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## The Four Petty Kingdoms of *Upplønd*:

### Equestrian Graves and the Political Integration of the Norwegian Highlands in Late Viking Age Norway

#### Abstract

In continental and north-western Europe armed cavalry – aided by the introduction of the stirrup – was closely linked to the emergence of feudalism but was this also the case in Scandinavia? Were the resulting military specialists linked to the growing national kingdoms, or to local and regional power spheres ruled by petty kings? I will investigate this in the historical region of *Upplønd* – the last Norse area to be integrated into the Kingdom of Norway by Óláfr Haraldsson around AD 1020. Two thirds of Norway's 51 known equestrian graves are located in this inland area and I will employ a novel way of investigating their relationship to local administrative units, such as *priðjungar* (thirds), *herøð* (hundreds), and not least *fjórðungar* (fourths), as well as travel routes and settlements. There is little that suggests that these graves were linked to an early national aristocracy, and its ruling Scandinavian dynasty – *Ynglingene* – as has been argued in previous research. Equestrian grave traditions survived longer in *Upplønd* than elsewhere in Scandinavia, which was not Christianised until the 11<sup>th</sup> century, and it is unlikely that the buried had served the uniting and converting King Óláfr. It is also difficult to establish links between historically known *lendr menn* (the most prominent retainers of the king) families, and such graves. However, a new revelation is that the farms where such graves were located, were situated along the boundaries between local *fjórðungar*, which were judicial districts, as well as subsidiaries of local military administration in the *herøð*. This suggests that these locations had important warning and supervision roles in local military systems.

#### Introduction

Equestrian graves existed in most areas of northern continental Europe, and prominent examples have been found in the linear cemeteries (*Reihengräberfelder*) of Germany, Belgium and northern France (Müller-Wille 1983) but there are some lavish Viking Age examples (AD 800–1050) in Scandinavia as well (Almgren 1963: 233–5, Callmer 1975, Gräslund 1980; Randsborg 1980; Braathen 1989; Pedersen 2014; Pedersen and Bagge 2021). In this article I will focus on the equestrian graves of *Upplønd* (the Viking Age name for the inland

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agricultural and forest areas stretching north from the areas surrounding Oslo in southern Norway), which has the largest number of such graves in Norway.

The equestrian graves differ from other ‘horse graves’, since they contain stirrups, spurs and one or several weapons (Fig. 1). In continental Europe the stirrup has been linked to the emergence of feudalism (White 1962; Roland 2003, for critique, see de Vries and Smith 2012). The stirrup improved equestrian warfare significantly by creating a much more stable position from which to fight. The resulting new type of weaponised cavalry, inspired from the East, has been prominently linked to Charles Martel and his victory at Poitiers in AD 733. It is the similarly equipped graves from southern Norway that will be examined here, in the light of developments in the political organisation of the Late Viking Age.

Feudalism is described as a European medieval political system by F. L. Ganshof (1969 [1968]), and as a societal system, especially by Marc Bloch (1962 [1939–40]). Feudalism is characterised by a legal personal submission (*hommagium/commendatio*) dependent on a benefit (*beneficium*), which on a political top level often took the form of land grants, offices,



Figure 1. The equestrian grave at Sterud, Hedmark (C21398), from AD 1050, is the youngest in Norway (no. 31). It was found in 1915 in a two metre high burial mound located 30–40 metres from the largest lake in Norway, Mjøsa. The mound was c. 16 metres in diameter and contained a centrally located cremation grave. The grave goods comprised pieces of an iron saw blade, scissors, various fittings and iron pieces, an iron awl, an iron ring (a bite?), an iron rod, a whetstone, as well as weapons, such as: an axe (M type), a spear; and a double edged sword, along with stirrups that had a 10.3 cm wide tread. A find of three grams of burnt bone may derive from the cremated rider. Photo: Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo. CC BY-SA 4.0

or other types of compensation. The ruling and subordinating system of that era was however characterised by a multitude of social links and ties (Smith 2012), and in a Scandinavian context entering the king's service often took the form of a *sverðtaka* ceremony, i.e. a warrior confirming his/her loyalty by accepting a sword from the king (Riisøy, this volume).

The source material from *Upplönd* is particularly good; there are quite a few equestrian graves, as well as written sources relating to political history, especially in skaldic poems from the early 11<sup>th</sup> century, and narratives from the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. By combining archaeological and written sources, new knowledge may be gained regarding political and military organisation during a period when petty kingdoms were absorbed by a unified national kingdom.

Three queries are central to this study: 1) Was the royal *hirð* based exclusively on personal relationships between warriors and the king, or was there perhaps a geographical component linked to this system? 2) Since the equestrian graves are seen as signs of times of turmoil and war, when did this occur in *Upplönd*? 3) How does the spatial and temporal distribution of equestrian graves correspond to the 13<sup>th</sup> century accounts of Snorri Sturluson regarding the war-like political integration of *Upplönd* into Norway during the reign of Haraldr *hárfagri*, around AD 900, and Óláfr Haraldsson, around AD 1020?

Earlier studies of the political developments in *Upplönd* have either focused on specific parts of the area (Skre 1998; Dørum 2004; Stylegar 2004), or been based on an obsolete view of the state formation process of Norway (Braathen 1989). My study includes all of *Upplönd*, and is based on a newer historical perspective, which focuses on *Vestlandet* – and not *Vestfold* – as the origin of the Norwegian national royal power. Previous Scandinavian research has paid much attention to the naval defences of the *leiðangr*, while my study emphasises cavalry. The equestrian graves will be examined in a context of developing military specialists in organised royal *hirðs*.

The Norse name *Upplönd* emerges in the skaldic poems of the AD 1020–40s. It was the area that was last Christianised, and in its remoter areas pagan burial practises are visible until the 1050–70s. In the small saga *Historia Norwegie*, 1150–75 (Ekrem and Mortensen 2003) the area is called *De montanis Norwegie* 'the highlands of Norway', and *Mediterranea zona* the 'middle zone', which are good descriptions. It consists of large valleys, such as *Østerdalen*, *Gudbrandsdalen*, *Tverrdalene* and *Numedal*, which extend towards different mountainous plateaus. There are significant cultural and economical differences between the lower lying, richer, and wide flat areas of *Romerike* and *Hedmark*, with historical traces of grain cultivation, and the narrow areas of the higher lying mountain farms of *Øvre Telemark*, with a higher degree of animal husbandry.

*Upplönd* was surrounded by *Zona itaque maritime*, or coastal regions, which contained the famous ship burials Oseberg (AD 834), Gjeltestad (before AD 840?), Gokstad (c. AD 896) and Tune (AD 905–10) east and south of *Upplönd*, and Storhaug (AD 779), Grønhaug (AD 790–5) and Myklebust (c. AD 900?) to the west. These regions also contained around 300 boat burials of which at least 79 were raised over women (Opedal 1998; Bill 2015; 2020; Glørstad and Aannestad 2017). The Viking Age warrior elite of *Upplönd* was however not interred in ship, or boat burials but in lavish equestrian graves, and it is the area that has the most equestrian graves in Scandinavia along with areas of southern medieval Denmark, by the *Schlienford* at Hedeby, as well as the islands of Langeland and Als in the south-western Baltic Sea (Pedersen 2014 vol 2: 160–1, 182). In contrast to the Danish

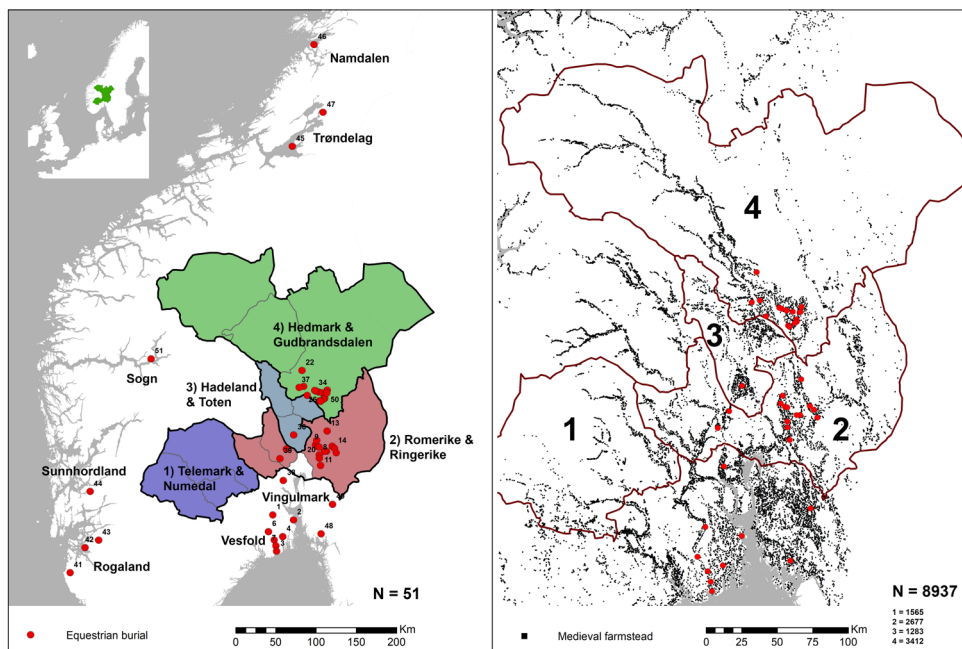


Figure 2. The studied area and the equestrian graves of Norway. Upplønd comprised four main regions with valleys running west to east and flatter areas in lower lying areas. The main regions, which may be old petty kingdoms, were divided into *þriðjungar* that can be traced to the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. There were close to 9,000 farms in the region during the Middle Ages, and in 1769 it had 150,000 inhabitants. The largest concentration of equestrian graves are found in the regions of Romerike and Hedmark. Map by Frode Iversen.

graves, which are dated to AD 925–75, the Norwegian graves have a wider temporal span, starting in the 9<sup>th</sup> century but primarily from the 10<sup>th</sup> and early 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. The latest ones date from the decades around the mid-11<sup>th</sup> century, and are located at Sterud in Hedmark, *Upplønd* (Solberg 2015: 286 fig. 7).

Sagas and skaldic poems give the impression that the early 11<sup>th</sup> century was a time of political turmoil and warlike conditions in *Upplønd*. The conflict was between four or five petty kings and the unifying King Óláfr Haraldsson. Supposedly he met the hardest resistance in the northern part of *Upplønd*, and the latest equestrian graves of Scandinavia, from the first quarter of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, were found there. Who were the people buried in these graves, and which king(s) did they serve, the unifiers, or the petty kings of *Upplønd*?

The find material of this article comprises 51 Norwegian equestrian graves dated between AD 800 and 1050, and 33 of these are from *Upplønd* (Fig. 2). The material has already been examined by the archaeologist Helge Braathen (1989), whose work has been important, especially regarding the identification of the equestrian graves. Based on typology he determined almost two thirds of the graves to 25–35-year periods, and the remainder – with a few exceptions – to 50-year periods (Fig. 6). My contribution, however, is not an archaeological

one but deals with a reevaluation of the political and landscape contexts that the graves were part of. After Braathen's study new more precise knowledge regarding the petty kingdoms of *Upplønd* has come to light, and the knowledge about the Norwegian state formation process has evolved considerably since his 30 year-old study (Krag 1990; 1995; Helle 2001; Dørum 2004; for a summary see Dørum and Holberg 2019).

## Background

There have been relatively few studies of the integration of the kingdoms of *Upplønd* into Norway, and no archaeological study exists that focuses specifically on the entire area. In a wider discussion regarding the emergence of feudalism in Europe, where cavalry played a crucial role, Braathen (1989) boldly proposed that the equestrian burial practises were brought to Norway by the *Ynglinge* family, from Sweden. He associated these graves to the most prominent warriors of the unifying king. Thus these 'agents of change' contributed to the empowerment of the national kingdom in *Upplønd*. His study deals with the equestrian graves of *Østlandet*, and provides a good summary of the Norwegian graves that contain stirrups.

The archaeologist Dagfinn Skre (1998) concurs with the main theory of Braathen, and in his PhD thesis Skre examined the political evolution of one of *Upplønd's* twelve *þriðjungar*, Romerike, between AD 200 and 1350. This is one of the key areas for equestrian graves in Norway, and he linked them to 'the time of the king's men' and suggested, in line with Braathen, that the interred probably had prominent positions in the army of the unifying king (Skre 1998: 252). Skre specifically linked them to the '*lendr menn* of the king' and focused investigations on the characteristic traces associated with the farms of these most prominent royal warriors (Skre 1998: 328). According to the 'handbook for skaldic poets' by Snorri Sturluson the terms in the 'Danish tongue' *lendr menn* and *hersir* corresponded to the *greifar*, or counts, of Sachsen (Saxland) and the *barúnar*, or barons, of England (SnE kap. 66<sup>20-21</sup> in Jónsson 1931: 161). Skre found that the 'farms of the equestrian graves' in Romerike were larger than the average and centrally located.

The integration of Romerike into the unified kingdom between AD 1000 and 1350 was also examined in a PhD thesis by the historian Knut Dørum (2004), where he criticises the suggested immediate links between the equestrian graves, and the unification process of the national kingdom. In line with new analyses of relevant skaldic poems and a reevaluated perspective on history Dørum argues that Haraldr *hárfagri* hardly dominated other areas of Norway than *Vestlandet*. The national kingdom was weak in *Upplønd*, and even in during the reign of Óláfr Haraldsson the farmers there had a large degree of self-rule and retained benefits that in other places belonged to the king (Dørum 2004: 24). He also refers to the historian Grethe A. Blom (1967: 61–3), who examined three independent sagas in search of privileges granted by King Óláfr in exchange for the support of the farmers of *Upplønd* in the battle of Nesjar in 1016. Especially in terms of military service (*utgerð*) the households of *Upplønd* received special exemptions from the unifying king, as well as in matters dealing with housing and supporting visiting kings and queens travelling through the area (*skyldir*).<sup>1</sup> Hence Dørum concludes by stating that it is highly unlikely that the equestrian graves were situated in military centres of the unifying king but rather that they ought to be linked to men of the local aristocracy in the service of a major chieftain, or a petty king (Dørum 2004: 30).



In 1982 the historian Andreas Holmsen examined the integration of the inland districts in the Norwegian realm, in a smaller study, and found that the royal administrative structures were weak and few in *Upplönd* during the early Scandinavian Middle Ages. The area was not part of the naval defensive system (*leiðangr*), which had developed since the mid-10<sup>th</sup> century (see Larrea, this volume). The royal tax and administrative system with its administrators, *lendr menn* and *sýslumaðr*, did not develop until later in *Upplönd*,<sup>2</sup> and even in 1273 its royal administration was weak in comparison to the coastal areas, according to a treaty found by Holmsen (NgL II: 428–30). During a three week long meeting in Tønsberg the king and his retainers decided on how many warriors the king's men in eastern Norway should supply, in relation to their royal compensation (*veitsler*). The retainers from *Opplanda* were asked to supply 87 warriors<sup>3</sup>, whilst the retainers from Viken – the areas from Göta Älv, in today's Sweden, to Grenland – were to supply 360. Holmsen (1982: 11–5) suggested that this indicated the sizes of the royal administration in the two areas, and not, for instance, of different sizes of population.

Dørum was not the first to criticise Braathen's suggested links between equestrian graves and Norwegian royal aristocracy. In an earlier small study the archaeologist Ellen Fjeld (1992) suggested that the equestrian graves and other late burial memorials of Hedmark rather belonged to the adversaries of the unified kingdom. One of her arguments was that the burial practises were pagan, and contrary to Óláfr Haraldsson's Christianising efforts in the *Upplönd* region. Accordingly Fjeld argued that it was implausible that these buried pagans had been riders in the service of the Christianising king. This meant that the burials in Hedmark, in the area of the well-known power centre at Åker – the second key area for equestrian graves in *Upplönd* – were more likely to be representations of a local elite milieu. Moreover, after excavating the early 11<sup>th</sup> century equestrian grave at Engelaug in Løten, Hedmark, in 1995, the archaeologist Ole Risbøl argued that it was unlikely that it was linked to retainers of the unifying Christian king. Instead he suggested that the interred must have been a chieftain who opposed the established royal power, which then controlled Hamar (Risbøl 1997: 20, referring to Fjeld's study (1992)).

It can be difficult to distinguish between equestrian graves and burials that merely contain horse tack. The Icelandic archaeologist Rúnar Leifsson (2018: 53) has recently argued that Norwegian horse graves were more common in the Viking Age than previous research has suggested. This is confirmed by another recent study that deals with 120 graves containing equestrian equipment, from the Sogn and Fjordane area (Rognø 2019: 4). These graves constitute a third of the 400 Late Iron Age graves of the area.

The archaeologist Maeve Sikora (2004) has found that bites are the most common equestrian item in burials. While harnesses are found in both in female and male burials, spurs and stirrups are exclusive to male ones. Moreover, it has to be considered that none of the equestrian graves have been sexed based on osteology. Previously, the combination of women, weapons and stirrups has not been found in Norwegian burial material. None of the equestrian graves in this study are included in the Norwegian female weapon burials that the archaeologist Leszek Gardela has identified recently (see this volume).

As previously mentioned, Braathen has focused on burials with equestrian equipment, such as stirrups and spurs, combined with weapons. This category only comprises 0.8% of the total Norwegian burial material from the Viking Age (see below). Other equestrian equipment included different tools, and while bits and spiked horseshoes also were used for

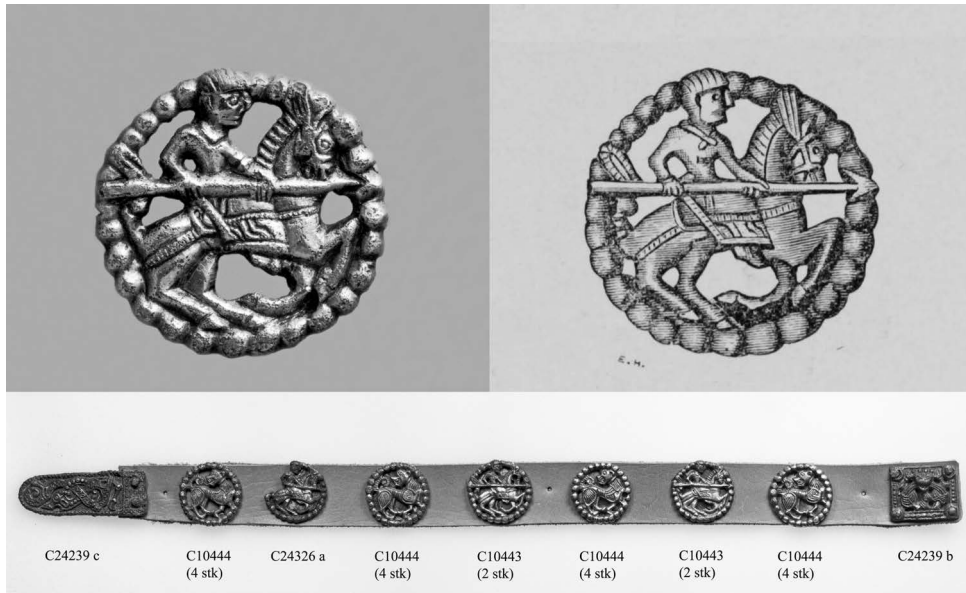


Figure 3. 'The Horseman medallion' from the Gokstad ship burial, is part of a horse tack in gilded bronze (C10443). The motif is used as the Norwegian Archaeological Society emblem. Another two, almost identical fittings, were found in the burial (AD c. 896–8). The diameter of the originals is 2.6 cm. They depict a mounted galloping warrior. The horse's gear include bridle, breast and haunch strap, as well as a saddle quilt. A feature attached to the rider's foot may be interpreted as a stirrup and a fender protecting the legs of the rider is attached to the breast collar of the horse. There is some uncertainty as to whether the rider is wearing a helmet or another headgear. The rider's hands are holding a spear or a lance, which has a long shaft, and its head has barbs, a well-known design predating the Viking Age. On the right, the interpretation of the philologist and archaeologist Oluf Rygh, as stylised by the illustrator C. F. Lindberg on Evald Hansen's (E. H.) xylograph (Rygh 1885, fig. 602). Under, all the fittings, including the four with a lion motif and the end fittings, were fastened to a leather strap that was stolen/lost during the exhibition "The Vikings" at the Metropolitan Museum, New York, 1980–1981 (no. added by Vegard Vike). Photo: Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo. CC BY-SA 4.0

riding, collars and bells would have been used for wagons and sledges. The differences between 'horse graves' and equestrian graves present several archaeological problems. One example is the horse's tack of the Gokstad burial, from the late 9<sup>th</sup> century, which displayed a mounted warrior while nothing else in the ship burial suggested an equestrian grave (Fig. 3). For now, I find the equestrian-grave definitions of Braathen and the archaeologist Anne Pedersen, with stirrups and the warrior techniques they allowed, appropriate (Fig. 4)

In a large and important study in 2014 Pedersen closely examined Scandinavian equestrian graves, with a particular focus on the ones in medieval Denmark. The archaeological objects were especially important, and she confirmed her own earlier conclusions, that cer-

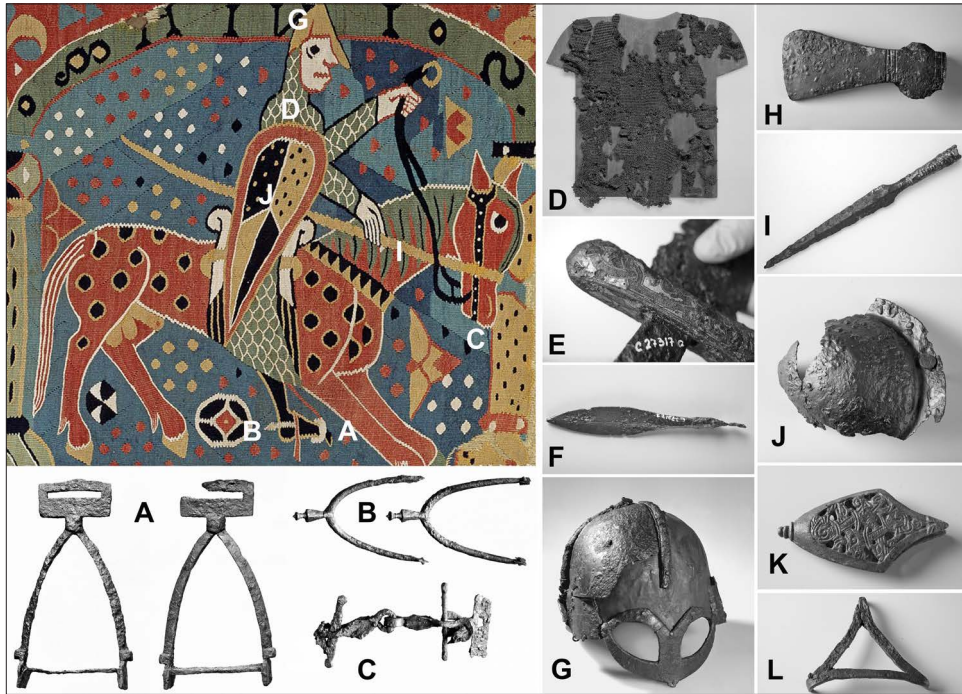


Figure 4. The equipment in the equestrian graves is similar to the depictions on the Baldishol tapestry from Hedmark, which is representative of the 12<sup>th</sup> century and comes from the neighbouring farm of Sterud, where the latest Norwegian equestrian grave was found (Fig. 1). The mounted warrior depicted here has a pointed shield, which is different from the round shields of the Viking Age and its decor is typical of later eras. He has a lance in his right hand and is mounted in a saddle that has an equally high pommel and cantle. The rider has spurs and stirrups. The reins from the horse's bridle are held in the rider's left hand. The warrior outfit may be entirely made of chain mail including a neck guard, and includes a helmet. There are many similarities between the depictions on the tapestry and the equipment from the Gjermundbu burial (AD 975–1000), which is the most complete grave and well equipped of the equestrian graves in Norway (C27317). The specific objects of an equestrian grave are: A) stirrups, B) spurs as well as a slightly more unusual C) bit. The other finds from the Gjermundbu burial include: D) chain mail, E) a double edged sword, F) an arrow head, G) a helmet, H) an axe, I) a spear or lance head, J) a shield boss, K) a sword ferrule, and L) a snow cleat. Photo: uppermost, detail, The Museum of Decorative Arts and Design, Oslo, all the photos below, and on the right Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo. CC BY-SA 4.0

tain areas have enough equestrian graves to allow conclusions to be drawn about social and military rank in a royal environment based on weapons and riding equipment (cf. Pedersen 1997: 133). The Ladby burial (AD c. 900–25) is one of the earliest equestrian graves in Denmark (Pedersen 2014 vol. 1: 173, see Andersson-Strand, this volume). Most of the Danish equestrian graves are however from the period between AD 925 and 975. Pedersen links



them to the so called ‘Jelling dynasty’, and rulers such as Gormr *gamli* (the Old) (d. 958), and Thyra, from Wessex (according to Saxo Grammaticus), or Jylland (according to Snorri Sturluson) (d. before 958), as well as their son Haraldr Gormsson ‘*blátǫnn*’ (Bluetooth) (d. 985–7), and his Vendian queen Tove. These customs slowly disappear during the reign of Sveinn *tjúguskegg* (Forkbeard). In this new study Pedersen included selected equestrian graves from Norway and Sweden. In it a thorough catalogue, which in the case of the Norwegian material is based on Braathen’s findings, provides an excellent overview of the Scandinavian material.

Recently an anthology was published that deals with equestrian graves associated to the lavish burial at Fregerslev II near Skanderborg in Denmark, which was investigated in around 2017 (Pedersen & Bagge 2021). In it close to 30 researchers discuss various aspects associated with Fregerslev II but also Danish equestrian graves in a wider more general and European context.

Not all areas of southern Scandinavia have equestrian graves (Pedersen 2014), and none are known from northern Norway (Bunse 2010). Specific studies of equestrian graves have been performed in a few areas, such as in Angeln and Schwansen, north of Hedeby, where they have been examined in the light of for instance Husby in Angeln (Lemm 2016). Around ten ‘horse burials’ are known from the Viking Age in what today is southern Scotland, of which one – containing two spurs – can be considered as an equestrian grave (Auldhame, East Lothian). It has been interpreted – with some uncertainty – as the grave of King Olav Guthfrithson of Dublin and Northumbria (d. 941) (Graham-Campbell 2021). The grave finds from Ringerike have largely dealt with the find from Gjermundbu and its possible connections to the east (Stylegar 2004; Stylegar and Børsheim 2021). Moreover, the archaeologist Frans-Arne Stylegar interprets the interred as part of a military leadership milieu subordinate to a regional king (Stylegar 2004: 176), hence emphasising a regional political aspect rather than a national one.

Obviously the military rank of the deceased was of great importance, and it is beyond doubt that the equestrian graves were ‘fixated on weapons’, as Braathen suggests. 60 % of these graves contain three different types of weapons, compared to 21 % in other types of weapon burials. On the whole the equestrian graves are lavishly equipped, and contain four times as many burial gifts as other weapon graves (an average of 19 compared to five burial gifts).<sup>4</sup>

An important question is whether to associate these riders with local petty kings in decline, or with emerging unifying national ones. I envisage the whole of *Upplönd* to consist of twelve provinces associated to four main areas (*patriae*), which were probably older kingdoms. These older kingdoms of *Upplönd* seem to coincide geographically with the regions acclaiming new kings in the Middle Ages. However, only one such region has been established with any certainty, and that is ‘Hedmark’ – encompassing Gudbrandsdalen, Hedmark and Østerdalen – which is of central importance to this study. This was confirmed in 1450 when King Christian I was acclaimed by representatives of said areas at the *fylkesting* (regional assembly) of Hedmark. The acclamation was performed in the traditional way by *wapnatake a almanligha fylkisthing e Heidmarkenne* ‘as a weapontake by the public at the regional assembly in Hedmark’ (DN III, nr. 812). It has been established that acclamations of kings was performed at Åker in Hedmark, both before and after 1450 (DN I, no. 1064; XII, no. 305). This was also the place where Haraldr *harðráði* was given his royal

name in 1046, or 1047<sup>5</sup>, and since it was proclaimed by the magnate Steigar-Þórir, from Steig in Gudbrandsdalen, it is quite likely that Hedmark and Gudbrandsdalen were linked politically. Åker was also the place where the public approved the royal council's choice of Fredrik I as king in 1523 (DN I, no. 1064; XII, no. 305).

There is more uncertainty regarding the other acclamation areas of *Upplönd*. Snorri Sturluson mentions a separate king for Toten and Hadeland (including Land) (Hkr. Olav den Helliges saga, ch. 36, 114). In addition, Romerike and Ringerike (*Raumorum ac Ringorum*) and the unnamed neighbouring provinces (most likely Tverrdalene and Solør) are mentioned as a separate *patria* in 1150–75 (Ekrem and Mortensen 2003: 56–8). The same applies to Øvre Telemark and Numedal (?) (*Thelamarchia cum remotis ruribus*). Nonetheless there is less confirmed information regarding these areas, and I will discuss this further in the discussion section below. The equestrian graves of *Upplönd* have not been analysed based on these regional divides before.

### Material and Method – the character and dates of equestrian graves

The object data bases of the five Norwegian university museums – that contain almost all of the archaeological finds of Norway – comprise close to 6,000 possible Viking Age graves.<sup>6</sup> In 1989 Braathen had identified 49 equestrian graves in Norway, which is only 0.8% of all the graves and indicates that this is a very select group. I have performed a spatial and chronological analyses of the equestrian graves, and the results have been associated to other source categories in my discussion section, primarily saga and skaldic poetry relating to the political history of *Upplönd*, as well as observations from relevant research.

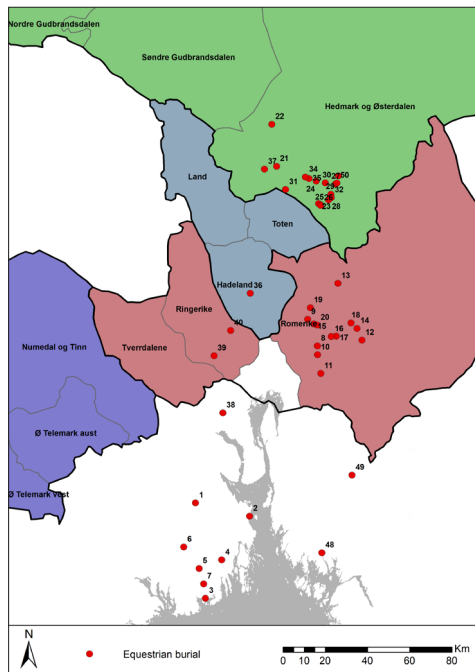


Figure 5. A map of the equestrian graves in *Upplönd* and *Viken*. The maps also shows the assumed *þriðjungar* (thirds) that *Upplönd* was divided into. Map by Frode Iversen.

## Graves

In all, my study comprises 33 equestrian graves in the primary research area, included in the total of 51 from all of Norway, which means that almost two thirds (65%) of the known Norwegian equestrian graves are situated in the research area. I have not included single finds, or unconfirmed grave finds, nor does the study include a systematic review of new finds from outside the administrative area of the Museum of Cultural History. I have added the burial at Engelaug Østre, Løten, Hedmark (C38620), excavated by Ole Risbøl (1997: 17–20) (Fig. 5). The cremation grave at eastern Englaug contained a double-edged sword (type Z), a shield boss, a spearhead, a girth buckle, bits, and two stirrups, of which one of Braathen's D type (Fig. 10), as well as other objects. In addition, Braathens grave no. 34, at Vikar, Ringsaker, Hedmark has recently been recategorised (C54789), and contained two spearheads, two bites, a single-edged sword and a stirrup. Pedersen has included another grave that Braathen has left out from Øvre Alma, Sogndal, Sogn (B10447a-1), outside my primary research area (Pedersen 2014 vol. 2, 118 nr. 48). The additions are marked as no. 50 (Englaug), and no. 51 (Øvre Amla) on my maps.

I have made further categorisations of Braathen's material, including mapping based on the coordinates from the object find database from the Museum of Cultural History at the University of Oslo. It also includes a shapefile with all the data from each grave. I have used Braathen's numerical system on the maps. I have also performed a review of Braathen's dating suggestions and found them to be precise and credible. Braathen has used a common typological method, based particularly on Rygh (1885) and Petersen (1919). The age of each object in the graves has been considered and the latest provides a *terminus ante quem* – or an earliest possible date – for the burials themselves. 34 of the 51 burials are determined to have taken place within a 25–35-year period, and the others within a 50-year period, with a few exceptions such as the 9<sup>th</sup> century grave at Særheim, Klepp, Rogaland (no. 41) (Fig. 6). I have categorised the graves chronologically, as well as geographically: according to affiliation to 'petty kingdoms', *priðjungar* (thirds), *herð* (hundreds), or *ffjórdungar* (fourths), as far as these can be reconstructed.

Chronologically, I have categorised the graves into four main groups:

- 1) Burials older than AD 875
- 2) Burials from AD 875–925
- 3) Burials from 925–75
- 4) Burials later than 975, divided into two groups:
  - a. AD 975–1000
  - b. Later than AD 1000

The categorisation is based on Norway's 'political periods'. The first before Haraldr *hárfagri's* assumed unification, signifying the time when cavalry was introduced to Norway. The second largely coincides with Haraldr *hárfagri's* assumed reign (AD 872–932). The third coincides with what is considered to be the classical equestrian grave period in Denmark, when everything suggests that the Danes dominated eastern Norway. After a hiatus Danish rule was reestablished in the coastal areas, which is displayed in category 4 a, when the rule was in the hands of various vassal kings, primarily Hákon Sigurdsson Ladejarl (AD 970–95) and his sons Eiríkr and Sveinn Jarl. In the 4 b period the power of the ladejarls was

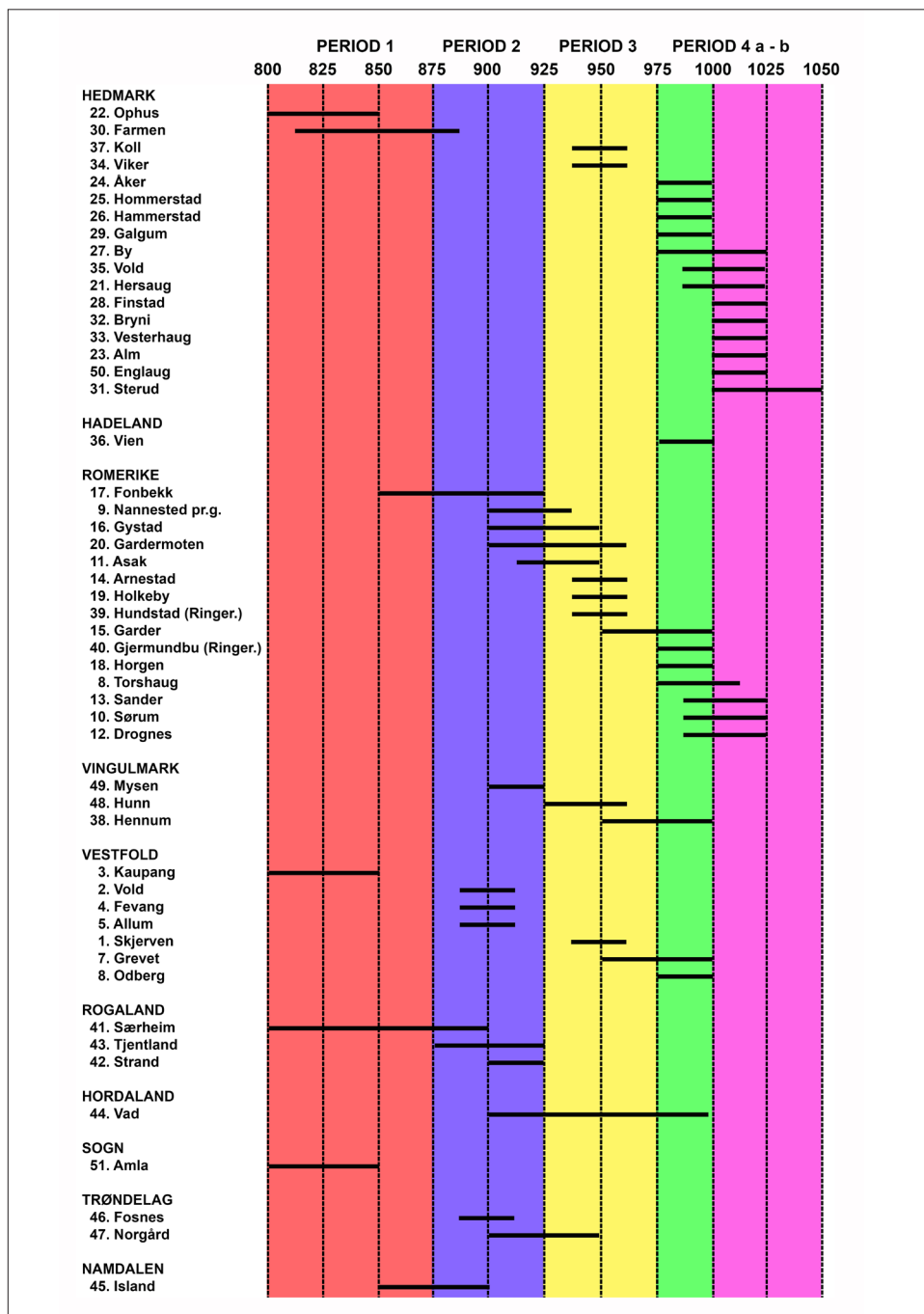


Figure 6. The datings of Norwegian equestrian graves according to Braathen 1989 with later additions. Period 1-4 b is highlighted with the colours of figure 7. Figure by Frode Iversen.

challenged by King Óláfr Tryggvasson (r. AD 995–1000) and by King Óláfr Haraldsson (r. AD 1015–28), who unified Norway c. AD 1015–20, including *Upplönd*, which will be elaborated below in my result's section.

### *Research area*

The most important source regarding the political and administrative history of *Upplönd* is *Historia Norwegie* 1150–75, which states that *Upplönd* consisted of twelve historical provinces that were part of four main regions: from the south: 1) Numedal and Tinn, as well as two areas in Øvre Telemark, 2) Romerike, Ringerike and Tverrdalene, 3) Land, Toten and Hadeland, and 4) northern and southern Gudbrandsdalen, as well as Hedmark including Østerdalen. Equestrian graves are found in four of the twelve counties of the research area: Hedmark (17 burials), Romerike (13 burials) Hadeland (one burial) and Ringerike (two burials) (Fig. 2). The two assumed kingdoms of (1) 'Hedmark and Gudbrandsdalen' and (2) 'Romerike and Ringerike' are the main areas for equestrian graves in Norway, along with Vestfold that has seven equestrian graves but lies outside the research area.

The reconstructed administrative partition is based on the parish boundaries found in the cadastre of the diocese of Oslo and Hamar 1574–7 (Stiftsboka) (Kolsrud 1929), and the division into *þriðjungar* comes from Iversen and Brendalsmo (2020). This division is based on the church dean division from the High and Late Middle Ages (1223 to the reformation).

Regarding further partitions, *herð* and *ffjórðungar*, I rely on the classical work *Fjording* by Gustav Indrebø that is still relevant, especially concerning the smallest units, the *ffjórðungar*. The *ffjórðungar* of Hedmark are relatively well evidenced in sources from the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries but also sporadically in earlier sources. The boundaries on my maps follow the base-unit boundaries from modern administrative maps and are far more precise than what has been presented in earlier research. There are caveats regarding the boundary between two of the *ffjórðungar* in the *herað* of Stange (between Stange and NN) (Indrebø 1935: 117, 123, map 13). My suggestion is that it went between Hommerstad and Hammerstad, which both had equestrian graves, since the estate numbers there make an unusually large leap that may reflect an older boundary, which Indrebø failed to acknowledge. The other key area for equestrian graves, Romerike, was also divided into *ffjórðungar* but in all but a small area lacks categorised information on a unit level (Enebakk) (Indrebø 1935: 114–5, 187–92), meaning that an analysis of the relationship between equestrian graves and the *ffjórðungar* division is only possible in Hedmark.

### *Written sources relating to the political history of Upplönd*

I have used the online database *The Skaldic Project* for my investigation, translation and interpretation of poems, as well as referenced research literature.<sup>7</sup> Two skaldic poems are of key importance: Sigvatr Þórðarson's *Erfidrápa Óláfs helga* (str. 2 and 7) (c. AD 1040) (Jesch 2012) and Óttarr svarti's *Höfuðlausn* (str. 17–9) (from before AD 1028) (Townend 2012). What is relevant regarding these skaldic poems is that they confirm that there were four or five petty kingdoms in *Upplönd* before Óláfs conquest, and that he negotiated with eleven of the local rulers regarding acceptance of Christianity in their *þriðjungar*, whilst himself already dominating the twelfth – Ringerike. This suggests that the division mentioned in *Historia Norwegie* (four *patriae* and twelve *provinciarum*) are of older origin, which will be evaluated in a comparison with Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla*.



## Results – temporal and spatial aspects of equestrian graves

Four of the equestrian graves are from the period prior to the reign of Haraldr *hárfagri*. They all relate to the time between AD 800 and 875 – corresponding to my previously mentioned first period. This applies to two graves in Hedmark (Ophus no. 22 and Farmen no. 30), one grave at Kaupang in Vestfold (no. 3), and one at Amla in Sogn (no. 51). These are the earliest examples of the equestrian grave tradition in Norway (Fig. 7 a).

I have found 13 equestrian graves from the second period (AD 875–925), which includes the reign of Haraldr *hárfagri* (Fig. 7 b). During this period the focus of such graves was in Trøndelag, Rogaland and Vestfold, and remarkably none of the 17 equestrian graves from Hedmark are from this period, which also means that none of the equestrian graves in Hedmark are from the time of Haraldr *hárfagri*. There are however three possible ones in Romerike (grave 9, 16 and 17), although two of those, grave 16 at Gystad (AD 900–50) and 17 at Fonbæk (AD 850–925) have date spans partly outside the assumed reign of Haraldr *hárfagri*. This means that it is only the equestrian grave no. 9, at Nannestad, in the whole of *Upplönd* that can be attributed to the reign of Haraldr *hárfagri* with any certainty.

There is a total of 13 equestrian graves from period 3 (AD 925–75), and during this period the tradition spread into Vestfold (two graves), Vingulmark (two graves), and especially into Romerike-Ringerike (six graves). In Hedmark it is however only the graves at Koll (no. 37), and Viker (no. 34) that are from this era. The well-known Golden Spur at Varna in Vingulmark dates from the end of the period (c. AD 970). Hákon *góði* (AD 930–61) was king in Norway at the time. He was mortally wounded at the battle of Fitjar in AD 961 by the supporters of Haraldr *blátönn*, the sons of Erik. In general there are few equestrian graves in Hákon's heartland, Vestlandet, where the only equestrian grave dated to his reign is the one at Vad, Etne (no. 44).

Eight Norwegian equestrian graves are known from period 4 a (AD 975–1000), of which seven were found in *Upplönd*, and one in Vestfold, at Odberg (no. 39) (Fig. 7 d). The perhaps most complete Norwegian equestrian grave from this period is the famous Gjermundbu one (no. 40). During this period Danish supremacy of the coastal regions is reestablished through several vassal kings, especially Hákon Sigurdsson Ladejarl (AD 970–95), and his sons Eiríkr and Sveinn Jarl, where Eiríkr Jarl seems to have had his own jarldom at Romerike and Vingulmark from AD 970 (see discussion below)

All of the 13 Norwegian equestrian graves from period 4 b (AD 1000–25), were found in *Upplönd*: four in Romerike, and all of the others in Hedmark. The latest equestrian grave is the one at Sterud in Ringsaker, Hedmark (no. 31) (Fig. 1) which may be as late as AD 1065–80 (Solberg 2015: 286 fig. 7) but more likely from AD 1000–50 (Braathen 1989).

During the years leading up to AD 1000 Óláfr Tryggvasson (r. AD 995–1000) challenges the influence of the Ladejarls but he is defeated at the battle of Svolder (AD 1000) by an alliance between the king of the Danes (*Rex ad Dener*), the Swedish Olof *skötikonung*, and the ladejarl. Consequently the Ladejarl became ruler of the coastal region as a vassal and ally of Olof *skötikonung* and Sveinn *tjúguskegg*. This meant that the coastal region was split in two: where one area, Viken, was ruled by one Ladejarl, Sveinn Hákonarson, while the western and northern parts were ruled by the other ladejarl, Eiríkr Hákonarson. Sveinn Ladejarl was married to Holmfriðr Eiríksdóttir, the daughter of the Swedish king, Eiríkr *inn sigrsæli* (d. AD 994), and according to later tradition he was perceived as the jarl of Holmfriðs brother, King Olof *skötikonung* (Krag 2009 b). This period was characterised by both

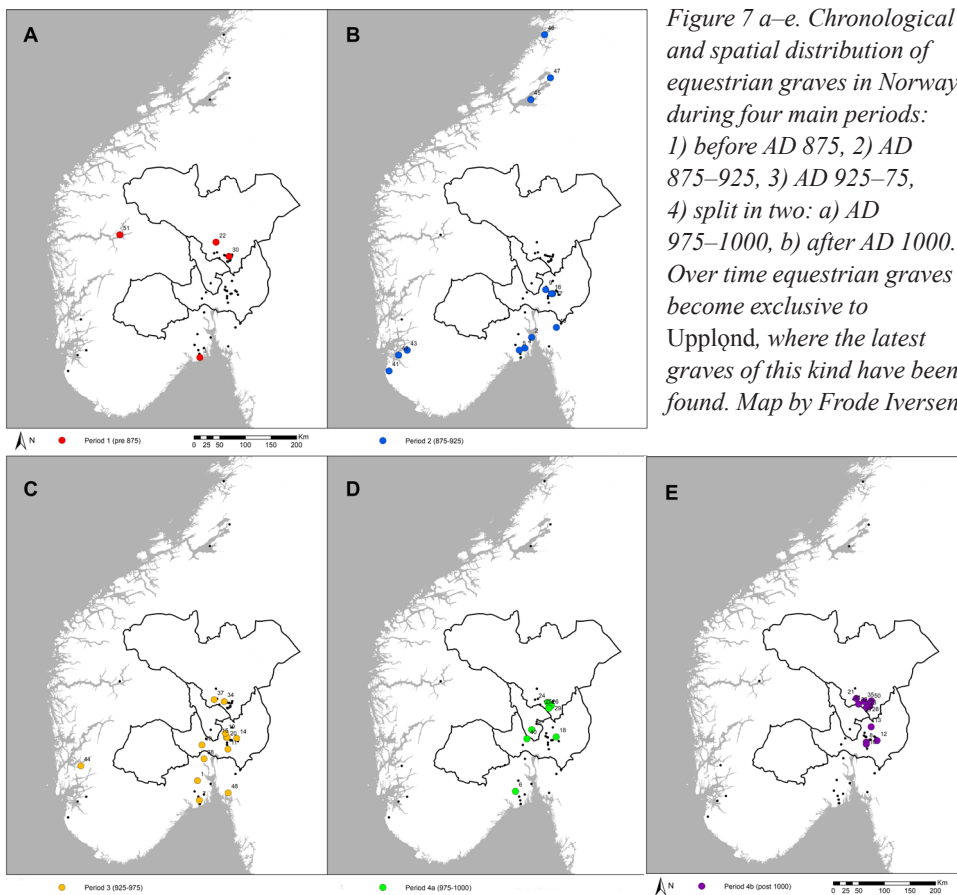


Figure 7 a–e. Chronological and spatial distribution of equestrian graves in Norway during four main periods: 1) before AD 875, 2) AD 875–925, 3) AD 925–75, 4) split in two: a) AD 975–1000, b) after AD 1000. Over time equestrian graves become exclusive to Upplønd, where the latest graves of this kind have been found. Map by Frode Iversen.

Danish, and especially Swedish influence in the eastern coastal region, although most of *Upplønd* was left out of this power sphere, except perhaps Romerike (see discussion below). Together, the kings of *Upplønd* and Óláfr Haraldsson (r. 1015–28) tried and managed to defeat Sveinn Ladejarl at the battle of Nesjar in 1016, and Óláfr banished the other ladejarl the same year. Afterwards, Óláfr turned on his previous allies from the battle of Nesjar, the rulers of *Upplønd*.

There are two prominent features of the equestrian graves of Hedmark: the great number, and the late dates. More than half of these graves are dated between AD 1000 and 1025, which means that they may hail from the time when Óláfr Haraldsson turned his attention to Hedmark. It is likely that this power struggle took place in AD 1018, or the following year. According to skaldic poems Óláfr faced the hardest resistance in Hedmark, where Ringsaker was the military mustering place for the resistance. The early 11<sup>th</sup> century equestrian graves in Hedmark indicate that some of the most important adversaries of Óláfr were based at such farms as By (Braathens no. 27) (may be a bit earlier), Vold (no. 35), Hersau (no. 21), Finstad (no. 28), Bryni (no. 32), Vesterhaug (no. 33), Alm (no. 23), Englaug (no. 50), and Sterud (no. 31) (although this grave may be a little later).

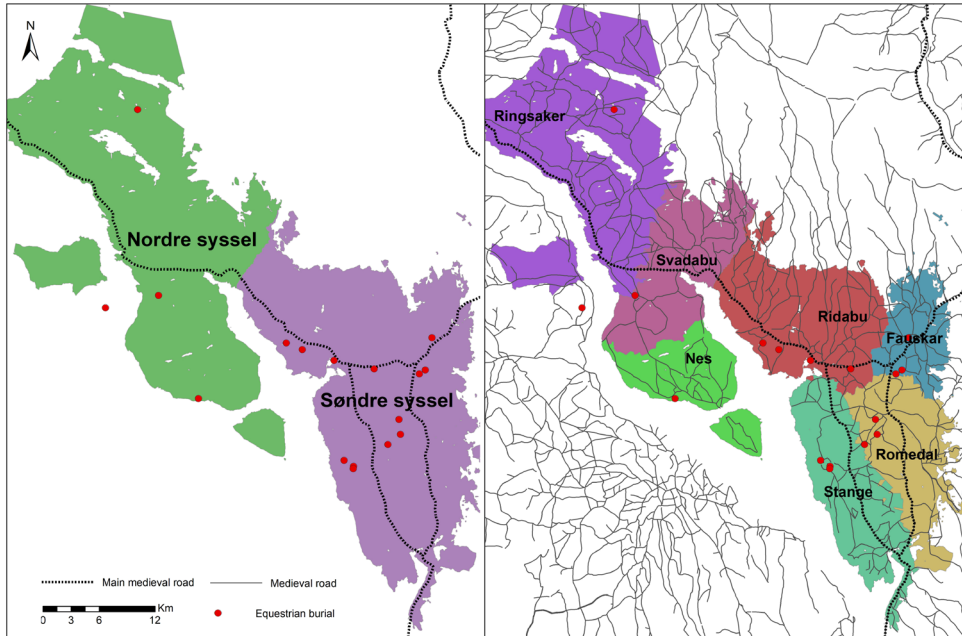


Figure 8. The equestrian graves and medieval administrative units of Hedmark. The map on the left displays the royal administrative (*sýsla*) boundaries of the 12<sup>th</sup> century as well as ‘the royal road’, the assumed medieval main road through Hedmark. The map on the right displays the *herøð* of Hedmark (according to Indrebø 1935, with corrections) as well as local roads/riding roads (according to 1829 map). There is no direct connection between the equestrian graves and these boundaries, although the graves are often linked to the local roads and to some extent to the main ‘royal’ road (in the Ridabu and Fauskar *herøð*). Map by Frode Iversen.

A detailed analysis of the equestrian graves in Hedmark does not reveal any connection between royal administrative (*sýsla*) boundaries and those of the *herøð* (Fig. 8). The *sýsla* partition is normally related to King Sverre (r. 1177–1202), and is hence later than the equestrian graves, while the *herøð* partitions probably relate to the Iron Age. The fact that twelve of 17 equestrian graves in Hedmark are related to farms near *ffjórðung* boundaries may be important, although *ffjórðungar* are relatively small units, which means that many farms will be related to such boundaries. A closer look at the *ffjórðung* boundaries of more centrally located areas with equestrian graves in Hedmark, where such boundaries are more substantiated, reveals that eleven out of 14 (79%) are situated next to such boundaries. This applies to the equestrian graves in ten *ffjórðungar*: Sterud, Deglum, Vang, Skattum, Musa, Ål, Voll, Stange, NN (no name) and Guåker. Correspondingly c. 186 out of 403 farms (46%) are situated next to such boundaries (Fig. 9 and 10). Generally the farms located next to the Mjøsa lake and those next to commons have not been included in the farms that have such boundaries. A caveat regarding the number of farms is required, partly because some of the farm boundaries in the *ffjórðung* of Vang have not been identified. However, it seems clear

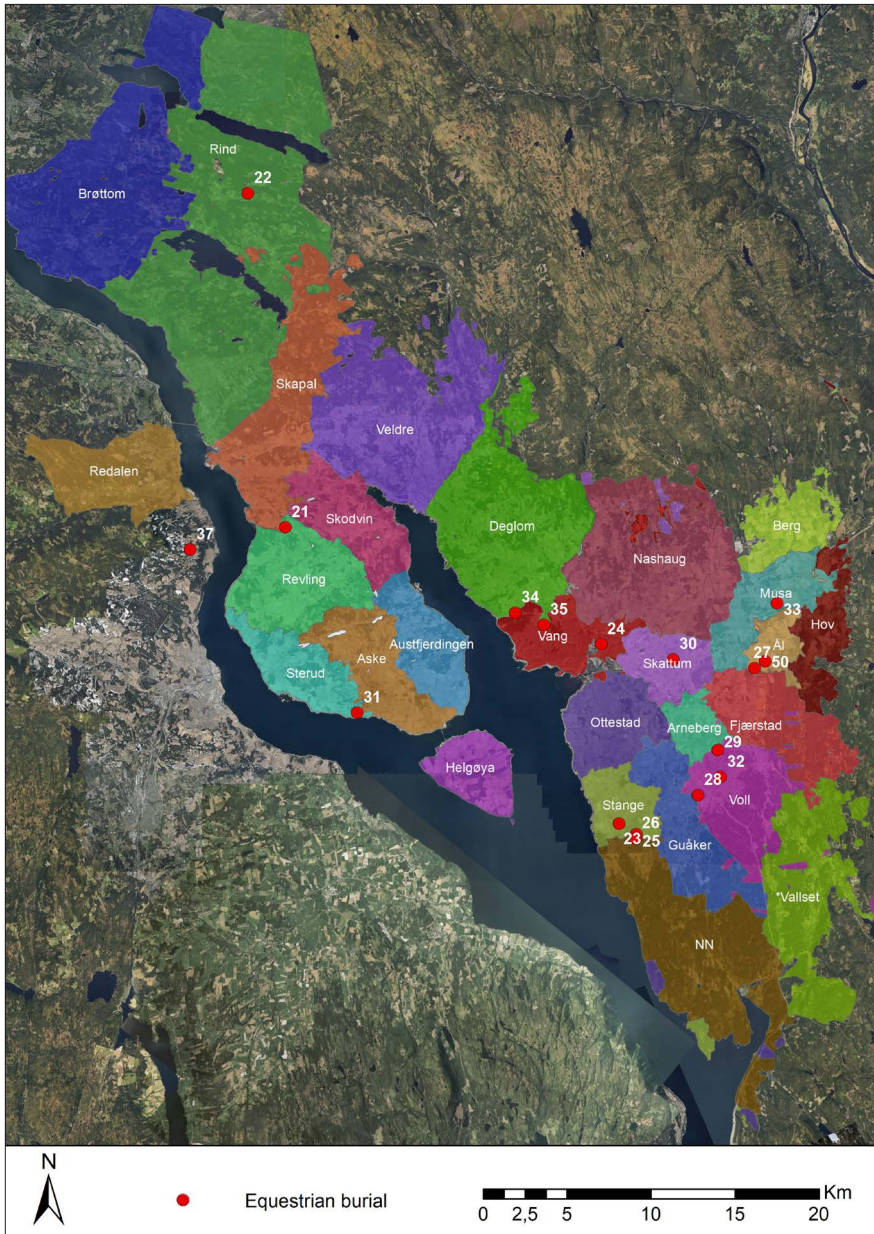


Figure 9. The equestrian graves and fjórðungar of Hedmark. An important revelation of this study is that these graves are situated by fjórðung boundaries. Every herað is divided into four fjórðungar (parts of Vardal by grave 37 were probably included in a fjórðung unit of Svadabu herað). This indicates that the riders had special warning duties connected to local defence, and probably link them to circumstances associated to local power structures. Map by Frode Iversen.



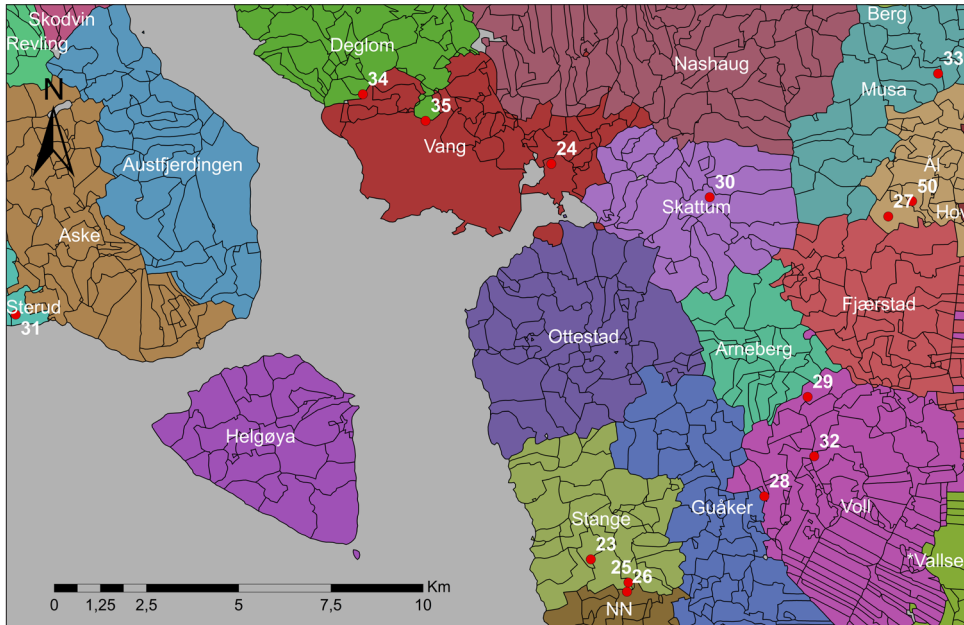


Figure 10. Equestrian graves, farm boundaries and fjórðungar in central Hedmark, where as many as eleven out of 14 such graves are situated by fjórðung boundaries. Map by Frode Iversen.

that the equestrian graves are more frequent along *fjórðung* boundaries than a more random distribution would suggest (79% versus 46%).

This means that the distribution of equestrian graves changed over time: in earlier periods they were found all over Norway as far north as Namdalen but after AD 975 they are almost exclusively found in *Upplönd*. The detailed analysis of Hedmark reveals that these graves are related to *fjórðung* boundaries, which indicates a geographical relationship suggesting that riders were part of a local defence system including essential warning duties requiring speedy communication.

### Discussion – the role of the riders of *Upplönd* in the politics of the era

What do these conclusions mean in a wider political context? The Norwegian equestrian graves especially seem to adhere to European traditions linked to the Carolingians, which makes them part of a wider context. Initially I posed three questions: 1) Is there a geographical component linked to these graves? 2) Are these graves a specific sign of times of turmoil and war, and if this is the case, when did these conflicts take place? 3) How does this correspond to the stories of Snorri Sturluson that deal with the warlike circumstances during the integration of *Upplönd* into Norway, both during the reign of Haraldr *hárfagri*, around AD 900, and Óláfr Haraldsson, around AD 1020?



During the course of the Viking Age the coastal regions were unified as far north as Hålogaland, sometimes controlled by Danish and sometimes by Norwegian rulers. Already in the 720s trade routes were established between Trøndelag and Ribe on Jylland (Baug, Skre, Heldal et. al 2019). The equestrian grave tradition appears in the late 8<sup>th</sup> century. *Upplønd*, in southern Norway, was made up of four petty kingdoms until they were conquered by Óláfr Haraldsson in AD 1018–9. These kingdoms cooperated in their political contacts with the outside world, and probably also militarily and judicially through a common law (The law of the Eidsivating) (Iversen 2017; Iversen and Brendalsmo 2020). The kingdoms of *Upplønd* seem to have been divided into thirds, resulting in twelve provinces that I interpret as *priðjungar* visible in the Christian laws as well as the fragments of the secular laws of the Eidsivating (c. 1150). There is no visible connection between the *priðjungar* and equestrian graves. Only four out of twelve *priðjungar* have equestrian graves and there are no signs of a specific distribution.

From Skaldic poems (from 1028 and 1040) it has been deduced that Óláfr negotiated the acceptance of Christianity with eleven rulers of *Upplønd*, while he himself controlled the twelfth *priðjung*, Ringerike (*Erfidrápa Óláfs helga*, str. 2 and 7, in Jesch 2012).

According to Óttar svarti's poem *Höfuðlausn* (str. 17–9, in Townend 2012) the area that Óláfr conquered was ruled by five kings. There are no equestrian graves in Telemark and Numedal, which may perhaps have been an older petty kingdom, and there are few such graves in Hadeland and Toten, which supposedly had kings of its own. However, in Hedmark there are many equestrian graves from this period, and according to a skaldic poem *Hverr konungr*, or 'every king', fled from Óláfr, and the 'princes of Hedmark' (*heiðska jöfra*), who had fought Óláfr hard, had received their justified punishments. The political leaders of *Upplønd* – i.e. the petty kings – were bypassed, and Óláfr probably made a deal regarding the Christianisation with the eleven leaders of the local þing. This is also mirrored in Snorri Sturluson's prose, where he describes how Óláfr – at the assembly in Hundorp, in southern Gudbrandsdalen (a *priðjung* of its own) – refers to the northern Gudbrandsdalen (its own *priðjung*) as already having accepted Christianity. Thus the Christianisation progressed, from *priðjung* to *priðjung*.

Not much has been known about the political development in Viking Age *Upplønd*, where Snorri Sturluson has dominated narratives. It is quite likely that his accounts of the petty kings of *Upplønd* (Hkr, Harald Hardrådes saga ch. 34; Hkr, Olav den helliges saga I, ch. 36) were invented to create a historical link to Haraldr *hárfagri*, in order to legitimise a partly violent inclusion of the petty kingdoms in *Upplønd* into Óláfr Haraldsson's Norwegian kingdom. In Snorri's accounts – that lack support from skaldic poetry – Haraldr *hárfagri* and his relative Guttómr committed arson and killed the petty kings of *Upplønd* at Ringsaker in Hedmark before annexing the area (Telemark is the only area of *Upplønd* that is not mentioned in relation to Haralds conquests) (Hkr, Harald Hårfagressaga ch. 2). My analysis reveals that there were few equestrian graves in *Upplønd* during the reign of Haraldr *hárfagri*, of which none in Hedmark. If these graves were related to an early 'unifying aristocracy' and Haraldr *hárfagri* they would perhaps have been more numerous. However, if they were not linked to the unifying kings, which rulers were they connected to? I find the most likely answer to be that they were linked to a local military defence controlled by petty kings and the local þing.

The historian Claus Krag (2009 a) argues convincingly that King Hrærekr Dagsson is the only one of Snorri's petty kings in *Upplönd* that actually existed. Although around AD 900, the poet Vittgeir *seiðmaðr*, from Hordaland, mentions a Rognvaldr *reykill* from Hadeland (one of the twelve *þriðjungar*) as 'the son of Harald' (Hkr, Harald Hårfagressaga ch. 35, Gade 2012: 140), but it is only Snorri Sturluson who claims that Rognvaldr was a king. The historian and numismatic Gareth Williams (2010: 31–33) suggests that few of Haralds supposedly over 20 (*Ágrip* and *Fagrskinna*) or 16 (*Historia Norwegie*) sons were actual historical people. There are few equestrian graves in Hadeland, where Rognvaldr was assumed to have been killed in an arson attack – along with 80 sorcerers – performed by his brother Eiríkr *blóðøx*.

According to Snorri Sturluson Hrærekr of Hedmark was the main opponent of Óláfr, who after his victory blinded Hrærekr but spared his life, since killing a king would probably have provoked a new uprising in Hedmark, which was one of the most influential parts of *Upplönd*. Óláfr instead banished King Hrærekr to Iceland, where he stayed with Óláfs friend, the chieftain Guðmundr *hinn ríki* Eyjólfsson at Möðruvellir until his death in 1021. There are evidenced equestrian graves in Hedmark from after this period, e.g. at Sterud, where the grave still displayed pagan traditions. According to skaldic poems the þing leaders who negotiated the Christianisation with Óláfr had to provide guarantees for the religious shift to the king by providing hostages. It is unlikely that the rider of Sterud was one of the negotiators, and if he was he would have reneged on his guarantee to Óláfr. The equestrian grave tradition seems to have survived the reign of Óláfr, which could be interpreted as a sign of continued resistance in the area. This makes it more likely that the interred in the late equestrian graves were the warriors of Hrærekr rather than the ones of Óláfr.

Dagfinn Skre has argued that the equestrian graves were linked to the unifying king's *lendr menn* but is that plausible in the light of the revelations above? The *lendr maðr* title appears in the late 10<sup>th</sup> century in Norway (Iversen 2008: 27), and before only powerful *hersir* are mentioned, who are assumed to have been more independent of the king's direct influence than the later *lenðr maðr* (Storm 1882). The Norwegian *lenðr maðr* on the other hand, had sworn allegiance to the king, and their titles were more or less hereditary, since sons of the *lenðr maðr* retained the titles of their fathers until the age of 40, when they were meant to be renewed (Iversen 1999). There is some reliable information about the royal *lendr maðr* of *Upplönd*, and the question is if there is a connection between them and the equestrian graves, as Skre has suggested?

In the 11<sup>th</sup> century there probably were *lendr menn* at the Steig estate in Gudbrandsdalen, and at Ringnes in Hedmark. Before the 12<sup>th</sup> century there is information about a further seven *lendr menn* estates in *Upplönd*: 1) Ask in Ringerike, 2) Sørum in Romerike, 3) Sástad, 4) Røyr and 5) Skog in Hedmark, as well as 6) Steig and 7) Sandbu in Gudbrandsdalen. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century Tandberg in Ringerike was added (Fig. 11). It is noteworthy that no equestrian graves have been found at these historically corroborated *lendr menn* estates in *Upplönd*. The closest such graves are found at the neighbouring farms to the north of Sástad: Hammerstad (no. 26) and Hommerstad (no. 25). This means that it is unlikely that the equestrian graves from the early 11<sup>th</sup> century – and earlier – were linked to the royal *lendr menn* cast, as has been suggested. However, can it perhaps be linked to the earlier *hersar*, and their warriors?

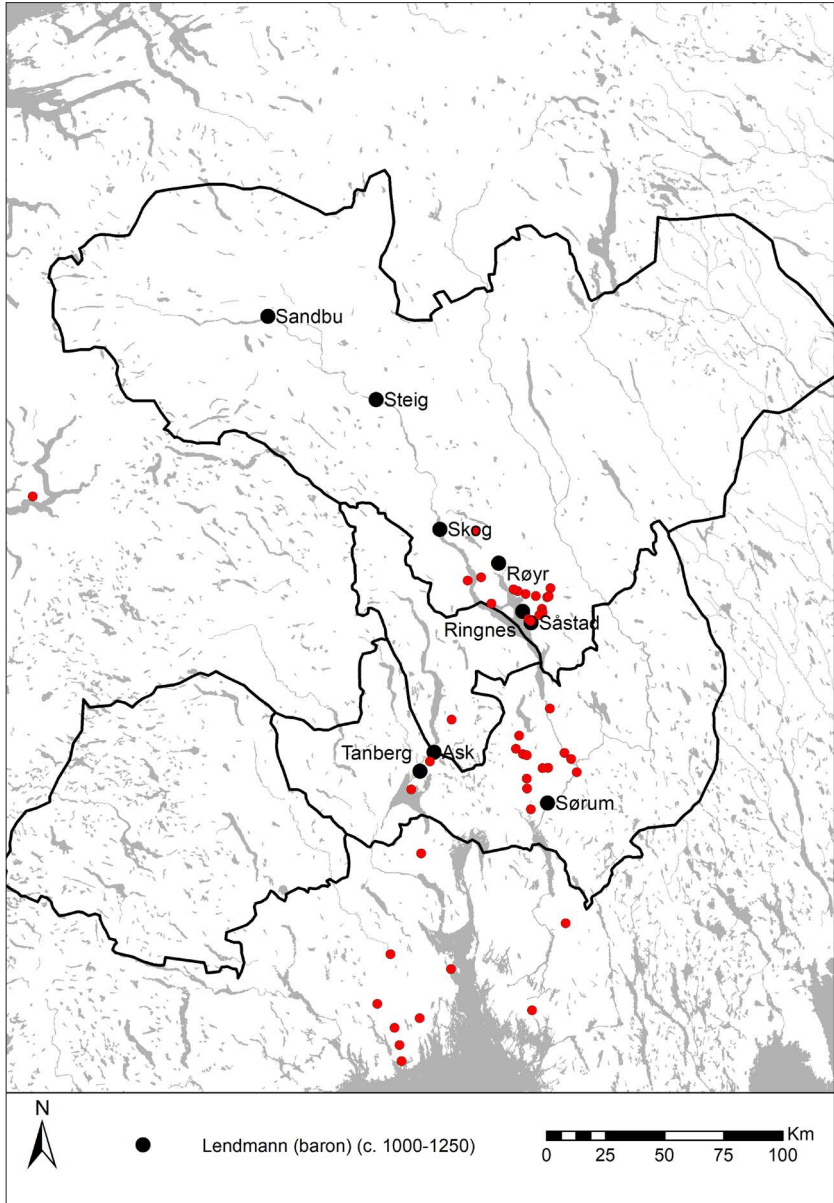


Figure 11. The lendr menn estates and the equestrian graves in Uppland. The lendr menn were the highest officials of the king in the provinces. In 1277 the title lendr maðr was replaced by baron, and even before it was partly hereditary (until the age of 40), which is visible in some aristocratic dynasties that span many generations. The equestrian graves have been interpreted as signs of lendr menn but as the map shows there are no geographical links between lendr menn estates (AD 1000–250) and equestrian graves (c. AD 800–1050). Map by Frode Iversen.

Only three *hersar* are known from *Upplönd*, and there are caveats regarding the historical authenticity of two of them: Ketill *vedr* of Ringerike, and Ulf *gyldir* from Øvre Telemark (Tinn) (both 9<sup>th</sup> century) (Storm 1882: 134; Bull 1930: 82; Landnámabók, Hauksbók: 110, ch. 314 in Jónsson 1900). There is more evidence of Dala-Guðbrandr at Hundtorp in Gudbrandsdalen, who has been mentioned by Sigvatr Þórðarson (Hkr, Olav den helliges saga ch. 112). It may be circumstantial but the known *hersar* seem connected to *þriðjungar* with few or no equestrian graves: Øvre Telemark, Ringerike and Gudbrandsdalen, which may indicate that *hersar* were placed outside the main areas of the petty kingdoms of *Upplönd*. The historically corroborated King Hrærekr of Hedmark and the *hersir* Dala-Guðbrandr of Gudbrandsdalen are more or less contemporaries. Could it be that Hedmark, with all its equestrian graves, was a main area, ruled by King Hrærekr, and that Gudbrandsdalen – which lacks equestrian graves – was ruled by a *hersir*?

It is unclear if the structure visible in Hedmark-Gudbrandsdalen exist in Romerike-Ringerike (and Tverrdalene) as well. The many equestrian graves of Romerike may have been linked to its petty kings but there are also two equestrian graves in Ringerike linked to areas allegedly ruled by *hersar* in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. However, there is also evidence that suggests that Ringerike was ruled by the petty king Sigurðr *sýr* (Óláfr Haraldsson's stepfather), which would contradict the petty king-*hersir* model suggested above. Óláfr is mentioned as the 'prince of the Hringa' in *Erfidrápa Óláfs helga*, which fits well with the fact that he negotiated the Christianisation of *Upplönd* – as the ruler of Ringerike – with the eleven other *þriðjung* leaders (*Erfidrápa Óláfs helga*, str. 2 and 7; Jesch 2012: 663). This also indirectly confirms Sigurðr *sýr*'s connection to Ringerike. There is no evidence of a common ruler for Ringerike and Romerike, although the area is mentioned as one *patria* in *Historia Norwegie* 1150–75. Moreover, Romerike is one of the main areas for equestrian graves, while Ringerike is not.

Eiríkr Hákonsson (c. AD 964–1024, who became a ladejarl in AD 995) supposedly received the jarldom of Romerike (in *Upplönd*) and Vingulmark (in Viken) in the 970s by King Haraldr *blátönn* Gormsson, with the same conditions as the previous tax kings (Hkr, Olav Tryggvasons saga, ch. 20), and it is possible that the equestrian graves could be linked to him, or to Haraldr *blátönn*? The information regarding the jarldom of Eiríkr is corroborated by the skaldic poet of the *hirð* of the ladejarl, Eyjólfur *dáðaskáld*, who mentions the vassal relationship of Eiríkr to Haraldr *blátönn* in *Bandadrápa* (str. 3), although it does not explicitly mention the extent of the jarldom. He does, however, use a so called *kenning* for the jarldom – *Yggjar brúði*, 'Odin's wife'. It is Snorri Sturluson who specifies the territory involved as Vingulmark and Romerike, and place names support his claims, since evidenced place names in Norway referring to Odin are only known from Vingulmark, Romerike and Trøndelag, where the ladejarls ruled. The place name researcher Stefan Brink has identified three out of six evidenced and possible Óðinn names in Vingulmark (*Onsáker* (Våler), *†óðinssalr* (Onsø), and *Onsø*), and one in Romerike (*Onsrud* (*Odenshofue*), Ullensaker) (Brink 2007: 112, 129).

The well-known Golden Spur from Varna was found in Vingulmark, the neighbouring county to Romerike in the south (Fig. 12), and it is one of the nicest Scandinavian so called Hiddensee finds – this is a find category that is normally associated to the Danish Jelling dynasty and medieval Denmark. The find consists of an elaborately crafted spur, a belt loop, and belt-end tip, all made of 22 carat gold (Stylegar 2020). The Golden Spur was made in



*Figure 12. The Golden Spur (Gullsporen) from Varna (C5905) in Vingulmark, and two belt adornments (C5905, C22406) from c. AD 970. One of these adornments was found in 1917 on the Rød farm (gnr 84) by Varna in the same area as the golden spur was found in 1872. The spur is made of massive gold, and its animal head and looped ornaments are either soldered or riveted in place. They are of the same style as the ornaments on horse tack made of bronze found in Vestfold and on elaborate bronze horse yokes found in Denmark. These finds belong to the Hiddensee category, which is especially associated to the Jelling dynasty in Denmark. Photography by Ellen C. Holte. Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo. CC BY-SA 4.0*

the AD 970–80s, when Danish kings dominated Viken. The archaeologist Ingemar Jansson (1991: 279) argues that this style was developed in association to Haraldr *blátǫnn* (r. AD 958–86), and that such objects would have been royal gifts to allies. Varna, close to where the spur was found, may have been one of the royal estates used by Eiríkr Jarl, and the spur may have belonged to him, or one of his most prominent warriors. Five or six equestrian graves from this period have been found in Romerike and Ringerike. However, it seems unlikely that the riders associated to them served under Eiríkr Jarl, since the Golden Spur is an exceptional find by Norwegian standards that differs from the finds in equestrian graves with its obvious association to the Jelling dynasty. A conclusion would be that Snorri Sturluson is the only source linking Romerike to Eiríks jarldom, which raises a caveat regarding his links to the equestrian graves in the area.

When Haraldr *blátǫnn* rebelled against the overlord Otto II of Sachsen (AD 955–83, Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire from AD 973) in AD 974, Hákon Jarl (ladejarl until AD 995) led a large force to help the Danes defend the ramparts at Danevirke. There is no information as to whether cavalry from *Upplönd* took part. Einarr *skálaglamm*'s skaldic poem *Vellekla* (AD 986) verse 28, tells the story of Hákon Jarl's exploits by the ramparts. It states that 'the sea hero made the forces from Sachsen flee', although later in the autumn, when the forces from the north had left, Otto's forces defeated the forces of Haraldr *blátǫnn*, burnt Danevirke, occupied the trading town Hedeby and invaded the realm of *blátǫnn*. The political development in the border areas of medieval southern Denmark are complex and feature various alliances over time (see e.g. Lemm in this volume). However, coin finds minted by Haraldr *blátǫnn* suggest a vigorous king who dealt with things (Moesgaard 2012: 131), and recent research argues that it is unlikely that Hedeby was ever under the control of the 'Germans' (Hilberg & Moesgaard 2010).



It is unclear how the geopolitical situation in Denmark, under some sort of subordination to Sachsen, influenced the Danish tax lands in Viken, and it is possible that the taxes from Viken went directly to the Holy Roman Emperor Otto II (r. AD 973–83). An exceptional account from *Historia Norwegie* 1150–75 supports this assumption, as well as linking Romerike to the power sphere of Sachsen. It states that people from Sachsen (*Saxones*) found gold in a river that ran from Mjøsa (*Miorso*) in Romerike, which was discovered after traces had been found in the hooves of a heifer that they had driven over this red tinged river. They consequently smelted vast amounts of the gold and brought it with them (*Historia Norwegie*, ch. 3 in Ekrem and Mortensen 2003: 59). If the account can be trusted the heifer can be interpreted as tribute paid from Romerike.

Several passages in *Historia Norwegie* deals with specific mineral deposits belonging to the king. Gold deposits are known from an area only a few kilometres east of Mjøsa's outlet, by Vorm, which confirms these accounts.<sup>8</sup> A similar account is linked to the discovery of large silver, copper and lead mines in Rammelsberg in the Harz mountains in Sachsen, during the reign of Emperor Otto I (AD 912–73), where a tethered horse kicking its hooves uncovered a silver vein.<sup>9</sup> The historian Inger Ekrem and the philologist Lars B. Mortensen (2003: 44) suggest that the unknown writer of *Historia Norwegie* may have studied in Sachsen or Denmark, and had picked up these stories from there, or alternatively had specific local knowledge about the Mjøsa area.<sup>10</sup>

The accounts of *Historia Norwegie* could offer support to Snorri Sturluson's assumptions of a Danish controlled jarldom that included Romerike, although it is difficult to establish a link between it and the equestrian graves. It is more likely that they were part of a local system where the þing had accepted taxation in exchange for preserved autonomy.

Only one equestrian grave dated to the last quarter of the 10<sup>th</sup> century is known from Romerike (from Horgen, no. 14), as well as the well-known Gjermundbu grave in Ringerike (no. 40). Were the interred Eirik Jarl's men? What is obvious is that there was no increase in the number of equestrian graves during this period, as was the case around AD 1000 and later when written sources convey stories of increased tensions between unifying national, and petty kings. If the Danish incursions had really influenced Romerike, a result would probably have been an increase of equestrian graves during this period. On the other hand it seems as if the equestrian grave tradition ebbed out in old Danish territories during this period.

Little is known about Toten, Hadeland and Land, and the information about the area as a separate kingdom is only known through the accounts of Snorri Sturluson. Only one equestrian grave is known from this area, at Espen (no. 36), dated to the last quarter of the 10<sup>th</sup> century.

Øvre Telemark and Numedal is the only one of the four main areas (*patriae*) of *Upplønd* that does not have any equestrian graves, from any period. Nor does it have any hill forts from the Early Iron Age. This means that archaeologically the area almost seems demilitarised, although the 190 known Viking Age graves from the area often contain the traditional sets of weapons, and that some magnificent Frankish swords have been found in the area, even in the upper parts of the Numedal, dated before the 8<sup>th</sup> century (e.g. C19809, Skjønne, Numedal, Petersen 1919: 18, specific type 1).

A lot of iron was manufactured in Øvre Telemark and Numedal during the Viking Age, although the production was less standardised and 'industrial' than in other iron manufac-

turing areas in southern and eastern Norway, such as Valdres, Hallingdal and Østerdalen (Loftsgarden 2019). In historical times the areas has had the highest percentage of self-owning farmers in Norway (more than 80%), which may have meant that the control and rights over resources was decentralised and in the hands of many. Øvre Telemark was also one of the last areas to be integrated into the unified Norway (Loftsgarden 2019: 82). A conclusion is that the area was unaffected by central power and displayed few traces of military organisation.

## Conclusion

The Vikings are often linked to sea voyages and ships rather than traditional continental cavalry. However, the equestrian graves display that ideas of cavalry had permeated all the way into the remotest mountainous areas of Europe's far north, already in the 8<sup>th</sup> century. They also prove that military groups loyal to petty kings and local *þing* fought and defended themselves from horseback against foreign warrior kings with unifying national ambitions.

I have shown that late equestrian graves in Hedmark may be a result of the period when Óláfr Haraldsson defeated Hrærekr Dagsson AD 1016–20. Such graves were raised over warriors loyal to the local petty kings and the *þing*, which also casts a light on the equestrian grave tradition in earlier times. Although inspired by the Carolingian ideals of the time it was local and remained pagan.

Most of the 33 equestrian graves in *Upplönd* date from period 3 (eight) (the mid quarters of the 10<sup>th</sup> century), period 4 a (seven) (the last quarter of the 10<sup>th</sup> century), and especially from period 4 b (13) (the first quarter of the 11<sup>th</sup> century). In accordance with written sources it seems clear that the large number of such graves in the last period is an indication of conflict and war. The total lack of such graves in Hedmark during the reign of Haraldr hárfagri confirm ideas suggesting that Snorri Sturluson created a history for *Upplönd* by copying a truer story about the events that took place when Óláfr Haraldsson invaded *Upplönd* more than a hundred years later.

There is cause to question whether feudalism – which was mentioned initially – really is a useful term for the understanding of these contexts. Well, yes, since the cavalry in *Upplönd* was inspired by the European fashion of the period but the warriors preferred to remain loyal to the local power structures, and not to the emerging national kingdom, as has previously been argued. It seems plausible that these warriors on horseback gained their recognition through local and regional social networks.

## Noter

- <sup>1</sup> It is noteworthy that at the assembly in Aker, as late as 1491, the inhabitants in the north and south of the county of Akershus (Hedmark, Østerdalen and perhaps Gudbrandsdalen) claimed that they only needed to pay the ships tax (Norwegian: *utfare-leidang*) and no other tax (Norwegian: *gjengjerd*) than the one traditionally paid when the king or queen travelled through the country (DN V, no. 954). It is likely that this can be linked to privileges of Óláfr.
- <sup>2</sup> The 'Opplanda med Gudbrandsdalen' of Holmsen is slightly smaller than the historic *Upplond*, which also included Numedal and Øvre Telemark.
- <sup>3</sup> Romerike, Hedmark and Hadeland 22 men each, Gudbrandsdalen a total of 16 men, and Østerdalen five men.
- <sup>4</sup> Braathen compared the equestrian graves with 81 other weapon graves from Øvre Romerike.
- <sup>5</sup> The information from Theodoricus *monachus* confirms that it was Åker in Vang (by Hamar), and not e.g. Aker in Oslo. According to Theodoricus this took place by the large fresh water lake in 'Uplond' (Lat: ... in Uplond ad stagnum ...) (Storm 1880: 54), which must be Mjøsa.
- <sup>6</sup> The collation of dates was made by Kjetil Loftsgarden, KHM, UiO.
- <sup>7</sup> <https://skaldic.abdn.ac.uk/m.php?p=skaldic>
- <sup>8</sup> Gold was mined at the Gold works by Holsjøen in Eidsvoll, in the far north of Romerike between 1758 and 1908. The outlet of Holsjøen is connected to Vorma of and older roads in the south and east cross the water. Holsjøen's outlet into Vorma goes via Rennåa→Fløyta→Jønsjøen→Jøndalsåa.
- <sup>9</sup> <https://visitworldheritage.com/en/eu/the-legend-of-rammelsberg/298cffb6-06e8-4d84-ac78-4b501c5d1541>
- <sup>10</sup> Information provided by Thietmar of Merseburg (AD 975–1018) suggests a connection to Sachsen. For AD 993 Thietmar mentions a *rex Gutring*, who visited the monastery in Verden (*monasterio Ferdensi*) in Sachsen before he became king and returned to the north (VII. 38 i Kurze (ed.) 1889: 216). Gutring studied to become a priest but became a heretic upon his homecoming. The historian Alexander Bugge suggested that Gutring may have been identical to Snorri Sturluson's mythical King Gudrød, the valley king from *Upplond* (Bugge 1910: 359), although this is very unlikely.

## Litterature

B = Bergen = Museum number, Bergen museum, University of Bergen.

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