

Burial Layout, Society and Sacred Geography

A Viking Age Example from Jämtland

Mikael Jakobsson

In the Viking Age community in the Lake Storsjön district in central Jämtland the landscape, the society and the religion formed a conceptual totality. The political power had religious overtones and was legitimized through the topography of the district, which was comprehended by the inhabitants as god-given. This result has been achieved through structural analysis of two different source materials. One is an analysis of the sacred place-names in the district. The other analysis has used the richly furnished Viking Age cemetery of Röstahammaren, in particular its most well-equipped grave, male grave IV. There are structural parallels between these materials.

Mikael Jakobsson, The Central Board of National Antiquities, Box 5405, SE-114 84 Stockholm, Sweden.

The settled country around Lake Storsjön in the central part of the province of Jämtland was until late historical time the only larger and coherently settled district in the interior of northern Sweden (fig. 1). The Lake Storsjön district was geographically isolated, being surrounded by vast areas of woodlands and mountains. The province has always been independent, and in the Middle Ages it probably had its own provincial law of which no original texts remain (Ekerwald 1983). During the historical period the province has been positioned between Swedish and Norwegian superiority. Politically it was subordinated the Norwegian kingdom, ecclesiastically it was subordinated an archdiocese of Sweden. The Lake Storsjön district can in many ways be viewed as a local community. The district offers good opportunities to study how a conception of the world is developed in a prehistoric local community and how this

conception is materially and non-materially expressed.

The focus will especially be on the relationship between burial layout, society and the landscape in which people lived. The reason for separating the burial layout from the unity formed by the landscape and society is the belief that the grave and the burialrites, of all the religious and cultural expressions, seem to have had a special role in the upholding of the societal ideology or conception of the world.

METHOD

The theoretical base is drawn from Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry. In their paper *Death and the regeneration of life* (1982) they show how the conception of an unalterable society often is projected in the burial ritual. The function of the burial ritual is therefore not only to reproduce the society but

also to create social classifications and give mythological legitimacy (Bloch & Parry 1982: 41-42). Death and the burial ritual that surrounds death do not have to represent the end of life. On the contrary, through the burial ritual the deceased is de-individualized and transformed into a symbol of the community, which confirms itself through the grave and the burial ritual (see also Ericsson & Runcis 1995).

As a consequence of this theory, graves

are an important source material for studies not only of the religious aspects of life but also of the ideology of the society. Another consequence is that we do not have to restrict our studies to quantitative analyses to gain knowledge of ideologies or conceptions of the world. More general knowledge is also possible to acquire through studies of single graves. The single grave is perhaps also the best source for studies of collective ideologies.

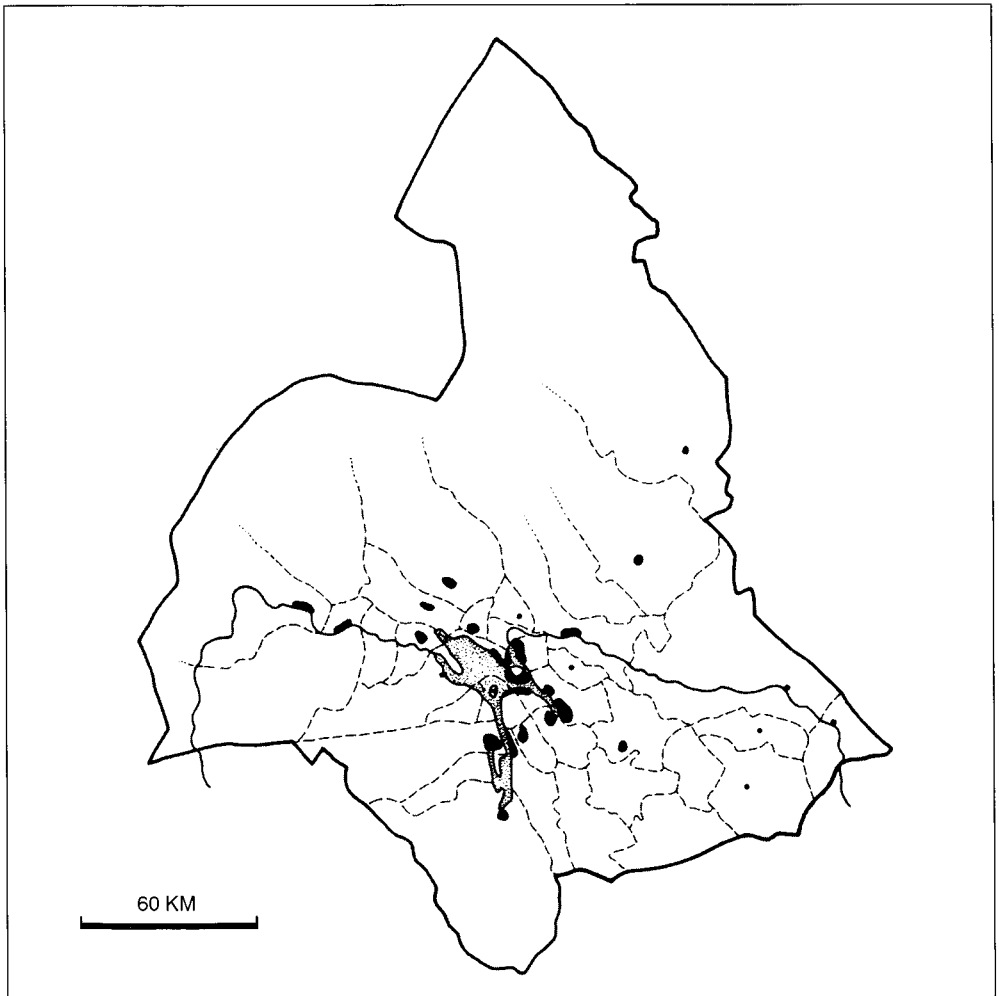


Fig. 1. Map of the province Jämtland showing Lake Storsjön, medieval parishes and the inhabited areas (hatched) in the late Iron Age (Brink 1996:173, fig. 8).

A major problem, however, is how to interpret the grave "correctly". On the one hand, the grave is part of a general world conception. On the other hand, the grave only represents itself. I have tried to solve this problem by working in three steps:

- the first step is to analyse the structure of the grave;
- the second step is to search for structural parallels in a relevant reference material;
- the third step is to understand the structures in the light of each other.

The primary material for the study is the Viking Age cemetery at *Röstahammaren*, situated in the centre of the Lake Storsjön district, and especially its most well-equipped grave. The point of departure is the limited space, the room, that the content of the grave constitutes, the room of the assemblage of bones and artefacts. Whether this is the most optimal delimitation when studying world conceptions may of course be discussed. The grave-construction, the monumentality and the location are also important symbolical factors. The number of factors that can be used in an analysis is endless, however, or at least hard to survey. If we define "context" as the number of relationships that give meaning to the grave, the context is not once and for all possible to delimit.

A delimitation is, however, necessary and for this study I have chosen to delimit the number of contexts to the room. A delimitation to the grave-room has a methodological advantage because the room, in which the bones and artefacts are assembled, is *de facto* physically delimited. It is a hole in the ground.

In my analysis of the grave I intend to use a structuralistic theory that says that people make their world comprehensible and controllable by classification. The classification is carried out, according to this theory, by using pairs of binary opposites. These binary opposites are usually fetched from the surroundings, for example man-woman or north-south. The main quality of the binary opposites is not that they thoroughly describe the

phenomenon they classify, but that they are good to work with (Levi-Strauss 1971:45pp). For example, the relation between north and south could be thought of in terms of male-female, and the relation between male and female could be thought of in terms of north-south. By this process the binary opposites are linked to each other and form chains of associations.

In the grave-room the survivors have deposited artefacts and other objects which in everyday life may have belonged to different cultural categories. By studying in terms of binary opposites, how the objects in the grave are outlined, we can gain knowledge of the set-up of binary opposites that existed and how they are interrelated. Then we can grasp the world conception of the people who built the grave.

By taking the concept of the room as the point of departure, we can conduct a similar analysis of the reference material that has been chosen for the study, namely the sacred place-names (Sw. *sakrala ortnamn*) in the Lake Storsjön district. These names have a pre-Christian content and are probably of ancient origin. They are here presumed to have been in use at the time the studied grave was built, that is, in the late Viking Age.

Place-names are a suitable reference material because they represent an ideological exponent of quite another nature than the grave. For this work, the most important quality of names is that they correspond to the landscape where the people lived. The naming of different places in the landscape implies that a classification and valuation of the landscape is carried out. Through the place-names the inhabitants have transformed a natural landscape into a cultural landscape and so filled it with an ideological content. The landscape is by this process integrated into the inhabitants' world conception. If the theory is correct - that the single grave is a result of a ritual that aimed to reproduce the world conception - there should be a connection between the grave and the cultural classification

of the landscape as mirrored in the sacred place-names.

THE CEMETERY AT RÖSTAHAMMAREN

The cemetery of Röstahammaren consists today of ca. 20 graves. The major part of it is situated on a peninsula in Lake Storsjön in the central part of the Lake Storsjön district. The peninsula belongs to the property of the farm Rösta, in the parish of Ås (fig. 2). From the peninsula there is an impressive view of the lake as well as the mountains in the distance. On the other side of the lake, in south, there is the large island of Frösön where the only runestone in the province is situated. On this island, in the village of Västerhus, there are also the remains of a patron church (Norwe-

gian: *Högendiskyrka*) dating from the early twelfth century (Berthelsson 1952). To the west there is the Rödön peninsula with a medieval fortress, Tibrandsholm, and a cemetery, situated on the shore facing the Röstahammaren peninsula.

The cemetery was discovered at the turn of the century when the archaeologist Knut Kjellmark was told that human bones and artefacts occasionally were found at a gravel-pit in the area. Kjellmark started to investigate, and in the years 1904 and 1909 he excavated 13 or 14 graves, most of them inhumations. The results of the excavations revealed graves containing rather exclusive grave-goods such as weapons, horses, sledges, balances made of bronze, and coins. The grave-goods can be dated to the tenth and eleventh

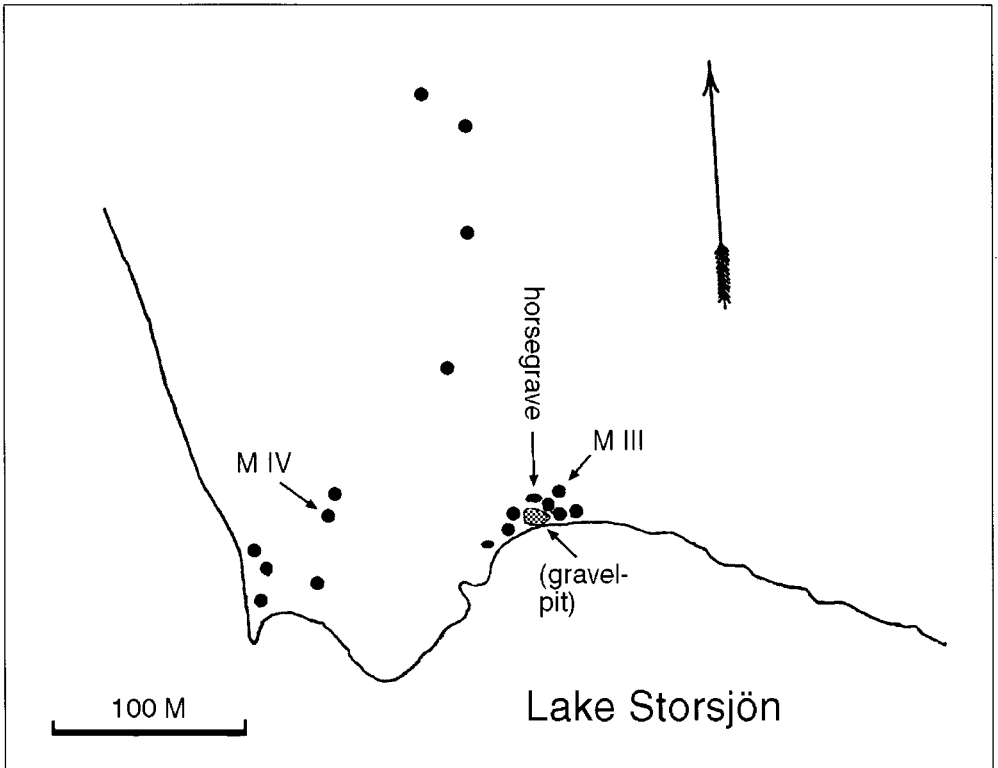


Fig. 2. The cemetery at Röstahammaren peninsula (after Kjellmark 1905:353, fig. 1). Dot=grave.

centuries (Kjellmark 1905, 1913, 1939). Compared with other graves in the province, the graves from Röstahammaren are perhaps the most well equipped. The Röstahammaren-graves also seem to distinguish themselves from the other graves regarding the large number of inhumations. Unfortunately there is no compilation of the Viking Age graves in the province. A subjective impression is, however, that cremation and inhumation were used alongside each other for burial during the late Viking Age (Hemmendorff 1989a:22).

GENERAL DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THE GRAVES

The graves from the 1904 excavations are the only ones that have been osteologically examined (Fürst 1905). The bones from the excavation in 1909 have thus not yet been classified. Of the osteologically examined

graves, five are male graves, two are female graves, and one grave contains two children. Two of the graves lacked enough material to be examined. Finally, there is a single grave containing a horse (Fürst 1905:372pp; Kjellmark 1905:351pp). Among the graves from the 1909 excavation there is a double grave which according to the artefacts probably contains a male and a female (Kjellmark 1913:7).

Five main categories of graves can thus be distinguished: man, woman, double grave (male and female), child and horse. The grave contents of these categories are listed below (fig. 3).

There are many differences and similarities between the graves. The most well-equipped graves are those containing humans, especially adult humans. The emphasis in the grave-goods seems to be not on age but on sex, on whether the grave contains a male or a female. The female graves are not as

	Male (5 ex)	Female (2 ex)	Double burial (1 ex)	Child (2 ex)	Horse (1 ex)
Mound	x	x	x	-	-
Flat ground	-	x	-	x	x
Inhumation	x	x	x	x	x
Cremation	-	x	x	-	-
Boat/canoe	-	x	-	x(?)	-
Sledge	x	-	-	-	-
Horse	x	-	-	-	-
Horse equipment	x	-	-	-	x
Dog	x	x	-	-	-
Weapon	x	-	x	-	-
Jewellery	-	x	x	-	-
Coin	x	-	-	-	-
Balance	x	-	-	-	-
Knife	x	x	x	-	-
Frost-nail	x	-	-	-	-

Fig. 3. Main categories of graves at Röstahammaren.

richly equipped as the graves of the men. Males could be buried with weapons such as a sword, spear, arrows, shield and axe. They could also be buried with a horse and horse equipment such as a horse-collar and bridle. Other male objects are balances, weights, silver coins and frost-nails. No female grave has been equipped with such objects.

With regard to the garments there is no distinct difference between the sexes. The garments have few accessories, and brooches are lacking in all graves except for the double grave in which the woman had two oval brooches.

Another difference between male and female graves is that women could be buried either cremated or inhumated. This is in contrast to the male graves, which contain no cremations. All the male graves were further marked with structures above ground, something which does not apply to all the female graves. Furthermore, men have been buried in sledges, but no woman has been buried in such. Women, on the other hand, have with similar exclusivity been buried in small boats or canoes.

When we compare the male and female graves, there are obvious differences and specific characteristics regarding how the deceased were treated. It is possible from these observations to deduce that the two "depressions", which were discovered during the 1909 excavation and which contained only bones and charcoal from a cremation (Kjellmark 1913:7), are female graves. The "depressions" could well have been the results of decayed boats or canoes. In view of the observation that the "depressions" contained cremations, it seems probable that the deceased in these "depressions" were women.

We can conclude that the material focus has been directed towards the male graves. They are the most well-equipped graves. Despite this, the male graves exhibit the smallest variation range regarding the type of grave and the burial custom. The male burial ritual seems to have been more standardized and

formal than the female burial ritual.

MALE GRAVE IV

Even if the male graves are more unitary in form and content than the female graves, there are variations. Among the male graves there is only one grave that contains several such objects as a sword, shield and horse, and that is "male grave IV", according to the terminology of Kjellmark (1905:364).

The grave can be described as follows (figs. 4, 5, and 7). It was constructed as a mound, 7 metres in diameter and 0.75 metres high. At the crest of the mound was a one metre long stone, probably originally upright. At the ground level were the remains of a man of short stature, an adult though of unknown age. The man was lying on his back. The body was oriented in north-south, the head to the north. The man was probably buried in a sledge (fig. 4). The traces of the sledge comprised rivets, nails, mounts and a draught-gear (Sw. *dragkrok*).

One metre to the west of the man was a horse, lying on its side with its back to the man and its head to the south. The horse was equipped with a plain iron bridle with a frost-nail attached to it. At the head of the horse an axe was found. In this part of the grave were also the remains of a dog.

At the man's hip, on the right side, was a small purse made of leather and textile. It contained two phalanxes of bear claws and crusts of hazel-nuts. The purse was decorated with bronze mounts designed as palmettes, vegetational loops and bear- or cat-heads. The purse is probably of Russian origin. It has parallels in the area of Kiev, Cernigov and Smolensk, where it was used as a symbol of high status (Gräslund 1975:110pp). At the feet of the man, on the right side, was an iron scabbard chape for a spear.

Next to the man's head, on the left side, was a bunch of arrows. Eight of them were made of iron, one of bone. Close to the body was a double-edged sword in a scabbard, pointing to the north. The sword was broken a

decimetre beneath the bottom hilt and the blade was missing. The pommel and the hilt were decorated in a vertical geometrical pattern of silver. The central part of the hilt was made of two boneplates decorated with a pattern of intertwined bands. To the right of the man, level with the head, were traces of a wooden bucket.

At the hip, on the left side, was an iron knife, three pieces of flintstone, and corroded iron pieces, "probably the rest of the fire-steel" (Kjellmark 1905:369). Below the hip was a slate whetstone and the remains of a shield consisting of an iron shield-boss. The shield had been destroyed prior to its deposition in the grave. Further below was a bronze balance. It was folded and kept in a small wooden box wrapped in a piece of leather. To the balance belonged a bronze-coated iron weight and a piece of wax. Close to these items were a knob of an oval brooch and a piece of an Arabic silver coin, dated to 943-944 AD (Magnusson 1978:41). Between the legs of the man was a bone comb.

Male grave IV may thus be dated to sometime after the first half of the tenth century. How the grave is chronologically related to the other graves at the cemetery, is unclear. The general impression is that all the graves are from the tenth and eleventh centuries (Kjellmark 1905, 1913, 1939). Any attempt to date the graves more precisely has not been done. Male grave IV may be the oldest grave. In any case it is more plausible that the grave is the oldest than the youngest. Male grave III, which is the other of the two most well-equipped graves at Röstahammaren, contained four silver coins (Kjellmark 1905:360), one for Olof Skötkonung (994-1022), two for Ethelred (978-1016) and one for Knut the Great (1016-1035). Male grave III can thus not be dated earlier than to 1016 AD.

SPATIAL ANALYSIS

North - south

The grave was oriented in north-south, with

the man's head to the north. This orientation will be taken as a point of departure for a spatial analysis of the grave. To use the grave's orientations in quarters as a basis for an analysis of the idea-content in Viking Age inhumation burials, leads easily to questions of Christianity and Christian influence. In the Christian environment the east-west orientation is important. Such an analysis of the Röstahammaren graves has recently been done by Anne-Sofie Gräslund (1996), who noted that none of the graves is oriented east-west. All but one (male grave IV) are oriented in northwest-southeast. Gräslund has interpreted this as a result of Christian influence (Gräslund 1996:31).

It is possible that a northwest-southeast oriented inhumation burial can be seen as influenced by Christian notions. To discuss and establish the symbolic content of quarters without consideration of the context is, however, difficult. That the east-west orientation has been symbolically important in a Christian environment, does not necessarily exclude that the same orientation may have been

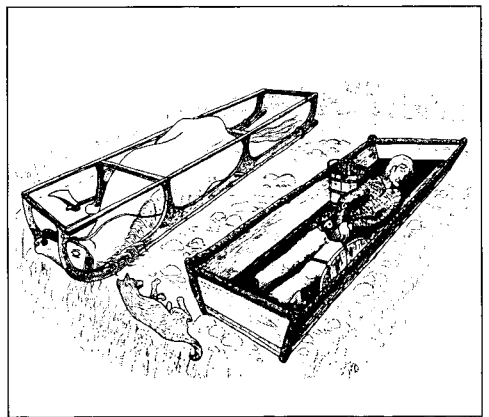


Fig. 4. A tentative reconstruction of male grave IV, in which the dead was placed in the carriage of a sledge. Drawing by Margareta Hildebrandt (Hemmendorff 1989a:23).

symbolically significant in a heathen or pre-Christian setting as well. In the following the grave and its content of different orientations shall be treated as a unity.

A division according to north-south may be conducted in different ways. The division chosen here starts from the buried body. A line is drawn across the middle of the body, by which a separation of the grave is made in a foot-part and a head-part (fig. 5).

The separation of the grave in these two parts does not correspond to a geometrically correct bisection. The man is positioned slightly to the north. The reason for taking the

human body as a starting point is borrowed from anthropology, where there are many examples of the human body functioning as a symbol of the way in which the world was divided and structured (Mauss 1973:75). There are also examples from the Scandinavian areas of the human body being conceived of as a metaphor of the universe, where the different parts of the body correspond to different parts of the universe - the head to the sky, the feet to the ground, etc. (Gureviti 1985:57).

Looking at the two parts of the grave, we find that the head-part contains fewer objects

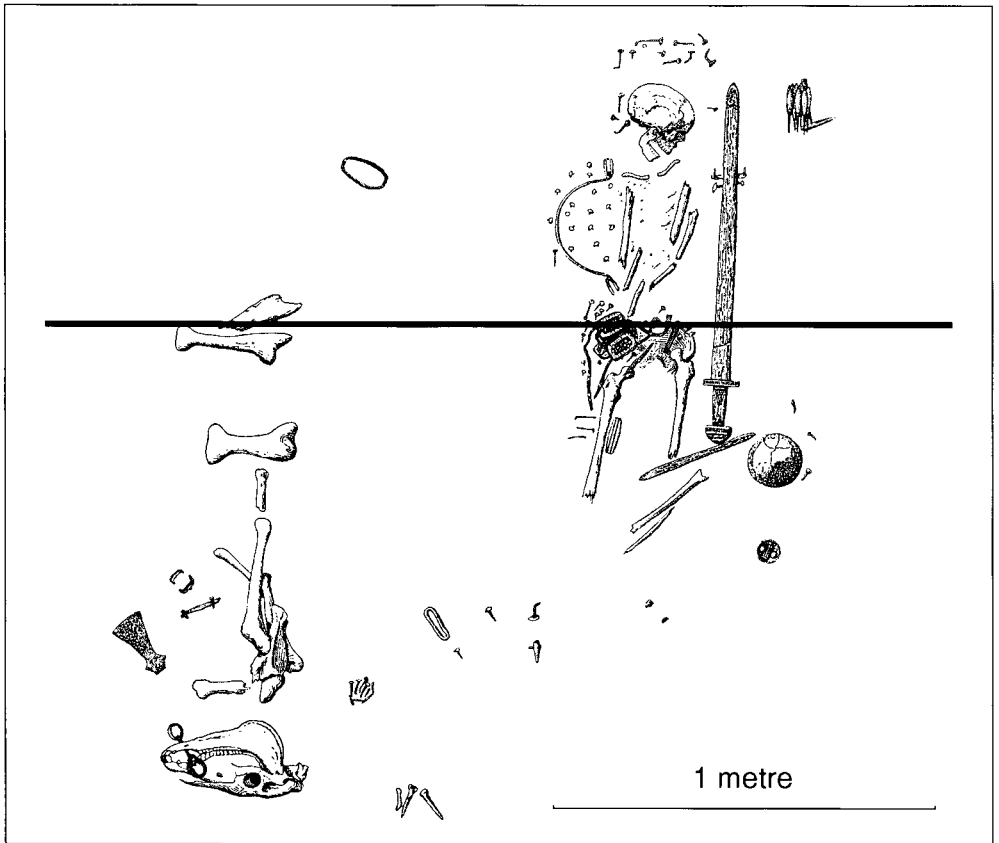


Fig. 5. A structural division of the burial layout of male grave IV into two parts, a head-part or a northern part and a foot-part or a southern part, respectively (original map in Kjellmark 1905:365, fig. 18).

than the foot-part. The few objects in the head-part consist of weapons, namely the sword and arrows. These are positioned pointing to the north. This part of the grave also contains the wooden bucket.

The pattern consisting of weapons in the head-part is also recurrent in several of the other male graves at the cemetery. The head-part in the graves has in general few artefacts. But when artefacts occur, they are almost exclusively weapons. One exception is the grave with a man and a woman, which has its weapon, a spear, lying in the foot-part of the grave (Kjellmark 1939:36). This grave is, however, unique and differs from the other graves in several ways. It is the only grave containing a man and a woman. It is the only grave containing oval brooches, and it is the only one with the head-part at the southern cardinal point. It is oriented to the southeast. The grave differs from the others in so many ways that it seems to intentionally break the pattern. But even if the burial layout is turned upside-down in relation to the other burial layouts, the spear is still pointing to the northern cardinal point despite its position in the foot-part of the grave.

To summarize, it seems to be a common pattern in the burial layouts that there is an association between weapons and the northern cardinal point.

Man - woman

One weapon differs from the others, namely, the axe. In male grave IV it is positioned in the foot-part of the grave, that is, in the southern part. The pattern is the same in the other graves with axes. The axe is situated in the southern part of the grave.

The divergent position of the axe can be discussed from a gender approach. In the northern part of Sweden the axe is the only weapon that is found in female graves (Hvarfner 1957:76). The different strategies of placing the weapon signals a separation of the burial layout into a male and a female part, respectively. The southern part, where

the axe is positioned, may have been a female part of the grave. Accordingly, the northern part of the grave could be viewed as a male part. A hypothesis can be put forward that the northern and the southern part of the grave have been considered as a male and female part of the grave, respectively.

Chains of associations can be linked to the two parts. Several of the male graves contained frost-nails, that is, mounts for the shoes and horse-shoes to protect the men and the horses from slipping on ice, and sledges. Together with the weapons these objects give associations to winter, snow and ice and to hostile relations. These associations have a parallel in the Old Norse and Icelandic written sources, in which the north is the home of hostile giants. The snow, storms and cold weather also originate from some of these giants (Motz 1987:217).

If the male was associated with winter and ice in the north, then the female should be associated with its opposite, that is, with summer and water in the south. The assumption that the female was symbolically connected with water, not to ice, can be strengthened by the observation of the woman buried in a small boat/canoe (Kjellmark 1905:354). This is of course just one case, but nevertheless no man has been buried in a boat or canoe. And no woman has been buried in a sledge. More empirical support can be provided by the double burial, in which the man was uncremated while the woman was cremated. Her remains were scattered in a limited area in the foot-part of the grave, at the knees of the man. The cremation of the woman suggests a gender-specific association of the woman not only to warmth but also to fire.

In the southern part of male grave IV are also the hilt of the sword, the shield, the balance, the silver coin, the axe, the whetstone, the oriental purse, the comb, the dog and most of the horse. The grave-material in this part of the grave has another and more complex character than the grave-material in

the northern part. The objects in the southern part can be associated with other kinds of relations. In contrast to those in the northern part, the objects here rather reflect peaceful relations. The hilt is the part of the sword which in medieval Europe had a pronounced symbolic function of creating alliances of faith and protection (Davidson 1962:185pp). The sword has a symbolic parallel in the shield, which can be viewed as a protection against physical violence and enemies. In this part of the grave is also the balance, which can be connected with trade; in the pre-capitalist society, to which Viking Age Jämtland belonged, the balance can be viewed as an instrument to create and uphold social relations (Hodges 1982:187). The balance may also symbolise “balance” in a broader sense, that is, balance between the forces in the universe. The purse with its amulet-like content can be viewed as a means of protection. The interpretations of the symbolic content of these objects are based on observations made in areas that are geographically more or less distant from Jämtland. They should be considered as hypothetical. Whether or not they are reasonable is to be judged by how well they fit into the explanation of the world conception.

The burial layout thus seems to have a structural division implying a northern and a southern part. The northern part is a male part. Here there are objects that can be associated with hostile relations. The southern part is a female part. The objects here can be associated with peaceful relations (perhaps with the exception of the axe). The nature of the two spheres of associations are promoted by the

two cardinal points, of which north stands for darkness, cold, ice and winter and south for light, warmth, water and summer (fig. 6).

East - west

Studying the burial layout in male grave IV further, we find that the horse has an interesting position. Its position suggests a structural division of the burial layout into an eastern and a western part. The eastern part is dominated by the man, the western part by the horse (fig. 7).

The horse is positioned beside the man with its back to him, and with its head towards the foot-part of the grave, to the south. This arrangement could at first glance be considered unproblematical. The alternatives to the horse’s treatment are several, however. They could have positioned the horse in the foot-part of the grave, or in the head-part. They could have dismembered the animal or chosen not to bury it with the man at all. The way they have chosen to treat the horse obviously has symbolic significance. Looking closer at the arrangement, it actually gives the impression that the position of the horse is an intentionally created reflection of the man’s position. The horse is positioned beside the man and in the same direction, but with its head towards the opposite cardinal point and with its back to the man, who for his part is turning his face away from the horse. In front of the faces of the man and horse are weapons. In front of the horse is the axe, and in front of the man are the sword and arrows.

The arrangement of the horse, also reveals a symbolical play with the cardinal points of north-south and east-west. The

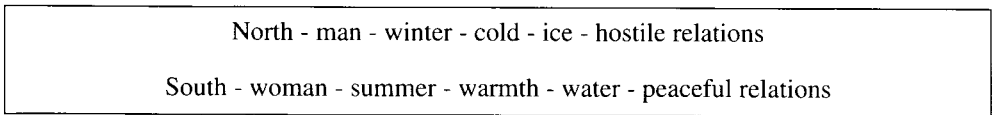


Fig. 6. Chains of associations that are connected with the northern and southern part of the burial layout, respectively.

horse is positioned in the western part of the grave but it is slightly displaced towards the southern part. And as mentioned above, the animal is arranged in such a way that it forms a mirror, a reflection, of the northern, male, part of the grave. At the same time the horse is in some sense positioned both in the northern and the southern part of the grave. Through the arrangement and position of the horse, the polarity between north and south and between man and woman is neutralized. The horse is both male and female.

There is no other grave with a horse. There is, however, a separately buried horse within the cemetery, which implies that the horse

was such a remarkable animal that it could be buried among human beings. The horse was buried just southwest of male grave III, which is the only other grave containing a sledge (Kjellmark 1905:364). The horse was revealed at a depth of one metre in a grave without any visible marker above ground. It was orientated in east-west with the skull towards the west.

In both male grave IV and the other case where a horse was involved in a burial ritual, the two cardinal points of west-east have been important and decisive for the horse's treatment. The horse seems to have had the symbolic function of mediating between the two

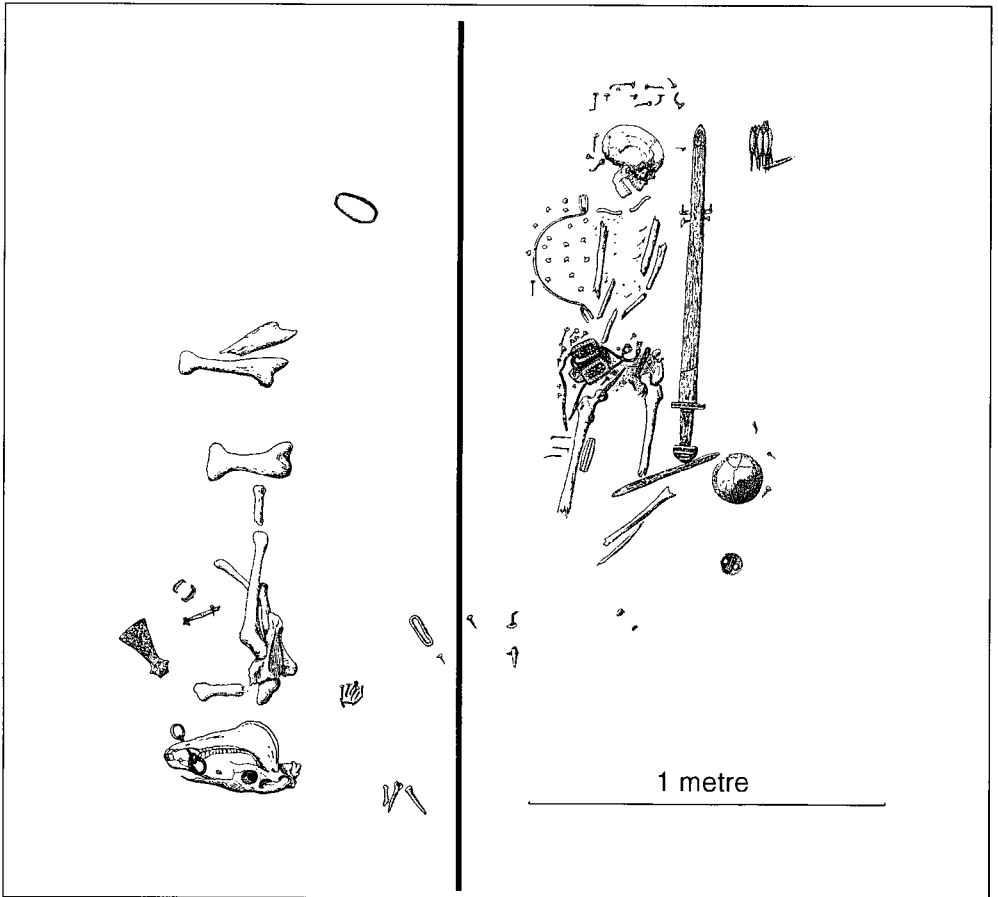


Fig. 7. A structural division of the burial layout in male grave IV into an eastern and a western part, respectively (original map in Kjellmark 1905:365, fig. 18).

profound poles of the human world, that is, man and woman.

MYTHOLOGICAL BURIAL LAYOUT

Two structures are discernible in the burial layout. They are expressed through the cardinal points of north-south and east-west, respectively.

The cardinal points north-south seem to have had a connection with a classification of the world into man and woman, respectively. To the male domain belongs a chain of association between winter, cold, ice and hostile relations. To the female domain belongs a corresponding chain of association between summer, warmth, water and loyal/protective relations.

The cardinal points of east-west are connected with the horse. This orientation makes the horse a neutralizer of the polarity between north and south. The horse fills the symbolic function of mediating between man and woman and the associations that can be connected with the two categories.

The structures reflect a world conception in which basal categories such as north-south, east-west, ice-water, etc., have been used to create a cosmological whole, where the human point of departure is the man and woman.

The outlined world conception is a simple construction based on natural and basic pairs of opposites. It is of interest that these are borrowed from a meteorological sphere and consist of polarized phenomena, such as warmth-cold, water-ice, summer-winter, etc. The warmth and brightness of the summer is contrasted with the coldness and darkness of the winter.

The pairs of opposites may in one way be considered as naturally given. The Lake Storsjön district, due to its geographical position in the north and the interior of the Scandinavian peninsula, is more exposed to changes in climate than corresponding northern coastal districts in Sweden and Norway. The differences between the seasons are dis-

tinct, with a short spring and a bright summer following a long, harsh and dark winter. These climatic conditions probably also were prevalent during the Viking Age, and the polarization of meteorological phenomena thus reflects the harsh conditions of life for people and the relief they felt when summer arrived.

There is more to interpret in the polarization. The contrast between the seasons can also be viewed as a contrast between the fertile season and the infertile. The sharp polarization focuses on fertility and puts it at the centre.

The emphasis on fertility as a central theme, which has been laid here, may be considered as methodologically contrived. However, with the fertility-theme as a starting point it is interesting to note the obviously important role that the horse had in the burial ritual at Röstahammaren.

The treatment of the horse is not unique to the Lake Storsjön district. It has parallels in other parts of Scandinavia, for example, in Trøndelag in Norway where horses occur as grave-inventoriy and sacrifices in late Iron Ages graves. Separate horse graves are, however, rare. As Guttorm Gjessing has shown (1943:60pp), these areas in Scandinavian countries have a common feature in their association to the heathen god *Frö*. *Frö* was the god that reigned over the sun and the rain and by that also over the crops and fertility (Halvorsen 1981b:618pp).

The background to the horse's association to *Frö* is not quite clear. In mythology *Frö* has a clear relation to the horse, especially to the stallion (Ström 1985:177). But the horse of the heathen god *Odin*, *Sleipner*, has also a mythological association to fertility. The connection between the horses of *Frö* and *Odin* has been interpreted by Gjessing (1943:92) as chronological. By this is meant that the *asarna* (the godly race of *Odin*) in the course of the late Iron Age were increasingly replacing the *vanerna* (the godly race of *Frö*) as the leading gods, which also means that the horse of *Odin* took over the qualities previously

held by the horse of *Frö*.

It seems, however, as if the link between the horse and the notion of fertility could be primary. In *Volsattr*, a missionary story in *Flateyrbok*, a horse's phallus called *Volsi* is used in a fertility rite. The rite takes place at a farm in the northern part of Norway, where the king St. Olav, or probably originally the god *Odin*, unexpectedly arrives. The king participates in the rite but then he (Olav/*Odin*) destroys *Volsi*, the horse's phallus. The story has been analysed by Steinsland & Vogt (1981) and their conclusion is that the legend reflects a tension between a central cult of warrior gods and a local cult of fertility deities (Steinsland & Vogt 1981:105). This tension is not due to chronology but is inherent in Scandinavian mythology.

The care given to the buried horses of Röstahammaren has thus been directed towards an animal regarded as nearly equal to man. In mythology this creature was associated with the concept of fertility and its specific god, *Frö*.

The results so far seem to suggest that the different parts of the grave are combined into one common theme, fertility. The male domain and the female domain are united in the domain of the horse (fig. 8).

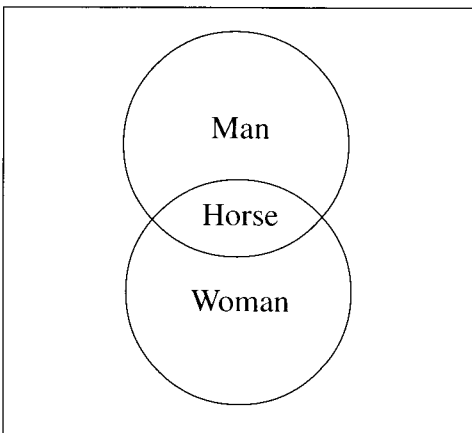


Fig. 8. The horse mediates between the female and male spheres in male grave IV.

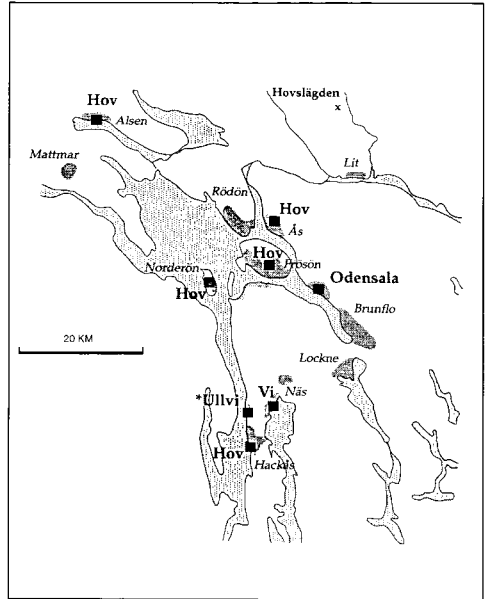


Fig. 9. Sacred names and the inhabited areas (hatched areas) of the Lake Storsjön district during the late Iron Age (Vikstrand 1993:60, fig. 1).

BURIAL LAYOUT AND SACRED GEOGRAPHY

The analysis has demonstrated a pattern in the burial layout of male grave IV. Both the dead man and the grave-inventory have been arranged according to a scheme. The symbolic content of this scheme revolves around the concept of fertility. In this there is a structure where male and female represent two antipoles, but they are united through the horse which functions as a mediator.

These results shall now be compared with the sacred place-names of the Lake Storsjön district (fig. 9). The question is whether the observations of the grave-material have parallels in other prehistoric remains from this area.

In central Jämtland, farmsteads that are situated adjacent to the sites of medieval churches often have sacred place-names (Vikstrand 1993:73). The majority have the

name *Hov*, but also the names *Vi* and *Ullvi* are present. The place-names can be translated as a holy place, a sanctuary, or a hall for sacred feasts (Vikstrand 1995).

The distribution of these place-names has been interpreted by the philologist Per Vikstrand (1993:76). His suggestion is that the structure of the medieval church-places and the establishment of parishes are adjusted to an earlier territorial structure built up around pre-Christian sacred central places. It seems as if there has been a continuity from these religious central places to the church-places of the Middle Ages.

In one case it has even been proven through archaeological investigations that it was not just a general continuity of cult in the same area, but a continuity at the very same place. When investigations were carried out under the floor of the chancel of the parish church on Frösön, there appeared an old stump with a large number of animal bones around it, including fragments of horse skulls. The material has been interpreted as offerings (Hildebrand 1989; Bergner 1990).

When studying the distribution of the sacred place-names more closely, it is possible

to find additional structures besides the demonstrated connection between pre-Christian sacred central places and medieval church-places. Two of the sacred place-names diverge strongly from the others, namely, Frösön and Norderön. The two names are theomorphic names deriving from the two heathen gods, *Frö* and *Njörd* respectively, and can be translated as the Island of *Frö* and the Island of *Njörd*. These names constitute a pair of names which occurs at a number of other places in the Scandinavian countries, and which signifies a male and a female fertility deity, respectively (Brink 1996:157). Frösön and Norderön are thus names that imply some sort of fertility cult.

In contrast to other sacred place-names the two diverging place-names denote areas larger than farms or villages. Frösön and Norderön are the two largest and, in late pre-historic time, the only inhabited islands of Storsjön. In historical time they came to constitute parishes of their own. A similar structure does not exist on the mainland, where the sacred place-names denote only the level of single farms or villages.

The place-names of the Lake Storsjön district thus seem to reflect not only a pattern of separate cult sites but also a spatial hierarchy, where the theomorphic names *Frö* and *Njörd* have been used to denote geographically larger and in some way also superior units.

In this sacred spatial hierarchy, it appears to be the relation between land and water that is essential. What distinguishes the *areas* with sacred/theomorphic names, Frösön and Norderön, from the *places* with such names is that they are islands. They are thus delimited and defined by their relation to water, to the lake Storsjön (fig. 10).

The Lake Storsjön district is in this way in agreement with a structure known from southern Scandinavia, where the binary opposites land-water have been an important sorting principle. The opposition between the pair is known as a symbolic expression of women

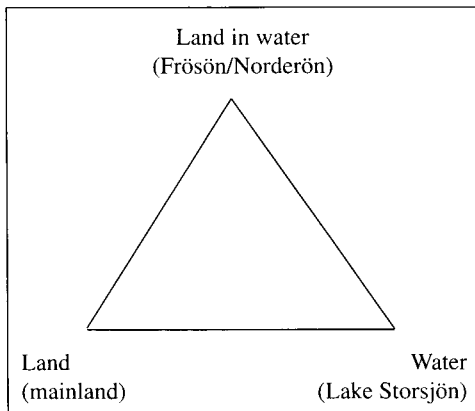


Fig. 10. The place-names in the Lake Storsjön district form a hierarchy of names. This hierarchy is founded on the relation between land and water.

and men respectively, as shown in graves where there is a general connection between women and carriages on the one hand, and men and boats on the other (Andrén 1993:47). There is also a mythological dimension to this, as the carriage and the ship are the attributes of the *vaner*. In Eddaic poetry the goddess *Freja* rides in a carriage drawn by cats and her male counterpart *Frö* is the owner of the ship *Skidbladner* (Halvorsen 1981a, 1981b). This polarity seems, however, to have been inverted in the Lake Storsjön district, at least in the burialstructure. The men in this area are not associated with the boat/ship but with the sleigh; instead it is the women who are buried in boats or canoes (and not in carriages). Chains of associations can here be drawn as man-sleigh-land and woman-boat/canoe-water, respectively. A south Scandinavian mythological structure has been transformed and adjusted to local conditions in Jämtland.

With the dichotomy land-water in mind, it is interesting to view the two large islands in Lake Storsjön, Frösön and Norderön, as phenomena with a wider significance than mere geographical units. As islands they can be said to mediate between the opposites land and water, both literally and metaphorically, and in this they resemble the grave. In the mythological landscape of the Lake Storsjön district the islands Frösön and Norderön have the same symbolic function as the horse has in the burial layout of male grave IV. They are mediators. Just as the pair of islands Frösön and Norderön represents both male and female in the landscape, the horse represents both male and female in the burial layout.

Thus there exists a structural connection between the burial layout and the landscape in this area. The two societal expressions mirror each other. It is difficult and perhaps also pointless to try to determine which of these structures should be considered superior. Rather, they should be looked upon as each other's transformation. On a mythological level the horse and the islands become one

and the same thing (fig. 11).

BURIAL LAYOUT, SOCIETY AND SACRED GEOGRAPHY

So far it has been possible to detect some structural connections and correspondences between the burial layout of male grave IV and the cognitive landscape of the Lake Storsjön district. The grave can be seen as a picture of the surrounding landscape, and this landscape in turn reflects - through the order created in it by existing name-giving principles - the structure of the grave. The similarities should be comprehended as different expressions of one and the same conception of the world. A question that arises is why the correspondence exists; who or what group of people needed to maintain the social order that was created through the reproduction of the world conception embodied in the graves?

In discussing this we should start with the island of Frösön. Frösön has, as we know, had a special significance in the mythological spatial hierarchy of the Lake Storsjön area. It is, together with Norderön, the centre of the cognitive landscape of the area. Frösön has also been the symbolic equivalent to the horse in the grave, which functioned as a mediator between the antipoles of the human

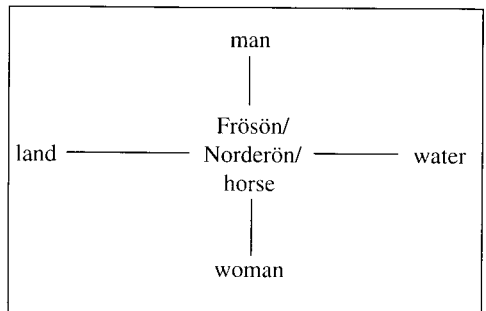


Fig. 11. The burial layout of male grave IV and the sacred place-names in the area are structurally connected. The horse in the grave and the islands Frösön and Norderön are equivalents.

symbolic universe. In order to try to understand the reproduction of these ideas, we have to further examine the role played by the island in the society of Jämtland.

In historical time and reaching back to at least the late Iron Age, the island of Frösön has been the social and political centre of the district. The political power was exercised from this area, and the central *thing* of the province, *Jamtamot*, was located on the large island (Ahnlund 1948:499). Unique in the province of Jämtland is a fortified settlement in the form of a hillfort situated on the island, although it originates from the early Iron Age (Hemmendorff 1989b). Also unique is the single runestone in the province, erected on the island. The inscription tells us that “Östman Gudfastson had this stone raised and this bridge built and he had Jämtland Christianized” (Ahnlund 1948:110). The bridge spoken of is supposed to have been a very large construction across the sound to the east of Frösön (Hemmendorff in print). In Jämtland there had been two royal estates, known from the fourteenth century, one of them situated on Frösön (Ahnlund 1948:210ff). Thus it seems likely that, at least since the late Iron Age, Frösön was both the worldly and the mythological centre of the Lake Storsjön district.

The fact that Frösön is the centre of the district instead of Norderön is illuminating. At Frösön there is a notion of symbiosis of worldly and mythological power that corresponds to the connection of fertility cult and the exercising of political power described in the Old Norse literature (Ström 1985:73). Connected with the fertility cult was also the notion of communal prosperity. Research so far has mainly created a picture of *Frö* that is dominated by his fertility qualities. *Frö* was, however, also a ruler. The name *Frö* can be derived from the Old Norse word *Frauiar*, meaning lord (Steinsland 1989:54; see also Schlesinger 1953:15). Among the periphrasis of *Frö* there are expressions like “the lord of the Asar”, “the best of warriors”, and the “ruler of people” (Steinsland 1989:54 op. cit.).

The choice of Frösön as the name for the political centre in the community of the province of Jämtland, can be understood in the light of *Frö's* connection not only with the notion of fertility but also with the notion of lordship. Through the associative connection with the island of *Frö* the power-exercising institutions became mythologically integrated into the world view of the people of the district. Thereby the institutions were ideologically legitimated (cf. Giddens 1988:193pp). The island of the god *Frö* was the place of power, in reality as well as in mythology.

Consequently, to the Viking Age community in the Lake Storsjön district the landscape, the society and the religion formed a totality not reducible to any particular societal expression. The societal coherence and execution of power had religious overtones and were legitimized through the topography of the district, which was comprehended by the inhabitants as god-given.

It is interesting that it seems to be the whole district that was in focus. This is in contrast to the Lake Siljan district in Dalarna (Ersgård 1995) and other parts of the Scandinavian countries, where it was the farmstead and the importance of possessing or belonging to a specific farmstead that was stressed. In these parts the farmstead was both a primary sustainer of identity as well as a mythological centre (Gurevič 1985:47-49; Burström 1996:171). In Jämtland it was the whole district that gave the people their identity. It was the Lake Storsjön district that was the constituting cosmos that gave the people a social and cultural identity.

These observations of the importance of the district may also throw light on the question of why the cemetery wasn't located at the farmstead of Rösta but at a place several kilometres away, where the land of the farm meets Storsjön. If the location of graves mirrors a valuation of the landscape, then the location of the cemetery to the peninsula of Röstahammaren mirrors that greater attention

has been paid to the contact with Lake Storsjön than to the contact with the home-farm. This is said with reservation for the fact that the areal extension of property belonging to the historical farm Röstå, has a prehistoric origin. Reservation must also be made for the possibility that there may have been a unknown farmstead situated at Röstahammaren. There is enough room for a smaller farmstead there (Vikstrand 1996:92).

The fact that Lake Storsjön has been important to the people in the settled areas around the lake, is obvious and can be described in geographical terms. The size and the extension of the lake has connected the inhabited areas around the lake to each other. Further, the volume of the lake has had a positive impact on the local climate. As the hierarchy of place-names shows, it is also possible to describe the importance of Lake Storsjön in symbolical terms. The relationship between land and water was determinant for the classification of the district and the farmsteads around the lake. Lake Storsjön may be called a symbol of the settled country and the society in the district. Perhaps there was a belief that Lake Storsjön was animated. Perhaps this is the background to the tradition, known since at least the seventeenth century (Oscarsson 1995:4), that there resides in the depths of the lake a lake-monster - the *Storsjöodjuret*.

THE FAMILY BEHIND MALE GRAVE IV

To return to male grave IV, and to reconnect with the functions of the burial ritual to sustain the societal structure, we find a family behind the deceased that has had an interest in reproducing the world view, the ideology, that was the basis of the political and societal exercising of power in the district. They probably shared this interest with several other groups in the region. To express this aspiration there were, however, other ways than to use the meaning of the inhumation burial. Not everyone, as we have seen, was buried according to this tradition. Neither did everybody

choose a grave-equipment of such exclusiveness as at Röstahammaren and especially in male grave IV. With a reservation made for grave-equipment and burial layouts that may have existed in cremation graves, we can catch a glimpse of a family behind male grave IV that stresses that they are part of the society in the Lake Storsjön district through an equipment of symbols reasonably not available to everybody.

Male grave IV was not created by a poor family. The reproduction of the specific world view visible in this grave as outlined above rather reflects a wealthy family who belongs to a group that upholds the societal structure. The grave is a manifestation of a social identity of being worthy members of society, or even a manifestation of being worthier members than others. The grave is an ideological performance which lacks or has almost no correspondence to the rest of the graves of the province. Such manifestations are often a symptom of a crisis. Perhaps this manifestation can also be seen as an indication that at least one of the leading families in Jämtland toward the end of the Viking Age understood that the ideological foundation of their position was about to be altered. Therefore it was more important than ever to stress their social position in the world order and also to emphasize that this position was to last.

It is possible that male grave IV reflects the beginning of an ideological crisis which would reach its culmination in the event mentioned on the province's only runestone, the Frösö stone, on which it is said that Östman Gudfastson "had Jämtland Christianized" (after Ahnlund 1948:110). The stone is unique and has no equivalent in Sweden or Norway. In Denmark there is the famous Jelling stone, which states that a single person, king Harald, brought about the Christianization of Denmark. The Frösö stone is often compared to the Jelling stone. There is, however, a significant difference between the two runic inscriptions. The Jelling stone speaks of

Harald, who “had the Danes Christianized” (Randsborg 1980:19). In other words Harald Christianized the people, the Danes, and not the country Denmark. On the Frösö stone on the other hand it is said that Östman Christianized Jämtland, that is, the province of Jämtland, and not the people of the province. The Frösö stone describes a different course for the Christianization than the Jelling stone. In the light of what has been outlined above regarding the world conception of the people in the district of Lake Storsjön, the statement on the Frösö stone is logical. For the person who set out to Christianize Jämtland, it would not be sufficient to Christianize individuals. In order to Christianize the people of *Jämtland* he would actually have to Christianize their landscape, because this landscape was of such importance to their cultural and social identity. That is why Östman “had Jämtland Christianized” and not the inhabitants of Jämtland.

In this context it is possible to view Östman’s bridge-building in a new light. In connection with runic inscriptions, the building of bridges is commonly seen as a deed with Christian motives. A number of Christian runic inscriptions speak of bridge-building. This is surely in the background of Östman’s undertaking (cf. Gräslund 1996:23 *op cit*). But a bridge of the size presumed here would have had further or perhaps a different religious significance. Extending across the sound, the bridge came to unite a basic mythological division of the district, the distinction between land and water. Through this the bridge came to be connected with a category of symbolic mediators previously only consisting of the horse and the islands of Frösön and Norderön. By his great construction Östman created a (new) mythological mediator, and in doing so he played a part previously reserved for the gods.

SUMMARY

In this work the theory of the grave as the result of a ritual whereby the society and its world conception was acted out and repro-

duced, has been applied. The application has been made on material from the settled country around Lake Storsjön in the province of Jämtland. Until late historical time this was the only larger and coherently settled district in the interior of northern Sweden. The district was geographically isolated and can be viewed as a socially and culturally relatively well-defined society. The analysed material consists of a Viking Age cemetery and in particular its most well-equipped grave, male grave IV, together with the sacred place-names in the surrounding district.

In the grave studied in particular, which contained a man buried in a sleigh, the man and the grave-inventory were laid out according to a plan. The symbolic content of this plan revolves around the concept of fertility. The same theme can be traced in the sacred place-names, which suggests a connection between cult and social organisation where the fertility god *Frö* was central. The grave-plan has thus had a structural connection with the cognitive landscape of the Lake Storsjön district, and this has further had a structural connection with the societal formation in the xarea. To the Viking Age community in the Lake Storsjön district the landscape, the society and the religion formed a totality not reducible to any particular societal expression. The political power had religious overtones and was legitimized through the topography of the district, which was comprehended by the inhabitants as god-given. Male grave IV is the result of a ritual drama by which the ideological legitimacy of the societal power was reproduced. The grave reflects a family belonging to a group that upholds the societal structure, and their wish that this order would last forever.

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