THE ANCIENT SVEARIKE
– A MYTH OR AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL REALITY?

INTRODUCTION

When I as a young custodian at the Historical museum in Stockholm in the fifties assisted doing a permanent exhibition of the Swedish Iron Age (for example the period between 500 B.C.-1000 A.D.) I read the paper written by Curt Weibull, a specialist of Mediaeval History (On the Origin of the Swedish and Danish realms)\(^1\). In this paper he considers that “it is always difficult to use archaeological evidences to define historical events of political kind as migrations, conquest etc.” (translation by the present author).

This comment worried me. However my older colleagues had no doubt on the usefulness of the archaeological material in these circumstances telling me just to look at the material to understand what it expressed. And no doubt when the whole archaeological material was displayed on long tables in the exhibitions rooms, one could clearly see differences in the material from different regions. What these differences really meant, was unclear and at that time I did not dare to interpret some of the regional diversities as expressions of an ancient Svea realm.

I took part in the archaeological excavations at Helgö and Birka and later directed excavations at Vendel and I concentrated to find relevant technical

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and scientific methods to get a source material, that could give more clear evidences of the cultural history of the early Mediaeval period, to be able to use the archaeological material for interpretation of political developments.

It was first in recent years, starting the project Svealand in the Vendel and Viking periods, Settlement, Society, and Power (SIV), supported by the Swedish Tercentenary foundation, where I could gather a group of senior researchers that I again dared to take up this theme. The recent and spectacular discoveries in the country of the Danes at Gudme on Funen and Uppåkra in Scania have also inspired to take up a new discussion on the foundation of states in Northern Europe. Specially Lotte Hedeager has in many papers based on archaeological material discussed the foundation and development of the Danish realm (state) in the early Mediaeval period².

In Sweden the controversy started by Weibull still goes on. Most of the Mediaeval historians do not acknowledge a Swedish realm (state) before the High Middle Age (13th century) claiming that there exist no contemporary written evidences that confirm an earlier state formation³.

And this statement depends I believe on the different circumstances that governs a realm (state) in a period when literacy was very rare for example the government had to depend on oral communications.

SVITIOD ON RUNIC STONES

Anyhow before going deeper into the implications of an oral government I want to quote one of the few written evidences of an early Svea realm, the Runic inscription on the stone from Ludgo, Södermanland⁴: “Astrid let make

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² L. Hedeager has in the book Tusen års Europahistorie, Romere, germanere og nordboere (eds. L. Hedeager and H. Tvarno, Oslo 2001, pp. 267-290) given a review of her research on the kingdom Denmark in the chapter Norden. She argues that around 200 A.D. the Danes were a confederation led by a warrior king. The base for the power of the Danes was the Danish isles and Scania. Hugleik is recorded in the Frankish annals 515, as the king of the Danes. Officially the land of the Danes became the Danish realm 970 when the king Harald Bluetooth (Blâtann) tells this on the runic stone at Jelling. But most probably this realm existed much earlier. The oldest dated wall of Danevirke is built in the year 737 and the channel that crosses Samso from east to west is dated to 726. It could be the work of the mythical king Angantyr.

³ D. Harrison in the book Jarlens sekel (Stockholm 2002, p. 123) writes: “Who were the Svear? The term Svealand is not found in written sources before the 15th century. To identify the Svear could about in the provincial laws with the people living in Uppland is not possible according to modern research on ethnic groups during Medieval time” (my translation). In the book Svitjods undergång (The Destruction of Svitjod) (Stockholm 2006) the brothers H. and F. Lindström have done an interesting analyse of the decline of Svitjod, but the description they give in the first chapter of Svitjod, as a primitive tribal confederation, does not fit for the early Mediaeval period.

this stone after Anund and Ragnvald her son. They died in Denmark. They were powerful in Raunigi and the quickest in Svitjod” (fig. 1).

The ornaments on the stone (fig. 3) give us a dating to the first decades of the 11th century5. At that time the inhabitants of south-eastern Södermanland reckoned themselves as a part of the community Svitjod. Although the inscription is boastful, it also indicates, that there existed a more general assembly place, a main thing place, in Svitjod – probably in Old Uppsala (see below) – where people could compare properties of this kind. But the sentence “they were powerful in Raunigi” – that means Rönö, the name for the hundred (härad) in this region – also indicates, that they belonged to the local power elite.

This stone is not the only one where Svitjod is mentioned. The name is also found on a stone from Scania and another one from Lolland and in no case there seems to be any doubt about where Svitjod was situated6.

It seems appropriate to discuss how the borders were recognized in early realms where no maps existed. I think David William Rollason’s7 description of how Northumbria in the time 500-1100 A.D. developed is a good illustration of this also because it is a kingdom contemporary with Svitjod. As Rollason emphasizes the kingdom does not coincide with the district Northumbria but had a much wider extension however with several changes during its existence. He remarks that the borders only in few cases in early Mediaeval kingdoms were marked. Natural landmarks such as rivers, large hillocks or large and dense woods were used as borderlines. Around every kingdom were dense uninhabited areas and the exact borderline was first recognized when the king or his men visited the district.

ANTIQUE SOURCES

I will start my analysis of the ancient Svearike, Svitjod, to summarize what the antique sources write about the swear. Tacitus describes in chapter 448 that the Suiones lived in the ocean. This statement has been taken as an example on how Tacitus wrote wildly. But in fact it is a very realistic description of the archipelago, consisting of small islands in the wide sea, that was typical for the Mälaren region in those days (98 A.D.), when the Baltic stood around one meter higher and the Mälaren was a broad bay of the Baltic. In his description he also gives another detail, that is that beyond the Suiones, there is a sea that

is almost motionless. This fits with the northern part of the Baltic, that is
covered with heavy ice from early autumn to late spring. So these geographical
details seem to give evidences, that Tacitus was fairly well informed about the
Suiones. And we can also note that he quotes that "the Suiones are powerful
in ships. The form of their vessels is peculiar in this respect that a prow at
either extremity acts as a forepart, always ready for running into shore. They
are not worked by sails, nor have they a row of oars attached to their sides:
but as on some rivers, the apparatus of rowing is unfixed and shifted from
side to side as circumstances require. As they likewise honour wealth, so a
single ruler holds sway with no restrictions and with no uncertain claim of
obedience. Arms are not with them, as with the other Germans at the general
disposal, but are in the charge of a keeper who is actually a slave".

The stone slab of Häggeby, Uppland, made of sandstone, is showing a boat
of the type described by Tacitus (fig. 2). On the other side two fighting stallions
are depicted. The stone was bought 1873 by the Historical Museum in Stockholm
from the church in Häggeby; the original provenance of the stone is unknown.
However the parish of Häggeby is very rich in ancient monuments, such as
cemeteries with mounds and no less than nine runic stones.

To the closest neighbour to the Suiones he names the tribe Sitones, "who
is like Suiones in all but that they are ruled by a woman. So deep have they
fallen" comments Tacitus. It shows us that the Sverar consisted of two different
groups with different commanders. Also Jordanes\textsuperscript{9}, writing in the 6\textsuperscript{th} century
writes about two different groups of sver called Suebans and Suetidi.

We can trace these two groups in the archaeological material from
Västmanland and Uppland, that in many details differs in the Early Iron Age.
There are fairly rich female graves from both Västmanland and Uppland from
Roman Iron Age, but with one exception these graves do not indicate a higher
status for females in Västmanland, where according to Tacitus the women
had the power. The exception is an extremely rich female grave from Tuna in
Badelunda\textsuperscript{10} with Roman imports and jewellery (for the location of this
findplace and other ones in Central Sweden mentioned in the text see fig. 4).
This grave has many similarities to the rich Danish graves from the same
period. This grave is dated to around 200 A.D. and is the earliest grave on the
cemetery of Tuna in Badelunda with continuity into the Viking Age. As Tacitus
wrote his comment much earlier than this burial was made, the possibility is
that still another cemetery with an earlier rich female grave from Västmanland
will be found.

\textsuperscript{9} Here quoted after A. Nordin, Jordanes Getica. Om goternas ursprung och bedrifter,

\textsuperscript{10} L. Fernstål, Delar av en grav och glimtar av en tid, Stockholm Studies in Archaeology,
XXXII, Stockholm 2004 and here quoted references.
Both Tacitus and Jordanes comment on that beyond the Svear lives a group called *Finnoi* or *Rerefinnae* (Jordanes means skiing Finns) a people that with outmost probability can be identified as the Sami\(^{11}\). The Sami have a typical gene, which makes that these people can be traced by DNA analyses. Here the DNA examinations of skeletons found in a cemetery from Tuna in Alsike in Uppland, show that one buried man from a Viking Age grave had a samian father or grandfather, whereas the mother was Nordic\(^{12}\). As it is typical for different groups of peoples living close to each other, that they get intermixed, this is a support for the comments of Tacitus and Jordanes.

The best geographical information given by the classical authors according to my opinion is the remark Tacitus makes about the moveless sea beyond the *Suiones* because that says that the *Suiones* did not anyhow live far north of Umeå, where Bottenviken begins.

Early Mediaeval Sources

There are several sources from the 9\(^{th}\) century that give informations about the Svear or mentions them.

I here think of Ottar’s and Wulfstan’s travels in Orosius\(^{13}\) and Rimbert’s Vita Anskarii\(^{14}\). In reading these sources I have noticed, that they in opposite to the classical authors, do not tell about different related Svea tribes, but just write about the Svear. The same seems to be the case with the Carolingian documents such as diplomatic acts and letters\(^{15}\). In later documents as those from Adam from Bremen\(^{16}\) as well as Snorre\(^{17}\) and Saxo\(^{18}\) we hear from

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Swedish kings fighting each other, but nothing about different tribes. This might be an indication of that sometimes after the 6th century, there was some kind of consolidation of a Swedish realm with one king in the top.

**CONDITIONS FOR ESTABLISHING A KINGDOM**

One of the main conditions for the existence of a realm or a state is that it must have a certain population density. There are for example no indications for that there existed kingdoms on the islands of Åland, Öland, Gotland and Bornholm in the Baltic Sea although they have had mighty chieftains. The Mälaren area has with its around two hundred fifty thousands identified ancient monuments of which one hundred fifty thousands\(^{19}\) are distributed in Uppland a clear advantage compared to other parts of the Scandinavian mainland (fig. 5-6).

Another prerequisite is that the society is segregated or divided into different classes. It is thus clear that the Germanic kingdoms on the continent, as for example the Frankish Kingdom was created by a group of noble men used to lead troops in warfare, where the king was the most successful chieftain\(^{20}\). Herwig Wolfram\(^{21}\), a specialist on the history of the Goths, maintains that the royal power among the Goths grew under pressure from the Romans and the Huns, where the king was the foremost negotiator in connection with peace treaties.

It may be appropriate to examine, what possibilities there was for a king to get resources to provide him to keep the power of his realm. The classical royal income is taxes from his people, but to get regular paid out taxes, the king must have a well organized administration. An income that was more favourable in these days was tributes from a conquered enemy. A prerogative to become a king, was therefore to have an army and the beginning of a kingdom, as seen among the Germanic tribes on the continent, was often a chieftain taking power after a successful warfare. The king collected through tributes and plundering a royal treasure\(^{22}\) large enough to keep his army going.

In late Roman time was the declining Roman empire an ideal counterpart for plundering and tribute taking. The many solidi found, specially on the Baltic Islands, must have been such tributes, that we know were paid by Roman emperors to Germanic chieftains taking part in military campaigns. But although


most of the treasure finds are found on the islands, there is evidence enough to ensure that the mainland for example the Svear also took part in handling these tributes. The solidi finds found in and around the Helgö settlements in the Mälaren are a typical example of treasure finds with solidi found within the Svea realm.

One may suppose that many solidi reached the Svear as tributes paid from the inhabitants on Öland and Gotland. The old discussion that these islands belonged to Svitjod, I think has no real relevance, as the islands have quite different settlement patterns. There are evidences of warfare between the Svear and the inhabitants on Öland. Such evidence may be the bog find found at Skedemosse with golden snakearmlets, a type probably emanating from Upland. The sacrifice in Skedemosse could be an evidence of such an event. In the beginning the inhabitants on Öland were successful in their resistance, but sometime in the 5th century they became closer connected and in the second part of the 6th century the artefacts show strong influences from Middle Sweden.

Anders Andrén who has worked with one the large ringforts on Öland, Ismantorp, has given a new explanation of one of the functions of the fort, being a place where troops were gathered and trained. It is evident in Denmark in the late Roman time that battles existed, where the combatants used rather large troops. Thus the large weapon finds in the bogs on Jutland seem to be sacrifices from battles fought against invaders among others from the western part of the Scandinavian peninsula. It might have been the same kind of battles in eastern Scandinavia. But it could also be that the training camps were used to gather troops, meant for activities on the continent in connection with the battles fought against the Romans. Most probably the Scandinavians, whatever part they came from, fought together either in the Roman troops or in Germanic alliances against Roman troops.

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24 For Skedemosse compare with U.E. Hagberg, The Archaeology of Skedemosse II, KVHAA, Stockholm 1967. For the snake rings compare with K. Andersson, Romartida guldsmed i Norden III, Aun, XXI, Uppsala 1995, p. 69 ff. I consider that most of the snake rings of Hildebrand’s C type being products by the Svear because of the findfrequency, where Svealand dominates, but also that this type occurs in one of the rich graves from Gödäker, Upland.
Providing troops

Having troops also means that you have to provide for them. The Romans had invented a very genius system for providing their troops along the limes. They gave the soldiers land for their long time provision. This kind of provision was probably well known among Germanic people, as many served in the Roman army. Grave finds with weapons made after Roman prototypes are found as far north as Northern Svealand. This may also hint that even Swear could have joined the Roman army. Later in the Migration period however the warrior from the North mostly seem to have joined Germanic troops. That even women came to south are indicated by the finds of female brooches in Alamanic cemeteries.28

The strategy by the Romans was to provide their soldiers with land, exactly measured entities so that hundred plots made one centuria. This practice, also meant that hundred soldiers had their supply, when they were not active in war and from this practice derives the Germanic word hundred and in an older version hund. Already Tacitus29 quotes that the Germanic soldiers were gathered in groups around hundred men from one canton, so this way of supplying the soldiers must have been familiar to Germanic people. We meet this word in early sources from Svealand, where the folklanden (swed.) are divided into hundreds, later called härader (fig. 7), but also among the Franks and Anglo-Saxons. Thus Guy Halsall30 in the book Settlement and Social Organization. The Merovingian Region of Metz writes, that as soon as written sources occur, that is from the 7th century in this area, they tell about pagi (that is a synonym to the Swedish word folklund) divided into hundreds. A hundred was lead by a centenarius, whereas the title for the leader of a pagus was dux. The centenarius as well as the dux were attached to the king and could often be his relatives. The same type of organisation is found among the Visigothic people and the Vandals. Procopius has made a remark about the leader of a hundred by the Vandals, who was called chiliarchen (= thousand) because according to Procopius, they wanted to pretend that they were more numerous than in reality.31 The lack of people was a constant problem in the Germanic societies, but this story also tells us, that the organisation into hundreds also had something to do with the number of inhabitants, signifying

29 M. Hades, op. cit., p. 712.
31 Procopius Caesariensis, Vandalkrigen (The Wars with the Vandals), translated and commented by S. Linnér, Stockholm 2000, p. 48.
the size of an army and in some way had left the Roman organisation of landplots. This is a strong support for the view of Th. Andersson that the names hund and hundred has to do with the organisation of people and not land\textsuperscript{32}.

The Frankish settlement that followed when the Roman limes along the Rhine had fallen in the later part of the 5\textsuperscript{th} century is still not quite known but it seems that northeastern Gallia was totally conquered by the Franks around 511. Already at that time the organisation of the pagi with its hundreds could have started. The name of the leader of a hundred centenarius became by time changed to comes. By the Franks, the leadership for a hundred was not inherited, but had to be confirmed by the king\textsuperscript{33}.

**Hundreds in Svealand**

There is in Svealand a marked difference in size of the different hundreds where some can be very small and others large (compare with fig. 7). In the high Middle Age the borders of the hundreds were very stable and Rahmqvist\textsuperscript{34} notes that the stable borders depend on, that most of the hundreds had natural borders. But also to change the border was a complicated process, as they were juridically assessed. On the maps of the hundreds (härader) published by Hyenstrand\textsuperscript{35} one can note, that the ancients monuments are not situated at the borders of the hundreds, that makes it probable that the lay out of the hundreds followed the borders of ancient small petty kingdoms. However there is also clear evidence of that some adjustments have been done. Thus in two of the folklands in Uppland, where the name gives the number of hundreds, Tiundaland and Fjärhdundraland (Fjädrundaland) the name does not any longer fit, as Tiundaland includes twelve hundreds and Fjärhdundraland five hundreds. Rahmqvist has noted that the adjustment of Tiundaland must have happened after 1244, where in a letter from Ulf Jarl, it is written about a certain sum of money, that should be paid to the dean of Tiundaland from the ten provinces\textsuperscript{36}. Rahmqvist proposes, that the two extra hundreds should be Väla and Vendel. However it is for several reasons more plausible, that the two extra hundreds were Väla and Tierp, both situated at the north western border of Uppland and both having a substantial colonisation in the 13\textsuperscript{th} and 14\textsuperscript{th} centuries.


\textsuperscript{33} G. Halsall, op.cit., p. 8 ff.


\textsuperscript{35} Compare with the maps of the hundreds (härader) in Uppland and Södermanland in Å. Hyenstrand, op.cit.

\textsuperscript{36} S. Rahmqvist, op.cit., p. 65, n. 28.
A reason why Rahmqvist proposed Vendel as a new hundred, was the peculiar shape of the Norunda hundred, boarding Vendel to the north and east (fig. 7). This hundred has the old name for a hundred – hund – that according to Andersson37 preceeds the synonym hundare and thus indicates a higher age. The name hund is only found in Svealand, in the provinces Uppland (where it is included in the names of the folklands), Södermanland and Västmanland. The three hundreds with this old name in Uppland, Norunda, Hagunda and Lagunda, are situated at the border of the folklands, Norunda to the north and Hagunda and Lagunda at the border between Tiundaland and Fjärdhundraland (fig. 7). The name Lagunda is derived from the old name for lake Mälaren, Lagen38, used in the Icelandic sagas and supports Andersson’s thesis that hund is an older word.

VENDEL

Everything speaks for that Vendel was separated from Norunda, but that most probably happened at an early stage in the Migration period, when Vendel had a substantial colonization.

The Vendel area has in later years been studied more extensively within the research project Svealand in the Vendel and Viking periods. The cemeteries have been investigated by Anton Seiler and the settlements have been analysed by Sven Isaksson and myself39. Doing extensive field walking and phosphate mapping as well as going through all the known graves, together more than thousand one hundred graves could be registrated, situated on seventy different cemeteries, of which the main part were placed on a south-west to north east running drumlin (fig. 8). A substantial part of the graves have been excavated earlier. In Vendel the rule seems to have been to place the earliest cremation graves on the highest level in the cemeteries and special investigations were made on these levels to find more graves. The result gave clear information of that the cemeteries firstly started in the last quarter of the 5th century. This fits also with the pollen diagrams taken in the vicinity40.

37 Th. Andersson, op.cit., p. 92.
These evidences could also be confirmed in the analyses of the settlements made by phosphate analysis, field walking and excavations. It appeared that the settlements in the colonisation period were concentrated around three main places from the south Burunge, Kläringe and Kättslinge (fig. 8)\textsuperscript{41}. These names are old settlement names meaning a group of settlers and probably the settlements belonged to three separated estates. From Kättslinge the settlement Tuna was detached and from Kläringe the settlement Husby in the late Viking period. The excavations were concentrated to the Tuna farm, where the largest settlement was located close to the cemetery with the famous boatgraves. Here in the slope turned to the south within the present churchyard was found a settlement that started in the later part of the 5\textsuperscript{th} century. It appeared that this settlement was placed directly above a settlement from the Stone Age. The settlement had several stages but consisted in the 6\textsuperscript{th} century of two buildings placed in a right angle. One of the buildings, in north-south direction was a four ailed house, thirty two metres long and with several rooms, whereas the other building consisted of a smithy and a stable. But also on other places within what we consider be the borders of the Tuna farm, we found traces of cowsheds and small buildings\textsuperscript{42}. All settlements were surrounded by cremation cemeteries contemporary with those found around the main settlement. Not only the buildings but also the cemeteries showed distinctions, where the rich graves were gathered around the main settlement with the hall, whereas the graves around the other settlements had simpler grave gifts. Also on the other settlement places of estate type as Kläringe one could note that there existed several contemporary cemeteries, within the borders of what one would consider an estate. And the cemeteries within the estates showed distinctions in the amount of grave gifts.

**The Ottar’s mound in Vendel**

A special position had the large mound the so-called Ottarshögen\textsuperscript{43} situated on the central cemetery in Kläringe (fig. 8-9). Ottarshögen is a mound in size comparable with the large mounds in Old Uppsala. The mound was build by many layers of sods that covered a core of stones. The finds from the cremation

\textsuperscript{41} Compare with B. Arrhenius, Bebyggelsestrukturen.


were found in a bucket dug down below the bottom of the mound and covered with white sand. The use of sods as well as many items among the grave gifts indicates that the deceased could have come from the western part of Scandinavia, it is Norway.\textsuperscript{44}

However there is one grave gift that points to the power of a Svea king that is a solidus struck for emperor Basiliscus 476/477. The emperor Basiliscus only was in power for two years and finds with solidi for Basiliscus are very rare.\textsuperscript{45} Thus only seven such coins have been found in Scandinavia, of which three come from a treasure of solidi found at Helgö in the Mälaren, the largest closed find of Basiliscus coins in Scandinavia. Two coins are found in different places from Gotland and one is found on Öland. It is therefore probable that the Basiliscus coin in the Ottars mound derives from the same treasure as the coins in the treasure from Helgö,\textsuperscript{46} situated (using the waterway) only sixty kilometres away. And to my opinion the Helgö settlement is one of several residences that have belonged to the Svea king. Helgö is here an analogy to the sites Uppåkra and Gudme in the ancient Danish region.

The buried in the Ottarshögen could have been the leader of the colonization of Vendel. To be allowed to colonize an area situated far from the coast could only be achieved with a permission from a ruler of the area for example the king and his subruler in the hundred.

\textbf{The dating of the hundreds in Svealand}

It seems therefore that Vendel could be used as a model for how a hundred could have been arranged in Svealand in a period when the hundred or hund were in the process of being installed. I have however here supposed that the hundreds were installed in the Migration period, whereas many researchers in the field – an exception is Gerhard Hafström\textsuperscript{48} who also dated the hundreds to the Migration period – have taken more or less granted that the hundred first began to be used in the Viking period often in the late part. The reason

\textsuperscript{44} W. Slomann has in her paper Medelpad och Jämtland i eldre jernalder, “Universitetet i Bergen årsbok”, Historisk-Antikvarisk Rekke, 1948, II (1950) discussed the strong Norwegian influences in Northern Sweden in the Migration period. The finds in Ottarshögen are evidences of that the Norwegian influences also reached northern Uppland.

\textsuperscript{45} M. Fagerlie, Late Roman and Byzantine Solidi found in Sweden and Denmark, Numismatic Notes and Monographs, CLVII, New York 1967, p. 59 ff.

\textsuperscript{46} For the solidi treasure from Helgö compare O. Kyhlberg, op.cit.


\textsuperscript{48} G. Hafström, Ledung och märklandsindelningen, Uppsala 1949, p. 137 ff.
for this is that in Anglo-Saxon England hundreds were introduced by king Edgar in the 10th century as parts of the shires. However as shown by Andersson in Sweden the hundred occurs with the name hund which is an older synonym. For dating Andersson\textsuperscript{49} quotes written sources from Alamania and Frisia (the Netherlands), which go back to the end of the 8th century. At that time both in the Alamania or in the Netherlands the meaning of the word had got lost.

But according to my opinion, there is no reason to suppose that the Svear took over the hundred institution from the Alamans or Frisians, rather it is a synchronic development, whose origin is in the Roman administration. As has been written above we know that people from Svealand took part in the warfare in the Migration period either on the Roman or the Germanic side and it is most probable that it was in this period the knowledge of Roman administration went north.

**Developing a hundred in Vendel**

It may be possible to depict the following events, when Vendel developed to a hundred. The king of the Svear or perhaps rather one of his sons was on the continent making warfare and collecting tributes. In his troop he had an allied from Norway, who also accompanied him home to Sweden.

They had learnt to know how the hundred institution functioned. Perhaps already the ruling king had begun to install hund in some border zones. There was in this time a strong pressure on the ruling class in Svealand, as the Roman tributes were ending and the warfare was more directed to wars between Germanic kingdoms and tribes. It was necessary to have an army with a navy and it was also necessary to be able to reward participants in a war campaign. The system of folklands and hundreds could really serve this purpose and besides the organisation was a way to canalise the demand of power in the small petty kingdoms in the region. To be the leader of a hundred became a prestigious post, that the king could give to his men and in several cases it was the leaders of the petty kingdoms, that got this honour. Still higher prestige would be to become the head of a folkland and to these positions, the king could assign close relatives as his sons.

We know of many rich warrior graves in Svealand from late Roman period and the Migration period, that could have been the burials of the leaders of the small petty kingdoms or the hundreds\textsuperscript{50}. And who was then the king?

\textsuperscript{49} Th. Andersson, *Die schwedischen Bezirkbezeichnungen*, p. 108.

THE KING SITUATED IN OLD UPPSALA

Here there are many evidences, that the king was the person who led the cult in Old Uppsala and according to the myth, he was a direct descendant to the fertility god Freyr

Through pollen diagrams we know, that in Old Uppsala there were settlements since the beginning of the Roman Iron Age. Most probably there were also graves from that period but due to the vast destruction of parts of the area these have disappeared. A loose find of a Roman denar anyhow is an indication. The central cemetery with large mounds (fig. 10), höggravgårdet has been analysed with georadar in the last years. It is now possible to locate the oldest of the excavated graves, the so-called gullgraven, that is situated close to the west mound. The finds in the grave consist of a small strap end of gold, with its closest comparison in Hunnic material from Hungary, further there are two X-shaped mounts of type that is found in Finland and a little piece of ceramic with stamped decoration. I would date the grave around 450. Of the three large so-called king’s mounds most probably the mound in the centre is the oldest. It is not excavated. The eastern mound belongs to the early 6th century whereas the west mound could be dated to around 550-570. The fourth mound, the so-called Tingshögen has to judge after the geophysical

54 J. Ljungqvist, op.cit., p. 75.
56 W. Duczko, op.cit. and J. Ljungqvist, op.cit. give a later date to this grave, however this is due to a misinterpretation of the two mounts. I am preparing a paper where I will inform about the localization of the grave and the reason for its dating. Compare also B. Arrhenius, Snorris Asa-Etymologie und das Gräberfeld in Alnupsala, in: Tradition als Historische Kraft. Festschrift Karl Hauck zum 65. Geburtstag, eds. N. Kamp and J. Wollasch, Interdisziplinäre Forschungen zur Geschichte des frühen Mittelalters, Berlin - New York 1982, pp. 65-77.
57 I am here in main following the dates given by S. Lindqvist (op.cit., p. 234). J. Ljungqvist (op.cit., p. 144) gives a later date to the mounds among others with reference to Sutton Hoo mound 1, that he believes is contemporary with the east and west mound in Old Uppsala. His arguments are not convincing as the Mound 1 in Sutton Hoo contains a remarkable collection of old (prestige) items as Byzantine silverware etc. The helmet with a “pressbleck” with a motif close to a “pressbleck” from the east mound in Old Uppsala could just as well be an old heirloom. One can note that the hand and helmet motif where helmets of this type are depicted, is used in Anglo-Saxon style I during the 6th century.
measurements never been used as a grave. The find material from the east and west mound is highly fragmentised, due to the heavy cremation, but the contents are of the same high quality as the Royal grave (mound 1) from Sutton Hoo or the newly found grave from Prittlewell, Essex. But the graves in Old Uppsala are older and they manifest the power of a king from the 6th century.

A THING IN VENDEL

Returning to Vendel we have assumed that the hundred was installed in connection with the colonization. At the cemetery with the large mound, Otтарshögen, there seems to have been a place for a thing. That could explain the high phosphate content in the soil above the small mounds around the Ottar’s mound. Every hundred had a thing for dealing with local activities. Lindqvist discussed in connection with his treatise of the king’s mounds in Old Uppsala, the significance of the mounds in connection with the thing. He quoted the Tynwald Hill on isle of Man, where still a law from 1417 states the proceedings at the thing with the king and his baronets seated on the top of the mound and the community below. Interesting is also the find of a Gallows hill close to and contemporary with the mounds of Sutton Hoo in East Anglia. In Vendel a thing may have been held since the time of Otтарshögen until the 18th century, however it was in the late Mediaeval time probably moved from the Otтарshögen to the slope at the churchyard. Here was in the 17th century a small thing house erected on the foundation of the dwelling house from the Migration period.

FURTHER EVENTS IN VENDEL

In Vendel on the estate Kläringe the leader of the colonization and probably also the hundred lived to the end of the 5th century and got buried in the large

58 Compare n. 55.
59 I have given a survey of items that can be interpreted as regalia in the west and east mound in Old Uppsala, see: B. Arrhenius, *Regalia in Swealand in Early Medieval Times*, “Tor” XXVII (1995), 1, pp. 311-335.
63 M. Carver, op.cit.
Ottarshögen (fig. 8-9). We know from the graves around the mound, that the settlement at Kläringe went on through the Viking period. On the estate Kättsinge, only two and a half kilometres further to the north something happens around 550, when the main house with the hall is left or rather moved higher up to the top of the slope, where now a large house is erected. We have only been able to excavate one gable, which laid under the churchyard wall and was built on a grave from the early 6th century. The rest of the house is now covered by modern graves. About the same time as the moving of the dwelling house, the oldest boatgraves Vendel X and XIV seem to be arranged. It is tempting to assume, that now is also the period when the Tuna farm is separated from the Kläringe estate.66

THE MEANING OF THE NAME TUNA

About the meaning of the term Tuna (the plural of Tun) there exists a long and interesting discussion. The word might be derived from the Celtic word dunum meaning a fortified place. So a simple explanation could be that it just means an enclosed farm. We have however carefully looked for fences and have in fact found nothing of that kind at Tuna in Vendel. Stefan Brink has pointed at the fact that Tuna like Karby and Husby are names, which in the Svearike meant power. I myself would assume, inspired of Peter Sawyer's article *The Royal Tun in Pre-Conquest England* that the name Tuna (plural form) was symbolic, meaning places where the king was specially protected, for example places where he could stay safe during his travels around his realm. But perhaps also places from where food and other products could be distributed to the king and his men.70 We have been able to identify in the Tuna farm in

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66 The early boatgraves contain material that shows close connection to the boatgrave cemetary in Valsgärde. The hypothesis is that both cemeteries were arranged on initiative from the kingdom in Old Uppsala.


Vendel an interesting specialization, where horsebreeding seems to have been the main activity in the stable situated in right angle to the older dwelling house. In opposite to the dwelling house the stable is not moved and has in the front a gallery typical for horse stables. On the other excavated site on the Tuna farm we only found sheds for cattle. Here was also a path for the cattle leading out to large meadows.

Husby and runic stones in Vendel

At the end of the Viking period another change can be observed in Vendel. Now a Husby farm is arranged on the estate Kläringe (fig. 8) and in that part of Vendel four runic stones were erected. Coming to high Mediaeval time the church is build on the land of the Tuna farm. At that time the owner of Tuna moves to Örby hus in northern Vendel, where a fortification later developing to a castle is erected. The castle was in the hands of the Vasa family since the 15th century and in the following century king Erik XIV died there.

The function of a hundred

As said above the events in Vendel could be seen as a model for how a hundred could develop in Middle Sweden in early Mediaeval time. What function did then the hundreds have more than being an area within a kings realm? Early in the research history the hundreds in Svealand were assumed to be part of a ledung (leding, leidang) organization. Specially Hafström made a very thorough investigation of this kind of organization, that is stated in the provincial laws from the 13th century. He could show that the hundred was subdivided into smaller districts, hamna and tolster, that had direct connection to the ship organization in the ledung. How much of these detailed subdivisions that existed in early Mediaeval time we do not know. That there was a kind of ledung organization already early, we can, I believe, take for granted. It was this organization, that made the Svear to become a powerful unit, that could conquer not only their neighbours, but also tribes further to the north and the east and make them to pay tributes. The tributes were in the beginning gold

71 B. Arrhenius, *Bland folk*.
72 A. Seiler, op.cit.; B. Arrhenius, *Bland folk*.
73 B. Arrhenius, *Tuna och Husby* and eadem, *Die ländlichen Siedlungen*.
74 S. Rahmqvist, op.cit.
75 Ibidem.
76 G. Hafström, op.cit.
77 N. Lund has shown in the book *Lid, leding och landeværn* (Vikingeskipshallen, Roskilde 1996, p. 286 ff.) that there were, during the time it existed, many changes in the details of the Ledung system.
mostly in the shape of solidi, but through Jordanes\textsuperscript{78} we also know that the
Svear were known for fur and splendid horses. Fur was in Mediaeval time
used for taxation in the north\textsuperscript{79}. The horses could be from own breeding, but
there are also indications of that foreign horses were imported to make a successful
breeding\textsuperscript{80}. How much that is peaceful trade and how much that derives from
plundering and war campaigns we do not know.

First in the 8\textsuperscript{th} century a proper trading place, an early town, is founded at
Birka on Björkö, situated in the lake Mälaren (fig. 4). To Birka comes also the
first known missionary Ansgar in the 9\textsuperscript{th} century.

**Christianity Challenges Svitjod**

The introduction of the Christianity first really starts in the 11\textsuperscript{th} century
when the Svea king Olof Skötkonung was baptized at Husaby in Västergötland.
It was also the beginning of the decline of Svitjod. In the strong heathen
community the close relation to a god, Freyr was the property that gave the
king of all Svear his priority. The king was never strong in direct power and
could only rule with mutual agreement with the elite from the hundreds.
A weakness was also that most of the regions where the Svear got power by
time, except the central part around Mälaren, were not accepted as true
members of the Svitjod. These regions paid their tributes, but were not full
members of the Svea community.

The many large mounds, that were erected in Svealand during the Viking
period, also show that the elite gained in power. A typical example of the growing
power of the elite is Jarlabanke in Täby, Uppland, a man who on runic stone tells,
that he owns the whole hundred\textsuperscript{81}. In fact it should be the Uppsala king who was
the formal owner of all land. Many other explanations for the decline of Svitjod
could be given. Anyhow Svitjod had as a matter of fact worked as a “rike” in
more than five hundred years and that is a long time for an ancient country!

**The Loss of Oral Communication**

As has been noted Svitjod was in the beginning a country, where very few
persons had literacy\textsuperscript{82}. First in the end period of the Viking Age literacy is

\textsuperscript{78} A. Nordin, op.cit.
\textsuperscript{79} Th. Wallerström, Norrbotten, Sverige och medeltiden. Problem kring makt och
\textsuperscript{80} A. Sundqvist, Hästarnas land, aristokratisk hästhållning och rikkonst i Svealands
yngre järnålder, Opia, XXVIII, Uppsala 1997; compare also A. Götherström, op.cit.
\textsuperscript{81} H. Gustavson, K.G. Selinge, Jarlabanke och hundaret, “Namn och Bygd” LXXVI
\textsuperscript{82} S. Fischer, Roman Imperialism and Runic Literacy. The Westernization of Northern
Europe (150-800 AD), Aun, XXXIII, Uppsala 2006.
growing, demonstrated by Uppland’s many runic stones. That means that most agreements were oral originally. Many historians deny that Svitjod altogether was a “rike” or a state. This is due to, that they do not realize, that oral communication can be very stable. The hund and hundreds subdivision with all its implications seems to have functioned for more than five hundred years in Svitjod, and then in fact directly copied by the härad subdivision (fig. 7), used in the Swedish state, showing how stable oral agreements could be.

When historians describe the half mythological and primitive tribal community, that should have been Svitjod, they totally neglect the density of the ancient monuments and the regularity you can trace in buildings and land use. Just because it was an oral tradition, it also became partly forgotten, when the new religion and new royal families took the power and Sweden was created. A typical example how events could fall into total oblivion is the story of the missionary Ansgar that first became recognized in Sweden in the 14th century⁸³, when clergymen studying abroad came to read Rimbert’s account.

And the loss of all the oral agreements in Svitjod also left the field open for the creations of myths and fancy stories from the Christian recorders in later periods. But still the ancient monuments and the geographical nomenclature give clear evidences of the long lasting power of the rule in Svitjod.

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⁸³ Compare N. Ahnlund and G. Rudberg (op.cit., p. 36) who claims that it was Nicolaus Hermanni who started the cult of Ansgar in Linköping 1384.
Inskrift:

\[ \text{ostr;} \quad \text{lit: -ira: kum} \quad \text{usi} = \text{at} : \text{anunt} = \text{auk} : \text{raknult} : \]

\[ \quad 5 \quad 10 \quad 15 \quad 20 \quad 25 \quad 30 \quad 35 \]

\[ \text{sun} : \text{sin} = \]

\[ \quad 40 \]

\[ \text{:urp} \quad \text{ua} \quad \text{ru} \quad \text{ta} \quad \text{tan} \quad \text{ku} : \text{ua} : \text{ru} : \text{rikir} : \quad 0 \]

\[ \quad 45 \quad 50 \quad 55 \quad 60 \quad 65 \]

\[ \text{rauni} : \text{ak} : \text{snialastir} : \text{i : sulpi}: \quad \]

\[ \quad 70 \quad 75 \quad 80 \quad 85 \quad 90 \quad 95 \]

Astrið let gæra kumbl pæusi at Anund ok Ragnvald, sun sinn.
Urp\text{u dauðir} [i] Danmarku, varu rikiR a Rauningi ok snia\text{llast}iR i Sve\text{pi}:\text{pu}.

»Astrid lät göra detta minnesmärke efter Anund och Ragnvald,
sin son. De dogo i Danmark. De voro mäktiga i Röninge och de
raskaste i Svitjod.»

Fig. 1. The inscription on the runic stone from Ludgo, Södermanland (S.B.F. Jansson, Sörmländska runstensfynd, see n. 4).
Fig. 3. The runic stone from Ludgo, Södermanland (Photo, Antiquarian Topographical Archive, The Central Board of Antiquities, RAÄ).

Fig. 4. The Mälaren area with findplaces mentioned in the text.
Fig. 5. Number of prehistoric graves in Sweden per economic map sheet (Å. Hyenstrand, Centralbygd – Randbygd, see n. 19).

Fig. 6. Prehistoric monuments in Uppland (The Central Board of Antiquities, RÅA).
Fig. 7. The folklands with häraden, originally hundreds in Uppland (B. Arrhenius, *Det forntida Sveariket*, see n. 1).

Fig. 8. Parish of Vendel. Reconstruction of the cultural landscape in the Iron Age. The arable Land, mostly in the vicinity of the gravefields, is not marked on the figure (B. Arrhenius, *Bebyggelsestrukturer*, see n. 39).
Fig. 9. The mound of Ottar (Ottarshögen) in Vendel parish (after J. Peringskiöld in: S. Lindqvist, Uppsala högar och Ottarshögen, see n. 43).

Fig. 10. The gravefields of Gamla Uppsala (after drawing by Truls Arvidssön after the original of J. Peringskiöld on a copperplate in Monumenta Uplandica per Thundiam, 1710; compare with Myth, Might, and Man. Ten essays on Gamla Uppsala, Stockholm 2000).