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## **A view from the valley: Langeid in Setesdal, South Norway – a Viking Age trade station along a mercantile highway**

Authors:

Zanette Tsigaridas Glørstad, Department of Archaeology, Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo  
Camilla Cecilie Wenn, Department of Archaeology, Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo

### **Introduction**

In the transitional phase between the Viking Age and Middle Ages, a radical reorganisation of the economy took place, with an increase in the extraction of raw material and bulk goods directed towards long-distance trade, leading to stronger economic integration between remote rural areas and central markets. The importance of including commodity exchange and bulk goods to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the Viking and medieval economy has been increasingly emphasised (Skre 2007). Studies of the intensified extraction of resources like fish and grain have presented new perspectives on how North Atlantic communities reorganised their economic activity towards long-range market trade, with new economic relationships between ‘peripheries’ and ‘cores’ emerging during the eleventh century (Barrett 1997; Barrett et al. 2000; Simpson et al. 2005). An orientation towards large-scale trade systems with utilitarian products can also be discerned in Norway, where archaeological investigations indicate that the latter half of the Viking Age saw an explosive increase in extensive trapping systems (Mikkelsen 1994), large-scale iron production sites (Martens 1987, 1988; Larsen 1991, 2009; Narmo 1997; Loftsgarden 2007; Rundberget 2007) and comprehensive extraction of raw materials like soapstone for vessels and schist for whetstones (Resi 1987; Risbøl 1994; Baug 2015).

Still, it has proven difficult to grasp the nuances of the correspondence between inland resource extraction, emerging trade routes and budding urbanism (Sindbæk 2007; Ashby et al. 2015). Methodologically, there are challenges in combining archaeological material derived from traditional excavations with more recent statistical approaches directed towards the scope of resource utilisation (Larsen and Rundberget 2009). In Norway, there have also been difficulties in localising inland trading or production sites, although in the past few years indications of such sites have been discovered (Maixner 2014; Loftsgarden et al. this vol.).

Recent perspectives have emphasised the dynamic and fluctuating aspects of exchange networks, with varying integration and connectivity with local

as well as international networks, depending on geographical conditions as well as local entrepreneurs (Sindæk 2007). In this paper, a recently excavated site pointing to the correspondence between the growth of regional trade routes and local resource extraction in the tenth–twelfth century will be presented. During the summer of 2011, the Museum of Cultural History in Oslo excavated a Viking Age cemetery at Langeid, located far up the narrow Setesdal Valley in southern Norway (Loftsgarden and Wenn 2012; Wenn et al. 2016). In addition to a large array of weapons, jewellery and tools, the burials surprisingly contained a large number of trade-related objects, in particular weights and coin fragments. The site presents one of the largest concentrations of such objects in Norway, next to the markets of Heimdalsjordet and Kaupang in Vestfold (Skre 2007; Bill and Rødsrud this vol.), prompting questions of whether Langeid represented a junction in a transactional network, and if so, the scale and type of transactions. In the first part of the paper, an overview of the Langeid site and its finds will be presented, before the broader topographical context of the Langeid finds is considered, comparing the finds with Iron Age finds from other upper-valley regions and mountain areas in eastern Norway. The extensive new finds provide, in our view, a window into the general development of inland networks and trade routes in the tenth and eleventh centuries, and illustrate the research potential being opened up by current surveys and excavations.

### **The Langeid cemetery in the Setesdal Valley**

The Setesdal Valley is located in south-central Norway, starting at the mountain plateaux around Hovden in the north and stretching more than 145 km south to the farming community at Evje. It is a narrow and mostly U-shaped valley, with steep mountain sides leading up to the highlands of Setesdalsheiene, and with the Otra River flowing along the valley floor (Fig. 10.6, and Fig.10.1). At the time of the earliest census of the area, in 1769, there were approximately 3,450 registered inhabitants in the entire valley, and population density is still low. Most people live on small farms in the valley's agricultural pockets, often separated by large distances. The valley is thus often considered isolated and inaccessible, and has until recently been subjected to few archaeological investigations. The present-day community of Langeid occupies a series of terraces in one of the larger agricultural zones in the mid to lower part of the valley.

The Viking Age cemetery stretched along the edge of a river terrace, with the floodplain and the Otra River just below. Altogether 18 graves had been dug into the sandy subsoil right at the edge of the terrace (Fig. 10.2). In addition, three smaller, near-empty pits may possibly constitute a further three graves, as they were aligned with the other graves, and the fill was similar. A circular foot ditch was also uncovered on the terrace, as well as a second foot ditch on a terrace further south. The foot ditches originally encircled grave mounds of considerable size, which have later been removed.

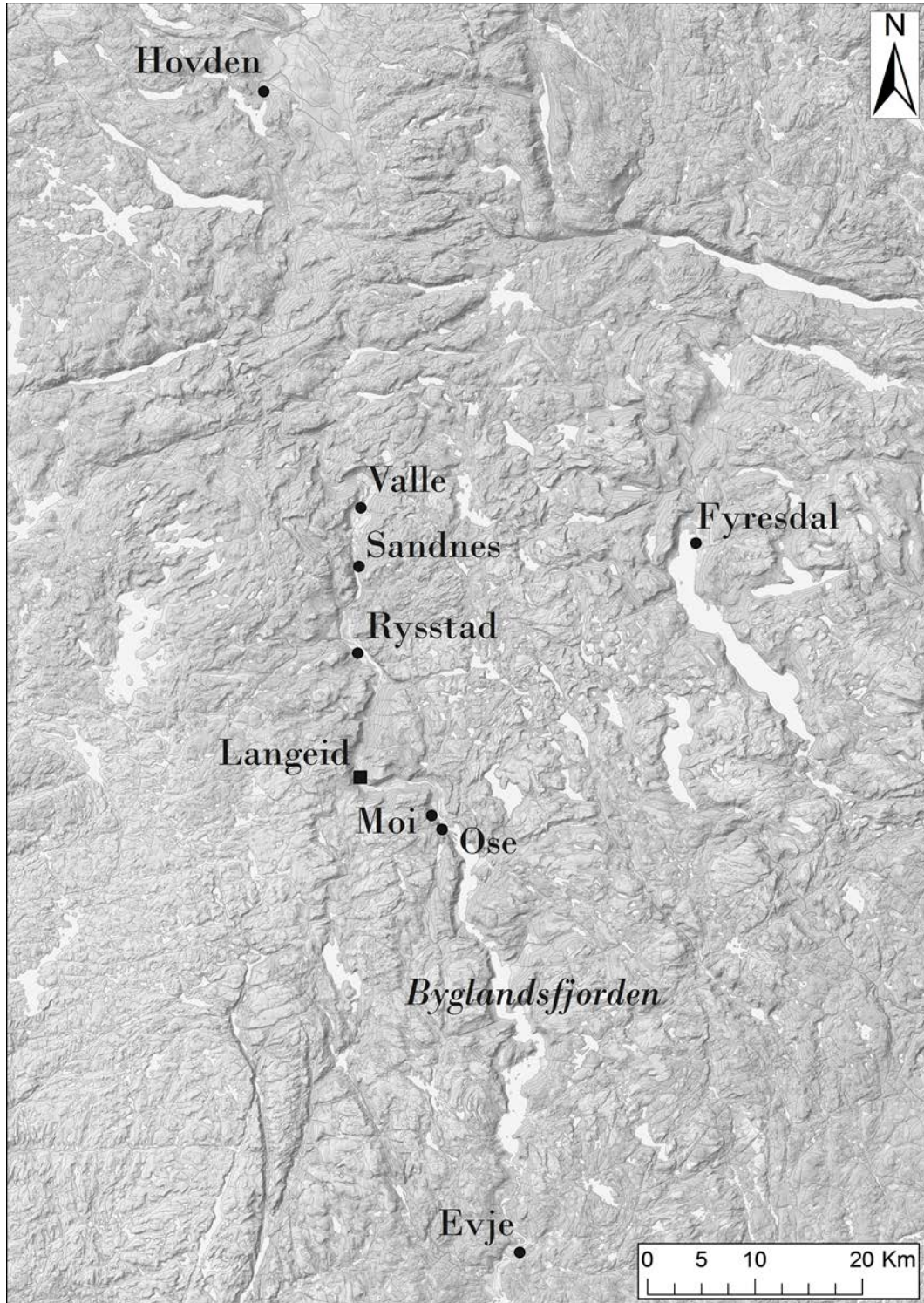


Figure 10.1: Map of the Setesdal Valley. Places referred to in the text are shown on the map.

The layout of the Viking Age cemetery was probably planned in relation to the older grave mound. The entire cemetery was excavated, and none of the



Figure 10.2: Layout of the Langeid cemetery. Source: © Museum of Cultural History, Oslo/ C. C. Wenn.

graves were visible before removal of the topsoil. Their close proximity to each other makes it unlikely that they were originally covered by a mound or cairn, as are many Viking Age graves. It is, however, plausible that at least some originally had a marker on the surface, as all the graves apparently relate to each other. The graves showed a variety of internal and external construction features, including large stones or stone slabs, placed either as stone linings

or in the upper layers, possibly having stood upright or formed part of a cover. Others had considerable amounts of small stones in their top fill, seemingly forming a type of cobbled structure which may have been visible on the surface (Table 10.1).

The 18 graves consisted of rectangular pits, measuring about 175–265 cm in length and about 60–150 cm in width (for a full presentation, see Wenn et al. 2016; Wenn in prep.). The depth varied greatly, from 4 cm to 75 cm. The variation was partly caused by erosion; nevertheless, it is obvious that some graves were originally fairly shallow. Only three graves contained human bones, all of them from cremations, and two of these are most likely secondary burials. Otherwise there were no preserved skeletal remains, and the rest of the burials are presumed to have been inhumations. A number of graves had remains of thin organic layers. In some cases these presented a rectangular or trapezoidal shape, occasionally with wood fibres, and thus seem to represent a base or platform on which the deceased had been placed, without any indications of walls. However, in at least three graves (nos. 8, 23 and 30) the dead had been placed in a coffin. In a number of other graves the fill strongly indicated some kind of physical demarcation, perhaps of wood, or even cloth or furs for swaddling.

The gender of the deceased and the number of burials in each grave have been cautiously inferred from the grave goods (Table 10.1). Many of the burials were richly furnished and/or contained high-quality items, while others contained relatively few objects of a more ordinary, everyday character. Knives were frequent, as were flints and/or fire strikers and axes. Seven swords were recovered, though only two complete ones. The swords included three of Petersen type Q, one of type Y and one richly decorated variant of type Æ. The Petersen (1919) type K axe was the most common, but axes of types E/F, I and M were also found. Only two spearheads were found, and the eight arrowheads all came from one grave. Two graves contained pairs of oval brooches, one of which also had four glass and amber beads; a third grave contained a circular silver brooch with a triquetra, and a necklace with 47 glass and amber beads. Small nails from combs were found in eight graves, needle boxes in two graves and scissors in three. Sets of two spindle whorls appeared in three graves, one of which also had a weaving sword and two wool combs. Seven or eight sickles were found, and seven whetstones, two of which were very large (50–60 cm).

### **Signs of trade and exchange at Langeid**

The most notable aspect of the Langeid burials, however, is the clear evidence of trade-related activities, with five of the 18 burials containing fragments of coins, weights, hacksilver, and a set of scales, making it one of the largest concentrations of objects of this type at a single site in Norway, outside of Kaupang and Heimdalsjordet in Vestfold County.

Four graves (nos. 6, 8, 15 and 20) held a total of 21 separate fragments of coins. Grave 6 contained eight fragments, probably from six coins, together with small pieces of hacksilver and silver wire. Three of the fragments turned

Grave no.	Pit size (L x W)	Construction elements	Coffin/ Platform	Male/ Female/ Child	Objects in grave	Date
6	238x102	Stone lining, small "cairn"		M+F	Set of scales, 6 coins, silver fragments, 5 weights, 2 sickles, 2 whetstones, 2 flints/fire strikers, 2 beads, wooden box, lock, keys, needle box, tweezers, knife, axe	t.p.q. AD 983
7	102x40			C?	Sherd of soapstone vessel	Late Iron Age?
8	237x120	4 post holes	C	M	Sword, axe, 2 coins	t.p.q. AD 975/ AD 1010–1030
9	233x98	2 slabs on top, 2 post holes		M	Sword, knife, flint/fire striker, comb	10th–early 11th cent.
10	190x97		P?	M?	Knife, sickle, flint/fire striker, comb	10th–early 11th cent.
11	240x126		C/P?	M	Sword, axe, nails	AD 850–1000
12	183x70		?	F	Weaving sword (?), 2 spindle whorls, part of wool comb	Iron Age
13	181x106			F	2 spindle whorls, bead	Iron Age
14	223x108		C/P?	M	Sword, axe, knife, flint/fire striker, nails	10th–early 11th cent.
15	244x110	Stone lining (?)	C/P?	M	Axe, knife, 6 coins, silver wire, comb, nails, flint	t.p.q. AD 975
16	232x100	2 post holes		F?	Part of wool comb, flint	Iron Age
18	223x122	Possible lining, large stones in centre	C/P?	M+F	2 oval brooches, sword, axe, 3 weights, scissors, knife, sickle, whetstone, fire striker/2 flints	AD 985–1015
19	174x61		?	?	Iron fragments	AD 1065–1210
20	218x85		?	M	5 coins, silver wire, 2 weights, whetstone, knife, fire striker	t.p.q. AD 991
23	250x120	Large white stone on top	C	F?	Axe, sickle, knife, needle box, tweezers, chain, iron fittings	10th cent.
24	118x82			C?	Knife	Iron Age
25	90x50			C?	-	Iron Age
27	220x106	Large stones, small "cairn", slab lining		?	2 beads, comb, flint, nails	Iron Age
28	225x134	Slab lining and bottom	?	M	Sword, spearhead, axe, 8 arrowheads, knife, fire striker/2 flints, comb, iron fittings, 2 beads	10th–early 11th cent.
29	246x125	Stone lining	P	F+M	2 oval brooches, bronze pin, weaving sword, 2 wool combs, 2 spindle whorls, 4 beads, scissors, sword, 2 axes, 2 sickles, 5 knives, 2 flints/fire-strikers, comb, 2 whetstones	Late 10th cent.
30	266x150	Stone lining, "cairn", slabs on top	C	F+M?	Circular silver brooch, 47 beads, silver fragments, spearhead, 2 knives, 3 flints, scissors, sickle, comb, nails	c. 950–970

Table 10.1 The Langeid burials. The table also includes the three small pits, tentatively interpreted as graves, nos. 7, 24 and 25. In addition to the finds listed, most of the graves contained unidentified iron fragments. Adapted from Wenn et al. 2016.

out to belong to one originally complete coin (Fig. 10.4a). This is a pfennig minted under Otto III in Dortmund, Germany, dated to AD 983–996 (see Hellan 2014 in Wenn et al. 2016, for full report). The fact that the three fragments had not been separated suggests that the coin was cut up a short time before the burial, indicating that non-fragmented coins also circulated and reached the inner parts of the valley. The remaining fragments are from Abbasid dirhams, minted c. 800–850. The coins were found together with silver fragments and five weights of different sizes in an area consisting of highly organic material, probably the remains of a purse. Grave 6 also contained a set of foldable copper-alloy scales of type R.476. The scales had been placed in a wooden case with a cover made of birch bark. Although the wooden case was badly preserved, it was possible to recognise the contours of an interlacing circle decor (Fig. 10.3), perhaps imitating the circular design known from other scales and cases (Vegard Vike, pers. comm.). The grave also contained an axe (type unknown), two whetstones, two sets of flints/fire strikers and two sickles, two glass beads, as well as the likely remains of a box, a lock and keys that may have belonged to the box, a needle box and tweezers. It is interpreted as a double male/female burial.

Grave 20 was in some respects very similar to grave 6. The grave held five coin fragments, among them two dirhams as well as a coin possibly minted under Otto-Adelheid, dated to c. 991–1035. The coins were found with two weights and fragments of silver wire. As in grave 6, these items were all recovered from a bundle of organic material in the middle of the grave, indicating a purse.

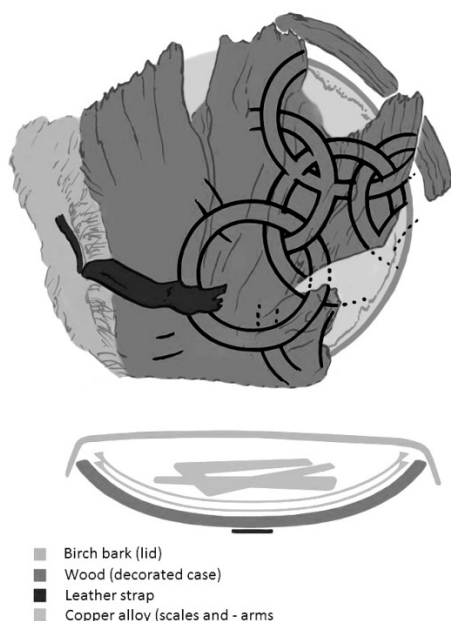


Figure 10.3: Illustration showing the case for the set of scales from grave 6. © Museum of Cultural History, Oslo/ Illustration by Vegard Vike.



Figure 10.4 a-b: A selection of weights, coin and silver fragments, and imported beads found with the Langeid burials. © Museum of Cultural History, Oslo / Ellen C. Holte.



In addition, a large whetstone, a knife, and a fire striker were found. Grave 8 contained an English penny minted under Ethelred II, dated to 978–1016, and a probable German coin from the same period (Hellan 2014). In grave 15, a type K axe and a knife were recovered, together with fragments of at least six coins and small fragments of silver wire. The coins included three dirhams, one half-bracteate of the late tenth century, possibly from Denmark/Skåne, and another possibly of Otto Adelheid. Graves 8, 15 and 20 are all interpreted as male burials. Three of the graves thus contained similar combinations of fragmented coins, giving a glimpse into the stock of circulating coins: graves 6, 15 and 20 held ninth-century Abbasid or Samanid dirhams, as well as late tenth to early eleventh century Northern European coins (Hellan 2014). The same three burials also contained other silver fragments of various types, found close to the coins and/or weights. The coins as well as the other silver fragments should probably be interpreted as hacksilver.

Altogether ten weights were found in three graves, with five separate weights from grave 6, three from grave 18, and two from grave 20 (Fig. 10.4a, see colour plate section). Grave 18, the only grave with weights but no coins, is interpreted as a double burial – a male inhumation with a secondary, presumably female, cremation. A type Y sword, a small whetstone, and a flint with a fire striker are associated with the male burial, as are the three weights found in the middle of the grave in a cluster of organic remains, again possibly a small leather purse. The female burial is indicated by a collection of cremated bones west of the inhumation burial. Placed on top of the burnt bones were two oval brooches wrapped in bark as well as in fur and textiles. A bear's claw was found among the burnt human bones, possibly indicating that the person had been cremated together with a bearskin. An uncommonly small type K axe, a pair of scissors, a sickle, and a knife may belong to either burial.

The ten weights vary greatly, from 0.9 g to 26.19 g, and indicate that the burials may have held carefully composed sets of weights. The five weights in grave 6 vary from 1.48 g to 26.19 g, while the three weights from grave 18 are 3.4, 13.5 and 21.9 g, respectively. Grave 20 holds two of the smallest ones at Langeid, weighting only 0.9 and 1.4 g. The calculation of weight standards from Viking Period weights has been widely applied and discussed (for a thorough review, see Pedersen 2008:138–48). A.W. Brøgger's (1921) work on weight standards is still highly influential, although later studies have criticised Brøgger's work and revised details (e.g. Steinnes 1927; Sperber 2004). Several studies have demonstrated the existence of different weight standards and systems, although it is possible that these were calibrated in relation to each other (Pedersen 2008:140–142). Due to their general state of preservation, the precise mass of the Langeid weights, and their calibration to known weight standards is however, not possible to determine accurately.

Although no typical imported objects of the era, such as Continental or Insular metalwork, were recovered, other objects testify to the way Langeid was interconnected with large-scale networks.

The 47 beads from a beautiful necklace in grave 30 consist mostly of transparent single- and double-segmented blue beads (Fig. 10.4b). There are also a large number of silver- and gold-foiled single-segmented beads, as well as occasional mauve single-segmented beads.

The segmented beads originate in the Islamic Caliphate, or possibly the Eastern Mediterranean, and seem to belong to the second import wave of segmented beads, dated to the mid tenth century, the first wave occurring around AD 800 (see e.g. Callmer 1977:Table 1; Ambrosiani 1995; Wiker 2013). The same necklace also contained a triangular amber bead. Another amber bead was found in grave 29, both most likely made from Baltic material.

While the weapons and utensils could largely be characterised as being of standard quality, the weapons from grave 8 should be mentioned, as they stand out as being of exquisite workmanship. The upper haft of the type M battleaxe had been fitted with a thin brass sheet. A few finds with similar fittings have been recovered in London and in Birka (Vegard Vike, pers. comm.). The grip of the late type Æ sword was covered with twisted silver wire. Most striking is, however, the richly decorated pommel and lower guard. The surfaces are coated in flat-hammered silver wire with decorative elements in flat-hammered gold, bordered by thin copper-alloy wire. The decorations include letter-like figures, crosses, and spirals, and on the pommel, quite surprisingly, a right hand holding a cross (Fig. 10.5). The same type of spiral occurs on the richly decorated hilt of a type Z sword from Sollerö, Sweden (Androshchuk 2014:Dr. 12, plate 134). The closest parallel to the particular decor on the Langeid sword might be an eleventh-century sword from Kvelperud, Buskerud (C36640) which features spiral designs as well as a similar shape of the hilt. The Langeid sword was most likely produced in a foreign workshop by highly specialised craftsmen, and indicates the range of networks and resources available for what might be considered a particularly wealthy or well-travelled member of the Langeid community.

All in all, 11 burials can be dated to the tenth–eleventh century, and at least eight of the graves are later than AD 975 (Table 10.1). The remaining graves can only be given a general dating to the Iron Age/Viking Age. The graves dated on the basis of swords and/or axes tend to fall into the period AD 900–1050, according to Petersen’s (1919) chronology, with one exception of AD 850–1000. Two graves (18 and 29), with a combination of oval brooches (type R.652/654) and late swords (types Y and Q), can be dated to the late tenth century on typological grounds. In the case of grave 18 this corresponds well with the radiocarbon date of the cremation, AD 985-1015 (1 sigma cal.).



Figure 10.5: One side of the restored, lavishly ornate hilt of the sword found in grave 8. © Museum of Cultural History, Oslo / Ellen C. Holte.

Four graves have a *terminus post quem* established from coins, coinciding with the dates of other objects in the graves. Graves 8 and 15 were constructed later than AD 975, grave 6 later than AD 983, and grave 20 later than AD 991. Grave 8 has an additional radiocarbon dating from a post hole: AD 1010–1030. The Petersen type Æ sword is a late variant and should be placed in the



*Fig. 10.6: Overview across Langeid, towards the Otra river. © Museum of Cultural History, Oslo / Camilla C. Wenn.*

first half of the eleventh century. Grave 30 has the narrowest time span. The secondary burial at the top was radiocarbon dated to AD 885–960 (1 sigma cal.). However, some of the beads in the primary burial are unlikely to have appeared before c. AD 950 (Wiker 2013). Both burials thus seem to have taken place just after the mid tenth century.

### **Beyond Langeid: a regional perspective**

But what form of economic activity do the deceased at Langeid and their objects represent, and how did the activity at Langeid, a small and seemingly isolated valley community, relate to similar environments in the region? To bridge the apparent gap between the lack of discovered trading/production sites and the evident growth in inland resource utilisation during the Viking Age, the distribution of scales and weights, coins and hacksilver, as well as objects acquired through long-distance networks, are often highlighted as indicative of a more intensified and formalised exchange economy (cf. Pedersen 2008). Still, scales and weights outside of the trading sites at Kaupang and Heimdalsjordet all come from burials or uncertain contexts. Their find contexts do not, then, indicate their primary use context, and one cannot rule out the possibility that the placement of weighing equipment, exchange currencies and likewise hacksilver in graves had metaphorical aspects. The fact that at Langeid these objects were placed in the graves as sets

strongly suggests that their primary use and context was known, and that this pattern reflects their actual use in trade and exchange.

There seems to be no doubt that these are graves of members of a community actively engaged in regional exchange networks, connected to larger networks of exchange and embracing impulses and items that drew on foreign contact and inspiration. The suggestion of trade routes and commercial activity in Viking Age Setesdal was first made by Jan Henning Larsen, based mainly on finds from Valle, some 25 km north of Langeid (cf. Fig. 10.1; Larsen 1980, 1984:143–6, 2000). Here, a large number of coins and weights have been found in at least four burial contexts, mainly dated to the early eleventh century. A number of Celtic and Anglo-Saxon objects are known from other funerary monuments in the area. Similarly, the only five Frankish spearheads in Aust-Agder County have been found in Setesdal, and at least three of them come from Valle (Larsen 2000:45). Furthermore, before the Langeid excavations, Valle had the only finds of imported beads of glass and amber in Setesdal (Larsen 1980).

Larsen points out that a large network of old trails and roads crossing the highlands and mountains is known in and around Valle, some of which may well date back to the Viking Age. From the twelfth century, furs and hides passed through the area as tax payments to the bishop in Stavanger (Larsen 1980), giving the name to one of the known old trails in the area, the ‘Hide Road’ (Norw. *Skinnevegen*). The ‘Hide Road’ starts at Fyresdal in Telemark County and passes through Valle towards Lysefjord in Rogaland on the west coast of Norway (cf. Fig 10.7). Archaeological finds from rock shelters along the road, for instance, suggest that the route has been used considerably longer, as it forms a natural access route through the mountains to the west coast (Rolfsen 1977; Mikkelsen 1980). Another well-known passage is the ‘Bishop’s Road’ (Norw. *Bispevegen*), which runs along the now-desolated Finndalen from Fyresdal to Valle. It is assumed that the road dates back at least to the thirteenth century, although this route might also be considerably older (Langstrøm et al. 1984).

Valle is regarded as a likely candidate for a transshipment centre for the distribution of raw materials, particularly iron, but products like furs and hides could also have been common. Investigations at Hovden in the northern part of the Setesdal Valley attest to large-scale iron production from the late tenth century, gradually increasing and reaching industrial proportions in the thirteenth century (Larsen 2009:163–8). It has been suggested that production averaged more than 8 tonnes of iron annually, although this estimate is most likely too low (Larsen 2009:147). A large number of iron extraction related sites are also known from the highlands above the valley further south, although not indicating production on such a large scale as at Hovden (Larsen 2009:168). A transshipment centre with local, perhaps seasonal, fairs in Valle would make sense, given its proximity to communication routes leading towards other inland networks, which headed further into the wealthy agricultural lowlands of eastern Norway and to the rich

agricultural communities on the west coast facing the North Sea. But could Langeid be a second such site with similar functions? The wide valley floor does give room for assembling people, but as far as the evidence goes today, there are no other distinct factors supporting the idea of a trading site at Langeid, though the distance to the 'Hide Road' is actually no further from Langeid than from central Valle. However, the new evidence from Langeid suggests as strong a connection to trade in the lower part of the valley as in the upper part.

Another striking concentration of artefacts associated with exchange is found in Fjære in the municipality of Grimstad, situated by the coast about 95 km south-east of Langeid. Grimstad has produced four of the six known Viking Age sets of scales in the county, as well as showing a marked concentration of weights, some with mounted Anglo-Saxon coins. A number of Insular and Continental objects have been found in graves in the area (Larsen 1986). Several hoards with gold and silver objects have been discovered along the coastline in the same region. In Fjære, other factors also come into play, such as a sheltered coastline offering a relatively short and convenient passage to the Continent across the sea, and roads going along the coast and heading inland. The area is characterised by fertile agricultural conditions, but even more important were probably the many soapstone quarries accessible from Fjære, which seem to have been exploited extensively from the tenth century (Risbøl 1994:130–131). Soapstone vessels may have been regularly exported to Denmark and to markets along the Norwegian coast, such as Kaupang (Skjølsvold 1961:120; Larsen 2000:42; Schou 2007). The coins, weights and imported finds seem to be concentrated in the main agricultural areas, where many of the historically known farms were the homesteads for clerical and royal representatives in the Middle Ages, and where there are large burial grounds, some dating back to the early Iron Age, the third–fourth century AD (Larsen 2000:41). Together, these aspects indicate an area with strong economic activity and substantial resources – political, financial and communicative – possibly including a regional emporium in the Grimstad area with sailing routes to Kaupang and/or Heimdalsjordet in Vestfold (Larsen 1986).

A word of caution should, however, be issued concerning the scale of distribution of trade-related objects in Langeid, Valle and Fjære/Grimstad, respectively. Apart from one previously collected weight, all the finds in the Langeid area are concentrated in the fairly restricted area of the cemetery, whereas the Valle finds come from graves in a much larger area, from different farms at different locations, and the same applies to the overall picture of finds in the Grimstad region. Finds of scales, weights and coins could thus represent different types of activity and varying temporal intensity. The graves in the Fjære/Grimstad area with trade-related material are hardly later than the tenth century, while the finds from the Setesdal Valley represent a later phase, mostly belonging to the tenth or early eleventh century. This could be explained by the influence of the Christianisation process on the coastal regions of southern Norway from the late tenth century, with pagan burial rites apparently fading out during the middle of the tenth century. Only one exception is found: a rich and apparently pagan early eleventh-century male burial from

Bringsvær/Fjære with a set of scales and six weights (Rolfson 1981). This allows the formulation of several questions concerning the relationship between the two apparent economic centres of Fjære and Valle. Do they signify a shift in how and where trade was performed? Does the Bringsvær grave point to the continuation of the marketplace or node in an economic network in Fjære, of which we have evidence from the tenth century, or does it indicate a change in the organisation of regional exchange and trade routes?

### **Stationary and mobile entrepreneurs**

One clue to the trade-related activities at Langeid might lie in the noticeable constraints presented by the natural topography, which largely dictates the location of feasible communication routes and meeting places. According to descriptions from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, land-based travel down and out of the valley was confined to trails and paths before the main road was built in the 1840s. These trails, like the 'Hide Road' and the 'Bishop's Road', connected Setesdal to Lysefjord and Rogaland in the west, and with the Telemark valleys and the coastal areas in the east via Fyresdal (Bull 1928:46; Midttun 1928:134; Kaland 1972:169). The steep hillsides and narrow roads meant that any transportation of goods had to be by pack animal, which limited the amount of goods that could be transported (Skar 1909:151). It is therefore no wonder that the two large lakes Byglandsfjorden and Åraksfjorden, linked by the Otra River, were also used as a vital transport route in the early nineteenth century. Traffic from Byglandsfjorden up to the next inland fjord, Åraksfjorden, and to its end at Ose was possible in the middle of summer, when currents were manageable. It is possible to travel up from Ose to Langeid by boat; during the summer the river here is wide and flows fairly smoothly, and in the early twentieth century a ferry stop existed directly across the river from Langeid (Helland 1904:117; Rysstad 1928:11). Continued river transport was impossible northwards from Langeid, as the river becomes considerably narrower at this point, with series of small rapids. There are, however, areas further north, notably at Rysstad, along Lake Flåni, and at Valle, where the river grows wider and calmer, and boating is easy. In between, it would have been necessary to use other forms of transport.

The topographical situation at Langeid presents it as a suitable place for transshipment and transactions. According to the archaeologist Oluf Rygh (1905:84, 197), who compiled the still widely applied lexicon of Norwegian place names and their meanings, Langeid simply means 'the long isthmus' and alludes to how the river was no longer passable, and the boats had to be pulled over land for a while from this point. Langeid represents the northern extreme of feasible continuous boat transport on the inland lakes in summer, thus serving much of southern Setesdal. A plausible suggestion is, thus, that Langeid constituted a natural last stop for the transshipment of goods coming along the lakes from the south, as well as for goods from the surrounding farms and mountains awaiting shipment southward across the lakes. It would have provided a good opportunity for producers, local landlords and traders to meet for gossiping, bargaining and negotiating the distribution of bulk goods. The occurrence of imported beads and luxury weapons

indicates that the economic activity was not limited to the transshipment and exchange of raw materials and bulk commodities. The establishment of a fairly predictable transport route could have made possible other types of trade, for example for travelling salesmen moving their goods, such as minor household items and affordable exotic goods into some of the small valley communities. Similar scenarios are probably reflected in the smaller rural communities on the Continent from the eighth and ninth centuries, where it has been suggested that travelling merchants, 'chapmen' or 'peddlers' undertook the distribution and exchange of goods from emporia to the rural population further inland (Loveluck 2013:209–10).

### **Setesdal Valley and the inland expansion**

In addition to the Viking Age cemetery, the Langeid excavations also revealed settlement activity, with a large number of post holes, cooking pits and waste pits, remains of iron production as well as agricultural activities, with dates ranging from the Mesolithic to the medieval period, but with a strong prevalence of activities in the Roman Iron Age. A similar chronological situation, pointing to the intensive long-term use of the limited agricultural resources and suitable settlement sites in the valley, is reflected in other recent excavations in Setesdal Valley, not far from Langeid (Moi, approximately 7.5 km south-west of Langeid, cf. Reitan 2011; Sandnes in Valle, about 20 km north of Langeid, cf. Wenn et al. 2015). These locations all paint a similar picture of how small farming communities with iron production as an important additional activity were established during the Roman Iron Age in the agricultural enclaves in the valley, their activity and population probably expanding in the Viking Age. This interpretation is supported by a marked increase in stray finds from the Viking period compared with the Roman Age and Migration Period (Låg 1999; Larsen 2000), and the gradual growth of iron production in the highlands and mountain areas towards massive production in the eleventh–twelfth century.

This situation is not, however, unique to Setesdal. Assuming that settlement intensity, at least to a certain extent, is indicated by the frequency of finds, surveys of graves and stray finds point towards a strong increase in settlement in the central upper valleys in East Norway during the Viking Age. Although a number of new finds have been acquired since these surveys were compiled, the proportional relationship between the periods remains largely unchanged (Table 10.2, see also Figure 10.7). The data suggest that a major settlement expansion took place in the upper valleys and mountainous areas in the western part of Scandinavia during the late Viking Age, in the period from the late ninth to early eleventh century. The upper valleys in Telemark County are particularly interesting in this regard, as they are connected with Setesdal by numerous paths and small roads across the mountains, and these, in turn, provide access towards the more fertile agricultural communities along the coastal zone. A closer look at the chronology of the Viking Age finds in the Telemark valleys shows that, although there is a significant increase in finds from the ninth century, the major boom occurs in the tenth century (Kaland 1972:175), coinciding with the assumed regional intensification of resource exploitation.



	<b>Roman—Migration Period</b> <i>(1st—late 6th cent. AD)</i>		<b>Merovingian Period</b> <i>(late 6th—late 8th cent. AD)</i>		<b>Viking Age</b> <i>(late 8th—mid 11th cent. AD)</i>	
	<i>Burials</i>	<i>Stray finds</i>	<i>Burials</i>	<i>Stray finds</i>	<i>Burials</i>	<i>Stray finds</i>
<b>Central valleys in Eastern Norway:</b>						
<i>Glåmdalen</i>	3	16	9	11	86	65
<i>Gudbrandsdalen</i>	11	34	20	6	115	139
<i>Valdres</i>	53	67	47	27	106	139
<i>Hallingdal</i>	6	20	8	3	36	63
<i>Sigdal-Eggedal</i>	4	1	2	-	13	1
<i>Numedal</i>	9	3	4	5	34	22
<b>Valleys in Telemark County:</b>						
<i>Kviteseid</i>	3	4	1	2	48	6
<i>Fyresdal</i>	2	3	1	-	22	5
<i>Lårdal</i>	6	-	2	1	27	3
<i>Seljord</i>		9	4	2	56	50
<i>Vinje</i>	2	-	-	2	18	18
<i>Rauland</i>	-	7		2	12	33
<i>Tinn</i>	5	8	3	8	36	66

*Table 10.2: The number of burials and stray finds from the Iron Age in some of the largest valley regions in East Norway, with data for specific parts of Telemark County (extracted from Hougen 1947:108, 117, 125, 141, 150; Munch 1965:161; Kaland 1972:180–215)*

The Langeid graves show a noteworthy variety in burial customs associated with pagan praxis, at a remarkably late stage. This is not unique in Setesdal, where at least 16 other non-Christian graves can be dated to the eleventh century (Larsen 1984). Although relatively few, compared to the considerable number of graves from the previous centuries, they indicate a notable preservation of pagan practices to a far greater extent than what seems to be the case in the coastal districts, where pagan burials largely disappear from c. 950 (Larsen 1984). As in Setesdal, the upper regions of the valleys in Telemark have a number of late pagan burials dating from the late tenth and the eleventh century. Among these is a male burial from Tinn containing a set of scales, two weights and a type Z sword, as well as other objects (Kaland 1972:133). Still, the find from Tinn is an exception to the rule concerning grave contents: while the burials in Valle and Langeid display numerous finds of weighing equipment and imported objects, these hardly occur at all in the Telemark valleys, even though several fine-quality swords, some of them probably made abroad, have been found. Apart from the burial in Tinn, weights and a set of scales only



*Figure 10.7: The main valley in East Norway, and main valley regions in Telemark County, referred to in Table 10.2.*

occur in one other place: a small concentration of weighing equipment found in two late tenth/early eleventh-century burials in Fyresdal (Kaland 1972:133). One of these weights is very similar to the ones found in Valle, and might be indicative of how the two communities participated in regular trade, possibly even along the same trade routes. The late dating of the three burials with weighing equipment, together with the noticeable number of late pagan burials in upper Telemark in general, mirrors to some extent the situation in Setesdal. This underlines the impression of a significant economic upsurge from the late tenth century onwards in the region, as well as of a common ideological stronghold in these areas. The strong emphasis on pagan burial rituals may possibly be interpreted as reflecting an increased need to underline a local

identity or as a common denominator of upper-valley identities during a period of more intensive contacts with other regions. The apparent close connection between communities in Setesdal and Telemark suggests that at this point a regular and well-developed route existed between different expanding inland communities, which made further economic expansion possible and allowed it to be effectively implemented.

## Conclusion

The excavation at Langeid underlines how little information we have from Setesdal – and most likely also from other parts of Norway – and exemplifies the potential that many areas still hold. The excavation at Langeid provides a new perspective on trade in the area, as it suggests that communication was not confined to trails across the moorland and mountains, but that in the tenth century a vital and structured route existed, or was established, along the valley and the inland fjords. This should most likely be seen as part of a general process towards a more dynamic inland transport system, caused by a considerable economic upsurge in the region through the increasing utilisation of hinterland resources, for example a growth in the extraction of iron from the latter half of the tenth century in large parts of East Norway, which rapidly increased at the transition to the Middle Ages. The datings of burials from Valle and Langeid coincide, strongly indicating that the two areas were interconnected in the same regional network. Further contours of fine webs of contacts towards similar inland communities can also be discerned, for instance in the neighbouring Fyresdal in Telemark County. The development, coordination and at least temporary consolidation of these routes was most likely dependent on local entrepreneurs functioning as key intermediaries on a local scale, who seized the opportunity and potential within their area at a given time. The development of these routes should, however, not necessarily be seen as solely an effect of increased hinterland exploitation and growth in raw-material extraction. There is no direct causal link between the sharp increase in the use of resources from uncultivated land and the development of transport routes and transshipment sites. The gradual development of more stable networks linking different regions may themselves have acted as an incentive to further production and investment in outlying areas.

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