10 CONCLUSION AND CONSEQUENCES: THE PROPERTY BOUNDARIES OF ØSTLANDET IN CONTEXT

ØSTLANDET AND ITS SURROUNDINGS

The dating of territorially embedded property rights to the Late Iron Age at the earliest and possibly as late as the Viking Period not only diverges from the conventional perception of circumstances in Norway but also from widely held ideas in other parts of northern Europe, such as the Low Countries and the neighbouring southern Scandinavia (Hedeager 1990; Gerritsen 1999; Herschend 2009; Løvschal and Kähler Holst 2014). I would note, though, that my own conclusions may not be so radically different from those of other researchers who have worked primarily from building evidence (e.g. Pilø 2015; Hansen 2015; Eriksen 2019; Grønnesby 2019). This could corroborate Pilø's (2005) proposal that the development of settlement can be studied best through what he called 'direct settlement evidence', namely the buildings. Concurrently, a much later introduction of property rights in Østlandet than in southern Scandinavia is consistent with the archaeological evidence and a genuine state of affairs in Prehistory, as will be demonstrated here. A common view is that the division and partition of the landscape in southern Scandinavia began as early as the end of the Bronze Age and progressed throughout the pre-Roman Iron Age until the concept of property was conclusively introduced in the Roman Iron Age (Hedeager 1990; Herschend 2009; Løvschal and Kähler Holst 2014), even if the extant settlement structure on Fyn cannot be traced back any earlier than c. AD 600 (Hansen 2015). Hedeager (1990:180–1) linked the development of farm boundaries to the separation of infield and outfield. In the Danish evidence which she considered, she found a process that began in the 3rd century and was completed in the 5th century. This is supported by Herschend (2009:216–17), who considered that larger buildings and reconstructed buildings were foreshadowings of an incipient restriction of the right to found one's one household with associated pastures and arable land. They also betokened that the distribution of land was no longer undertaken by the community or by leading individuals, who were losing their function or their power. In southern Scandinavia, this process was initiated towards the end of the pre-Roman Iron Age and it was completed around AD 500 when it became possible to own land without living on it (Herschend 2009:258–9, 393). In Østlandet, the process started with larger and reconstructed buildings in the Roman Iron Age, several centuries later, except in Østfold where this practice appeared as early as the pre-Roman Iron Age. I believe, therefore, that, apart from Østfold, the growth of property rights came about up to 500 years later in Østlandet than in southern Scandinavia. On its own, this may appear remarkable, given that there is geographically a relatively short distance between these two areas, and probably also no great cultural gap (Solberg 2000; Myhre 2002; Jensen 2004; 2006).

A quick glance at the archaeological evidence and the process behind the emergence of property rights, however, makes the substantial chronological discrepancy more plausible. Already at the end of the Bronze Age, defined and clearly bounded and marked fields, the so-called Celtic fields, were under cultivation in Denmark (Løvschal and Kähler Holst 2014). There are no such fields in Østlandet. The marking of the fields at Hørdalsåsen in the pre-Roman and Roman Iron Ages, the clearest boundaries known in Østlandet, was slight and low, and the individual fields show no signs of standardization (Mjærum 2012a; 2012b). In the pre-Roman Iron Age, the position of the buildings in the villages of Denmark can be seen to be the result of regular plot-division even though few fences of this period have been found there (Løvschal and Kähler Holst 2015). Such features are also absent from Østlandet. In the pre-Roman Iron Age, the buildings in Denmark are continually rebuilt on the same plot, a phenomenon that is not seen in Østlandet before AD 200. Østfold, however, is an exception in this respect too, where that process began as early as close to the end of the pre-Roman Iron Age (Bukkemoen 2015). There is little doubt, therefore, that Østfold is quite distinct from the rest of Østlandet. I would suggest further that there is greater similarity between Østfold and southern Scandinavia than between anywhere else in Østlandet and southern Scandinavia.

The absence of finds of fences in Østlandet may be due to the methods of construction and source-critical

factors, but the increasing continuity of settlement early in the pre-Roman Iron Age in Demark and in the second half of the Roman Iron Age in Østlandet indicate that the process of dividing up the landscape began much later in the latter region. I associate the specialized cooking-pit sites with assemblies of equally ranked folk, and suggest that it may have been precisely there that the land was distributed. The cooking-pit sites fell pretty much completely out of use in the pre-Roman Iron Age in Denmark (Löwschal and Holst 2014) but did so only at the transition between the Early and Late Iron Age in Østlandet (Narmo 1996; Gjerpe 2001; Gustafson 2005b; Henriksen 2005; Martens 2005b; Gjerpe 2008c; Baar-Dahl 2012). It would appear, then, as if the process of dividing up the landscape took place with an interval of around 500 years, first in Denmark and later on in Østlandet. There are also major differences in burial practice in the Late Iron Age between Østlandet and Denmark, with the latter, for instance, having far fewer richly furnished graves or graves marked by a barrow. There is also a wide range of aspects, such as equestrian graves, chamber graves, wagon graves, plus the Trelleborg sites and other fortifications, which testify to the presence of a centralized authority and an organized army in the Viking Period in Denmark (Jensen 2004:335–99). Some of these features, such as the equestrian graves and the chamber graves, are found in Østlandet as well, but they appear far less standardized (Braathen 1989; Eisenschmidt 1994; Stylegar 2005b; Pedersen 2014:207). A lower level of standardization in the grave furnishings and the complete absence of major defensive fortifications appear to me to reflect the absence of a central authority in Østlandet in the Viking Period.

While the development of a right to hold property seems to have come about later in Østlandet than in southern Scandinavia, it does find parallels further north. In a series of studies, Geir Grønnesby (2005; 2013; 2015; 2019; Grønnesby and Heen-Pettersen 2015) has shown that the historically recorded farmsteads in Trøndelag were founded in the 7th century. He argues that at that time cereal cultivation took over the role that pastoralism had previously played as the most important element in farming, both in social terms and economically. Along with that, continuous settlement close to permanent fields developed, and livestock was no longer the most important resource and embodied form of value of the society. Arable land became so instead, and the right to own land was either introduced or reinforced. Grønnesby thus dates the appearance of the historically known farm to around the year 600 and he and I are therefore very much in agreement even though I would assert more firmly that in Østlandet this was a process which began around the year 600 but may not have been completed before the Viking Period.

CONSEQUENCES AND THE WAY AHEAD

This research has shown how the agricultural economy of the Iron Age was rooted in a society for whom other ideals than economic profit were decisive. With that, the idea of the Iron-age farmer as a rational economic agent whose objective was the greatest possible economic gain becomes untenable. My understanding of property rights in the Iron Age differs from the hitherto predominant view according to which property rights are seen as stable, at least from the Roman Iron Age or Migration Period onwards. This has major consequences for the understanding of non-state or pre-state society, and the development of the state in Østlandet. Although the consequences of my views will not be fully investigated here, I do want to note certain areas that are ripe for further research.

This work has opened up the prospect for a new understanding of the variations that characterized the farms and the agriculture in the Iron Age. If the farms were not permanent settlements but moved around the landscape at intervals of just one or a few generations, the large number of deserted farms can be re-interpreted as representative of their context rather than as marginal farms that were worked only in periods when there was an excess in the population. The abandoned settlement sites thus become a source of evidence for Iron-age society to a much greater extent than is usually supposed. There is reason to believe that lands were left unused without being marginal and being worked only in relatively brief periods of high population pressure. These results clear the way for new studies of why those farms were deserted, with a firmer focus on social explanations.

The conclusions also make it possible that the Viking-period military expeditions and emigration can be understood as the result of social and economic factors rather than excess population. The density of population in the Viking Period can hardly have been greater than it was early in the Medieval Period, but because a lot of land was used as pasture by the elite, there was still a shortage of proprietorial arable. The foundation of new households could only happen in the wake of subjection to a landlord. Some people found subject status acceptable, others did not. The uneven distribution of land thus resulted

in emigration to Iceland, raiding expeditions, and eventually expeditions of conquest in Britain and Ireland, amongst other places, and social stratification within Østlandet. In other words, the introduction of property rights and the consequent imbalance in access to land was a catalyst for profound changes in Europe.

I have demonstrated that changes in building practice are an integral and crucial aspect of the change of religion and also a precondition for state-formation. Knowledge of chronological differences between the emergence of territorially based rights in Østlandet and in southern Scandinavia thus renders a new understanding of corresponding differences in state-formation possible as well. An understanding of agrarian settlement and of settlement as embedded also permits settlement studies and studies of religion, cult and identity to illuminate one another to a much greater extent than has been the case up to now.

Much of the knowledge of the non-state or pre-state societies outside of Europe that I have used for guidance was originally collected in a purposeful manner to contribute to European states' colonization, and that knowledge is therefore Eurocentric. In the effort to decolonialize these histories, researchers have pointed out that the transition from customary rights or 'traditional' law to written laws not only favoured the colonial power but that some local groups were strengthened at the expense of others (Pottier 2005). That perspective appears intensely relevant for us to be able to understand the marked changes that occurred in Scandinavia in the Late Iron Age. I am of the opinion, as a result, that studying the transition from non-state or pre-state societies to states, and from heathen to Christian societies, in the North as a process of colonialization may be fruitful, for instance in decolonializing ethnographic texts such as *Germania* and the *Gallic Wars* and in distinguishing more effectively between 'authentic' and 'false' history and memory in Scandinavian historical sources.

My survey and critique of a set of postulated premisses for the retrogressive method, my critique of the view that burial mounds marked óðal in the sense of a preferential male right to inherit land, my understanding of the Iron-age agricultural economy as rooted in a society for whom the primary goal was honour rather than the maximization of an economic surplus, my demonstration of marked variance in settlement in time and space, my understanding of Iron-age society as heterarchical and maintaining a balance of power between warriors with honour, chieftains without power and productive farmers, and not least my understanding of the Iron Age as a dynamic period of constant struggles for power and shifts in power, and the restructuring of settlement and society at the transition between the Early Iron Age and the Late, make it difficult to make use of conditions known from later documentary sources, maps or property relations and the retrogressive method to shed light on earlier, prehistoric periods. My findings emphasize, by contrast, the need to use the retrogressive method in order to identify and to understand both the differences and the similarities between the Iron Age and later periods. I shall conclude, therefore, that the retrogressive method in combination with rigorous source evaluation is suited to research into — for example — the roots of the historically known farming structure. On the other hand I argue strongly that the method is not suited to research into or the demonstration of historically specific features of Iron-age society. We can, to put in another way, employ the retrogressive method in order to understand ourselves but not to understand the aliens of the Iron Age.

The new knowledge of change and continuity in Iron-age agrarian settlement is also relevant to the present day. We are living in a period of major changes. The new understanding of the agrarian settlement of the Late Iron Age as a long, progressive process which finally produced a radically new settlement pattern and a new society may perhaps be used to undertand what long-term consequences the changes in contemporary agropolitics are going to have.

My research questions have been focused upon change in time and space, and I have been concerned with social and economic variations in building practice to a lesser degree. It would be of interest if fresh research into functional divisions of the buildings making use of artefacts, macrofossils and architectural solutions could show whether certain sorts of social and economic status were over- or under-represented in the settlements that had longer continuity, or if detailed studies of the macrofossil evidence could show differences of changes in the agrarian economy. The settlement evidence from Østlandet has yielded up nothing like all of the information it holds.