

CENTRAL PLACES AND CHANGE IN LATE PREHISTORIC AND EARLY MEDIEVAL PERIOD IN VESTFOLD

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ABSTRACT

In Vestfold Kaupang, Borre and Tønsberg has been discussed as central places of the Viking Age. Only Tønsberg survived to be a town in the Middle Ages. To decide the back-ground for central places and to trace signs of change, a settlement pattern of the Viking Age and the Middle Ages is suggested. The use of land and its division into units is dependable on the geographical resources of the landscape. The resources of sand and clay soil decide where expansion and change can be. Central places besides the so far mentioned could be "-hus", "-heim" and "Tun-" names. The introduction of Christianity plays an active role as a variable of change.

Central places - where and when?

Historically and archaeologically we are aware of the existence of central places of economic, legal, religious and military functions in Vestfold in the late Prehistoric and Early Medieval period. The location of these centras is important for understanding of the development from local chiefdoms in the Pre-historic period to a region with a Christian kingdom of the Middle Ages.

In this discussion Borre, Tønsberg, Kaupang in Tjølling and Mølen i Brunlanes has been included (Andersen 1977:67f, Blindheim 1987:33)(fig 1). The background for this is the sagas, documents and the archaeological finds. The latest development within archaeology does not make the central place discussion easier, but perhaps more interesting.

We now have evidence of contemporary settlement activities in Borre Tønsberg and Kaupang, from at least the 8th century to the middle of the 10th century. The archaeological campaigns in 1988, 1989 and 1990 in Borre has given evidence of a settlement within that period. Only Tønsberg continued as a settlement into the Medieval period (Newspapers 1988-1990).

To discuss central places, their district and change it is necessary to know the settlement of the actual period. A central function or place can not exist



Fig 1. The greater part of today's Vestfold. Drawing by author.

without a district or hinterland. The location, or definition, of these surroundings is necessary for understanding the character and importance of the central function. Districts or hinterlands can be geographical as well as social (cf Hastrup 1984:118ff).

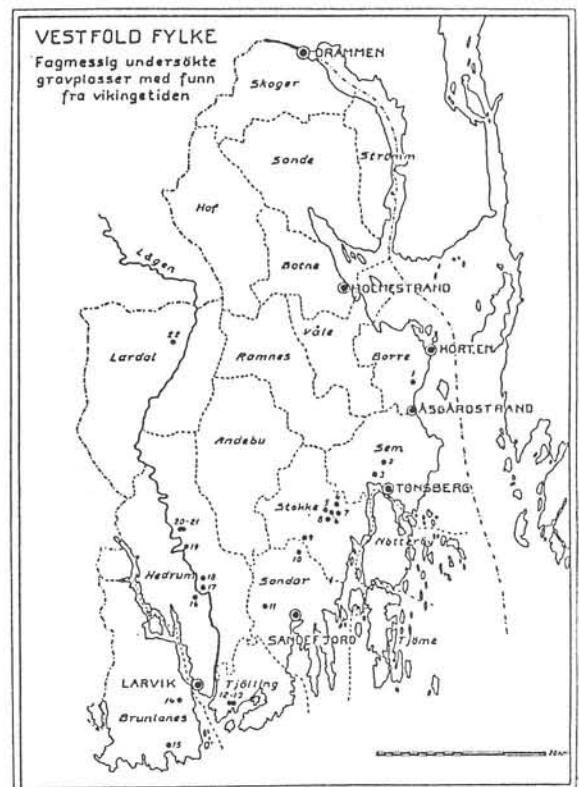
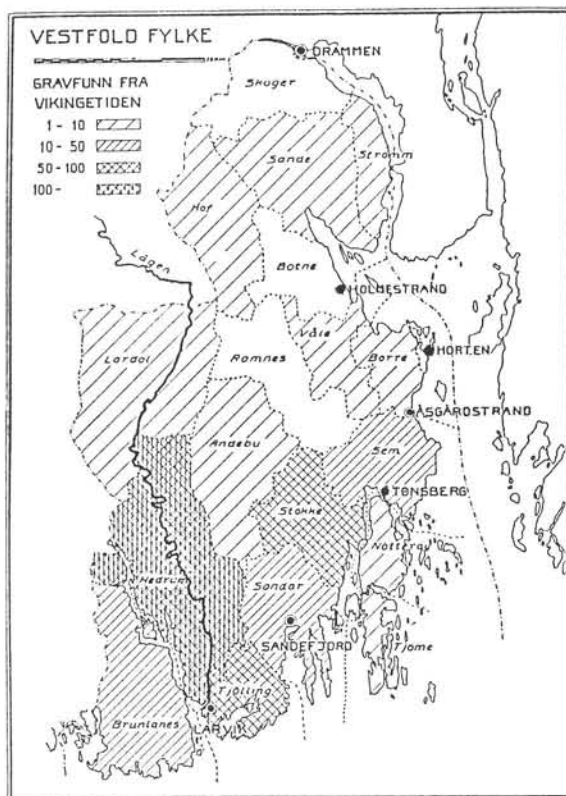


Fig 2. The traditional picture of the Viking Age settlement in Vestfold. The dated grave finds to the left, and the professionally excavated grave finds to the right. After Grieg 1943:57 and Sjøvold 1944:7.

The discussion on Viking Age and Medieval settlement in Vestfold has been based on the written sources of the sagas and the Medieval documents concerning transactions of real estate and claims of taxes. None, or very few, of these are contemporary with the Viking Age and the Early Middle Ages. The useful part of the sagas are written down in the 13th century and most documents on the settlement dates from the 14th century or later.

The base of discussion has been on the dated grave finds of the Viking Age. The result of this, taking no account of what happened in the historic period, has been a picture of the Viking Age settlement concentrated in the southern part of Vestfold and almost none in the middle and northern parts.

Sigurd Grieg and Thorleif Sjøvold, in 1943 and 1944, confirmed this opinion with two maps (fig 2) (Grieg 1943:57, Sjøvold 1944:7). Sjøvold's map is not quite relevant in this connection, while his aim was to study the inhumation tradition of Viking Age Vestfold. The distribution of Prehistoric hillforts, though not dated, show that this picture might be wrong (fig 3). This map by Einar Østmo suggest other concentrations of settlement than did the grave finds of the

Viking Age (Østmo 1977:108 ff). Traditionally hillforts are dated to the migration period, but lately also evidence of Viking Age hillforts have been presented from the western part of Norway (Per Ringstad, paper read 30/8 1989, XVIII Nordiska arkeologmøtet). A more even spread of settlement in Vestfold seems reasonable, new concentrations of settlement and functions will appear.

The topographical units

One reason for the distribution of graves and finds is of course the landscape itself. I have restricted my area of investigation to the middle and southern part of the county. This is a practical way of doing it, but it also implies a topographical and cultural reason (fig 1).

In the Middle Ages the castle Tunsberghus was the administrative, economic and military center of a kind of fief, "Sysla" in Norwegian. Tunsbergsysla is by some historians supposed to have consisted of an area larger than today's county. When, in 1380, this area was divided into two fiefs or "syssel" the division resulted in Numedal skipreide (consisting of Hedrum, Sandeherred, Tjøme, Tjølling and Brunlanes)

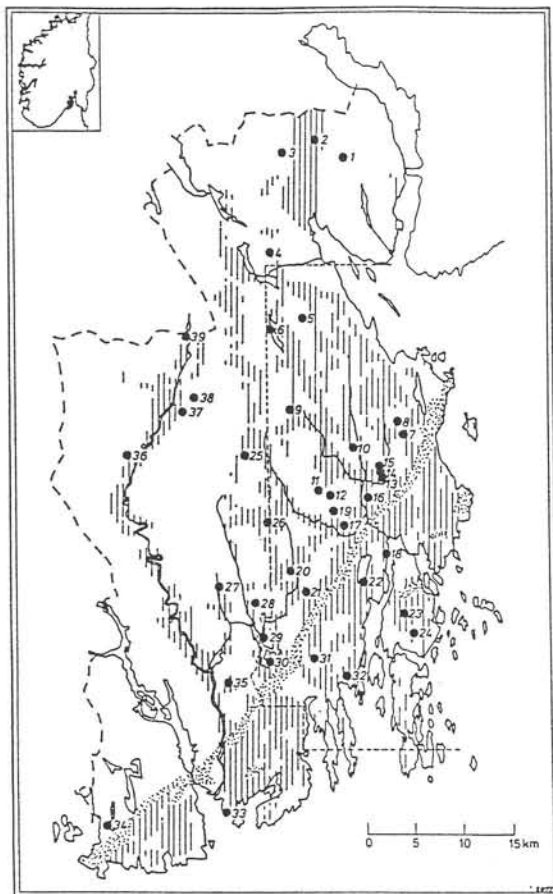


Fig 3. The distribution of hillforts i Prehistoric Vestfold. Cfr. figure 2. After Østmo 1978:111.

and Tunsberg syssel (consisting of Strømmen, Skoger, Sande, Hof, Botne, Ramnes, Våle, Borre, Andebu, Sem, Stokke and Nøtterøy) (Johnsen 1929:353).

This area division is the basis of the taxation for the coastal naval defence of the "Leidang"-organisation, as documented in the 17th century (Fladby & Winge 1980:232). This organisation is of an old date in Norway, clearly existing in the 13th century, and probably of an Viking Age origin, in the 10th century (Steinnes 1933:55). These Vestfold areas, in Norwegian "skipreider", are still in existence in the 17th century and are then divided into Brunla and Tunsberg len.

The northern part of the county, Skoger, Sande and Strømmen, is clearly cut off topographically from the rest of the county by a mountain ridge, of an altitude of 220 to 360 meters above sea level. On the northern side, in Sande, the level is under 20 meter above sea level. This ridge was until the end of the 18th century possible to pass only in two places, Hanekleiva and Angers klev. Both places are situated

about 200 meters above sea level. The shoreline passage by the Oslofjord was built in 1793 (Müller 1772:140, Helland II 1914:264).

Steinnes states his opinion that this northern part belonged to Oslo syssel. Taxes were here paid in flour, while in Tunsberg syssel in cereals (Steinnes 1933:57, 72f). I have therefore chosen not to include the northern part of the county in the treatment of this subject.

Lardal is also topographically cut off from the middle part of Vestfold by a mountain ridge, of an altitude of 360 to 420 meters above sea level. This parish was not a part of Numedal skipreide but did probably belong to Råbygge skipreide in Tunsberg sysla. When counting Lardal as a part of southern Vestfold we can face two districts of almost the same size, 941 square kilometers in the southern part and 964 square kilometers in the middle part. (Helland 1914:4).

The Prehistoric settlement of Tønsberg

When dealing with the Viking Age material of Vestfold scholars have had a tendency to look more to the number of finds on each site, than the distribution of them in the landscape. A plotting of these finds on the basis of which farm they were found on will give a better picture of the settlement pattern, than a statistical plotting after the number of finds. (cf finds in Grieg 1943). The finds, including dated graves and finds without a context, are plotted on figure 4. Already here we can get a more versatile picture of the inhabited landscape.

The most significant change in the source situation since the 1940's, are the finds from within the Medieval town area of Tønsberg in the 1970's and 1980's. We now know of a Prehistoric settlement of a rural character from the 6th century to 11th century.

Cultivated layers of fossil fields have been found, and under these there often are furrows made by the ard or scratch plow. The traces of cultivation appears within an area of about 90,000 square meters, where also the foundations of four or five houses with a more or less accentuated oval groundplan have been found. In 1987 and 1988 four Viking Age graves were excavated in the southernmost part of the same area (Eriksson 1990 b; 1 f, 7 f).

Two inhumation graves contained armed men. One grave was a cremated boatgrave with remains of more than one human being, and one boatgrave,



Fig 4. The distribution of Viking Age grave finds and finds without a stratigraphical context, plotted according to the farmname of the site. Cfr. Grieg 1943. Drawing by author.

which was not burned, contained the skeleton of a male person with his forging tools. The dating of these graves seems to be about the end of the 9th century or the beginning of the 10th century. Radiocarbon dates on material of the two weapon graves suggest AD 680-890 (T-7963 A BP 1240 $\pm$ 70) and AD 790-990 (T-7962 BP 1150 $\pm$ 60) (Nordman 1989; bilag 6). The existence of one or more farms on the Tønsberg peninsula is therefore now established.

Borre, Tønsberg, Kaupang

Returning to the traditional view on central places in Vestfold, the discussion has been concentrated on which of the places Borre, Tønsberg and Kaupang, or to be more precise Tjølling or Skiringsal, were dominating. It has been suggested a movement of political power from Tjølling to Borre and lastly to Tønsberg (Johnsen 1929:24 ff). All three places are mentioned in the sagas in connection with the Viking period. Only the port of Skiringsal, Kaupang, though not mentioned by name, is known in a contemporary written source.

The topographic and economic basis has not been included in the earlier discussion. The hinterland of these central places must be defined for achieving a

meaningful discussion on their basis. The two known types of land divisions are the military skipreide and the Christian parish, disregarding the difficult problems of district names like "fylke" and "herred". The parishes of Borre and Tjølling is about the same total size but Sem, Tønsberg included, is about 62% larger. It is not clear if the parish areas reflect also an older settlement structure or a district (fig 5).

According to the 17th century leidang taxation, a part of Sem parish, an area of 24 square kilometers, south of the river Aulielven, belonged to Arnadal skipreide. The real differences could therefore have been lesser. Sem was perhaps only 25% larger than the other two parishes. But also the area of Borre parish differs from the skipreide borders. Nykirke parish, annex parish of Borre, was divided on Våle and Slagen skipreide.

Undrumsdal, annex parish of Våle parish, was a part of Slagen skipreide. So, if the skipreide borders really reflects the land organisation before the establishment of parishes in the early 12th century, we are dealing with quite other units. The reduced parishes of Sem and Borre should therefore represent 81 respectively 52 square kilometers.

Tjølling parish, the size of 65 square kilometers, and Tjølling in the skipreide organisation has the same borders (Helland I 1914:19). So what we could discuss is the relevance of 17th century skipreide borders in a discussion on chiefdoms in Viking Age Vestfold.

The size of Slagen skipreide should have been about 156 square kilometers, including Undrumsdal parish with 21 square kilometers, and the size of Tjølling should have been about 65 square kilometers. One would have to add Sandeherred with about 116 square kilometers to get a matching size in the southern part of Vestfold.

To establish my own opinion on the settlement of the Viking Age and the Middle Ages I have used the material made available in 1943 by Grieg, and supplemented this with the survey by the historian and archaeologist Oluf Rygh in 1907 of the Norwegian farmnames "Norske Gaardnavne". (Rygh 1907, Grieg 1943).

By using the finds and the unexcavated survey material of Grieg's, and by supposing that Medieval farms with Prehistoric graves were established in the Viking Age, a settlement pattern of this period can be suggested. A Medieval settlement pattern is esta-

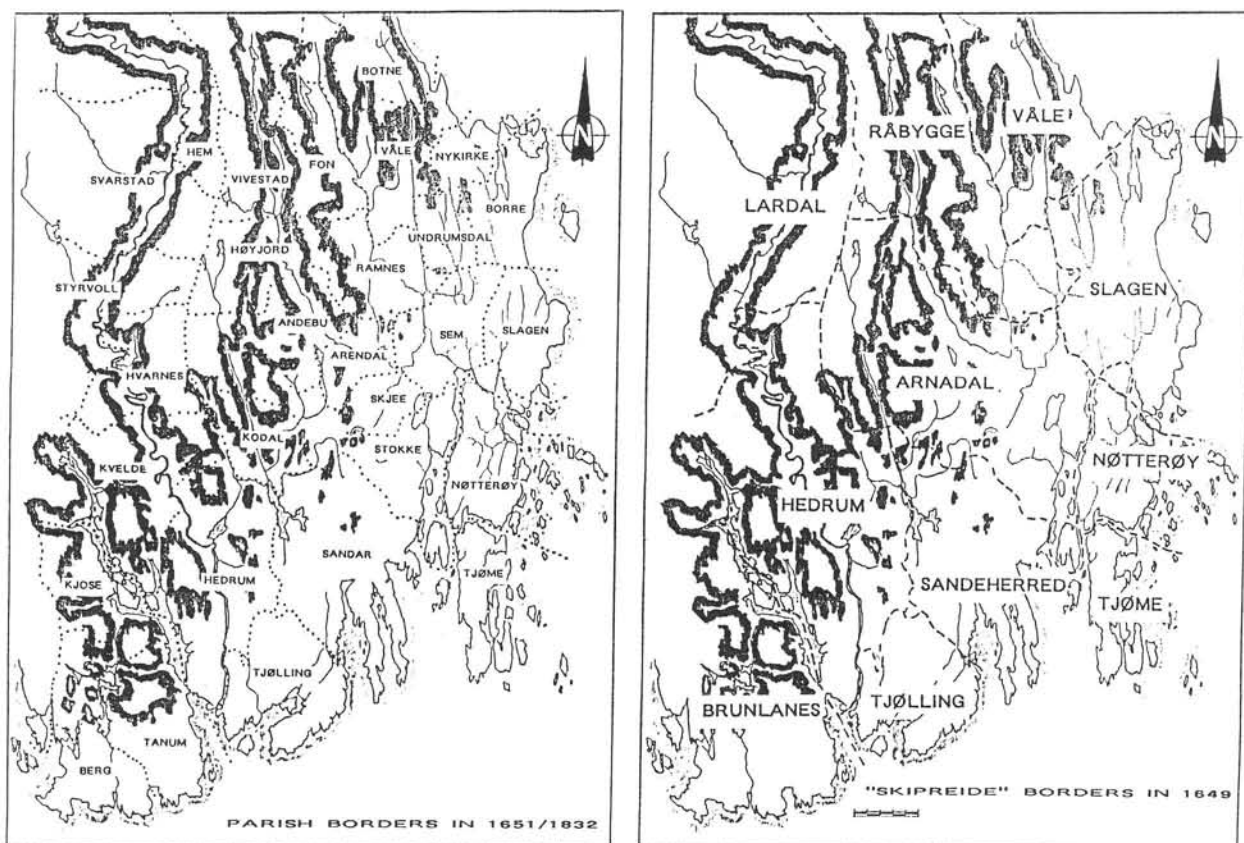


Fig 5. The difference between the landdivision in the parish organisation and the "skipreide" organisation. Note the changes of borders in Nykirke, Undrumsdal, Sem and Kodal parishes. Drawing by author.

blished by using Rygh's farmnames, which have references to each farm in the written sources of the Medieval and younger periods.

My case study is of an retrospective and quantitative character. Mapping and use of geographical and topographical material is an important part of the study (Cf Eriksson 1990a). The archaeological material presented here has to a very small extent been increased since the 1940's.

The settlement

The Medieval and the supposed Viking Age farmnames are plotted on the following maps, figures 6 and 7. Figure 6, showing the distribution of the Viking Age farmnames and figure 7 those of the Medieval period. My suggestion is that this development in number of farmnames also shows the expansion of the settlement. Each square on the maps represent about one square kilometer, which I consider an average farm size in this area.

These maps suggest a change in concentration of settlement and an emphasis on the middle part in

the Medieval period. It also seems unreasonable that the earlier archaeological picture of the Viking Age settlement can be true, cfr. the distribution of hill-forts and finds. In a historical perspective the suggested increase of farmnames from the Viking Age to the late Middle Ages with 159% in the middle part and 114% in the southern part of the county seems reasonable (Nagel 1980;147).

The "leidang" taxation of 1647, though not containing all farms, suggests 31 farms/farmnames in Tjølling in the Viking Age and 49 in the Medieval period. (Fladby & Johannessen 1971;43 ff, Fladby & Winge 1980;12 ff, 177 ff). In Slagen skipreide the figures could have been 42 and 156. This clearly reflects the economic ability and the size of the population of the middle part of the county and especially the neighborhood of the Medieval town Tunsberg.

The reason why the middle part of Vestfold could expand more than the southern part lies in the topographical base for both areas. The amount of arable soil of sand and clay is greater in the middle part of Vestfold, as shown in figure 8 and 9. Since we do not have detailed mapping on the land upheav-



Fig 6. The suggested settlement of the Viking Age according to the distribution of documentary dated Medieval farmnames with Prehistoric or dated Viking Age graves or finds, and later farm names with Viking Age graves or finds. Cfr. figure 9. Drawing figs 6 & 7 by author.

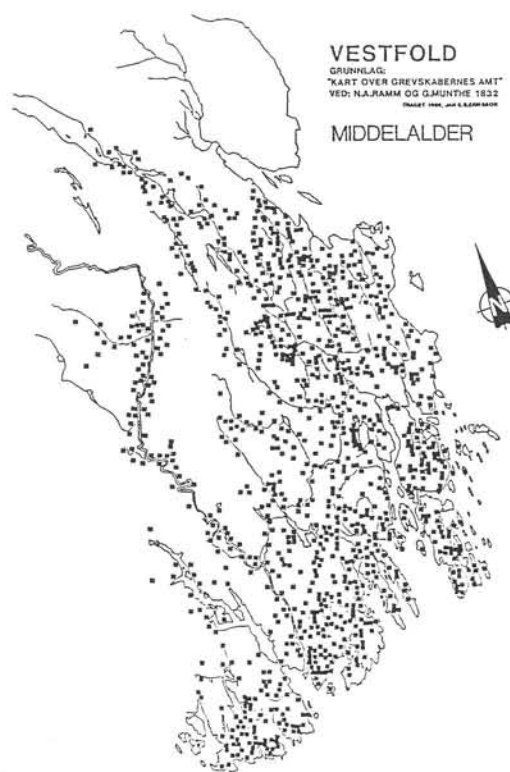


Fig 7. The suggested settlement of the medieval period according to documentary dated farm names (69% -1400, 13% -1537, 15% -1593) and younger farm names with Prehistoric graves or dated graves or finds of the Viking Age (3% 1593-).

val the 1907 agricultural survey will have to do for those figures. The comparison between both areas on the potential of fields and meadows in 1907 confirms the same tendency, though it is clear that Sem has gained more land as a result of land upheaval than the others.

Later period's borders of farms, parishes and "skipreider" could be the basis for further discussion in an attempt to establish what units of land we have to deal with. A look at some interesting farmnames in these areas could give us ideas where to look for central places. My last map shows the parts of Vestfold in question with some names that might be of interest. The borders of the 17th century skipreider are plotted (fig 10). The names of Huseby and Tuna has been mentioned before in connection with territorial organisation (Cf Hyenstrand 1989). I think that a closer look at the details on all the composed names of "-heim", "Tun-" and "Hus-" could be of interest.

The function of "hus" (Norwegian for house) seems to be strongly connected with the royal administration of fiscal, judicial and military functions. The

naming of the Norwegian royal castles Bohus, Tunsbergus, Akershus, Bergenhus and Vardøhus illustrates that. King Håkon Håkonsson built houses, "husa alt bergit" on the castlecliff of Tunsberg in the 13th century. Bohus (Bagahus) mentioned in 1319 and "Tunsbergs huss" from the 1340's are the earliest ones in Norway. (Johnsen 1929; 175, KLN 7; 90, 93). At present it is difficult to see a clear pattern for those names in connection with an older division of land.

Conclusion

The process of change from chiefdom to kingdom implicate several variables:

- the economic basis in the land resources
- the expansion of settlement into the clay soil areas
- the spacial units for taxation of leidang and tithe
- the conversion to Christianity, which caused change socially and economically, though the religious and military land organisation continued side by side
- the introduction of the deep scratching iron bound ard or the plough on clay soil, which made change possible

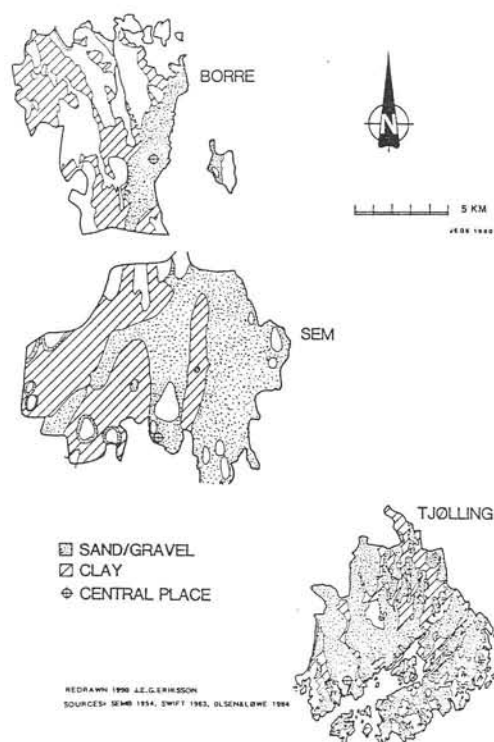


Fig 8. The agricultural potential of Borre, Sem and Tjølling parishes. Note that Sem parish is not complete, cfr figure 9. Drawing by author.

What the political incitements were to start this process we can just guess.

The location and administration of economic, legal, religious and military functions must be seen in connection with the topographical conditions. According to the agricultural potential, measured in the area of clay and sand soil, Sem, Sandeherred, Brunlanes and Hedrum are about the same size. It is not

possible today to have an opinion on which of these functions were predominating on each of these places, and which function to each period. The importance of Kaupang, Borre and Tønsberg is still obvious, though other central places may emerge when searching on other criteria.

It is understandable why Tønsberg was the place to develop a Medieval town. The amount of arable land on clay is much larger in Sem parish than in Tjølling and Borre. Especially in Tjølling all arable land was probably in use in the Viking Age. It is on the clay type of soil one should expect agricultural expansion in the Middle Ages, with the help of the plough and the deep scratching iron bound ard (Myrdal 1985: 151). In addition the topographical and strategic situation of the Tønsberg peninsula has been of great importance. The Leidang fleet could be gathered on the Byfjorden, by the easily defensible castle cliff and near the marketplace and the thingplace at Haugating.

A study by A. Jan Brendalsmo in 1989 has made plausible that a distribution of ground plots took place in the 11th century for a marketplace, "kaupang" or early town. Christian graves, that seems to be the start of the later churchyard of St. Peters, are probably from the same period. One radiocarbon dated grave can be dated to AD 990-1163 (T-6729 BP 970±80 with a central value of AD 1027). All together five graves could be datable before AD 1100 (Brendalsmo 1989:25). An early establishment of Christianity in Vestfold has been discussed before on the basis of the Danish influence on the Viken area and Vestfold. The lack of graves of the Viking period in this middle part of the county could be an effect both of early Christianity and a great expansion of cultivation during the Middle Ages.

MIDDLE AND SOUTHERN VESTFOLD - COMPARISON

SOURCES:

Amund Helland(ed.) Norges land og folk.Topografisk-statistisk beskrevet.
VII. Jarlsberg og Larvik amt. Den alminnelige del.Kristiania 1914.

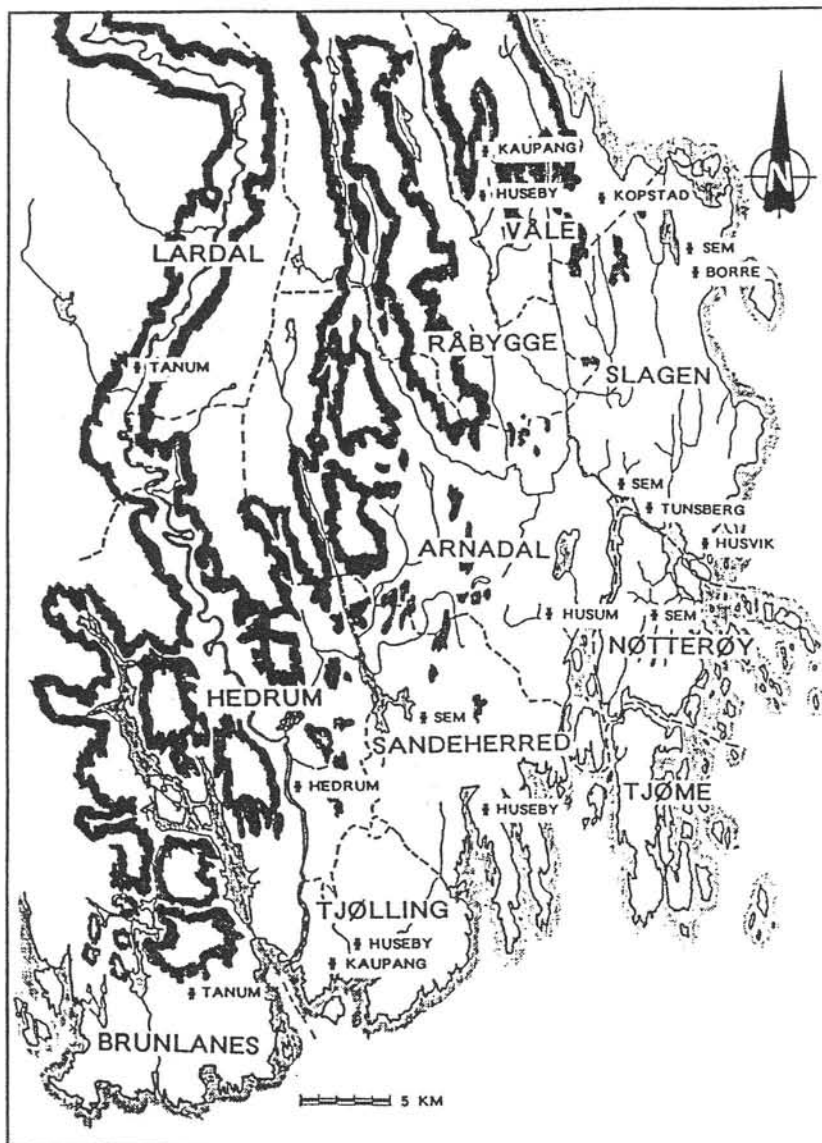
Jens Kraft Topographiske-Statistisk Beskrivelse over Kongeriget
Norge. Anden Deel. Christiania 1822

Sigurd Grieg Vestfold Oldtidsminner. Arkeologiske landskapsundersøkelser
i Norge. II utgitt ved A.W.Brøgger. Oslo 1943

Oluf Rygh Norske gaardnavne. VI. Gaardnavne i Jarlsberg og Larviks amt.
Oplysninger samlede til brug ved matrikelens revisjon.
Utgitt av A.Kjær. Kristiania 1907.

**= NOT TOWNS											
"HERRED" (+ TOWNS)	Area-km2 1900	LAND AREA 1900	WATERS 1900	CLAY/SAND 1907	FIELDS/MEA- DOWS 1907*	FORESTS 1907*	NUMBER OF FARMNAMES 1900*	1822*	MEDIEVAL FARMNAMES	VIKING FARMNAMES	VIKING VIKING GRAVES FINDS
HOF	145.05	13.5		34	21.7	113	92	84	48	49	5 5
BOTNE	85.6	1.84		27	27.7	49	125	97	54	12	0 1
ANDEBU	175.34	1.63		28	37.5	115	130	97	65	29	3 5
RAMNES	134.98	2.99		48	46.3	82	169	159	93	26	0 2
VÅLE	82.3	0		41	45.4	35	162	146	94	41	1 3
BORRE	66	1.75		31	29.2	25	111	117	58	14	4 2
SEM	104.5	.15		65	51	40	160	159	77	15	6 2
STOKKE	115.61	3.18		42	50.6	53	158	144	88	45	24 2
NØTTERØY	55.23	.06		20	19.5	23	137	95	59	15	3 0
SUM	964.61	25.1		336	328.9	535	1244	1098	636	246	46 22
LARDAL	273.28	5.6		51	38.1	212	102	101	58	32	9 4
HEDRUM	279.71	21.82		64	50.5	192	137	140	94	46	30 3
BRUNLANES	170.43	16.67		66	40	100	150	145	101	40	12 4
TJØLLING	64.91	.42		26	28	27	120	107	74	46	14 7
SANDEHERRED	115.79	2.18		67	51.8	50	162	169	111	54	13 1
TJØHE	37.34	.05		4	7.5	14	57	56	43	7	3 1
SUM	941.46	46.74		278	215.9	595	728	718	481	225	81 20

Fig 9. The basic material for the discussion on central places and change in the middle and southern part of Vestfold in Viking Age and Early Middle Ages. Table by author.



Interesting names in the middle and southern part of Vestfold

NAME	DATING	"SKIPREIDE" (Parish)
Borre	1340 "Borro"	Slagen (Borre)
Hedrum	1368 "Hæidræim"	Hedrum
Huseby	1593 "Husseby"	Våle
Huseby	c.1400 "Husabø"	Sandeherred
Huseby	c.1400 "Husaby"	Tjølling
Husum	1386 "Husæim"	Arnadal (Stokke)
Husvik	1369 "Husswik"	Slagen
Kaupang	1472 "Kaupang"	Våle (Botne)
Kaupang	1401 "Kaupangr"	Tjølling
Kopstad	1593 "Kopstadt"	Våle (Nykirke)
Sem	1391 "Søm"	Borre
Sem	1320 "Søm"	Slagen (Sem)
Sem	1317 "Søm"	Nøtterøy
Sem	1366 "Søm"	Sandeherred
Tanum	1376 "Tuneim"	Brunlanes (Tanum)
Tanum	1376 "Tuneæim"	Lardal (Svarstad)
Tønsberg	1170 "Tunsberg"	Slagen (Peter, Maria)

Fig 10. The names and oldest, contemporary, documentary dating of farmnames that could be important in the discussion of central places. Drawing by author.

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Tønsbergs Blad 24.08.1988, 05.07.1989, 17.07.1989, 10.08.1989, 26.08.1989, 09.09.1989
Vestfold Avis 22.06.1989