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### An Example from Upper Dalarna

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# The Change of Religion and its Artefacts

## An Example from Upper Dalarna

By LARS ERSGÅRD

### Abstract

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This article deals with the change from paganism to Christianity in the parish of Leksand in Upper Dalarna. The phenomenon of a change of religion is primarily defined as a change in people's conceptual worlds, and the article examines various material expressions of this change. The material consists of artefacts from graves of the Late Viking Age and the Early Middle Ages, and from votive finds from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. A central idea in the article is that religious conceptions associated with an individual farm and its role as a social and ideological centre survived from the Viking Age to the Middle Ages, but the conceptions were transformed into new ritual forms. A material expression of this process is that the same categories of artefact can be followed in different spatial and chronological contexts.

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### Introduction

The transition from paganism to Christianity in Scandinavia in the Viking Age and the Early Middle Ages (AD 800–1200) is at present the subject of considerable research.<sup>1</sup> The interest in people's ideologies and conceptual worlds in early times is no longer the exclusive preserve of historians of religion, but has also grown among archaeologists and historians since the 1980s. It is scarcely questioned that religion played a central role in the changes undergone by Nordic society during that period. This applies in particular to the problem of state formation. "The Christianization of the Scandinavians ... depended on the conversion of their rulers", as Peter Sawyer declares (1987, p. 68), and the king as a "victorious Christ" must have had a powerful ideological impact on a Nordic society in change. Christianity and kingship were thus indissolubly linked during the Early Middle Ages.

Frequently, not least in archaeological research, one encounters the view that the change of religion was an antagonistic

relationship between two distinct and absolutely defined "doctrines", with Christianity gaining ground against pagan resistance (e.g. Steinsland 1989; Thunmark-Nylén 1989). Although the transition between these two may have been protracted, the essential question is seen to be determining the date when the country can be deemed to have been definitively Christianized. The introduction of Christianity, in other words, is viewed as synonymous with some sort of administrative reform, the content of which is a foregone conclusion. But the change of religion is not just a matter of the adoption of a new system of belief, since it also involved a change in people's conceptual world. This changed because there was a radical change in people's existence. When we can observe religious "transitional forms" as the Late Viking Age gives way to the Early Middle Ages, we should therefore not see them as something that must necessarily arise simply because one doctrine succeeded another. They are expressions of ideas about life as it was changing, they are the results of an ideological strategy which was developed so

that people could define themselves in a world where the most fundamental conditions for human life were being reshaped.

Seen in this light, the change of religion is not just a transition but also a phenomenon with its own content, which says something essential about the society where this change took place. At the same time, the task of delimiting the change of religion becomes problematic. It is not exclusively a matter of people abandoning a number of beliefs and rituals in favour of other beliefs and rituals. Relics of paganism lived on but in a transformed state, surviving in the complex of customs and ideas usually known as "folk belief" (see Schjødt 1989, pp. 191 f.). Pagan gods, for example, are transformed into trolls, wights, elves, and so on, beings who were believed to inhabit different parts of the natural world. In popular belief, these beings had the ability to influence people's lives and could be appeased with sacrifices of various kinds. There is no reason to believe that such phenomena were immediately reduced to curious ideological elements beyond the official Christian religion. On the contrary, the efforts of the church and the central government to combat such folk beliefs in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries suggest that they were significant elements in people's ideology and therefore seen as an offence against the official Christian doctrine. The change of religion thus lasted not only well into the Middle Ages but also into modern times.

Paganism is usually described as the religion of the kin-based society, whereas the coming of Christianity was synonymous with the emergence of a hierarchical society of "feudal" type. In this article, however, I intend to study the change of religion in a part of Sweden that lacked all "feudal" elements. On the contrary, kin relations have played a primary role in social life here right up until recent times (see Sporrang 1987, 1989). The area in question is the parish of Leksand in Upper Dalarna (Dalecarlia). What was the change of religion like in this area, where

Christianity was evidently able to establish itself with social consequences that differed from what was normally the case?

### Religion and artefacts

Accepted knowledge about pagan religion and the transition to Christianity is largely based on literary sources, above all the Norse skaldic poetry and the sagas. Remarkably, there is one source from the early thirteenth century which speaks very clearly about the state of religion in our area. It is the Norwegian *Sverris saga*, which describes events in conjunction with King Sverrir's journey through Jarnberaland in 1177. As shown by Åke Hyenstrand (1972, pp. 31 ff.) and others, Jarnberaland must be identical with the district around Lake Siljan in Dalarna. The saga says that the area was pagan at this time, but it is of course uncertain what the author means by this. For my study, this information will not be of decisive importance, but it will be seen that the end of the twelfth century is a key phase in development. In what follows my interest will be concentrated exclusively on material expressions of religious ideas.

Artefacts, and in particular artefacts in graves, are part of material culture which are often brought up in the discussion of the change of religion. It is relatively rare, however, that there is any consideration in depth of the conceptual world behind the artefacts. Since the intention mostly has been simply to distinguish pagan elements from Christian elements, the artefacts in graves have scarcely had any more advanced function than to represent paganism in general, while the absence of grave goods is allowed to represent Christianity.

In this article the intention is not to distinguish one faith from another in the material traces. It is rather in the combination of different, ostensibly also contradictory religious expressions that I seek a unique religious content. It is not just the artefacts in themselves which give this content. It is

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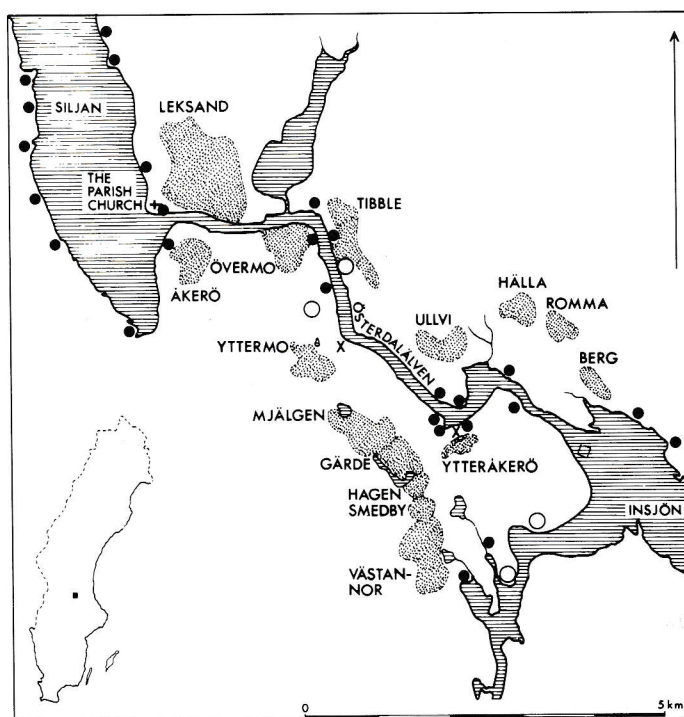


Fig 1. Map of the central parts of Leksand parish. Symbols: Black circle: site of iron production. White circle: findspot of skeletal grave. Cross: settlement remains from the Late Iron Age. The hatched area indicates the present location of the villages.

rather the surrounding context that bears meaning, a context which cannot be confined to the individual grave or even the cemetery.

It is not often that one can follow the material traces of ideology over a continuous period in one and the same area. The parish of Leksand is an exception, however, on account of a variety of favourable external factors. In this article I shall deal with two complexes of graves from the Viking Age/-Early Middle Ages, one by Leksand church, the other along the river Dalälven in the centre of the parish. Votive material from the High Middle Ages found in one of the villages in the parish also plays a role in the discussion.

### The area

The parish of Leksand lies on the southern shores of Siljan, the lake surrounded by the central settlement districts of Upper Da-

larna. The river Österdalälven cuts north-south through the parish. The fertile arable soils are to be found in the flat land on either side of the river, and it is here that the major part of settlement has been located throughout the ages. Leksand in former times comprised a very large area, much bigger than today's parish, and has been one of the most densely populated parishes in the province. There are numerous traces of human activity from prehistoric times, especially sites for the production of iron and Late Iron Age graves. The earliest maps of the area from the seventeenth century show settlement to consist of a large number of villages, some of them very big, and shielings for summer pasturing. Most of these settlements originated in the Middle Ages. The centre of the parish is where the Österdalälven flows into Siljan. (Fig. 1.) This is the location of the parish church, dated on stylistic grounds to the early fourteenth century, and it was here that local administrative and

mercantile functions such as the local court and assembly and the market were located (Nisbeth 1982, pp. 29 ff.).

Upper Dalarna is generally known to have been a socially and culturally homogeneous area in historical times. There are no towns and no social élite of landowning nobles. The earliest evidence of the central government exerting some form of lasting dominance over the area comes from the first half of the sixteenth century. Upper Dalarna was a decidedly agrarian society with an egalitarian social structure. The peasant congregations in the large parishes were local but politically strong and independent units, who displayed their power in several peasant uprisings in the Middle Ages and the early modern period.

### The landscape and the ancestors

One suitable starting-point for our study is the latter part of the Viking Age (tenth and eleventh centuries). It is evident that there was a decisive change in burial practices, a change from cremation to inhumation (see Serning 1966 and 1982b for excavated graves in the Leksand area). Only a few cremation graves have been found in the Leksand area. These graves were probably cairns with the cremated remains lying near the surface, which appears to be why many of them have disappeared as a result of later tillage. Late Viking Age inhumation graves, on the other hand, have been found in several places. (Fig. 1.) Most of these finds share many common features. They lie close to the river. Iron production sites and the hitherto localized settlements from the Late Iron Age also lay by Österdalälven and other watercourses. The dead were therefore probably buried close to the settlements.

In addition, there seem to have been only a small number of graves at each findspot. The only professional excavation (on land belonging to the village of Yttermo in conjunction with the excavations occasioned by the construction of Highway 70 in 1983)

revealed six graves (Fig. 2.) (Ersgård & Syse 1984). Other findspots in Leksand parish contain one, two, or three graves, all of them discovered in conjunction with construction work in the first half of this century.

No graves appear to have been covered by barrows or cairns, but a number of large post-holes near the graves at Yttermo suggest that the graves were marked above ground, perhaps with some covering structure of wood.

The graves varied in their orientation; both east-west and north-south graves occur. The six graves at Yttermo all had a "Christian" orientation, with the heads to the west. As for the characteristics of the individual graves, coffin burials have been observed in several cases. Both male and female graves occur, with neither category dominating. In only one place, at Yttermo, was a child's grave found.

Practically all the graves contained artefacts. Common objects in male graves are axes, knives, fire-irons, arrowheads, and combs. Female graves can contain bead necklaces, knives, buckles, and arm-rings. There are isolated examples of graves with objects such as a wooden bowl, a lump of slag, and a piece of bronze plate with five carved runes not making up a coherent inscription.

As for the dating of these graves, Inga Serning (1982, pp. 95 ff.) has suggested a general dating framework, based on the analysis of artefact types, of the tenth to the twelfth centuries. There are five C14 datings from the six graves at Yttermo. Two of these are from human bones in male graves, giving ages of AD 660-939 and 660-936 (calibrated values, 1 sigma). Of the other three, which come from post-holes by the graves, two go back to the Stone Age and can therefore be ignored in this discussion; the last dating is AD 1194-1280. Finally, two graves found in land belonging to the village of Västannor contained five datable coins: grave 1, 1068-90; grave 3, 997-1003, 983-1024, 1056-75, 1086-87 (Jonsson 1982).

The chronological framework of the tenth to the twelfth centuries appears reasonable

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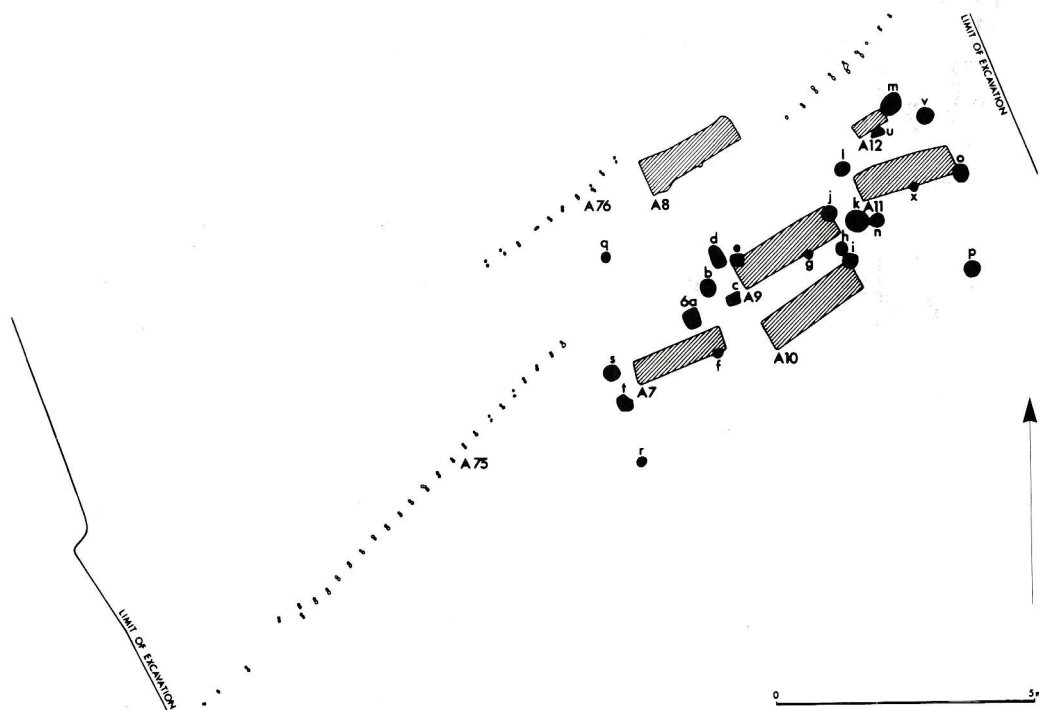


Fig. 2. Burial place at the village of Yttermos Ägor, investigated in connection with the rerouting of highway 70 in 1983. Features 7–12 are skeletal graves from the Late Viking Age. Features 6 a–x are post-holes. Features 75 and 76 are fence lines.

on the basis of the total datable material. In view of the uncertainty of the C14 method, of course, it is doubtful how far back the anterior limit should be taken. As for the posterior limit, the evidence of the coins is interesting. As we see, one grave can contain a number of coins ranging over a wide period. The oldest coin in grave 3 must have been in circulation for at least 83 years before it ended up in the ground. The question is how much time may have passed between the minting of the youngest coin and the digging of this grave. We cannot rule out the possibility that the grave dates from as late as the late twelfth century.

Graves contemporary with those described above have been found at yet another place in Leksand parish. This is a burial place which has great similarities but also some decisive differences from those already mentioned. Under the porch of Leksand

church, a total of 164 inhumation graves have been excavated in an area of about 40 square metres (Fig. 3) (Serning 1982a). Disturbed remains of at least five cremation graves have also been found. The site was part of the cemetery until the porch was built in the fifteenth century. About thirty of the inhumation graves contained artefacts. All of these were oriented east–west with the heads to the west. The excavation comprised only the area within the walls of the porch, so it was not possible to determine the limits of the area containing graves with artefacts. All we know is that this is part of a larger burial place. A majority of the graves with artefacts turned out to be women's graves. These could contain objects such as necklaces, coins, temple-rings, ring-brooches, ring-needles, bracelets, knives, fire-irons, keys, combs, and so on. Of the more unusual finds we may mention a miniature scythe, a

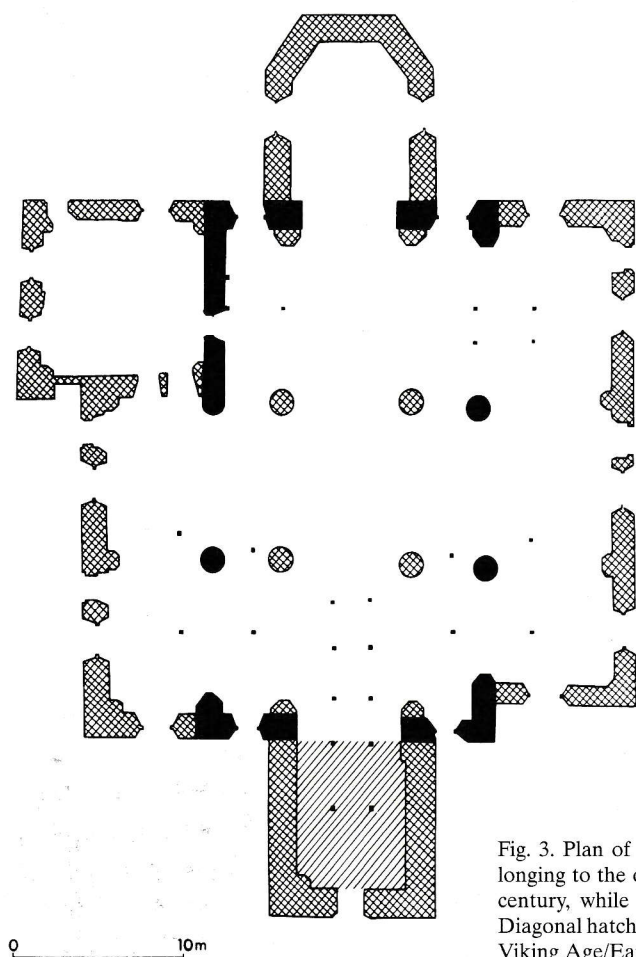


Fig. 3. Plan of Leksand church. Black parts mark walls belonging to the oldest church from the start of the fourteenth century, while cross-hatched parts indicate later additions. Diagonal hatching marks the findspot of graves from the Late Viking Age/Early Middle Ages. After *Sveriges kyrkor*.

wooden bowl, and a piece of iron. One grave contained the remains of a cape and a patterned band woven by a fairly advanced technique (Nockert 1982, pp. 143 ff.). Primarily on the basis of coins and other datable artefact types, Inga Serning has dated these graves to the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

For the further interpretation of these graves, there are some interesting earlier observations made in connection with digging to lay pipes under the church floor. Remains of stone foundations and walls from one or possibly two buildings, predating the existing medieval church from the start of the fourteenth century (Nisbeth 1982, p. 28). In

the absence of any documentation, we cannot say what this building or these buildings were like or when they were built. We can hypothesize that there was an early medieval predecessor to the fourteenth-century church and that it had a large cemetery. The graves excavated in the porch could then have been part of this. The fact that almost only female graves were found may suggest that there was a spatial division according to gender in the early medieval cemetery. This kind of pattern has been observed in several early medieval cemeteries in Scandinavia, an example being at Wästerhus church on the island of Frösön in Jämt-

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land, where the women were mostly buried to the north of the church and the men to the south (Vretemark 1992).

It is the same custom of burying the dead with artefacts that we find both at Leksand church and at the smaller burial places. However, we are dealing with burials in two different topographical and structural contexts. On the one hand we have a large cemetery probably adjoining some form of cult building, where the position of the individual graves was determined by the gender of the deceased; on the other hand we have a number of burial places with only a few graves at each place, located close to settlements. The graves in both contexts all come from the same period. Inga Serning (1982b, p. 112) has argued that the small burial places come from the older part of this period, the tenth and eleventh centuries, representing a transitional stage before people buried their dead exclusively at a common cemetery beside the church. The smaller burial places would thus have been in use for only a short time, which would explain why so few people were buried at each place. This argument does not stand up to close scrutiny, however. From the smaller sites we have C14 datings from the tenth century at the latest and coins from the end of the eleventh century. There is no evidence to suggest that the graves with artefacts at the church are later. Here too, the youngest coins are from the late eleventh century. This must mean that there is no demonstrable chronological difference between the two types of burial place. Instead it is a matter of a long period, from the tenth to the twelfth century, during which people buried their dead in either one of two different contexts, at a large cemetery and in small groups near the settlements, but otherwise following similar customs. The explanation for the small number of graves at the smaller sites would thus be that only a small proportion of the population were buried there. If we reckon with a period of roughly 250 years when these burial practices prevailed, then at most one

individual per generation was buried at these places.

How are we to interpret this situation that we find in the Leksand district in the Late Viking Age and Early Middle Ages? There are undoubtedly elements of a purely heathen character, such as the custom of depositing objects in the graves and burying the dead near settlements. Alongside this we see Christian features such as graves in what resembles a common cemetery, and east-west orientation of the bodies. Does this mixture of religious elements reflect a transitional phase filled with conflict? Did part of the population start to adopt the Christian faith while others resisted? Were the former buried in the large cemetery while the latter were laid to rest near their farms following the old pagan custom? In accordance with the stance I took up at the start of this article, I think that these burial customs make up a unit of religious ideas shared by everyone in the district, and that the complex and partly also contradictory picture is due to conceptions of life in a complex and contradictory transitional phase.

What all these graves have in common is that the dead are accompanied by artefacts. These are traces of rituals associated with some form of cult of the dead or the ancestors.<sup>2</sup> Such a cult is generally of great significance in all societies where ties of kinship are the primary social relation. The dead were not regarded as biologically extinct individuals but as socially important members of the kin community. As ancestors they represented the origin of the kin and as dead people they occupied a central position in communication between gods and men. A crucial element in the cult of the dead ancestors was the votive ritual in connection with a burial, which can be regarded as a gift ceremony in honour of the deceased. Underlying this there were also ideas that the dead, who were still part of the kin community, had a right to share in its material possessions. It is in this light that we can regard the artefacts in the graves both at the church and by the

farms. They are generally things that had a function and a meaning in other contexts before they ended up in the graves. We find here both simple utility objects such as fire-irons or knives and more exclusive ornaments such as bead necklaces and ring-brooches. Some of the objects had travelled a long way, such as the temple-rings of Slavonic origin. This category also includes the coins, which in favourable cases can tell us something about how they were handled before they were deposited in the earth. The coins found in the graves in Leksand all had holes punched in them, showing that they were worn as amulets or pendants. Moreover, they come from several different countries in Europe: Sweden, Norway, England, Ireland, and Germany (Jonsson 1982). In grave 222, which has by far the richest grave goods of all the graves by the church, there were eleven coins on a necklace along with 43 beads of glass, cornelian, and metal, besides a silver pendant. Among these coins, several of which are badly worn, the oldest was struck for Olof Skötkonung in Sweden 995–97, the youngest for William II of England 1090–93. As we can see, the time-span is great. When the youngest coin was minted, the oldest coin had been in circulation for almost a century. Many years must therefore have elapsed before the coins were joined with the other objects in the necklace in Leksand. It is thus probable that they were accumulated over several generations as the property of the kin. The deceased who finally took the necklace to the grave was a young woman, aged only 20–30 (Serning 1982, p. 121).

It was the “normal” pagan pattern for the ancestors’ cult to be practised at the farm, the centre of the kin community. However, we can observe traces of this cult at a larger communal burial place which shows several Christian features. We can interpret this cemetery as a new religious centre in the district. At the same time, behind the creation of this cemetery there must have been ideas of a new sense of community in the area, of

new social ties between the farms which extended beyond the bounds of kinship. When we find distinct traces of an ancestors’ cult both in the graves at the church and in the graves at the farms, we should not interpret this as revealing some sort of “conservatism” against innovations; instead ideas about the origin of the kin and the ancestors would have been vital and significant at a time when much of existence was in change. The changes in the Leksand district during the Late Viking Age and Early Middle Ages are a complex problem, too large for me to consider here from more than one limited but important angle. I have previously spoken about iron production in this area, an activity that was especially widespread in the Late Iron Age. It has left numerous traces in the landscape, in the form of slag-heaps, which are usually found along the river banks and thus mark the location of the production sites (see Magnusson 1986, pp. 179–86). Settlements were also located at these places. Iron handling was important not just economically but also because it gave the area its social and cultural identity. Evidence for this is found in the name *Jarnberaland* (land of the iron-bearers), by which the area around Siljan was known to the outside world in the Early Middle Ages (Hyenstrand 1972). Artefacts showing direct links with this activity can be found in male graves in the form of iron axes and arrowheads.

According to a large number of radio-carbon datings from different sites in Upper Dalarna, iron production here ceased during the twelfth century at the latest (Magnusson 1986, pp. 180 ff.). This is not just a matter of a technological change, as the phenomenon has often been considered in earlier research. The end of iron production meant that the very foundation for the identity of the individual farm was radically changed. We may assume that land took the place of iron. Possession of land became the new basis for the identity of the farm. We can date this process of change to the transition between what we call the Viking Age and the Middle

Ages, or the tenth to the twelfth century. It is in this context that we should consider the special burial practices described above. In the transformation of settlement and landscape which took place at this time, the ancestors of the farm were to play a decisive role. A few details in the topography of the little cemetery at the village of Yttermo illuminate this in a concrete and striking manner.

Above the burial ground, following roughly the same orientation as the graves, that is SW-NE, ran a boundary line; on the excavated surface it was visible as a double line of pairs of post-holes or rather stake-holes (Fig. 2.). Immediately north of the graves were the remains of yet another line, which appears to have converged with the first line towards the east. These fences appear to have been built following an archaic technique, with the pairs of stakes being more closely spaced than was customary in later times. Nor do they coincide with any later field boundaries as we know them from the oldest maps. The remarkable thing is that none of the fence lines cuts over the graves, which would have been natural if they had been set up later. On the contrary: at least one of the lines appears to stop at the edge of the burial ground and then continue on the other side of it. It cannot have been the graves that disturbed an earlier boundary, since traces of it would then have been discovered between the graves. The conclusion must be that the people who staked out the course of the fence had regard for the burial ground. This was probably marked above ground by the structure that left the large post-holes beside the graves. I would therefore argue that the relative position of the burial ground and the fences is not a coincidence. On the contrary, the former must have been a guiding factor in determining the course of the latter, a fixed point in the terrain in conjunction with an early change of boundaries. In this way the ancestors were participants in the creation of a new landscape and guarantors of the farm's lasting social role and its right to the land.

On the basis of the datings cited above, we may assume that the custom of depositing artefacts in graves ceased by about 1200 at the latest. Burials at farms likewise did not occur after this time. About a hundred years later, at the start of the fourteenth century, the existing church was built, in its oldest form a rectangular granite building with no apse. Around 1300 we also find the first evidence that the area constituted a parish belonging to a larger diocesan organization. Can we therefore conclude that the change of religion had been definitively accomplished in the Leksand district after 1200, and that the Christian faith had by then completely conquered the popular conceptual world?

### The holy tarn

Near the village of Västannor there is a small lake or tarn of irregular oval shape which is just over 200 metres long at its greatest extent. It takes its name – Västannortjärn – from the village. One of the oldest maps of Leksand, from 1697, shows the village farms bunched around the lake (Fig. 4). Today all settlement is grouped to the west of the lake. In the 1970s a medieval occupation layer containing a large number of richly varied finds was found on the eastern shore (Myrdal 1984). In this layer, deposited in wet sludge which favoured the preservation of organic material, there was a large number of wooden artefacts, including several different agricultural implements, and objects of leather and iron, such as shoe fragments and four axes. The layer also contained glass beads and a wide variety of objects of copper, bronze, lead, and silver, including twenty medieval coins, costume items, and two strips of lead with runic inscriptions (Fig. 5.). Finally, the layer also held animal bones, above all burnt bones, and waste from wood crafts in the form of a large number of chippings.

As regards the dating of this layer, the coins provide a preliminary framework. The oldest of them was minted for Knut Eriksson

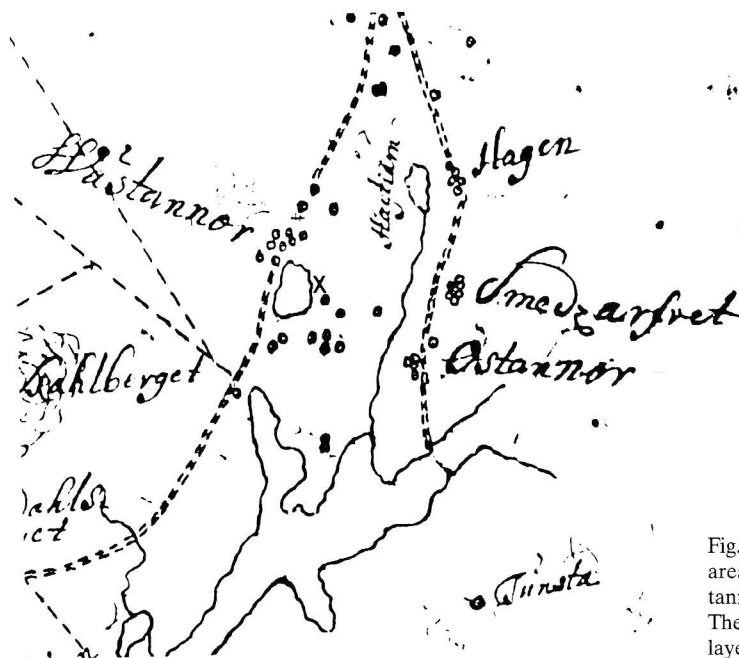


Fig. 4. Section of a map of the Leksand area from 1697. The map shows Västannortjärn and the farms around it. The site of the find-bearing occupation layer is marked with a cross.

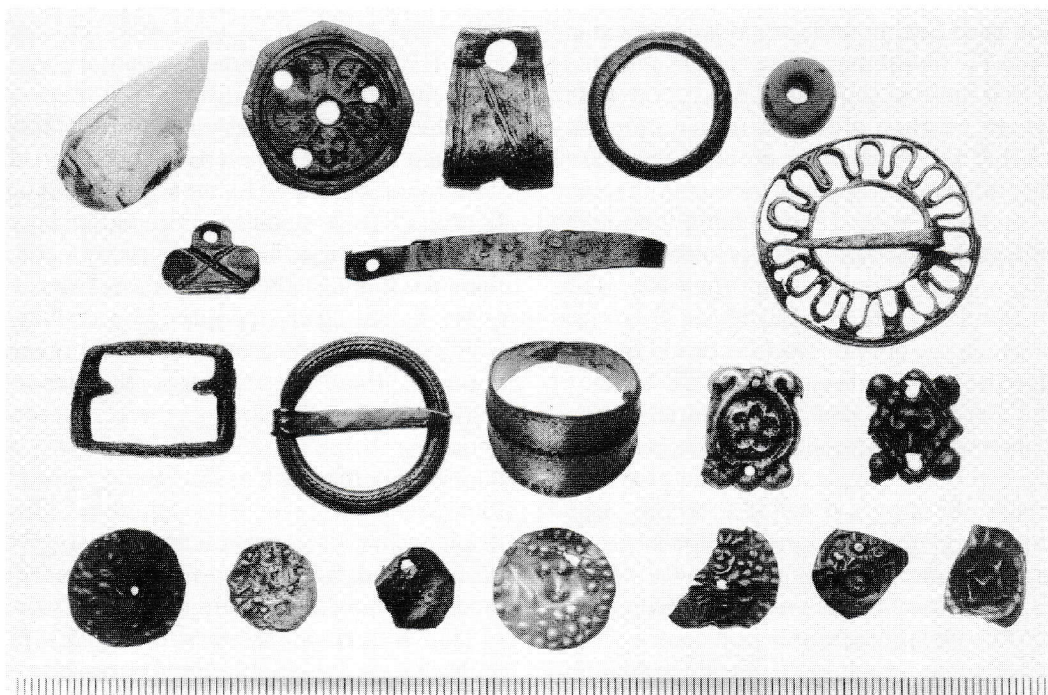


Fig. 5. Selection of finds from Västannortjärn. Top row, left to right: rock-crystal, costume ornament of bronze, bronze ring, glass bead; second row, left to right: bronze pendant, copper plate, silver ring-brooch; third row, left to right: iron buckle, bronze ring-buckle, silver finger-ring, two dress mounts of copper plate; fourth row, left to right: seven coins from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries. Photo: Bengt A. Lundberg, RIKfoto, Central Board of National Antiquities.

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(1167–96), the youngest for Magnus Eriksson (1360–1370s) (Wiséhn 1990, p. 41). Six C14 analyses, the first of which comes from material under the find-bearing layer, have given the following time intervals: 1020–40, 1170–1285, 1185/1120–1290/1300, 1165/1180–1640, 1040/1185–1275, 1280–1425. Finally, a dendrochronological investigation of the wood chippings showed the youngest annual ring to be from 1307 (Myrdal 1984, p. 7). The tendency in the overall dating evidence is fairly clear. The occupation layer at Västannortjärn belongs chronologically to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, with some uncertainty about how far back and forward it may be taken.

How are we to interpret this remarkably rich find? The layer undoubtedly has a direct link with a nearby settlement. As the maps show, there were in early times farms both east and west of the lake, and the large quantities of chippings may come from the building of a house (Myrdal 1984, p. 6). The find composition, however, is highly unusual, deviating from the normal picture of medieval occupation layers that we know from, say, the medieval towns. The large concentration of small metal objects is scarcely an expression of normal farm waste, and must instead be the result of very special activity. The combination of coins, ornaments, and costume items deposited in the water is clear evidence that these objects were votive offerings deliberately deposited in the lake. What appears initially confusing is that these votive finds are mixed up with what looks like waste, for example, the wood chippings, waste leather, and broken wooden objects. Yet this need not make interpretation impossible. The specific find combination can in fact give a special dimension to both votive acts and waste deposition in the sense that both activities were part of a shared ritual context.<sup>3</sup> Throwing waste into the water, like throwing objects of silver and copper, had a religious meaning; the votive act was an integral part of the life of the farm along with other activities.

A votive find in this chronological and spatial context is of the utmost interest for the problem considered in this paper. To understand the deeper meaning of the finds at Västannortjärn, we must begin by comparing them with the grave goods described above.

We have evidence that people began to make votive deposits in the lake at the end of the twelfth century at the earliest. As I have shown above, the custom of depositing objects in graves, which we observed at the church and the smaller burial places, was not continued beyond this time. We have here, then, an unusually clear agreement in time for the cessation of one custom and the commencement of another.

As for the individual artefacts, we can see that surprisingly many categories occur both in the graves and at Västannortjärn. Among these we find beads, coins, runic inscriptions, finger-rings, ring-brooches, belt fixtures and buckles, axes, and keys. Costume items in the form of textiles do not occur among the Västannortjärn finds. On the other hand, there are costume items in the small metal clasps and fittings that were once riveted to various garments.

The coins at Västannortjärn differ from those in the graves in that the former group has coins only from Scandinavia (Sweden, Gotland, Norway). The oldest of these, from the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, have holes punched in them in the same way as the coins in the graves. The latter, from the late thirteenth century and the fourteenth, have no holes, which suggests that they generally functioned as more than just amulets before they were deposited in the lake.

Among the Västannortjärn finds there are also examples of objects with a decidedly Christian stamp. One of the two rune-inscribed lead strips has a legible text consisting of the prayer "Ave Maria" in Latin, some letter formulas, and an invocation of Christ (Fig. 6.). When it was deposited the lead strip was folded up and contained a bit of bone, probably a relic.



Fig. 6. Rune-inscribed lead strip found at Västannortjärn. Length 73 mm, width 22.5 mm. The runic text consists mainly of the prayer "Ave Maria" in Latin. Photo: Bengt A. Lundberg, RIKfoto, Central Board of National Antiquities

It is thus largely the same type of objects that function in both contexts as media in communication with a world beyond this earthly life. This fact along with the chronological relation between the two find complexes therefore make it possible to assume that we have here a custom that was transformed; in other words, the general underlying meaning persisted, but the forms it took and the context in which it appeared were changed. In the earlier context, the deposition of objects is associated with the physical remains of the ancestors. When this custom was abandoned, the powers represented by the ancestors made their home in the waters of the lake, where the deposition of the same kinds of objects continued. In both cases it is a matter of the transfer of material wealth to a supernatural world with a view to bringing prosperity to the farm. The small lakes and ponds which occur here and there in the landscape – Västannortjärn is just one of many – may therefore have guided the localization of farms in the High Middle Ages. Being close to water may therefore have been not only of economic importance but also just as much of religious and symbolic significance.

Having observed that old religious customs survived in new forms at farms after 1200, we must also turn our attention to the church in Leksand, the centre of the parish and the scene of the official exercise of religion. What happened when the custom of burying objects with the dead ceased?

It is not completely true to say that objects no longer occur in the graves at the church after 1200. The excavation of the porch floor revealed two graves where the dead person was holding a coin wrapped in leather in the right hand. One of these coins was from the time of Magnus Eriksson (1319–63). These finds can probably be interpreted as a variant of "Charon's toll", a coin to pay for the dead person's passage (Serning 1982a, pp. 93, 121). Judging by the dating, this appears to have been a late medieval custom which should not be regarded as a transformation of an earlier pagan practice.

What we still lack in Leksand is finds from the floor layer of the medieval churches. (As I said above, we can assume that the existing medieval church had a predecessor.) The medieval church floors have generally proved to be rich in finds of small objects such as coins, rings, ornaments, costume items, and

the like. The phenomenon has stimulated interest and discussion throughout Scandinavia. The coins found in Swedish churches from the Middle Ages have recently been exhaustively studied in a dissertation by Henrik Klackenberg (1992). The relative increase in these church finds which can be noted during the thirteenth century is interpreted by him as a sign of growing monetization in the Swedish countryside; coins were now increasingly penetrating the peasant economy (Klackenberg 1992, p. 193). The concept of monetization is used to denote "part of the process which led to a market economy, that is, an economy dominated by the market principle and complete currencies" (p. 19). In my view, however, one must also take into consideration the explanatory value of the actual find context and concentrate on the fact that the coins found in churches are the result of votive acts. Whether they were dropped in connection with offerings at the altar or in offertory trunks, or deliberately placed on the floor of the church – a question on which opinions differ – is not decisive for our purposes; the important thing is that the coins have a wholly non-economic function as media in communication with the divine. We have seen that coins have been used in this function ever since the Late Viking Age, even in a place as remote from the major trade routes as Upper Dalarna. What happens in the thirteenth century is that the offering is moved into the church. The same phenomenon has been observed on the continent, for example, by Georges Duby (1981, pp. 54 f.): "Treasure-hoarding, centred until recently in burial-grounds, was simply transferred to Christian sanctuaries where consecrated valuables were deposited. ... Ancient beliefs were engulfed in Christian practice, making sacrifice of earthly goods the surest means of acquiring Divine favours and atoning for sin." Whether it was magnificent objects of gold and silver offered by the élite of society, or a coin from a simple peasant, the idea behind the act was the same:

by offering material possessions, one could obtain success and prosperity from the divine powers. The church finds should thus be seen, in my view, not primarily as a sign that the market had made its entry into the world of the peasant, but as traces of an old custom, which is transformed and brought within the walls of the church.

In the Leksand area we can only *assume* that the same type of offerings were made within the walls of the church. What we do know, however, is that the finds from Västannortjärn show a striking similarity to the church finds as regards the composition of the material. The pattern from the earlier period thus appears to repeat itself. A similar custom occurs in two different contexts, probably at the communal place of religious assembly and at the individual farms. It is evidently the case that the farm in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries was still an object of strong religious beliefs. These should not be seen as obsolescent relics of an old pagan past; through them the farm continued to play a living role as a primary social centre in human existence.

After 1400 we can no longer follow this pattern of religious belief through material expressions in the landscape, as was possible in the Late Viking Age and Early Middle Ages. In the Late Middle Ages it is above all the official Christian religion which manifests itself materially through renovations and additions to the existing church. A tower was built to the west, and the building was divided into three aisles by the construction of a vault (Fig. 3.) (Nisbeth 1982, pp. 35 f.). In the Late Middle Ages and modern times there are absolutely no traces of religious manifestations at the farms in the concrete shape we encounter at Västannortjärn. This does not mean that the farm had completely lost its ideological-social role; the customs that maintained such a role must have taken on a different character. As the historical geographers have shown, kin relations were still of primary significance for social and economic life in the Leksand district (Spor-

rong 1987, 1989). A custom that deserves attention in this context concerns rituals associated with death. When a dead person left the farm for the last time, a ceremony was held at the farm before the journey to the cemetery. Known as *utsjungning* (singing out), it had a wholly Christian content, consisting of hymns and prayers. The ceremony was nevertheless combated by the clergy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but it continued to be held into modern times (Björklöf 1982, p. 20). Behind this custom we can detect ideas about the farm as a religious sphere of its own, ideas which can scarcely have had their origin in official Christian belief, but rather in older pre-Christian religious conceptions.

### Conclusions

What this study has shown is that the transition from paganism to Christianity in Upper Dalarna was not a simple substitution of one belief for another but a protracted and complex process. We have seen how customs which we can call pagan vanished and were replaced by others with a Christian content. At the same time, we can observe that people never stopped performing various religious rituals at their farms. We cannot understand this phenomenon if we view it in isolation and see it as an expression of general cultural conservatism. By maintaining such customs, people recreated basic ideas about life in the district, where the farm continued to be a centre for important social relations. There is thus social structural continuity through time, a continuity that lasted from the Iron Age until modern times, through all the changes in the religious and ideological means of expression.

The aim of this paper has not only been to study the change of religion but also the phenomenon as revealed in material culture. As we have seen, small artefacts in particular were important as media for expressing religious ideas. We have also seen how the

places where the objects were deposited – in the soil with the ancestors or in the waters of the offertory lake – were living and active elements in the landscape, able to guide the location of farms and fields. This was a landscape of production, but at the same time a ritual and social landscape.

The time around 1400 marks the terminus of our study. After this we can no longer study the religious ideas in the way that was possible before, that is, through artefacts. Does this break reflect a change of a greater general scope? Although our material is limited, I shall nevertheless try to argue that this was indeed the case.

Material property in Scandinavian society at the time with which we are concerned, the Late Viking Age and Early Middle Ages, was not conceptually separable from its owner. We may quote here the famous Russian historian Aaron Gurevich, who has considered the phenomenon in several works: "Things in general could embody the qualities of their owners; this may refer not only to land, but to swords, horses, ships, and treasures as well" (Gurevich 1970, p. 43). The thing was a part of the owner, and when material objects were given away, whether as gifts or as offerings, they were not just symbols of friendship or religious invocation. It was conceived of as a part of the owner himself being handed over to another person or a divine power. In this way, artefacts took on an importance far beyond their simple function as ornaments, weapons, drinking vessels, and so on. Against this background, we can also better understand the strong ideological role played by artefacts in graves and votive sites.

The special and crucial role played by material possessions in the Early Middle Ages was gradually lost, although the belief in individual objects as lucky amulets with supernatural powers has survived for a long time. The meaning of objects became increasingly economic, and in religious rituals the verbal invocation through prayer became the central feature of the Christian church's

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official ceremony. On the basis of our findings from Leksand, we could assume that the Late Middle Ages marked a watershed in this respect.

In some of the finds from Västannortjärn we can detect the start of such a change. As we have seen, the oldest coins had holes punched in them, but not the younger ones. The former were worn solely as amulets, whereas the latter probably had other functions, perhaps of an economic nature.

The rune-inscribed lead strip has clear links with a pagan conceptual world, in which runes enhanced the magico-religious power of an object (Fig. 6.). At the same time, the text inscribed in runes is one of the best-known Christian prayers, *Ave Maria*. We can scarcely find clearer evidence of the change of religion given concrete form in a single artefact.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> An interdisciplinary research project, "The Christianization of Sweden", has recently been started at Uppsala University. Its first publication is *Kontinuitet i kult och tro från vikingatid till medeltid*, 1992. See also *The Christianization of Scandinavia*, 1987, *Medeltidens födelse*, 1989, and *Nordisk hedendom*, 1991, which contain several essays on the topic; see also Ström 1985; Gräslund 1983–85; Broberg 1991.

<sup>2</sup> On ancestor cults in Norse society see Gurevich 1970, pp. 51 f.; Ström 1985, pp. 207–21.

<sup>3</sup> On the ritual dimension of medieval waste handling see André 1989, p. 41.

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Translated by Alan Crozier

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