in various linguistic sources related to the religion of the Northern Iron Age. Religion changed slowly, and in the course of the Iron Age there was a change in the identity of the religion. In parallel with a growing influence from the classical Mediterranean area, mediated by among other things the expanding Roman Empire, the gods of the Late Iron Age and Viking era changed and took on the forms familiar from the legends.

Our knowledge of the cosmological and mythological beliefs of the Viking Era is based primarily on the written sources of the post-Viking Middle Ages, which describe the gods and heroes of the Vikings and the myths surrounding them. However, the picture we get from the Icelandic sagas and the Eddic poetry cannot by itself create a verifiable picture of the identity and activities of religion then. A credible account of the interplay that took place between the population then and the pre-Christian cult, and the underlying organizational structure, requires an analysis that encompasses not only the written remains, but in particular includes the now extensive archaeological source material that is accessible today.

### Archaeology and cult sites

In 1935–1942 the archaeologist Poul Nørlund conducted an excavation of the Viking era fortress Trelleborg in Zealand. Besides the well known fort, which was erected around the year 980/981, a number of older wells and features from the ninth and tenth century were also found (Figs. 1–2). In the wells entire skeletons of four children aged between 4 and 7 were found, as well as a skull from an adult man and several whole animal skeletons, ornaments and weapons, all of which can be dated to the Viking era.

Poul Nørlund considered that these sensational finds belonged to “a sacred sacrificial site”.<sup>1</sup> Despite this, the features are rarely mentioned in modern research,

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1 NØRLUND, Poul: Trelleborg (Nordiske Fortvikstranddsminde Bind 4/1), København 1948.

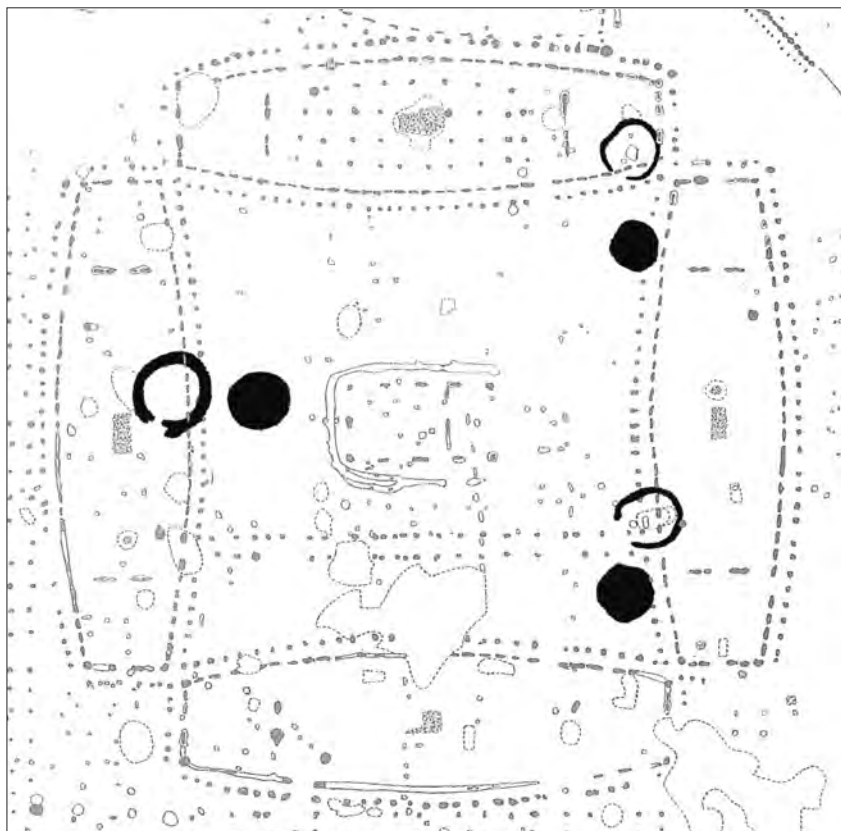


Fig. 1: Plan of one building quarter at the garrison Trelleborg in Denmark. On the plan is emphasized the ritual features from the 9th–10th century before the establishment of the military garrison in 980/981 AD. These comprise three wells with clearly associated ditch features. (After NØRLUND: Trelleborg [note 1], redrawn).

which for many years has more or less avoided discussing the potential identity of the finds from Trelleborg. One of the obstacles was that Nørlund's interpretation could not be directly supported by similar features, written sources or research.

However, in recent years a number of new archaeological excavations have made it possible to identify archaeological remains that can be related to rituals associated with the pre-Christian rites. It can now be demonstrated that the presumed cult sites varied. The central settlements were not associated with just one cultic or sacrificial site, but several in the form of cult buildings that were sited close to the magnates' residences, as well as several sacrificial sites in the surrounding landscape. The new knowledge now offers the potential for closer investigation, and today we can arrive at a better understanding of the pre-Christian religion's rites and their organization in the first millennium AD.

Since the beginning of the 1990s a growing number of Scandinavian researchers have been working on the theme in the light of the increasing number of archae-





Fig. 2: Trelleborg, Denmark. The sacrificial well B121 and the associated ring ditch during the excavation in 1937. The well contained skeletons of two 4-year-old children, three horses, two cows, four pigs, two sheep, a dog, a red deer and a peregrine falcon. Photo: Roar Skovmand/NMK.

ological excavations that have supplied finds and features shedding light on aspects of the pre-Christian religion.<sup>2</sup> Interdisciplinary work with these issues and relat-

- 2 ANDERSSON, Gunnar/SKYLLEBERG, Eva (red.): *Gestalter och gestaltningar – om tid, rum och händelser på Lunda* (Riksantikvarieämbetet Arkeologiska undersökningar Skrifter 72), Stockholm 2008; CHRISTENSEN, Tom: *Ældste Lejre?*, in: *Skalk* 2008/6, pp. 18–24; CHRISTENSEN, Tom: *Gudefigur*, in: *Skalk* 2010/2, pp. 3–10; EINARSSON, Bjarni F.: *Blóthouses in Viking Age Farmstead cult Practices. New Findings from South-Eastern Iceland*, in: *Acta Archaeologica* 79 (2008), pp. 145–184; HILDEBRANDT, Margareta: *Frösö kyrka på hednisk grund. Arkeologi i fjäll, skog och bygd, 2 järnålder – medeltid*, Uddevalla 1989, pp. 153–166; JEPPESEN, Jens/MADSEN, Hans-Jørgen: *Trækirke og stormandshal i Lisbjerg*, in: *Kuml* 1995–1996 (1997), pp. 149–171; JØRGENSEN, Lars: *En storgård fra vikingetid ved Tissø, Sjælland – en foreløbig præsentation*, in: LARSSON, Lars/HÅRDH, Birgitta (eds.): *Centrala Platser – Centrala Frågor* (*Acta Archaeologica Lundensia*, ser. in 8°, No. 28), Lund 1998, pp. 233–248; LARSSON, Lars/LENNATORP, Karl-Magnus: *The Enigmatic House*, in: LARSSON, Lars (ed.): *Continuity for Centuries. A ceremonial building and its context at Uppåkra, southern Sweden* (*Acta Archaeologica Lundensia*, ser. in 8°, No. 48), Lund 2004, pp. 3–48; MAGNELL, Ola/IREGREN, Elisabeth: *Veitstu hvé blóta skal? The Old Norse blót in the light of osteological remains from Frösö Church, Jämtland, Sweden* (*Current Swedish Archaeology* 18), Lund 2010, pp. 223–250; NIELSEN, Ann-Lili: *Pagan Cultic and Votive Acts at Borg. An Expression of the Central Significance of the Farmstead in the Late Iron Age*, in: ANDERSSON, Hans/CARELLI, Peter/ERSGÅRD, Lars (eds.): *Visions of the past. Trends and Traditions in Swedish Medieval Archaeology* (*Riksantikvarieämbetet. Arkeologiska undersökningar* 24 = *Lund Studies in Medieval Archaeology* 19), Lund 1997, pp. 373–392; NIELSEN, Ann-Lili: *Rituals and power. About a small building and animal bones from the late Iron Age*, in: ANDERS, Andrén/JENNBERT, Kristina/RAUDVERE, Catharina (eds.): *Old Norse religion in long-term perspectives. Origins, changes, and interactions. An International conference in Lund, Sweden, June 3–7, 2004* (*Vägar til midgård* 8), Lund 2006, pp. 243–247; NÄSSTRÖM, Britt-Mari: *Offerlunden under Frösö kyrka*, in: BRINK, Stefan (ed.): *Jämtlands kristnande* (Projektet Sveriges kristnande. Publikationer 4), Uppsala 1996, pp. 65–85; NILSSON, Lena: *Blóta, Sóa, Senda. Analys av djurben*, in: SÖDERBERG, Bengt (red.): *Järrestad. Huvudgård i centralbygd* (*Riksantikvarieämbetet Arkeologiska undersökningar Skrifter* 51), Lund 2003, pp. 287–308; SKYLLEBERG, Eva: *Gudar och glassbägare – järnåldersgården i Lunda*, in: ANDERSSON/SKYLLEBERG: *Gestalter och gestaltningar* (note 2), pp. 11–63; STENHOLM HÅLLANS, Ann-Marie: *Lilla Ullevi – en kultplats*, in: BRATT, Peter/GRÖNWALL, Richard (red.): *Makt, kult och plats. Högstatusmiljöer under den äldre järnåldern. Kultplatser* (*Arkeologi i Stockholms län* 5), Stockholm 2011, pp. 49–56; SÖDERBERG: *Järrestad* (note 2); SÖDERBERG, Bengt: *Järnålderens Järrestad. Bebyggelse, kronologi,*

ed social and religious aspects has mainly been conducted by Swedish researchers.<sup>3</sup> Today the view that pre-Christian Norse religion was a confessional religion based on specific texts has been abandoned. In the preserved written sources the pre-Christian religion is called “forn siðr”, which can be translated as “the customs of older times”. With this expression the Norse religion already appears far more differentiated than the later Christian religion. The pre-Christian religion involved obvious possibilities for geographical and social differences, as well as variations in ritual practice, expression and mental content. Already at this point, as the archaeological traces are appearing in larger numbers, we can note variations in both time and place. Not least, the growing archaeological find material means that we are beginning to be able to identify the traces of the pre-Christian rites.

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- tolkningsperspektiv, in: *ibid.*, pp. 109–174; SÖDERBERG, Bengt: Aristokratisk rum och gränsöverskridande. Järrestad och sydöstra Skåne mellan region och rike 600–1100 (Riksantikvarieämbetet Arkeologiska undersökningar Skrifter 62), Lund 2005; ZACHRISSON, Torun: The Holiness of Helgö, in: CLARKE, Helen/LAMM, Kristina (eds.): *Excavations at Helgö*, vol. 16: Exotic and Sacral Finds from Helgö, Stockholm 2004, pp. 143–175; ZACHRISSON, Torun: Helgö – mer än ett vi, in: BRATT, Peter/GRÖNWALL, Richard (red.): *Makt, kult och plats. Högstatusmiljöer under den äldre järnåldern* (Arkeologi i Stockholms län 5), Stockholm 2011, pp. 79–88; ÅQVIST, Cecilia: Hall och harg. Det rituella rummet, in: ENGDALH, Kerstin/KALIFF, Anders (eds.): *Religion från stenåldar till medeltid*. Artiklar baserade på Religionsarkeologiska nätverksgruppens konferens på Lövsdabruk den 1–3 december 1995 (Riksantikvarieämbetet Arkeologiska undersökningar Skrifter 19), Linköping 1996, pp. 105–120.
- 3 ANDRÉN, Anders: Platsernas betydelse. Norrön ritual och kultplatskontinuitet, in: JENNBERT, Kristina/ANDRÉN, Anders/RAUDVERE, Catharina (eds.): *Plats och Praxis. Studier av nordisk förkristen ritual* (Vägar til midgård 2), Lund 2002, pp. 299–342; GRÄSLUND, Anne-Sofie: The material culture of Old Norse religion, in: BRINK, Stefan (ed.) in collaboration with Neil PRICE: *The Viking World*, Oxon 2008, pp. 249–256; HEDEAGER, Lotte: Iron Age myth and materiality. An Archaeology of Scandinavia AD 400–1000, Oxon 2011; HULTGÅRD, Anders: The religion of the Vikings, in: BRINK: *Viking World* (note 3), pp. 212–218; JØRGENSEN, Lars: Pre-Christian cult at aristocratic residences and settlement complexes in southern Scandinavia in the 3rd–10th centuries AD, in: VON FREEDEN, Uta/FRIESINGER, Herwig/WAMERS, Egon (eds.): *Glaube, Kult und Herrschaft. Phänomene des Religiösen im 1. Jahrtausend n. Chr. in Mittel- und Nordeuropa*. Akten des 59. Internationalen Sachsensymposiums und der Grundprobleme der frühgeschichtlichen Entwicklung im Mitteldonauraum (Kolloquien zur Vor- und Frühgeschichte 12), Frankfurt a. M. 2009, pp. 329–354; JØRGENSEN, Lars/GRÖNNOW, Bjarne/ARNEBORG, Jette/GULLØV, Hans Christian: At ordne min verden – billeder af inuits og nordboernes mentale landskaber gennem 4500 år., in: AKHØJ NIELSEN, Marita (red.): *Grønlands fascinationskraft. Fortællinger om polarforskningen*. Et festskrift til Hendes Majestæt Dronning Margrethe II ved 40-års-regeringsjubilæet 2012 (Det Kongelige Danske Videnskaberne Selskab), Viborg 2012, pp. 69–83; SUNDQVIST, Olof: Uppsala och Asgård. Makt, offer och kosmos i forntida Skandinavien, in: ANDRÉN, Anders/JENNBERT, Kristina/RAUDVERE, Catharina (eds.): *Ordning mot kaos – studier av nordisk förkristen kosmologi* (Vägar til midgård 4), Lund 2004, pp. 145–179; SUNDQVIST, Olof: The universe of myths – On the powers and their dwellings, in: ANDRÉN, Anders/CARELLI, Peter (eds.): *Odin’s Eye – Between people and powers in the pre-Christian North* (Skrifter. Stadshistoriska avdelningen, Dunkers kulturhus 6), Jälsingborg 2006, pp. 267–273; SUNDQVIST, Olof: *Cult Leaders, rulers and religion*, in: BRINK: *Viking World* (note 3), pp. 223–226; VIKSTRAND, Per: Gudarnas platser. Förkristna sakrala ortsnamn i Mälardalskapen (Acta Academiae Regiae Gustavi Adolphi 77 = Studier till en svensk ortsnamsatlas 17), Uppsala 2001; VIKSTRAND, Per: Jämtland mellan Frö och Kristus, in: BRINK: *Jämtlands kristnande* (note 2), pp. 87–106; VIKSTRAND, Per: Berget, lunden och åkern. Om sakrala och kosmologiska landskab ur ortsnamns perspektiv, in: ANDRÉN/JENNBERT/RAUDVERE: *Ordning mot kaos* (note 3), pp. 317–341.

## The pre-Christian rites

*niu haborumR, niu hangistumR HapuwulfR gafj[ar] ...  
With nine bucks [and] nine stallions, HapuwulfR (Höðulfr) gave fruitful year ...*

The runic text, which is probably from the seventh century, forms the introduction to a longer inscription on the Swedish rune stone from Stentofthen in Blekinge.<sup>4</sup> The text fragment, which comprises the first three lines on the rune stone, is interpreted today as a so-called *blot* inscription, where the erector of the stone, HapuwulfR, gives nine bucks and nine stallions as a gift to the gods to ensure a good harvest.<sup>5</sup> *Blot* was the Old Norse word for sacrifice/sacrificial rite, and the expression could encompass various actions in the pre-Christian religion. Unfortunately the medieval sources only sporadically mention the actions, forms and functions of the various rites. In contrast, the sources – and not least the researchers – have to a far greater extent dealt with the Norse myths, since the medieval literature elucidates these aspects far better. If we sum up the information in the medieval sources, they seem to involve indications of the existence of three central rites in the Norse, pre-Christian religion: the *gift offering*, the *communion offering* and the *propitiatory offering*.<sup>6</sup> Today archaeology is well on its way to fleshing out these rites with new archaeological finds.

We see probably the *gift offering* represented in the introductory lines on the rune stone from Stentofthen in Blekinge, where the interpretation is underscored by the use in the text of the Old Norse “*gaf*” = gave. The gift offering was mainly used in connection with the seasonal or calendar rites where offerings were made to ensure a good harvest and peace – “*blóta til árs ok friðjar*” or as sacrifices for the crops – “*blóta til groðrar*”.<sup>7</sup> In the inscription on the stone from Stentofthen, HapuwulfR gave or sacrificed a number of animals to achieve a good yield of crops. The task of archaeology is now to document this rite. The ultimate gift offering is described in the 11th century by the German historian Thietmar of Merseburg, who mentions that the Danes had a centre at Lejre in Zealand, where they gathered every nine years and sacrificed 99 humans, horses, dogs and chickens etc. to the gods.<sup>8</sup>

The *communion offering* was probably the most common sacrifice in the Scandinavian cult. It involved among other things *blot* and ceremonial meals where people shared their meal with the god or gods in collective feasts. The offering belongs to the calendar rites with sacrifices of large animals, ritual meals and liba-

4 SANTESSON, Lillemor: Eine Blutopferinschrift aus dem südschwedischen Blekinge. Eine Neudeutung der einleitenden Zeilen des Stentoftener Steines, in: FMASt 27 (1993), pp. 241–252, pp. 248ff.

5 Ibid., passim; NÄSSTRÖM, Britt-Mari: Blot. Tro och offer i det förkristna Norden, Stockholm 2002, p. 33.

6 NÄSSTRÖM: Blot (note 5), pp. 25ff.

7 Ibid., p. 37.

8 THIETMAR VON MERSEBURG: Chronik, ed. von Robert HOLTZMANN (MGH SS rer. Germ. n. s. 9), Berlin 1955 (übersetzt nach der Freiherr vom Stein-Gedächtnisausgabe 9, Darmstadt 1957).

tions in the form of ritual beer drinking and then offerings of liquids/beer to the gods. The libation offering is described in the marginal remarks on Adam of Bremen's account of the nine days of feasting in connection with the great nine-yearly *blot* in Uppsala. Judging from the written sources, these sacrificial meals may have left distinct archaeological find material in the form of among others things food remains and possible traces of the great beer production.

*The propitiatory offering* is the third sacrificial type mentioned in the written sources. It often takes the form of a great, dramatic offering including human sacrifices, for example when the relations between man and the gods are to be restored. According to the *Ynglinga saga*, for example, the Swedish King Domald, one of the first mythical kings of the *Yngling* line, was sacrificed to re-establish contact with the gods.

### The elite and religion

Today we have increasing opportunities for archaeological identification of the pre-Christian rites in the various accounts given by the written sources. Against the background of new archaeological investigations that relate the magnates' residences to the religious activities, it is possible to build an interpretative model that provides a more specific account of the function of the elite and the organization of the pre-Christian cult. Such an elucidation takes its point of departure in the magnates' residences as well as the settlement features that in all likelihood belonged to people from the absolute elite. The reason for this is not a theory that the elite alone practiced the cult, but rather that the primary archaeological sources in the form of ritual objects, cult buildings and sacrificial complexes are mainly associated with the magnates' residences. These large settlement complexes very likely functioned as supraregional cult centres to which the rest of the population came at certain periods. At several sites one sees an accumulation of a large number of pit-houses that may well have functioned as temporary dwellings for the population of an area when they met at the site, for example during the large religious gatherings in connection with the seasonal *blot* feasts.<sup>9</sup> Today a number of intriguing new archaeological sites give us new insights into the rites and activities that took place in connection with the great religious feasts in the 6th–11th centuries in the North.

Today the finds show that the *hof* and *hörgr* of the Norse Eddic poetry were integrated into the building structure of the elite residences as early as the third century AD.<sup>10</sup> Special enclosed areas around presumed cult buildings in connection with central hall buildings have been identified at several southern Scandinavian

9 NØRGÅRD JØRGENSEN, Anne/JØRGENSEN, Lars/GEBAUER THOMSEN, Lone: Assembly Sites for Cult, Markets, Jurisdiction and Social Relations Historic-ethnological analogy between North Scandinavian church towns, Old Norse assembly sites and pit house sites of the Late Iron Age and Viking Period, in: BOYE, Linda et al. (red.): *Arkæologi i Slesvig/Archäologie in Schleswig*. Sonderband "Det 61. Internationale Sachsensymposium 2010", Haderslev, Danmark, Neumünster 2011, pp. 95–112.

10 JØRGENSEN: Pre-Christian cult (note 3), pp. 349f.

magnates' residences. This is the case for example at the large residence at Järrestad in Scania,<sup>11</sup> Lisbjerg,<sup>12</sup> Lejre Kongemarken<sup>13</sup> and Erritsø in Jutland.<sup>14</sup> To these we can add a number of settlements where several smaller buildings have been noted, succeeding one another and directly connected with the prestigious hall. This has been demonstrated at the residence in Lejre,<sup>15</sup> at Borg in Västmannland<sup>16</sup> and at the Swedish site at Lunda in Sörmland.<sup>17</sup> The sites also have many other structures and features which can very probably be associated with activities and actions related to the pre-Christian religion. In the following an overview with some of the sites will be presented, covering a number of the most notable sites in Scandinavia.

### Elite residences and cult activities

Aristocratic sites that were founded in the 6th–7th century make up a new and second generation of elite residences that succeed the first generation from the Early Iron Age such as Gudme, Uppåkra and Helgö.<sup>18</sup> So far we are not able to demonstrate any sites of the new type of residences such as Tissø and Lejre with such an early dating in West Denmark. The West Danish aristocratic sites such as Lisbjerg and Jelling seem to have been established at the earliest in the eighth or more probably in the ninth century. However, new excavations can change this odd picture. But this clear regional difference between East and West Denmark may also be due to fundamental differences in the ownership of land and other social aspects. Compared with the first-generation sites, the structure and organization have changed in the later places. The many permanent farms with craft activities found at Gudme and on Helgö do not appear at these places, where they seem to have been superseded by seasonal market places. Only at the old sites from the first generation does the Late Roman organizational picture continue with a large residence surrounded by sedentary farms with a combination of craft production and farming.

### *Lunda, Sweden (4th–7th cent.)*

The extremely interesting Swedish settlement complex from Lunda in Södermanland reflects the fine find situation in central Sweden, where the prehistoric set-

11 SÖDERBERG: Järnålderens Järrestad (note 2); SÖDERBERG: Aristokratisk rum (note 2).

12 JEPPESEN, Jens: Stormandsgården ved Lisbjerg kirke, in: Kuml 2004, pp. 161–180.

13 CHRISTENSEN: Gudefigur (note 2).

14 CHRISTENSEN, Mohr Peter: Erritsø, in: Skalk 2009/4, pp. 9–15.

15 CHRISTENSEN, Tom: Lejre – syn og sagn, Roskilde 1991; CHRISTENSEN, Tom: Hallen i Lejre, in: CALLMER, Johann/ROSENGREN, Erik (eds.): ...Gick Grendel att söka det höga huset... Arkeologiska källor till aristokratiska miljöer i Skandinavien under yngre järnålder. Seminarium Falkenberg 1995, Halmstad 1997, pp. 47–54; JØRGENSEN: En storgård fra vikingetid (note 2).

16 NIELSEN: Pagan Cultic (note 2); NIELSEN: Rituals and power (note 2).

17 ANDERSSON/SKYLLBERG: Gestalter och gestaltningar (note 2).

18 Cf. JØRGENSEN, Lars: Pre-Christian cult (note 3).



lements can be found in almost fossilized condition without later disturbances. The Lunda settlement shows continuity back to the 4th–5th century,<sup>19</sup> but its most interesting period is the 6th–7th century, when it clearly functioned as an elite residence. Lunda probably had the same function in the 4th–5th century, but not with the same imposing architecture. In the course of the 8th–9th century the place lost its special status, and finds from the later periods are very scarce. Lunda is a fine example of the link between an elite residence and its related ritual sacrificial site.

The residence was dominated in the 6th–7th century by a hall c. 50 m long sited on a large stone-built terrace (Fig. 3). At the western end of the hall a concentration of quern stones has been found, and the finds from the building indicate that it was a residence with related functions. Immediately south of the main building a

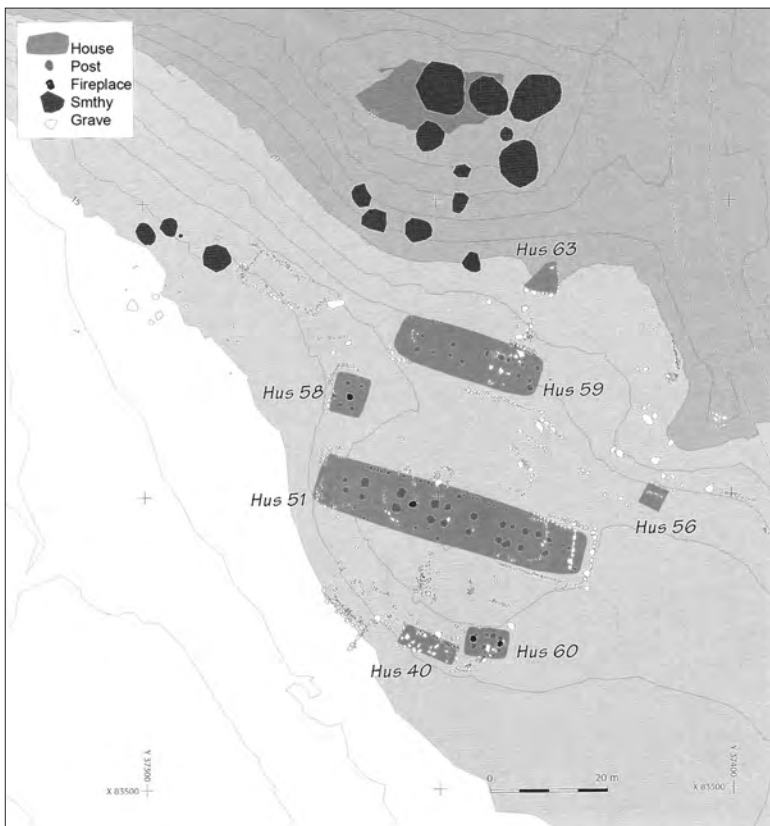


Fig. 3: Lunda, Södermanland in Sweden. The residence in the 6th century is dominated by the large main building placed on a stone terrace. Just south of the house is the feast hall situated on another stone terrace. Marked are the find spot for the figurines A–C shown in Fig. 4. (After ANDERSSON/SKYLLBERG: *Gestalter och gestaltningar* [note 2]).

19 ANDERSSON/SKYLLBERG: *Gestalter och gestaltningar* (note 2).

smaller building stood on a terrace with stone foundations. The bulk of the glass fragments found at the settlement area come from this terrace. There is much to indicate that there was a smaller building reserved for libation rituals here. The relations between the two buildings in Lunda greatly resemble the situations at Gudme and Helgö, where the great main building also probably functioned as a residence, while the side buildings housed a variety of rituals. Among the evidence of ritual aspects at Lunda we should also count three small male figures from the fifth century found in the area by the two buildings (Fig. 4). Two of them were found in connection with a small building just by the north wall of the large residence, while the third figure comes from a stone paving between the hall and the ritual building south of it. Lunda's representative and ritual functions are also emphasized by a collection of very large cooking pits in the area north of the hall. Large quantities of food must have been prepared there for use in connection with the ritual meals and *blot* feasts.

Just over 100 metres west of the large farm an open sacrificial site laid out on a 140 m long, 10 m high rock ridge was investigated.<sup>20</sup> More than 50 stone pavings and stone-reinforced terraces had been built up on the ridge (Fig. 5). Culture



Fig. 4: Three small figurines A–C of gilded bronze and gold from probably the 5th century at Lunda. (After ANDERSSON/SKYLBERG: *Gestalter och gestaltningar* [note 2]).



Fig. 5: Part of the open air ritual site at Lunda, Sweden. More than 50 stone settings were constructed during the ritual use of the site. (After ANDERSSON/SKYLBERG: *Gestalter och gestaltningar* [note 2]).

layers, fireplaces, metal objects, beads, pottery, fired clay, lumps of resin and burnt human and animal bones were found by and among these features. The highly varied features of the site and the composition of the finds suggest that it was probably used in connection with a wide range of rituals. Among the finds one notes espe-

20 ANDERSSON, Gunnar: *Pärlor för svin – den heliga lunden och rituel praktik i Lunda*, in: ANDERSSON/SKYLBERG: *Gestalter och gestaltningar* (note 2), pp. 65–129, pp. 65ff.

cially many glass beads, arrowheads, knives and other cutting implements that had been deposited among the many features of the site. These do not represent a single deposition, but continuous activity and small depositions over a long span of years. The carbon-14 datings point to a very long-lasting use of the ritual site – from 500 BC to 1500 AD.

The find picture at the site has many similarities to that of the open sacrificial site at Helgö and a new ritual site from the 8th–10th century at the settlement complex at Tissø in Denmark (see below). A wide range of small objects is mixed with remains of ritual meals. The animal bones from Lunda, for example, show a marked predominance of pig, even in the form of suckling pigs; an indication that a high-status environment was associated with the use of the site. However, among the bone material from the ritual meals human bone material also appears in the form of skull fragments.<sup>21</sup> Human bones have also been identified in connection with the ritual site investigated at Tissø (see below). The appearance of human bones at clear ritual sites from the 6th–10th century such as Trelleborg, Lunda and Tissø shows that human sacrifices were part of the religious world in the Late Iron Age and Viking Era. Several other sites with human sacrifices from the same period are also on their way in both Denmark and Sweden.

*Tissø, Denmark (6th–11th cent.)*

The best elucidated of the second-generation complexes is the site at Lake Tissø in western Zealand.<sup>22</sup> The settlement is situated on the west bank of the lake at a distance of some seven kilometres from the coast. The total settlement area is about 50 hectares. Over the past 100 years there have been finds of sacrificed weapons, jewellery and tools from the 6th–11th century at the bottom of Lake Tissø. The bulk of the objects are swords, axes and lances from the Viking Age. At the present bridge over Halleby River.

In its lifetime of more than 300 years the later residence of course underwent many changes and we can trace its development in size, structure and building types through four main phases. The first two main phases 1–2, which cover the 8th–9th century, show a complex that gradually grows in size, both in overall area and in the number of buildings (Fig. 6). A monumental hall of c. 350 m<sup>2</sup> forms the centre of the complex. In the eastern part of the hall shards from drinking-glasses have been found as well as a tuning-peg for a lyre, a Frisian *sceatta* in mint condition from the late seventh century and a few other metal objects. A large number of animal bones include those of 'aristocratic' birds like osprey and spoonbill. The western half of

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., pp. 80f.

<sup>22</sup> JØRGENSEN, Lars: Manor and Market at Lake Tissø in the Sixth to Eleventh centuries: The Danish 'Productive' Sites, in: PESTELL, Tim/ULMSCHNEIDER, Katharina (eds.): Markets in Early Medieval Europe. Trading and 'Productive' Sites, 650–850, Bollington 2003, pp. 175–207; JØRGENSEN, Lars: Tissø, in: RGA, vol. 20 (2005), pp. 619–624; JØRGENSEN, Lars: Manor, cult and market at Lake Tissø, in: BRINK: Viking World (note 3), pp. 77–82; JØRGENSEN: Pre-Christian cult (note 3).



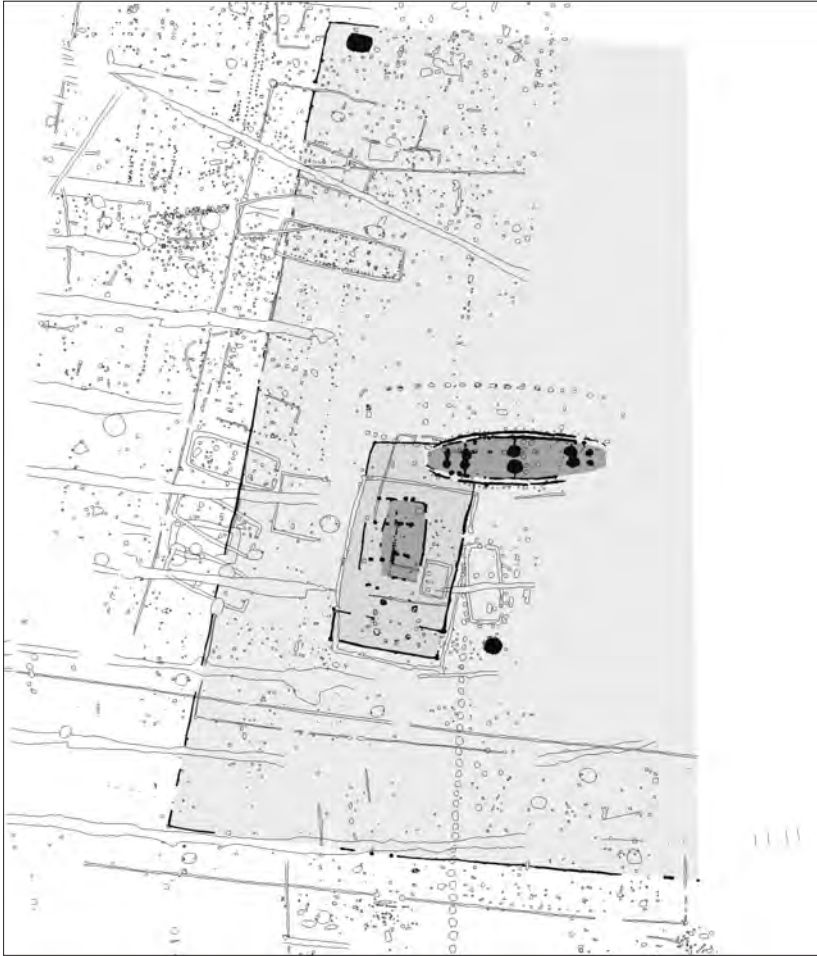


Fig. 6: Tissø, Denmark. The elite residence at Fugledegård in Phase 2, primarily from the eighth and possible the earliest ninth century. The residence area is *c.* 15.000 m<sup>2</sup>, parts of which towards the east have been dug away by modern gravel quarrying. In the south fences one sees a gate *c.* 4 m wide. A number of pit-houses and a forge in the north are the only other buildings apart from the hall and the small fenced-in cult building. The residence is dominated by features related to pre-Christian cult activity, and the absence of utility buildings is conspicuous. The pit-houses contain an inventory of finds that suggests that they also had more ritual functions.

the hall, on the other hand, is largely devoid of finds except for among other things fragments of a dish of copper alloy. This highly characteristic find distribution shows that the prestigious activities such as banquets and ritual meals took place in the eastern part, while the western part was probably a private area. Associated with the hall is a smaller enclosed area, which underwent major rebuilding after it was established. Throughout the process a smallish building was inside the enclosure.

The combination of hall and enclosure can be traced through Phases 1–3, while a varying number of buildings can be seen in the other residence area.

Associated with the hall area are a number of features whose purpose should probably be viewed in connection with ritual functions related to the hall and the special enclosure. Immediately North West of the hall lay a large heap of several cubic metres of stones. There were no finds among the stones, and no traces of charcoal or soot to suggest cooking stones. Similar mainly sterile heaps of fire-brittle stones have been noted at the magnates' residences in Lejre and Järrestad in southern Sweden. Another interesting area was found in the northernmost part of the residential complex, where there was a pit-house. East of this was the forge of the complex, and beside this thick deposits were found with culture layers containing animal bones, charcoal and other objects, for example new strike-a-lights, sickles and other tools. Clearly this is no ordinary refuse, and the deposits seem to be the result of deliberate deposition. Looking at the appearance of the large residence in Phase 2, it is striking that the whole area of the complex is full of features and buildings, which on the whole appear to have been connected with pre-Christian rituals. There seems not to be any distinct utility buildings, unless they lay in the eastern part, which has been dug away. Even the three pit-houses seem to have functioned as ritual features, judging from their distinctive find inventory. There is every indication that the complex did not function as a production unit, but that the resources were brought to the complex.

In the later Phases 3–4 from the 10th–11th century the complex reached its peak with a croft area of at least 25,000 m<sup>2</sup>. A new and considerably larger hall succeeded the older one (Fig. 7). The floor area was probably *c.* 500 m<sup>2</sup>. In its predecessor five pairs of stout posts formed the roof-bearing structure of the building, but the roof-bearing construction was not so deeply embedded in the new building. Instead a heavy wall construction can be seen in the form huge post holes for slanting supporting posts. The missing, smaller roof carrying post was probably founded in the artificial house terrace that the house clearly had been placed on. This was heavily damaged by later cultivation. The actual course of the wall and doorposts is entirely missing, except for a pair of gable posts. This might indicate that both the walls and the roof-bearing posts had foundation stones that have been ploughed away today. Quantities of large stones were found lying in the gravel pit immediately east of the hall, and these had been removed from this area in connection with ploughing. They may well have been the foundation stones of the house.

The monumental hall was the representative public face of the magnate's residence, while the related special area with the single building undoubtedly had a special function. A phosphate analysis conducted before the excavation showed a higher concentration in this very area, indicating ploughed-up bone material. Within the residential area many amulets and items of jewellery were found with motifs from Norse mythology: Thor's hammers, pendants with valkyries and costume pins with possible Odin images. There are relatively few finds from the area, which suggests a low level of activity as far as the handling of objects is concerned. The same is true of the halls. The buildings are moreover better and more solidly

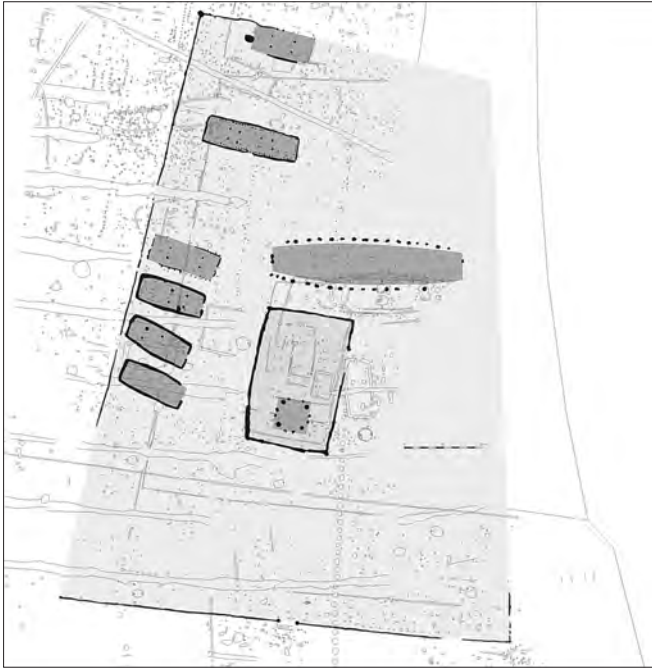


Fig. 7: Tissø, Denmark. The residence in Phase 3, probably late 9th early 10th century, is very different from the previous phase 2. Many more buildings have been added in several tempi and the complex function as a centre of power is evident. The 9th and 10th centuries also represents the height in the activity level at the large settlement complex.

constructed than the presumed utility and residential buildings of the complex. In the two oldest phases there was also direct access from the west end of the halls to the special area. Only in Phase 3 was the fenced-in area separated from the hall.

If we put the elements together, the picture emerges of a magnate's residential complex surrounded by a pre-Christian ritual landscape (Fig. 8). Within a distance



Fig. 8: The ritual landscape around the presumed royal building complex from the 6th–11th century at Tissø. Six areas with ritual functions from the Viking Period have been identified so far. 1: The residence with cult building and ritual features. 2: Weapon and jewellery offerings in Lake Tissø. 3: An open ritual site with sacrifices and traces of meals. 4: Offerings of a tool chest and sword in Halleby river. 5: A well with animal offerings in the market area. 6: Horse sacrifices in the bog area Maderne. Photo: Per Poulsen/NMK.

of about 1 km, at conspicuous points in the landscape, six sites have so far been demonstrated, all involving a variety of ritual functions during the Viking Era. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in the lake itself, whose name derives from the god Tir/Tyr, swords, lances, axes and ornaments, mainly from the Viking Era, have been found. The distribution of finds immediately below the actual residential area suggests that these are objects that were sacrificed individually. In the small river Halleby Å, which demarcates the 50 hectare settlement area towards the south, a tool chest has been found containing among other things a template for casket mountings from the tenth century and a few swords. Towards the west, the settlement is demarcated by the bog area Maderne, where numerous horse bones, probably from sacrifices, have been found. A number of human skeletons in the same area seem so far to belong to sacrifices from the Early Iron Age.

On a hilltop a few hundred metres west of the actual residence, there is a system of pits from which clay was extracted for the erection of the monumental buildings of the residence. In the same area, clear traces of ritual meals in the form of bone refuse and fire-brittle stones have been found mixed with deposited silver objects, coins, ornaments and glass beads from the 8th–10th centuries, indicating that the large construction works were accompanied by several kinds of rituals – both gift offerings and ritual meals. The finds also include a few human bones dated c. 700 AD – contemporaneous with the building of the first residence at the foot of the hill.

Finally, in the related market-place area north of Halleby Å, a two-metre deep well was investigated whose content, especially of skulls and limb bones from several animals – horses, bulls, cows, pigs, dogs and goats – indicates a function as a sacrificial site related to ritual meals in the 9th–10th century (Fig. 9). A clear stratigraphy, where depositions of animal parts are separated by gyttja deposits from quiet periods without activity, shows that the sacrifices took place over a long period starting in the early ninth century. The sacrificial layers of the well were probably sealed in the tenth century with a large boulder weighing 3–400 kg, which was



Fig. 9: Tisso, Denmark. Profile section through the possible ritual well A1182 in the market area from the 8th–10th century. The finds from the sequence of depositions consists primarily of skulls and extremities from 5 horses, 2 dogs, 2 bulls, 1 ram and 2–3 cows. To this shall be added typical consumption waste such as bones from sheep and pig. The well was used in the 9th and 10th century. Photo: Anne Birgitte Gotfredsen/NMK.

placed on top of the well. The mould fragments from tortoise brooches in the top layers shows that this sealing was probably done in the tenth century.

Today the sites at Tissø are almost all nameless, but ritual sites of a similar character in the rest of Scandinavia show that they often had sacral toponyms appropriate to their function.<sup>23</sup> The sites at Tissø testify to a very deliberate organization of the landscape, and their various characters are a clear indication that there were differences in their ritual functions: offerings to a variety of gods, temporal/seasonal differences in the rituals etc. The picture from Tissø illustrates how the ritual landscape in the close surrounding area of an elite residence was structured. More or less all characteristic places in the landscape were charged with a psychological significance which meant that a number of rituals were associated with them. The density of the sites shows that the Vikings had superimposed their cosmological understanding on the surrounding environment. The people of the Viking Age had in other words organized these 'mental' landscapes, where their religious world-picture was given highly physical and concrete expression. Tissø offers us unique insights into the complexity of these landscapes at the local level. The existence of similar organized landscapes, but of a far greater geographical extent, is shown to us by the picture that emerges from the almost 'fossilized' place-name environments. Especially in the Swedish landscapes.<sup>24</sup>

#### *Järrestad, Sweden (6th–11th cent.)*

Järrestad in Scania is in many ways a parallel to the Tissø complex in Denmark. Like many of the eastern Scandinavian sites belonging to the second generation of the aristocratic places, the magnate's residence at Järrestad was established in the sixth century.<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately the site was investigated in connection with road building, and this meant that only the actual course of the road was excavated. It was therefore only the central hall area that was investigated, and the overall size and structural development of the complex is unfortunately unknown. However, the excavation of the hall area has resulted in very interesting finds and a picture of development very like the one from Tissø. Järrestad was established in the last part of the sixth century and abandoned some way into the eleventh century. As at the Tissø complex one can trace the development of Järrestad through several phases, but because of the absence of preserved fencing the relative chronological development of the complex is only well elucidated by the stratigraphy (Fig. 10). Despite the great question marks surrounding the structural development, there is much to suggest that Järrestad had a development like that of Tissø.

23 VIKSTRAND: Berget, lunden och åkern (note 3).

24 VIKSTRAND, Per: Jämtland mellan Frö och Kristus, in: BRINK, Stefan (red.): Jämtlands kristnande (Projektets Sveriges kristnande 4), Uppsala 1996, pp. 87–106; VIKSTRAND: Gudamas platser (note 3); BRINK: Viking World (note 3).

25 SÖDERBERG: Järrestad (note 2); SÖDERBERG: Aristokratisk rum (note 2).



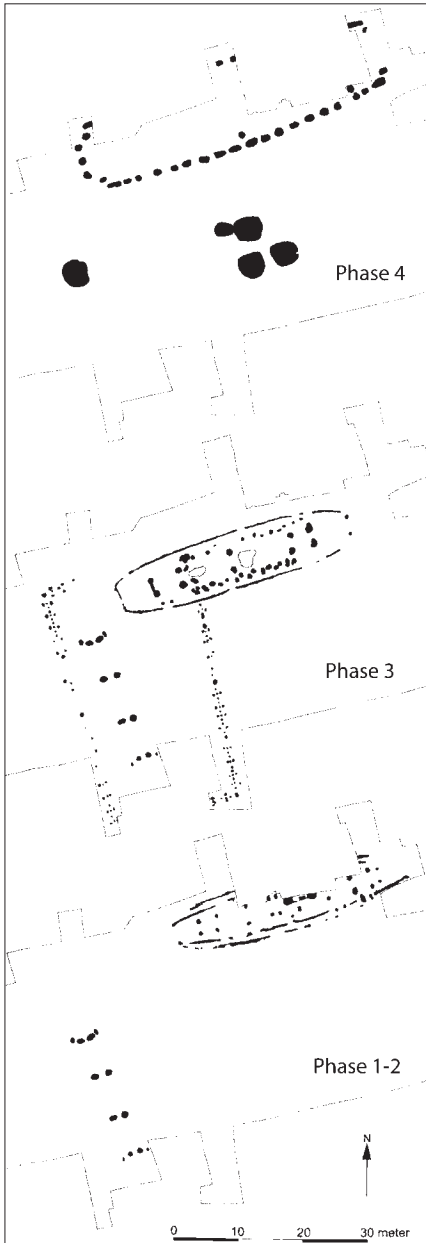


Fig. 10: Järrestad, Sweden. Plan of the development of the residence area in four main phases. The structure of the residence area is very similar to that of Tissø, with the hall and the related enclosure with a smaller building. (After SÖDERBERG: Aristokratisk rum [note 2]).

However, in this context it is in fact the well-documented hall area that is important. In Järrestad Phase 2 we see an enclosed special area built together with the hall walls in the same way as in Tissø Phase 1–2. Within the enclosure there is a smaller but solidly constructed building. In one of the post-holes in the building an offering of tools had been deposited. As at Tissø we also see higher phosphate levels in and immediately around this enclosure. About 30 metres east of the hall, in a wet depression, an area was investigated where up to 60 m<sup>3</sup> of fire-brittle stones had been deposited. As at Tissø and Lejre, there were hardly any finds in the striking stone layers. On the other hand there were a number of wells in same area that could be dated to the 9th–10th century. One of the wells was actually a succession of wells established in the same place. The finds in the wells included a considerably quantity of animal bones (horse, cattle, sheep and pig). There were a markedly higher percentage of horse skulls in particular.<sup>26</sup> The animal bones found have been interpreted as sacrifices, and Järrestad is therefore one of the first places where possible sacrificial wells have been found since the excavation of the wells at Trelleborg. At Järrestad the many skulls and limb-bones have been seen as indicating that these parts were separated out for sacrifice in connection with the ritual *blót* meals. The central hall area at Järrestad thus exhibits several of the elements and cultic features demonstrated at the other elite residence complexes: an enclosed cult area, sacrificial wells and heaps of fire-brittle stones.

<sup>26</sup> NILSSON: Blóta, Söa, Senda (note 2), pp. 287ff.

### Other open-air ritual sites

Today we know a number of ritual sites in Scandinavia which cannot be directly identified as parts of settlements, for example the cult buildings at the magnates' residences from Tissø, Lejre and Järrestad. On the face of it they seem to be sited in the open landscape, but probably they are sites of the same character as the sacrificial grove at Lunda and the ritual site in connection with the clay extraction area at the Tissø complex. They are perhaps ritual sites placed in the open landscape, but associated with a high-status settlement nearby. The character of the features and the quality of the finds indicate that they may not represent private cult sites, but should more likely be viewed in connection with as yet unlocalized elite residences. The picture of the sites in the ritual landscape around the Tissø complex and the clear relationship between residence and sacrificial site in Lunda give us models for understanding the still context less ritual sites.

### *Lilla Ullevi, Sweden*

One of the new, exciting finds of ritual sites in Sweden was investigated in 2007 at Lilla Ullevi in Uppland just north of Stockholm.<sup>27</sup> 'Ullevi' is a classic theophoric toponym with its origin in the Norse religion. The name actually means 'the sacred place of the god Ull'. Ull is rarely mentioned in the Norse sources. However, the geographical distribution of the Norse place-names indicates that he was primarily a god who was spread throughout eastern Scandinavia. A similarly limited geographical distribution applies for example to the concentration of Tyr/Tir toponyms in southern Scandinavia.

The excavation at Lilla Ullevi revealed traces from various periods. The oldest features consisted of a large number of fireplace pits for cooking from the Pre-Roman and Roman Iron Age. These features might indicate that in this period the site functioned as a gathering place where many people came in certain periods. Quite unique, though, are a number of special features and finds from the 7th–8th century. The complex is dominated by a large stone platform about 165 m<sup>2</sup> in area with a couple of extensions at the sides (Fig. 11). The form of the construction greatly resembles the gable of a large hall building, and between the two wall-like extensions there are also two pairs of posts. The excavators believe that these may have borne a wooden construction.<sup>28</sup> Both on and around the platform, find-bearing culture layers show that activities took place in connection with the complex. The area with the large stone platform is fenced in by rows of posts and pits which demarcate an area of c. 2000 m<sup>2</sup>. Within this area and close to the platform 4–5 post groups have been noted, consisting of three closely spaced posts that do not

<sup>27</sup> STENHOLM: Lilla Ullevi (note 2).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp. 51f.



Fig. 11: Lilla Ullevi, Uppland in Sweden. Aerial photo of the ritual site with the house shaped stone platform during excavation. Photo © 2007 Hawkeye.

form part of the building constructions, but which were probably in use in connection with rituals at the platform.

The finds from the complex comprise objects from the 7th–8th century, and mainly consist of more than 65 amulet rings that were found both on and around the stone platform. In addition there are a few fine costume mounts, arrow and lance heads, as well as fragments of among other things presumed *seiðr* or *völva* staffs/wands; a body of material that seems to indicate that the elite participated in rites at the site. The number of animal bones, on the other hand, was more modest, and the faunal material appears to include no noteworthy elements. The ritual complex was sealed in the eighth century by covering it with a sand layer up to one metre thick. This action thus seems to indicate a very deliberate ‘closing-down’ of the ritual complex.

### *Lærkefryd, Denmark*

In the 1990s metal detector reconnaissance were carried out during a small excavation at the site Lærkefryd near the village of Jørlunde in north-eastern Zealand.<sup>29</sup> As early as 1814, gold bracteates from the fifth century had been found there, and in the bog Rappendam Bog just a few hundred metres from Lærkefryd many wagon wheels and parts had been found earlier, as well as a human skeleton and animal bones from the Late Pre-Roman Iron Age and the Early Roman Iron Age. The site

29 SØRENSEN, Søren A.: Metal detector finds from Lærkefryd, Zealand. Votive offerings from the Roman Iron Age – Viking Period, in: *Journal of Danish Archaeology* 14 (2006), pp. 179–186.



at Lærkefryd seems to have succeeded the sacrificial site in Rappendam Mose, and lies on a hillside. When the gold bracteates were found, a *c.* 30 cm thick black culture layer with small stones was also found at the site. The dark culture earth could still be seen during the excavation in 1992. The excavation covered an area of *c.* 120 m<sup>2</sup> and resulted in finds of 47 Roman denarii, 15 pieces of hack gold, five gold finger rings, gilt bronze fibulae and pendants, hack silver in the form of chopped-up horse harness, a sword hilt, an axe, an Arab dirham etc. (Fig. 12). Several of the larger objects show clear signs of ritual destruction. The sword hilt, jewellery and harness parts had all been chopped up. Most of the finds from the site belong to the 3rd–6th centuries, while the 7th–8th centuries are very sparsely represented. From the Viking Age, however, there are a number of jewellery items and the Arab dirham.

Lærkefryd in many ways recalls the find situation at the open sacrificial site on the hill by the Tissø complex and the open ritual site at Lunda. At Lærkefryd a striking black culture layer was found with small stones that might indicate the cooking of meals, and all over the area there were scattered finds of metal objects. Of actual traces of features only a few post-holes and fireplace pits were found. No traces at all of buildings could be found in the area. The excavator also interprets the site at Lærkefryd as a sacrificial site, and it is probably of the same character as the site on the hill at Tissø. In this connection it should also be mentioned that the name of the nearby village, Jørlunde, is thought to mean ‘wild boar grove’ and thus to refer to a pre-Christian sacrificial grove.



Fig. 12: Finds from the open ritual site Lærkefryd in northeastern Zealand, Denmark. The objects which were found scattered over an area with a dark culture layer cover a period of 700 years from the 3rd–10th century. (After SØRENSEN: Metal detectors [note 29]).

### *Frösö Church, Sweden*

In 1984 Swedish archaeologists conducted excavations in Frösö Church in Jämtland. The church, which is on the island of Frösö in the lake Storsjön, has roots going back to about 1100 (Fig. 13). The church land still bears the name *Hov*, showing that in the Late Iron Age and Viking Age there was probably a large farm



Fig. 13: The lake Storsjön in Jämtland, Sweden. In the foreground Frösö Church can be seen; beneath which traces of a Norse sacrificial site have been found. Photo: Tomas Johansson/Laponia Pictures.

at the place. In the excavations beneath the chancel of the church the archaeologists found the unique traces of a Norse ritual site from the Viking Age.<sup>30</sup> Around the remains of a birch tree stump lay hundreds of bones from at least seven bears and seven elks as well as several red deer, cows, sheep and pigs (Fig. 14). Alongside the animals, skeletal parts of several humans were found, but it is uncertain whether they belong to sacrifices or perhaps come from later destroyed graves.<sup>31</sup> When the exciting finds appeared, however, it seems almost too good to be true. Archaeology

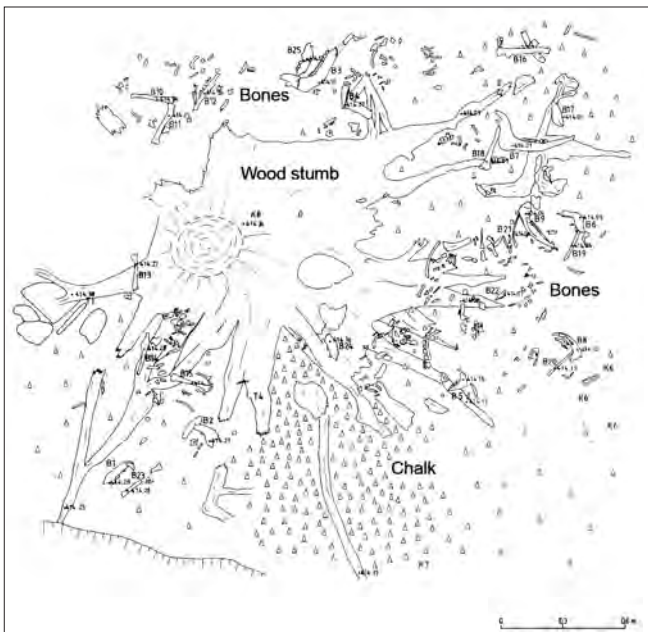


Fig. 14: Frösö Church, Jämtland. Norse sacrificial site from the Viking Period around a birch stump. The scattered bones represents 7 bears, 7 elks, several red deer, cows, sheep and pigs. Furthermore, human remains that perhaps derive from later destroyed graves. (After HILDEBRANDT: Frösö kyrka [note 2]).

30 HILDEBRANDT: Frösö kyrka (note 2).

31 MAGNELL/IREGREN: Veitstu hvé blóta skal (note 2).

now strengthened the supposition that there were realities behind the highly controversial statements about pre-Christian sacrificial rituals in among other sources the Old Norse Eddic poetry and in medieval works. Not least Adam of Bremen's account from the 1070s of the "pagan" temple in Uppsala, in which animals and humans were said to have been sacrificed in connection with the great *blot* rituals, was re-examined.

Of course the fascinating finds beneath the church inspired researchers to look more closely at the area around Storsjön. It turned out that the archaeological finds from the Iron Age and Viking Era in the form of settlements and burial sites have a clear tendency to be concentrated in localities with pre-Christian, sacral place-names. In the area round Storsjön alone there are today eight localities whose sacral place-name types testify to sites that probably housed important religious and political functions: *Ullvi*, *Odensala*, *Vi* and no fewer than five localities called *Hov*.<sup>32</sup> The last of these in all likelihood shows where the large farms of the Norsemen lay in the Late Iron Age and Viking Era. Originally, there were probably more places with similar name types, but we cannot expect all the place-name environments of the Viking Era to have survived until today. New names have superseded the original ones, and the older name-strata disappeared from memory and thus from the sources. The toponymic environment around Storsjön in Jämtland is however a good example of how, against the background of the almost 'fossilized' place-name contexts, we are still able to read off the Viking Era's organization and understanding of the surrounding landscape in the first millennium AD – at the religious as well as the political level.

In the Late Iron Age and Viking Era Jämtland was an important resource area where the Norsemen exploited large deposits of bog ore for iron production. The characteristic spade-shaped iron bars of the region have been found scattered over large parts of eastern Scandinavia. And to this we can add the Sámi hunters' wide-ranging hunting for valuable furs that they traded with the Norsemen for among other things iron tools, weapons and ornaments. The iron and the fine skins were in demand in Scandinavia and on the Continent. The gathering and further distribution to the Mälars area, for example, was controlled by Jämtland's Norse population, and the Storsjö area was a centre of their widely ramified network, through which the coveted resources were distributed.

The Norsemen thus shared the area with southern Sámi population groups who had put down deep roots in the landscape over many centuries – in many ways a situation reflecting the one between the Norsemen and Inuit in Greenland. Norsemen and Sámi probably also had different understandings of the landscape, and Jämtland therefore exhibits several mental and economic layers which are not all reflected, however, in the preserved place-names of the landscape; but here archaeology steps in with its finds. For the Norsemen in Jämtland the border areas were important, and the extent of the place-name environments perhaps reflects the border region between their interior, known world and the external, alien world

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32 VIKSTRAND: Jämtland mellan Frö och Kristus (note 24), pp. 87ff.

frequented mainly by the Sámi groups. The Norsemen transferred their cosmological world-picture to the surrounding landscape to create order and familiarity, and the traces of this can be seen preserved today in the characteristic Norse place-name environments.

### Organization of the pre-Christian cult

The above review of a number of examples from Scandinavia shows that at aristocratic residences one sees a certain pattern in terms of the organization of the central, prestigious area on the one hand, and of the closest hinterland on the other hand.

The main building, the actual residence, recurs in all the complexes described. With more or less all of them a smaller building is associated, for example at Tissø, Lejre, Järrestad, Lisbjerg and probably Toftegård. In these cases the smaller building is seen to be surrounded by fencing which is often built directly together with the main building.

The most significant residences in southern Scandinavia have shown that throughout the period they have included several buildings and structures that functioned as elements in pre-Christian rituals and activities. At the older complexes the pattern can be seen to have consisted of a large main building accompanied by a smaller hall building, as at Gudme for example. There seems to be a functional difference between the two buildings, in that a number of sacral activities took place in the smaller building, while more profane activities such as receptions and feasts took place in the large residence building. However, there are indications that in the course of the 6th–7th century several functions were moved from the smaller hall building to the large main building. At the magnate's residence from the 7th–11th century at Tissø, for example, it can be seen clearly that the large hall was divided into a public area and a private area, while the fenced-in cult building is on the whole without traces of activities other than a higher phosphate level, which could be interpreted as evidence of sacrifices. The development indicates that the hall room, the ritual meals and the so-called *blót* feasts moved to the large main building. The cult building perhaps functioned for as a shrine for the statues of gods, sacral objects and sacrifices. This may be the picture we see at the Tissø magnate's residence, where there was direct access from the private area of the hall to the fenced-in cult area, which indicates that the magnate was responsible for maintaining the sacral objects kept in the building.

However, besides the two central buildings, there are a number of other features and structures at the magnates' residences which were clearly also involved in the pre-Christian rituals. On the one hand there are the distinctive culture layers at Helgö, Gudme, Tissø and Lejre, clearly containing objects deposited in connection with sacrificial rituals. In addition there are probably special pit-houses, among other places at Tissø and Hofgardar on Iceland, where special finds in the form of keys, knives, tools, insular casket mountings and huge amounts of animal bones

indicates a special function. In connection with investigations of a pit-house on the Icelandic *Hofgarðr* ('lordly mansion') Einarsson has proposed the idea that pit-houses could also function as *blóthús* (sacrificial house). To these features we can add the large stone-heaps noted at the magnates' residences at Tissø, Lejre and Järrestad, which should probably be seen as the results of cooking or brewing for ritual *blót* feasts.

The picture of the Tissø residence in Phase II from the eighth century is of a complex where almost the whole organization seems dictated by the pre-Christian cult activities, for which the owner was clearly responsible. It is worth noting that this is the picture that seems to prevail in all the magnate complexes of this article. Not until the Viking Age do more economic factors appear to intrude in the form of utility buildings. The residences at this top level seem to have organized large parts of a ritual landscape around them, as is evident for example from the open sacrificial sites we see today at Tissø, Lærkefyrd, Smørenge, Lunda and Lilla Ullevi in central Sweden. To these we can add the known sacrificial sites in the form of lakes and streams, several of which were probably also related to large residential complexes of a similar character.

Today archaeology can document a highly varied picture of the pre-Christian rituals, which can be difficult to link or identify with precise rites and concepts, and not least with their elements as mentioned in the early written sources. The statements of the sources are heterogeneous and it can be difficult to uncover the original layers of meaning in the texts. However, the archaeological material is today so extensive that it has overtaken the written sources. The ritual site at Lake Tissø clearly connected to the clay mining for building material in the 8th and 9th century for the elite residence at Fugledegård gives a clear indication on the connection between building activities and rituals.

The extent of the traces after the suspected rituals and buildings seems quite significant at the manors. The rituals were not limited to one building or place, but took place at different locations perhaps depending on their background and/or nature. The archaeological finds show that it is primarily the elite settlements, which contain identifiable indicators in the form of buildings, structures and ritual objects. The ordinary rural settlements apparently contain no similar findings, which may be due to the rituals might have had a different character. From the rural settlement are known many finds of particular deposited objects such as pottery, quern stones in the houses, but we do not see the continuity which the elite residences can demonstrate. Perhaps the pre-Christian cult had a more private nature on the common residences, and therefore has not left the significant archaeological traces that have been documented at the elite residences.

We must assume that we are only in the recognition phase, where we now have the opportunity to identify sites and structures associated with the pre-Christian religion. We need then to make the step from recognition to a proper understanding of its organization, rituals and nature. There is a long way yet and it requires an interdisciplinary collaboration between archaeology, religion, anthropology, history and a series of natural sciences in particular to clarify such formation pro-



cesses underlying the marked accumulation of cultural deposits at the open ritual sites. One feature we can often observe at the open ritual sites is that they tend to have remains of both presumed ritual meals and sacrifices of small objects in the form of ornaments, weapons, food etc. Apparently they were used both for gift and communion offerings. This is perhaps the case with some of the open sites on dry land that either the sites or the formative events were multifunctional.

Based on the archaeological traces of the pre-Christian religion on the Scandinavian sites, so we can at least see that we in the 9th–10th Century has a religion, which partly seems very vigorous and whose rituals seem to be firmly embedded in mental world of the people. This is important for our understanding of the transition from the pagan to Christian religion.

### From pre-Christian religion to Christianity

Human beings have always had a quite fundamental need to understand the world of which they have been a part for millennia. Mankind needed a well organized world-picture in order to live in and understand the surrounding world. Depending on the surrounding environment and the period, people have of course constructed changing cosmologies, but the fundamental idea has on the whole remained unchanged – to organize a comprehensible world-picture that could help to guide mankind safely through life. Archaeological finds from prehistoric and early historical times often afford us a glimpse of – perhaps even real insight into – the cosmological worlds of the past. As a rule these are only fragments of pictures that are often highly complex. But thanks to the ever growing number of archaeological excavations and finds, as well as the historical accounts from the Middle Ages of the pre-Christian Norse religion, our insight into the mental landscapes of earlier generations is growing surely and steadily.

Both the Norse pre-Christian religion and Christianity were therefore constructed with a view to the creation of a safe, understandable world. In this respect, regular, recurring rites were a very important element. The same is true of the minor arts, mainly in the form of pendants and a wealth of amulets, which appear especially in the Late Iron Age and Viking Era (Fig. 15). They have clear references to the Norse mythology and the world of the gods. Their function was to protect the wearer, in exactly the same way as the subsequent Christian cross pendants were meant to safeguard their owners. The gods and religious rites of the two religions were perhaps different, but the purpose was the same.

The archaeological picture shows is that the spatial organization of the pre-Christian religion and its customs, *forn siðr*, must have been deeply ingrained in the mentality and worldview of the population, given the temporal continuity exhibited by many of these places. In connection with the introduction of Christianity, it would therefore have been necessary to demonstrate cultic continuity at the absolutely central places to obtain the acceptance of the population. Archaeology can now finally begin to demonstrate the cultic continuity that Olaf Olsen



Fig. 15: Selection of small amulet pendants from the Viking Period from the Tisso complex in Denmark. Photo: Pia Brejnholt/NMK.

called for almost 50 years ago in his dissertation “Hørg, Hov og Kirke”.<sup>33</sup> At places like Frösö and Uppsala in Sweden, Lisbjerg and Jelling in Denmark and Mære in Norway, continuity has been documented from pre-Christian to Christian times. These earlier pre-Christian religious centres continued to play this role in the early Christian period. This demonstration of continuity was probably also necessary to legitimize the position of both the ruling class and Christianity with the population.

The transition from the Norse religion to Christianity happened neither overnight nor in the reign of King Harald Bluetooth alone. It was a very long process that started back in the early eighth century when the first missionary attempts can be documented. By the early ninth century it is very likely that there were Christian population groups in Denmark. In 826, for example, the Danish King Harald Klak was baptized during a stay at Ingelheim near Mainz with the Holy Roman Emperor Louis the Pious. Some of his followers were probably also baptized at the same time, and a group of Christian magnates probably returned with Harald to Denmark. Parts of the Danish elite in particular were thus Christian as early as the ninth century, and this can be confirmed by some objects with Christian motifs (Fig. 16).



Fig. 16: The fine gold armring with Golgata motives from Råbylille, Møn in Denmark is clear evidence for the presence of Christian individuals before the traditional dating of the conversion to the late 10th century. The armring is from the late 9th century or around 900 AD. Photo: Kit Weiss/NMK.

33 OLSEN, Olaf: Hørg, Hov og Kirke. Historiske og arkæologiske vikingetidsstudier, København 1966.

Archaeology shows that in all probability it was the elite of the Viking Era who were responsible for most of the rites and rituals of the pre-Christian religion. Control of religion was one of the pillars on which their position of power rested. It is therefore unlikely that they welcomed with open arms the first missionaries who now began to question their former monopoly of the practice of religion. But on the principle “If you can’t beat them, join them” the reaction of the magnates was to erect the first Christian buildings on their farms. In this way they maintained control of the practice of religion during the period that Brian P. McGuire has called *aristocratic Christianity*.<sup>34</sup> At first the Christian rituals probably took place in buildings with traditional Viking Age architecture, which were consecrated to the Christian liturgy by an itinerant priest. Not until some way into the eleventh century do proper stave churches seem to have been built at the magnate farms. However, throughout the eleventh century the elite tried to retain their control of religion, to the irritation of the Catholic Church. At the Second Lateran Council in Rome in 1139 Canon 10 states: *Praecipimus etiam ut laici, qui ecclesias tenent, aut eas episcopis restituant aut excommunicationi subiaceant* (“We recommend that laymen who hold churches either restore them to the bishops or are subjected to excommunication”).<sup>35</sup> It is likely that one of the reasons for this conflict of interests was that the control of religion was synonymous with potential revenues. Not until around 1200 were the ecclesiastical system and the formation of parishes in place in Denmark, and the control by the old magnate families directly challenged. However, they had already found a pragmatic solution to this problem, since the members of the magnate families instead embarked on careers in the Church. One of the best examples in Scandinavia is the Danish Bishop Absalon (1128–1201), who was a member of the powerful Zealand magnate family the Hvides.

### *Acknowledgements*

I am grateful to Prof. Brian Patrick McGuire for the information on *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta*. The research project on pre-Christian religion is supported by A. P. Møller og Hustru Chastine Mc-Kinney Møllers Fond til almene Formaal in 2010–2015.

34 MCGUIRE, Brian Patrick: *Da Himmelen kom nærmere. Fortællinger om Danmarks kristning 700–1300*, København 2009, pp. 166f.

35 ALBERIGO, Giuseppe: *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta*. Istituto per le scienze religiose di Bologna. Centro di documentazione, Bologna 1962, p. 175.