# COOKING AND FEASTING: CHANGES IN FOOD PRACTICE IN THE IRON AGE

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## ABSTRACT

This article seeks to explore to what extent food practices were altered with the establishment of a new social structure in Late Iron Age, specifically in relation to an assumed abandonment of open air-cooking pit sites and changes in kitchen utensils in the late 6th century AD. In the Late Iron Age, new types of kitchen utensils, such as roasting spits, frying pans and various types of vessels appear in the grave material. New ways of handling waste may also be visible from the Viking Age onwards. These changes are discussed with reference to theories of commensality and feasting, and with regards to a newly excavated site at Guåker in Stange, Hedmark.

## INTRODUCTION

Food and food preparation are important aspects of society because they encompass fundamental practices that structure everyday life as well as social and ritual settings. The 6th and 7th - centuries AD witnessed profound changes in many ways, both cosmological and institutional (Herschend 2009; Hedeager 2011; Ystgaard 2014). Change is manifested through architecture, in the numerous abandoned settlements, in the grave goods and overall burial customs, in the production of pottery and in the political landscape. Suggested explanations include social change, war, plague, climatic changes, changes in the hereditary rights, or different combinations of these (Gräslund 2007; Gräslund and Price 2012; Löwenborg 2012; Iversen 2013).

As this transitional period is often analyzed in a macro-perspective, through elite manifestations like large burial mounds and hall-buildings, I wish to highlight the processes of change through an alternative perspective. This article seeks to explore to what extent food practices were altered with the establishment of a new social structure in Late Iron Age by discussing an assumed abandonment of open air-cooking pit sites and changes in kitchens utensils in the late 6th century. Through the years numerous cooking pits have been excavated in Norway. Their use and function have been thoroughly discussed

(e.g. Gustafson et. al. 2005), but as will be argued, their primary function, at least in the setting of large sites of cooking pits, seems to have been as ovens for dry-cooking. The dating of cooking pits indicates that they are predominantly used in the Early Iron Age, c. 500 BC–AD 600, with a peak in the period c. AD 200–500 (Narmo 1996; Gjerpe 2001; 2008; Diinhof 2005; Gustafson et. al. 2005; Kjos 2007; Samdal og Bukkemoen 2008; Bukkemoen og Simonsen 2009; Baar-Dahl 2012; Derrick 2012; Iversen 2013). Although cooking pits are still in use in the Late Iron Age, the numbers are low compared to earlier periods. During the 6th century, a previously rich and vibrant pottery production ends (Rødsrud 2012; Fredriksen et. al. 2014) and new culinary objects like roasting-spits, frying-pans and soapstone-vessels are introduced in the grave goods. These might represent a break with the earlier practices of cooking. The possibility of new manners of waste handling are discussed in relation to layers of fire cracked stones and kitchen refuse in the vicinity of historical farms (e.g. Pilø 2004; Grønnesby and Heen-Pettersen 2015). The important role of drinking in Iron Age society is emphasized by many (Enright 1996; Gjerpe 2001; Rødsrud 2012). However, the use and preparation of food in communal settings is rarely focused upon. By using different archaeological data I wish to broaden the perspectives on social practice in this period.

## COMMENSALITY, FEASTING, AND FOOD PRACTICE

Commensality is a fundamental aspect of all meals, both spectacular feasts and meals shared by family members as part of the daily routine (Pollock 2011: 9). At its simplest, commensality is about eating and drinking together, but it is far more than just a physical act. It also comprises the myriad of social and political elements entailed in those occasions (Pollock 2011: 9). Food practice and commensality also comprises sensual aspects, the material world eliciting emotional responses in human beings (Harris and Sørensen 2010; Hamilakis 2013 ). The practice of eating is therefore a complex business.

It has been proposed that feasts are commensal events that disrupt normal temporality and produce time as a distinctive moment (Hamilakis 2008). This disruption can be materialized through eating in an unusual locus, sharing a meal with people outside the normal social unit, by consuming unusual food, often but not always in excessive quantities, or following distinctive rituals, such as animal sacrifice (Hamilakis 2008). Yet there is fair reason to believe that feasts have been intimately involved in the processes of social change (Dietler and Hayden 2001: 16) and that food can function as a political tool (Dietler 1996). Food and feasting has for some time been recognized as having a prominent role in the emergence of social hierarchies and in the negotiation of power and identity (Bray 2003: 1). Likewise, class, gender, and ethnicity are deeply implicated in distinctive sensorial regimes (Hamilakis 2013: 3). As "embodied material culture", food has an unusually close relationship to the person and to both the inculcation and the symbolization of concepts of identity (Dietler 2010).

The archaeological material from houses and graves as well as the written sources make it evident that feasting was ideologically and symbolically important in the Iron Age (Herschend 1997; Lönneroth 1997; Eriksen 2010; Rødsrud 2012; Likewise, hall-buildings, and thereby feasting, are believed to display strategies and negotiations of power and status (Herschend 1997; Eriksen 2010). Food preference and the way a meal is prepared and consumed is a socially constructed and dynamic concept (Bourdieu 1995). However, most people within a limited geographical region ate more or less the same thing. The crucial point is to examine the products, preparations and consumption that have been used to distinguish between cultural groups,

genders or social ranks (Montanari 1994:7; Bourdieu 1995; Isaksson 2000:9; Eriksen 2015:73). As will be discussed later on, a meal serves two diametrically opposed semiotic functions; it can serve to indicate and construct social relations characterized by equality, intimacy, or solidarity; or, it can serve to sustain relations characterized by rank, distance, or segmentations (Appadurai 1991: 496).

## COOKING AND FEASTING IN EARLY IRON AGE – WHAT HAPPENED TO THE COOKING PITS?

There are several categories of Early Iron Age material associated with food preparation, meals and feasting. The Iron Age longhouse, as a basic social institution (Herschend 2009; Eriksen 2015), represents a key space for (everyday) commensal activities, and all activities inside the house seem to be structured to a great extent by the placement of the hearths (Webley 2008; Bukkemoen 2015; Eriksen 2015). Nevertheless, an analysis of changing interior, e.g. the morphology and placement of hearths exceeds the limits of this article but has a potential in future research.

One of the most common structures unearthed on archaeological excavations are cooking pits, and sites with large numbers of cooking pits, the so called specialized sites, will be the central category of discussion. A cooking pit contains a layer of fire cracked stones at the bottom, most often with a layer of charcoal underneath. The stones' primary aim is to store heat; as the pit is sealed by a layer of turf the heat will create an excellent oven for cooking of meat or fish. Cooking pits are most commonly found on Iron Age settlement sites but do also appear in grave fields, outlying fields, and in isolated large clusters. The dating of cooking pits show that they are predominantly used in the Early Iron Age, c. 500 BC– AD 600, with a peak in the period c. AD 200–500 (Gustafson 2005: 105). There seems to be a consensus that their main purpose is food preparation (Gustafson et. al. 2005), although there exist examples of alternative uses. Some pits might have been used in craft production, e.g. production of cod liver or blubber oil (Isaksson 1996; Solberg 2014), but interpretations as e.g. sauna or pits for human sacrifice have also been promoted (Gustafson 1993; Oestigaard 2000). Numerous ethnographic examples underline the use of earth ovens or cooking pits for preparation of large quantities of food, and are still commonly found in the Pacific region (Lerche 1970; Heibreen 2005; Perminow 2005). Material remains from cooking pits are most often from the layer of back fil on top of the pits. Thus the material might mirror secondary use of the area and not the actual function of the pits (Langsted 2005). Analysis of animal lipids from cooking pits has not yielded convincing results but does not exclude the use of pits for food preparation (Langsted 2005).

During the last 20 years, numerous open-air cooking pit sites have been unearthed. Sites generally vary from about 20 pits to more than 500 (e.g. Narmo 1996; Gjerpe 2001; 2008; Kjos 2007; Samdal and Bukkemoen 2008; Bukkemoen and Simonsen 2009; Baar-Dahl 2012; Derrick 2012; Iversen 2013). None of the sites are excavated in their entirety and the total number of pits is quite likely considerably higher. Such sites are well known in Northern Europe, primarily Denmark, Sweden and northern Germany as well as Norway up to Trøndelag. In South Scandinavia and Germany the fields seem to date back to the Bronze Age and Pre Roman Iron Age (Heidelk-Schacht 1989: 225; Thörn 1993; Henriksen 1999; 2005) while the sites in Northern Scandinavia are normally later (Martens 2005). An overview of cooking pits from Vestfold show that specialized sites are most intensely used in the Roman period, AD 200–400 (Gjerpe 2008; Baar-Dahl 2012). This trend is supported by the results from Foss nordre in Sørum, Akershus, although

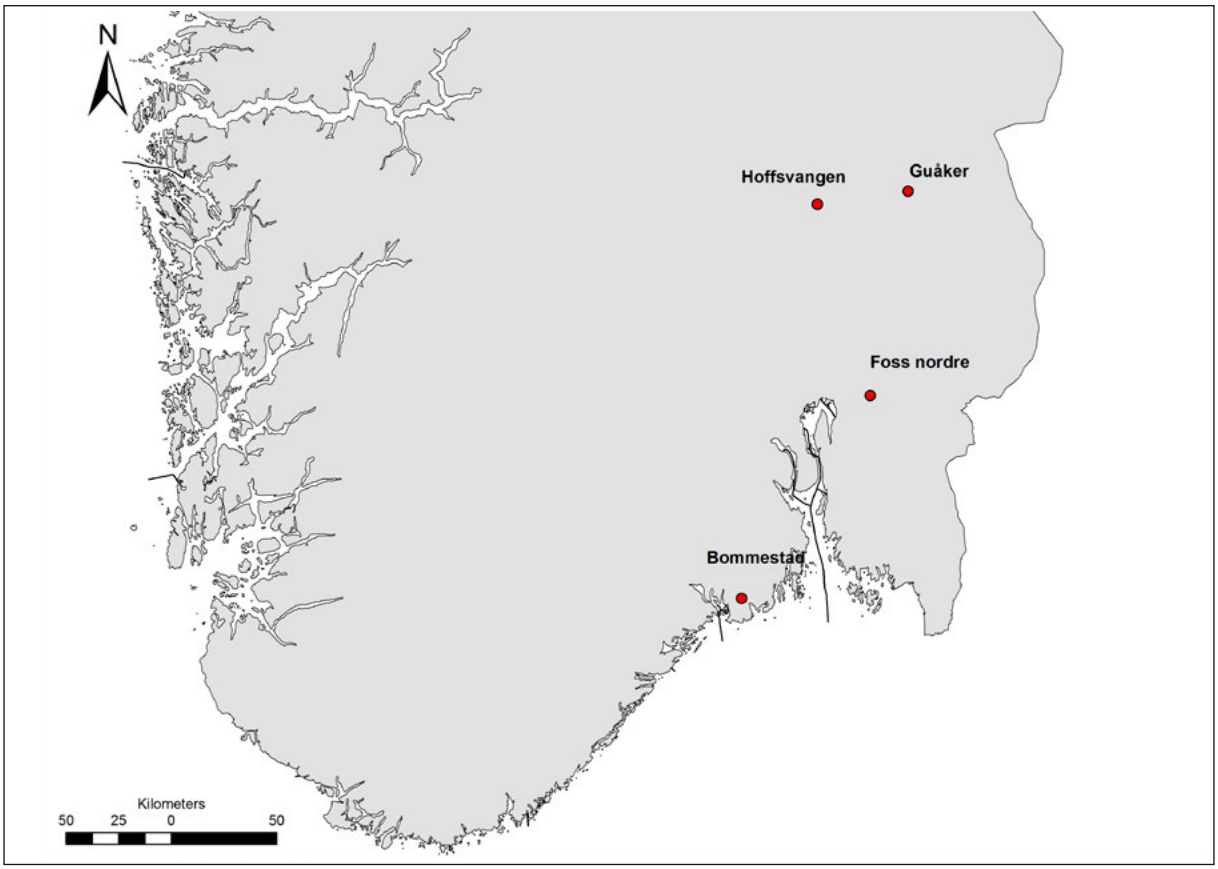


**Figure 1.** The southern part of Norway with the sites mentioned in the article. Illustration by Grethe Bukkemoen, Museum of Cultural History.

sporadic use in the Late Iron Age is also documented (Bukkemoen and Simonsen 2009).

The preservation conditions for bones are poor in most parts of Eastern Norway, nevertheless some burned and unburned bones and teeth are occasionally found in the pits. Remnants of animal heads, generally horse, are frequently found in the top layer of cooking pits, and might represent cultic aspects connected to the head (Oma 2005). At Bommestad, in Vestfold, a site with more than 500 pits, a total of c. 300 g of Roman Period pottery was found in addition to burned bones of beaver, cattle and unspecified mammal (Gjerpe 2008; Samdal and Bukkemoen 2008). At Foss nordre, in Sørum, Akershus, a well preserved site with c. 200 cooking pits surrounded by grave mounds, 14 % of the pits contained finds, mainly of burned animal bones or unburned teeth of cattle, but also shards of pottery, an iron knife, a whetstone, an iron needle and a horse bridle (Bukkemoen and Simonsen 2009). At Hoffsvangen, Østre Toten, Oppland, a total of c. 500 cooking pits was unearthed. The site was established in the early 2nd –century AD and had its height in the 4th to 5th –centuries AD through

**Figure 2.** Foss nordre in Sørum, Akershus; an open air cooking pit site surrounded by gravemounds that are now damaged by ploughing. Photo: Tom Heibreen, Museum of Cultural History

to the mid-5th -century AD. Sporadic use is documented in the Merovingian and early Viking Age. More than 50 % of the pits contained cattle teeth, unburned animal bones or a combination of these finds (Derrick 2012). Supported by the finds from Guåker, Stange, Hedmark (Bukkemoen 2010) presented below, it seems rather likely that at least for the large sites the cooking pits' main purpose is food preparation and consumption.

Considering the time aspect, preparing a meal using cooking pits was not an everyday activity. This assumption is supported by the ratio of pits relative to their time depth, both on cooking pit sites and in settlement contexts (Gustafson et.al. 2005). Preparing meat might also be associated with special occasions. A Swedish study based on analysis of lipid-extraction from pottery found in settlement-contexts and graves indicates that meat is not so prominent in everyday-cooking but has had an exceptional cultural and mythological position (Isaksson 2000; 2003). Furthermore, recent studies suggest that members of the same household could consume different types of food, based on age and/or social status (Naumann et. al 2014).

Large clusters of pits may represent communal sites for gathering with a pronounced culinary aspect. The cultic or ritual aspect inherent in these communal meals and their preparation is stressed by several archaeologists (e.g. Bergstøl 2005; Diinhof 2005), most clearly by Lars Erik Narmo (1996) in his interpretation of the cooking pit site at Leikvin in Sunnmøre. Various researchers highlight the resemblance between cooking pits and the *seydir* mentioned in early Scandinavian written sources. The *seydir* is most likely a cooking pit where a meal is prepared as part of the pagan tradition of sacrifice, *blót* (Narmo 1996; Diinhof 2005; Steinsland 2005:276). The meal is then considered a sacrifice to the gods. The egalitarian structure that these feasts and sites reflect is stressed by Lars Erik Gjerpe (2001), who emphasizes the political and social function of the meals, probably arranged by men of more or less equal status and rank. Gjerpe suggests that all participants contributed meat and beer to the feast, and he puts great emphasis on intoxication as an important part of the feast. The administrative dimensions of these sites are also central in novel works on the subject (Ødegaard 2015).

Feasts are ritualized social events in which food and drink constitute the medium of expression (Dietler 1996: 89). In this respect, food can likewise be crucial in the production of collective remembrance (Hamilakis 2013: 84). Cooking pit sites appear strongly regulated and arranged, placed in areas without traces of settlement. As such, they can, in Hamilakis' (2013: 87) terms, materialize the disruption of normal temporality by eating in an unusual locus. The meal, as in preparation, eating and drinking, is obviously the center of attention, and the duration gives an opportunity for social interaction. A ritual meal differs from an ordinary meal in, amongst others things, the way the meal is prepared and consumed (Hamilakis 2013: 87), and in the *blót* the meat and its treatment are essential elements. Crucial in this respect is the evocative power of sensuous memory generated through eating, connecting people to places (Hamilakis 2013: 85). In a sacrificial meal both man and gods were brought together creating a state of *friðr* (peace), a harmony between man and the gods (Steinsland 2005: 276). Participating in the ritual meals was considered crucial for the social status in the Iron Age and being shut out meant that you were *fredløs,* an outlaw (Steinsland 2005: 279). As with Gjerpe, Steinsland (2005) emphasizes the *blót* as a shared meal where food and drink were provided by all participants thus creating an ideal environment for discussion and interaction as important parts of commensal acts (see also Pollock 2011).

## CHANGES IN POTTERY PRODUCTION IN THE MIGRATION PERIOD

The use of cooking pits fades during the transition to the Late Iron Age. Likewise pottery production disappears totally in the Merovingian period. The production of pottery is vital in the Early Iron Age and different types of vessels, both finely decorated table ware and common utility vessels are frequently found in contemporary graves. A study of pottery and vessels from eastern Norway show that early in the period the vessels are used as cremation urns, but from the beginning of the Roman Period (AD 1 ) complete sets of vessels for food and drink were also placed in the graves alongside the deceased. The scene is reminiscent of a table setting associated with ritualized feasting (Rødsrud 2012; 2016; this volume). In the later part of the Migration Period (c. AD 550 ), there is a marked decrease in the practice of placing clay vessels in burials, and in the Merovingian Period this practice became obsolete and ceased altogether (Rødsrud 2012; 2016; Fredriksen et. al. 2014). A novel article on bucket-shaped pots suggests that at the peak of their development the pots were made in intimate

connection with high-quality metal objects, perhaps even made in goldsmithing workshops by smiths themselves (Fredriksen et. al. 2014). The production of pottery had become increasingly excluded from the everyday material repertoire of the household, perhaps related to societal changes and changes to burial symbolism culminating in ceramic containers no longer being members of the material world (Fredriksen 2006). Bucket-shaped pottery thus became tied to the ideology of commensality and elite production of high-quality metal objects (Fredriksen et. al. 2014: 14).

## THE INTRODUCTION OF NEW FOOD PRACTICES IN THE MEROVINGIAN PERIOD

Although the use of cooking pits does not cease completely by the end of the Early Iron Age, the frequency changed dramatically, as illustrated by the abovementioned sites. The use of pottery on the other hand, seemed to end more suddenly. Does this indicate spatial and technological changes related to food practice in the 5th and 6th centuries? It is suggested that a consequence of the development of a more hierarchic society in Late Iron Age was that the communal meals were, to a larger degree, moved indoors (Herschend 1992; Gjerpe 2001; Ystgaard 2014; Eriksen 2015). Furthermore, new elements in the grave goods in the periods to come might indicate not only the use of new cooking techniques but also the use of food in political contexts and as a means to signal group identity.

Different types of vessels made of iron or soapstone represent the most noticeable changes in cooking utensils as they seem to replace pottery as the main utensils for every day cooking (Petersen 1951; Skjølsvold 1961; Rabben 2002; Baug 2015). However, different types of frying equipment also turn up in graves in this period, although in relatively small numbers. From both literary and archaeological

**Figure 3.** Iron roasting spit from Liltvedt in Hurum, Buskerud (C409). Photo: Ellen C. Holte, Museum of Cultural History. Iron frying pan from Aakeren in Tokke, Telemark (C1757). Photo: Eirik Irgens Johnsen and Ove Holst. Museum of Cultural History.

sources we learn that roasting spits of metal were a well-known object in ancient Greece and date back to 700 BC (Bøgh-Andersen 1999). The use of roasting-spits spread from Greece via Italy and northwards and was adopted early by the Celts. During the Merovingian period the first roasting spits of metal occur in the Nordic area, with a clear connection to warrior graves (Rabben 2002). Susanne Bøgh-Andersen (1999: 69) has convincingly shown that roasting-spits most likely are associated with the aristocracy, as the spits from Sweden in the Merovingian period are known exclusively from the rich male boat graves in Vendel and Valsgärde in Uppland. A total of 72 spits are documented (Bøgh-Andersen 1999), and as many as 50 are found in Norwegian graves. The material is clustered in two

main areas; Western Norway and the Oslofjord-area. There seems to be a connection between high-status graves, especially warrior graves, and kitchen utensils in this period. Along with the spits the roasting grates and the frying pans underline a seemingly new focus on different cooking techniques as roasting and frying, at least for the upper strata of society. The oldest examples of fry-pans go back to the 7th century, but the majority of pans are dated to the period AD 850–1000 (Petersen 1951; Rabben 2002: 43–44).

## COOKING AND EATING AT GUÅKER IN STANGE, HEDMARK

To investigate the tendencies proposed thus far in this article, I will use newly excavated material from Guåker in Stange, Hedmark. The site at Guåker was excavated by the Museum of Cultural History in 2009 (Bukkemoen 2010).

A total of 93 cooking pits were unearthed along with an area used for waste management. The area of excavation was limited by the requirements of the project and the number of cooking pits is supposedly much higher. The activities at Guåker display an evident horizontal stratigraphy as they appear grouped according to date. Furthermore, the activities seem to reflect aspects related to food practice in the transition between Early and Late Iron Age. A main area of cooking-pits in the north dating from the Roman and Migration periods was dominated by seemingly standardized large pits, round or oval in form. One small pit, east of the main clustering, is dated to the early Roman Period, and represents the earliest activities at the site. Some of these pits contained small amounts of unburned teeth from cattle (Hufthammer 2010). None of the pits in the main clustering showed any signs of being reused, although some physical overlap did occur, but there is clearly an internal differentiation as the pits seem to be grouped more or less according to date (Bukkemoen 2010). Like other larger cooking pit


**Figure 4.** The site at Guåker in Stange, Hedmark. Illustration by Grethe Bukkemoen, Museum of Cultural History. Kartverket, license-number: NE12000-150408SA.

sites in Norway, the site at Guåker has well-defined outer borders, while more or less internal disarray, in contrast to the regular rows documented in Swedish and Danish examples (e.g. Henriksen 2005; Samdal and Bukkemoen 2008; Bukkemoen and Simonsen 2009).

In the southern part of the site the pits gave a more heterogenic impression and were not dispersed in clusters. The pits are dated from the Roman Iron Age to the Viking Age, c. AD 200–900. One of the pits contained a large amount of unburned bones

from sheep/goat, cattle (calf), swine and horse. Cattle-bones and charcoal from birch were dated to the transition between the Migration and the Merovingian periods, AD 535–600 (1530±40 BP, TRa-3252) and AD 535–595 (1530±30 BP, TRa-581). Comparative material on this topic is scarce, but the amount of unburned bones might indicate alterations in bone treatment following a (ritual) meal compared to the small amounts normally left in the Early Iron Age cooking pits, as mentioned. The various species represented in this pit most likely denote remnants that are left from one occasion.

A culture layer, 10–40 cm thick, interpreted as waste-deposit, covered large parts of this southern area. The layer consisted of fire-cracked stones, burnt and unburned bones and charcoal. I believe the layer has originally been cairns or heaps that were spread by the plough later on (cf. Grønnesby and Pettersen 2015). Still visible remnants of cairns were observed and investigated during the excavation. The bones from the layer and cairns are identified as mostly mammal: cattle, sheep/goat, swine and horse, but bones of crow and kestrel were also identified (Hufthammer 2010).

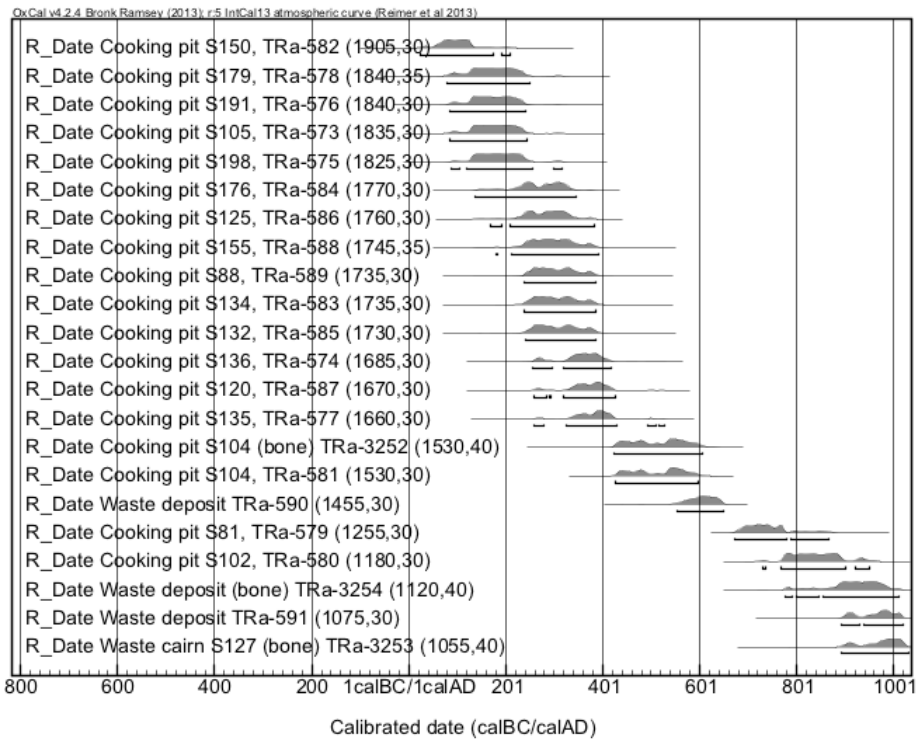


**Table 1.** An overview of C14-datings from Guåker (cf. Bronk Ramsey 2013; Reimers mf. 2013). OxCal 4.2.4: Bronk Ramsey 2013; Reimer et al 2013.

There exists several C14-datings from the layer. One sample of pine is dated to the Merovingian period, AD 600–650 (1455±30 BP, TRa-590). The pine could be of old age, and this may interfere with the dating result. Another sample, of birch, is dated to the Viking Age, AD 970–1010 (1075±30 BP, TRa-591). Two bone samples are also C14-dated. An unburned bone of horse from one of the still visible cairns was dated to the Viking Age, AD 975–1020 (1055±40 BP, TRa-3253) and a burned mammal bone from the cultural layer was also dated to the Viking Age AD 890–980 (1120±40 BP, TRa-3254). The C14-datings thus indicate that the waste and the cairns where deposited primarily during the Viking Age. At Guåker, there were also found a few cooking-pits dated to AD 700–800, but cooking in pits seems much more sporadic in this period.

Generally, open-air cooking pit sites seem to lose their relevance as meeting places and for communal meals by the end of the 6th century AD (Eriksson 1998; Ødegaard 2015). We still find cooking pits in settlement contexts in the Viking Age, e.g. at Totenvika and nearby Åker (Pilø 2004; Loktu and Hovd 2014) and single datings from the Viking Age do appear at cooking pit sites, but the tradition of communal meals prepared and consumed at these large sites seems to have decreased. It is uncertain whether a single cooking pit with a large amount of unburned bone at Guåker is evidence of these changes as early as AD 600. This is in contrast to the previous periods where only small amounts of burned bones and unburned teeth are left in the pits (Gustafsson 2005; Oma 2005). A similar context was documented at a cooking pit site at Ringvold in Ringerike, Buskerud, where unburned remnants of a horse dated to AD 430–650 (Ua-53453) was found in a cooking pit along with bones from cattle and swine (Wenn and Bukkemoen, forthcoming). The most evident change at Guåker is the waste-deposit documented south of the cooking pits. The same pattern is documented at nearby Åker where the cooking activities are replaced by areas for waste disposal during the Viking Age (Pilø 2004).

## FOOD PROCESSING TECHNIQUES - COOKED AND ROASTED MEAT

As mentioned, objects for roasting and frying as well as vessels for cooking turn up in the grave material in the Late Iron Age. At Guåker, the use of cooking pits diminishes and the area was used for waste management in the Viking Age. The large amounts of fire-cracked stones indicate cooking and boiling, rather than roasting. Such layers of stones seem to accumulate at historical farmsteads with roots in the Late Iron Age, and are often interpreted as stones used for brewing (Pilø 2004; Grønnesby and Heen-Pettersen 2015). The bone material at Guåker, both burned and unburned bones has not been analyzed to identify whether the bones have been boiled, butchered and /or roasted. In my view they are clear signals of waste handling, possibly from food processing. Nearby grave finds give a clear impression that the new kitchen utensils were known in the district from the Merovingian Period onwards.

At Arstad in Ottestad, Stange, two roasting-spits of type II were documented in a double grave that dates to AD 700 (Gudesen 1980; Bøgh-Andersen 1999: 46; C20314). The Arstad grave also contained, among other things, an iron kettle and a frying-pan as well as warrior- and horse equipment (Gudesen 1980). At Berg in Løten one type III spit is found in a male grave from AD 900–950 (C3859) (Bøgh-Andersen 1999: 48), also along with warrior equipment. These two graves, and especially the Arstad-grave, have strong affiliations with the warrior aristocracy and the feasting-rituals of the Late Iron Age. At Flagstad in Hamar another two roasting-spits of type II were found in a woman's grave dated to the Viking Age, about AD 900 (C 21671) along with a frying pan, a bronze bowl, a

bronze ladle, jewelry and a horse (Petersen 1951; Bøgh-Andersen 1999:46).

One of the most obvious aspects concerning cooked vs. roasted food processing techniques is the visibility. While the cooked meat is prepared in a cooking pit or a cauldron, often accompanied by vegetables, roasting implies visibility and emphasizes both the meat in question and the utensil. Likewise the use of frying-pan involves bringing the food up from the ground or fire and preparing it using a specially designed utensil. As mentioned in *Rigstula* the earl's bread was made of wheat and baked on frying pans of iron with shafts, in contrast to the thrall and farmer's flat-bread which was baked in the ashes or on a baking stone (Baug 2015: 39). Likewise there are indications that bread was used and baked on special ritual occasions (Bergström 2007; Zachrisson 2014 and ref.). Furthermore, the description in *Rigstula* of the diet in different strata of society makes it evident that it is the qualitative differences that are important. The thrall, the farmer and the chieftain all serve meat and bread. The thrall served meat in a soup, the farmer served cooked meat and the chieftain served cooked swine and roasted birds (Isaksson 2003). As mentioned, lipid-analysis of pottery from settlement contexts and graves in Sweden show that meat was more often represented in pottery from graves, indicating that meat had a certain cultural and mythological role. While the everyday cooking seemed to be characterized by porridge, stews of vegetables and meat were made in cauldrons (Isaksson 2003: 275; Baug 2015).

Spit-roasting must have been used by those who could afford consuming fresh meat, like steaks, joints and birds and seem to be used at feasts and special occasions (Bøgh-Andersen 1999: 104). On the Bayeux-tapestry from c. AD 1000 there is an image of roasting spits in a royal context (Isaksson 2003). In the daily life, it seems that fresh meat was rarely eaten and spit-roasting must be considered a waste both when it comes to fresh meat and fuel (Grøn 1927; Bøgh-Andersen 1999: 108). According to Claude Lévi-Strauss (1979) spit-roasting and open fire are closer to the the wild and the untamed nature than boiling in a pot. Despite this there is a close connection between the elite in Late Iron Age Scandinavia and the *Wild* or *Beast of prey*, first and foremost through the Odin cult and the close relation between roasting spits and warrior graves (Montanari 1994; Isaksson 2000). Odins warriors were called *ulfheðnar* (in wolf garments) and *berserk* (in bear garments) and Odins companions are two wolves and two ravens (Isaksson 2000: 23). Sven Isaksson argues that the roasting spit provides a symbol of the spear; further, Odin is called the God of spears, which ultimately connects the two.

Deduced from this, preparing food by using roasting-spits and other roasting or frying equipment would bring new sensual aspects to the commensal act (Hamilakis 2013). The meat would be more visible, the sound and smell of the prepared meat more tangible. Following from this, the new utensils and the whole sensorial regime can be interpreted as a diacritical symbolic device to naturalize and reify concepts of ranked differences in social status (Dietler 1996: 98) and mark group identity especially relevant in this period. The use of differentiated cuisine and styles of consumption are distinguishing elements of feasts of this kind (Dietler 1996: 98). If the communal meals earlier performed on cooking pit sites were moved indoors in the Late Iron Age and developed a greater exclusivity, new techniques of food processing may have developed as well. It thus seems that utensils for food preparation are increasingly used in specific contexts and underline the importance of food as a marker of change in social settings. Not only does food highlight social identity, but the preparation itself, in the way food is handled, seems to provide the occasion with a special dimension (cf. Hamilakis 2013: 89).

## FINAL REMARKS

The aim of this article has been to discuss to what extent food practices were altered with the establishment of what seems to be a new social structure in the Late Iron Age. I've chosen to focus on cooking pit sites and to some degree kitchen utensils as the two categories appear to be changing during the relevant time span. The open air cooking pit sites are taken to represent places set aside for repetitive ritual meals with a more or less egalitarian structure, creating an environment suitable for social interaction and generating synchronicity, promoting group identity (cf. Hamilakis 2013: 87). Lack of settlement evidence in the vicinity of these sites, implies that these gatherings were held outside the immediate farmsteads (e.g. Martens 2005; Samdal and Bukkemoen 2008; Bukkemoen and Simonsen 2009; Ødegaard 2015) As such, they represent a different context than a feast in the hall of a lord or chieftain (Enright 1996). The layout, and the large dimensions of the pits, along with the obviously regulated food preparation speak in favor of regular activities that are distinguishing qualities of ritual meals (Hamilakis 2013: 87; 2008). The use of cooking pit sites has its peak in the Roman and, to a lesser degree, Migration periods. The production of pottery came to an end in the 6$^{th}$ – century. At least for the bucket shaped pots, the production of pottery and the production of high quality metal work seem to have gone hand in hand during this final period.

I introduced a case study from the cooking pit site at Guåker where activities are documented both in the Early and the Late Iron Age. After intense use during the Roman period, the use of cooking pits faded, albeit with sporadic use in the Viking Age. However, in the Merovingian period we witness a change at Guåker. Large amounts of unburned bones turn up in one of the cooking pits as a contrast to the earlier more or less empty pits. Later on, accumulations of fire cracked stones and animal bones, both burned and unburned, indicate a break with the earlier practice in this area. Looking at the Late Iron Age grave material we see the introduction of new types of kitchen utensils, such as vessels of iron and soapstone and utensils for roasting and frying, often alongside warrior equipment. It seems rather clear that food, and especially the way food is prepared, was increasingly used as a political tool and as a means to distinguish between social groups and hierarchies in the Late Iron Age.

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