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5 The Ship Graves on Kormt – and Beyond

Two of the most significant archaeological monuments on Karmøy are the burials from Storhaug and Grønhaug. Consisting of impressive mounds containing large chamber graves in ships, they belong to the most exclusive and costly group of ritual expressions known from the Viking Age. The two ship graves on Karmøy thus represent persons and politics at the very heart of what made this island an important place in early medieval Scandinavia. This chapter suggests that the majority of monumental burials using the ship allegory were manifestations of a certain origin myth, of which the Danish Skjǫldungar *legend is an example, erected as part of the power struggle between ascendant royal families.*

Archaeological material and written sources are analysed to illuminate the use of ship symbolism in monumental burials in and around Scandinavia: large mounds with inhumations or cremations in ships; large ship-shaped stone settings; and written sources from the 10th to the 14th century mentioning ship burials. The archaeological study shows that two different traditions were in use from the late 6th to the late 10th century. One was utilising stone ship settings, at least sometimes in combination with cremations, and was used in southern and eastern Sweden as well as in Denmark. The other, employing inhumation burials in ships, derived from a Scandinavian tradition of placing the deceased in boats for the funerals, but was only developed into a monumental format in East Anglia around 600. From there, it spread to Norway and, to a lesser extent, Denmark in the late 8th–10th centuries.

This resonates with the written sources, which reveal the existence of two traditions. The ship burials in Norway, Iceland, and Greenland are described as inhumation burials, while narratives playing out in southern Scandinavia – often regarding royal persons – present cremation burials in ships.

This chapter thus suggests that the Karmøy ship graves and many other of the largest monumental ship burials and ship settings were created to establish the godly origin of a deceased dynastic head in collective memory, thereby ensuring the transfer of this exclusive status to his or her heirs. The origin myths used would be following the pattern of the Skjǫldungar *myth, in which the originator of the clan magically arrives as a small child alone in a drifting boat, and who was returned by the clan to the gods by means of a ship funeral. This ideology, it is argued, first emerged in southern Scandinavia in the Migration Period, where its most vivid expression was that of monumental ship settings; subsequently it transformed to ship inhumation burials below mounds as it was briefly adopted by an East Anglian royal family. Later it was adopted again, in its morphed Anglo-Saxon form, by sea-kings ruling from Karmøy in the late 8th century. Close connections between the east- and the west-Norwegian ship graves suggest that their dynasty brought the ideology and ritual to eastern Norway in the 9th century, where it flourished for a century before its disappearance in Norway and possible monopolisation by Danish kings in the late 10th century.*

In a recent essay, the Danish historian of religion Morten Warmind (2015) argued that archaeology is an indispensable and more representative source to religions in the past than any surviving religious texts. His argument was that archaeology reflects a community's actual religious practices, and not what a devout elite propagated as religion in written texts. The premise is that the presence of such practices

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can be convincingly demonstrated in the archaeological record. The present study will apply much of this approach to archaeological and written sources that illuminate the use of monumental ship symbolism in burials – including those on Karmøy – among Scandinavians and Anglo-Saxons in the early medieval period. In this view, this was certainly not an entirely religious practice, but neither was it devoid of religious signification. Of greater relevance in light of Warmind's argument is that the main non-religious topic of these burials, the transfer of legitimacy from one generation to the next, is one that is treated with no less bias in written sources than that of religion. Taking for granted that the monumental ship graves belonged to the uppermost echelon of society, these constitute physical evidence for tangible actions, carried out by men and women acting in the pursuit of agendas crucial to their position. There are certainly elements of custom in the burials, but it is precisely because they are so extraordinary that they have the potential of expressing more than tradition. This 'more' likely represents the specific meaning of the burials to those who carried them out.

Warmind's argumentation highlights the bias underlying the written sources; the same must be said for the archaeological sources as well, but crucially, archaeology has the potential to illuminate practices that the elite-produced texts ignored. Nor was this normative attitude a strictly vertical phenomenon, between elite and commoners. The majority of the texts that provide information on the burial rituals among early medieval rulers in pre-Christian northern Europe were written with a bias for the purpose of producing historical pasts for competing, contemporary elites. Oblivion was as important a strategy as memory in the construction of such pasts (e.g. Goeres 2015:47, 139), and bears a definite influence on the surviving written sources; likewise, the plundering of the ship graves from Oseberg and Gokstad can be seen as an attempt to erase the collective memories attached to them (Bill and Daly 2012). It is thus important to recognize the incompleteness of both the historical and the archaeological record, and to understand that the monumental ship burials and the written sources represent two fragmentary images of the past that do not necessarily converge.

Many researchers, most recently Arnfrid Opedal, who have intensively engaged with the ship graves on Kormt, have stressed the importance for early medieval rulers of demonstrating their godly origins (Sundqvist 2000; Steinsland 1991; Hedeager 1996; Opedal 2010). This chapter will take this concept as the point of departure for the interpretation of the ship graves as monuments created within a cosmology where the ruler's authority ideally was anchored in their status as descendants of a god or god-like figure. Following Warmind's approach, the study analyses the archaeological material – the ship graves – as the actual expressions of ideological belief by the communities and their leaders, while considering the written sources referring to the same phenomenon to be selective renderings. Both will be interpreted as formed by their respective political and ideological contexts, but with one critical distinction: whereas the archaeological examples *are* the phenomenon itself, the written sources will, with the exception of a few runic inscriptions, always remain at some remove – in social,

geographical, and chronological terms – from the actual construction of the ship burials. The goal here is not to find archaeological clues that confirm interpretations of the written sources; rather, this chapter will extract patterns of practice from the ship graves as the basis for investigating whether the evidence of the ship burial practice in the written sources can further understanding of the ideological content of these practices. With these observations in mind, the chapter can turn towards the evaluation of the archaeological material.

Both the Storhaug and the Grønhaug ship burials (Fig. 5.1) have recently been published in several works; the present text need not repeat their detailed descriptions and discussions (Opedal 1997, 1998, 2005, 2010; Christensen 1998; Bonde and Stylegar 2009, 2016). Instead, focus will be on deliberating the two finds in the wider context of ship graves known from early medieval Scandinavian and peri-Scandinavian contexts. This will be the content of the first part of the chapter. Because the study transgresses borders between different research traditions and disciplines, it is useful to clarify a few chronological and geographical terms. Reference is made to the following overlapping periods: Migration Period (300–700), early Middle Ages (476–1066), Viking Age (793–1066) and High Middle Ages (1066–1350). Unless stated otherwise, all dates given in the text are CE (Common Era). A number of terms are used to define geographical areas, without implying that these were polities. By 'Scandinavia' is understood present-day Norway, Sweden, and Denmark plus northern Germany down to Danevirke and Hedeby. 'Denmark' is understood as modern day Denmark down to Hedeby/Danevirke plus the Swedish provinces Scania, Halland, and Blekinge. By 'southern Scandinavia' is understood Denmark as described above, plus Sweden south of the provinces Värmland, Dalarna, and Gästrikland. 'Viken' is the region around the Oslo Fjord.

5.1 Ship burials – the archaeological dimension

5.1.1 Monumental ship burials – an *ad hoc* definition

This chapter has used the phrase monumental ship burial' a number of times already, but it should be defined if it is to make a useful tool for the discussion of the Karmøy ship graves – not universally, but as a rational delimitation of the comparative material of other burials from the time and region against which to study the Karmøy ship graves. Monumental ship burials such as Grønhaug and Storhaug are not members of a solitary class of graves, dramatically different from all others; they form a segment of a much larger population of graves, signified solely by the symbolic use of a boat or ship during the burial ritual. Such graves are found in many different variants – big, small, inhumed, cremated, marked with a mound or apparently unmarked – but which of all these graves share the most meaning with

Fig. 5.1: The two ship graves Storhaug and Grønhaug by the Karmsundet. Illustration: I. T. Bøckman, MCH.

the two from Karmøy? The definition should cover those, but hopefully not too many others. To achieve this, four criteria have been defined.

The first criterion: of interest are only burials that use the ship motif in the funeral rite – a dominant feature in the Storhaug and Grønhaug burials.

The second criterion: the graves potentially could share rituals. Boat graves occur intermittently from the Mesolithic onwards in Scandinavia, and the Bronze Age is rich in ship symbolism, also in connection with burials, but evidence is lacking for boat burials in the last half-millennium BCE. The focus will therefore be on graves from the first millennium CE, especially the early Medieval Period, and in terms of geography on the region from Brittany in the west to the Volga in the east, as this seems to be the area where Scandinavians or people with some degree of Scandinavian identity used boats in burials.

The third criterion: outstanding size. This is a useful gauge because of the exponential proportionality between size and investment. A vessel twice as long as another requires more than double the resources for its construction, as it is not only bigger in length, but also breadth and height, and requires stronger materials and better carpentry for its construction. A mound twice as wide as another requires not only double, but eight times or more the materials and transport labour. Even for ship settings, a more than linear growth of investment with growing size can be argued, given that the stones used for a larger ship setting are also mostly in themselves larger and heavier, and thus require more labour and skill to transport over longer distances and to erect. Monument size is thus an excellent way to communicate power and importance because it reflects the social and economic power of the clan performing the burial. From an archaeological point of view it also has a large advantage towards the other prime measure of power – wealth –as a plundered or cremated burial may have preserved little of its original wealth, but its size will often remain visible.

The fourth and final criterion: monument type. As mentioned above, two different categories of monuments demonstrate ship symbolism in connection with funerals: those including remains of real ships, and those using ship-shaped constructions or ship settings. Due to the thousands of characteristic iron-clench nails used to put the hull together in early medieval Scandinavian ship building, even cremated ships in mound burials may be identified; many boat cremation burials have been detected. Ship settings are more difficult to categorize as graves because they usually do not include a contemporary mound and thus what protection they offer to the burial remains is limited. Further, it has recently been demonstrated that early medieval cremation sites are more elusive than previously thought, and may not have left any archaeological traces at all (Henriksen 2016). Most of the large ship settings have not been documented to contain any primary burials – either because none were found during excavation (Capelle 1986:34), or because excavation never took place, or was only partial. Some ship settings evidently were used as *thing* sites in later times, and it has been suggested that such

monuments were not graves but had other functions, for example as cult places (cf. Vestergaard 2007). The archaeological support for this is slim, and consists of phenomena that we also associate with burials, for example fireplaces, charcoal pits and cremated animal bones (Vestergaard 2007:156–9). By contrast, there are several examples of strong evidence for large stone ships used as funeral sites or memorials. The 90 m long ship setting from Vejerslev in Jutland, which has recently been rediscovered and investigated, surrounded the remains of a cremation from around 600 (Holst 2017). The find owes a great deal to the use of metal detectors, a fairly new technology in the research of ship settings. At the other end of the early Middle Ages sits the monumental ship setting at Jelling, which frames the North Mound with its burial chamber from 957–9 (Holst et al. 2013a, 2013b). In between these two, there are examples of less manifest evidence. Located near the centre of the large Kåseberga stone ship, also known as 'Ale's Stones' and dated to 600–1000, a charcoal pit may or may not stem from a cremation. An inhumation burial was found in a similar position in one of the Lejre ship settings (Vestergaard 2007:163). It is unclear whether these findings represent primary funerals. The rune stones of the Bække, Glavendrup, and Tryggevælde ship settings state their purpose clearly: all are memorials, sometimes including mounds, raised over deceased individuals; still, it is not entirely certain that burials also took place there.

Given this state of the evidence, and for the purpose of the study, all large ship settings will be considered as potential burials or memorials. The meaning of burial', in this light, will be taken to mean 'the location at which a deceased person was, symbolically or factually, put to rest'.

Sizes of ships in graves

Armed with this definition of the term 'monumental ship burial' and having established its chronological and geographical limits, the next step is to quantify the 'monumental' aspect of ships in graves, of mounds, and of ship settings. Size is relative (Wijkander 1983); a mound or ship that was considered a monumental element in a burial in East Anglia in the 6th century may not have appeared monumental in Norway in the 9th; the 90 m long Vejerslev ship setting was certainly dwarfed by the one at Jelling, erected three and a half centuries later. Regional and chronological context must be taken into account when measuring monumentality. This section will first look to burial ships, next to mounds, and finally to ship settings in order to determine which of them can be deemed to have extraordinary proportions.

What kind of ships would have been in use in early medieval burials around the Baltic and the North Sea? Both logboats and plank-built vessels could be built to a large size, but it seems that big, expanded logboats were not used in graves.

Lapstrake vessels – that is, the type of plank-built rowing and sailing ships that the Vikings, but also Slavs, Anglo-Saxons, and others in Northern Europe used – first occur in the 3rd century, as demonstrated by the boats from the war sacrifices in the Nydam bog in the south-westernmost reaches of the Baltic (Rieck et al. 2013). The Nydam B boat, dated to c. 320, shows the length of one of these: 23 m, with 30 oars. Finds of individual ship timbers indicate that vessels of this size or larger continued to be in use in the following centuries (Rieck and Crumlin-Pedersen 1988:133–8). From the other side of the Baltic, on the Estonian island of Saaremaa, a burial from around 750 has revealed a 16–17 m long vessel, probably originating from Uppland (Peets et al. 2012; Price et al. 2016). Apart from this, there is little evidence from which to estimate pre-Viking age ship sizes in the eastern Baltic. The numerous vessels from the boat graves in the Mälaren Valley are all much shorter than the one at Salme II, the longest being Valsgärde 14, which has been reconstructed to a length of barely 12 m and a maximum of 12 oars (Bill 2018). This grave, however, is relatively late, and among the boat graves from before 750, the largest once measures only 9–10 m (Müller-Wille 1970:Catalogue I, nos. 52, 59, 76, 78 and 159; Gräslund and Ljungkvist 2011). Since the east-Swedish boat graves are found along rather small inland waterways and their boat sizes seem to reflect river size, they are probably not representative of the vessels used on open sea (Bill 1991).

Turning to the North Sea, the East Anglian Sutton Hoo 1 ship, buried c. 625, measured 27 m and would probably have featured 40 oars. A few ship fragments from about the same date have been found north of Ribe on the southwestern coast of Jutland, and demonstrate the presence of ships similar in size to that from Nydam (Crumlin-Pedersen 1968). Going further north, to Kvalsund in western Norway, the largest of two vessels sacrificed in a bog at some point in the 7th or 8th century has been reconstructed to a length of 18 m, with ten pairs of oars (Shetelig and Johannessen 1929; Myhre 1970).

These few measurements provide evidence for substantial ships frequenting the coasts of the Baltic and the North Sea throughout the early Middle Ages; the sizes of vessels found in graves should be viewed against this background. A quite extensive sample of vessel sizes can be found in Müller-Wille's 1970 catalogue (150–82), which summaries all the then-known north-European boat graves. Among the 422 catalogue entries, 81 provide information about the lengths of the grave vessels (shown, together with Müller-Wille's dates of the burials, in Fig. 5.2). There seems to be no relation between date and length – early and late finds are randomly mixed. The numbers of vessels of different lengths clearly show that the shorter of the vessels – all those up to c. 12 m – form a group that exhibits something close to a normal distribution around a mean length of c. 6 m. The diagram further shows a very long tail to the left consisting of extraordinarily large vessels, creating a clear divide between 'normal' grave vessels, measuring 12 m or less, and the graves with larger vessels.

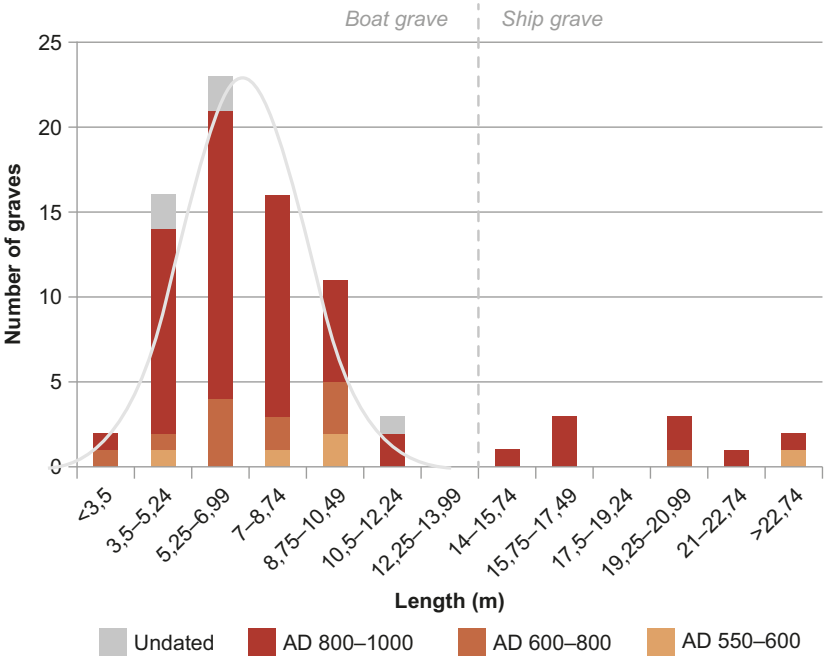

Fig. 5.2: Recorded lengths and dates of burial vessels (boats and ships) in Müller-Wille 1970. The curved line is illustrative of a bell curve, not calculated. Illustration: I. T. Bøckman and Jan Bill, MCH.

Since 1970 a few additional graves with large vessels have been excavated: a 13–15 m long boat from a 10th-century grave at Lø, Steinkjer, in northern Trøndelag (Farbregd 1974:10–11); a 12–14 m long vessel from a very poorly preserved Viking Age grave in Tønsberg, Vestfold (Nordman 1989); and the 16–17 m long Salme II ship mentioned above. These finds are in the lower end of the large vessel group, blurring the differentiation between the two groups without removing it. On this background this study distinguishes between graves with watercraft less than 14 m long – called 'boat graves' – and graves with craft 14 m or more long – 'ship graves'. The former group will not be included in comparisons, but will form a backdrop against which the ship graves are seen.

Sizes of mounds

If a watercraft in a burial is defined as being of monumental proportions when it is at least 14 m in length, how is the monumental mound to be defined? A commonly suggested criteria is that mounds of 20 m or more in diameter are counted as 'royal' or 'elite' or simply as extraordinarily big (Hyenstrand 1974:103; Gansum 1996a:10;

Bratt 2008:43–5; Opedal 2010:293). However, there are clear regional differences in the use of mounds. In the Mälar Valley, 17 well-documented parishes with 1028 mounds of known diameter showed a normal size of 4–13 m in diameter, while only two percent would be 15 m or larger (Bratt 2008:44–5, tab. 3, fig. 13). This region also shows some of the largest known Scandinavian mounds, those at Gamla Uppsala. Ljungkvist has shown that the east-Swedish mounds of 15 m or greater generally contain elite grave furniture, which could be found even in mounds as small as 10 m (Ljungkvist 2006:39–40, 159–62).

Turning to Norway, Ringstad (2004) has investigated the occurrence of large mounds in the western part of the country. Mounds counted as 'large' are those with a volume of 400 m3 or greater, corresponding to a diameter of 20 m and a height of 2.5 m. He finds that in two municipalities with uncommonly large numbers of preserved mounds, large mounds make up only 1.5–2.1% of the total. In a region starting with Karmøy in the south and ending at the border with Trøndelag, he finds c. 300 large mounds, 86 of which are more precisely datable; 33 of these date to 300–550, only five to the late 6th and 7th centuries, and 24 to the 9th and 10th centuries. A total of 58 mounds have a volume of 1000 m3 or greater, meaning that they measure at least 30 m in diameter and 3 m in height. Among these, the Iron Age mounds predating 550 make up 60% of the dated mounds, and those ante-dating 550 only 14%. This landscape is thus much more monumentalised than the Mälar region.

For eastern Norway, Terje Gansum's work on Vestfold offers a different picture (Ringstad 2004:250). Gansum identifies 23 dated mounds of more than 20 m diameter. The 14 mounds he dates to the period 300–550 only in one case exceed 26 m in diameter – reaching 32 m – while nine mounds dated after 550 are in the range of 34–46 m. Seven of these are from the 9th and early 10th centuries. In Vestfold the Viking Age boom in the construction of monumental mounds is thus even stronger than in the west, especially when seen in contrast to the more modest sizes of the early Migration Period mounds. Vestfold is, however, atypical for eastern Norway in its high number of large early medieval mounds.

The inner reaches around the Trondheim fjord in central Norway constitute another area relatively rich in mounds in large mounds. Stenvik (1996) has shown that mounds measuring more than 20 m in diameter make up between 2% and 10% of the preserved mounds in a region with in total c. 2000 mounds. Datings are few, however, and thus the extent to which large mounds were a Viking Age phenomenon here remains unclear.

Turning to Denmark, older mounds were frequently used as focal points for cemeteries (Ulriksen 2011), but most new mounds are very modest constructions. South on Jutland two preserved Viking Age mound cemeteries at Træhede at Haderslev and Thumby-Bienebek near Schleswig show that small mounds may have been more common (Jensen 2004:341–2). Monumental mounds are only known from very few sites, notably Jelling and the ship graves, and are not known at all from the Migration Period.

Mounds also seem to be used sparingly across the North Sea in East Anglia. An exhaustive survey shows that mounds constructed in the early Anglo-Saxon period were generally few, and small compared to their Roman predecessors; they rarely exceeded 30 m in diameter (Lawson et al. 1981; Pollington 2008:19).

The use and size of mounds thus vary markedly across the area where ship graves are found. In some areas, for example Denmark, nearly any sizeable mound – one large enough to cover an entire vessel – would be impressive, while in Rogaland or Vestfold the competition on marking the landscape with monuments would be much sharper. This does not preclude the possibility of using mounds to identify which burials with watercraft that are most likely to represent the highest social strata. But it does make it necessary to measure the mounds against their regional context, and not arbitrarily in relation to a set value. Nevertheless, it appears that beyond the Mälar region 20 m is useful as a minimum value to identify the monumental mounds.

Sizes of ship settings

Many of the questions concerning the evaluation of boat and mound sizes are also relevant in discussing ship settings. They were constructed at different times and in different sizes, and they are unequally distributed across the area where ship and boat burials appear. Chronologically they seem to appear mainly in the Bronze Age and in the early Middle Ages (Capelle 2004), although many are undated. Spatially they are not found outside Scandinavia and the Baltic region, with the exception of a 30 m long example and some smaller ones at Mosfell on Iceland (Byock and Zori 2013:129–31). In the early Middle Ages they are produced in highly varying sizes, from only a few metres in length, for instance at Lindholm Høje in Jutland (Ramskou 1976) to 356 m at Jelling (Jessen et al. 2014:51). The Bronze Age settings all belong in the lower end of this scale. Capelle (2004:80; see also Vestergaard 2007) has defined ship settings above 40 m as monumental, a definition that excludes all ship settings with Bronze Age dates. The early 10th-century, 52 m long Glavendrup stone ship with its runic stone stating that it was raised for a *þegn* makes it evident that ship settings more than 40 m long did not necessarily reflect burials of the highest-ranking people in society. However, ship settings of 60 m or more are exclusively known from Scania and Denmark, while settings of 40–60 m are also found in the remaining parts of Sweden south of a line from Bohüslän to Uppland. As with ships and mounds, the discussion will include the medium size ship settings.

The following criteria will thus be applied to identify a monumental ship burial:

a) It must include ship symbolism (ship in mound or ship setting)
b) It must date from the first millennium CE (or later) and be from the wider north European area (from Bretagne to Volga)
c) If a ship is used, this has to be outstandingly large (min. 14 m, dependent on context)

d) If a mound is used, this has to be outstandingly large (min. 15 m, dependent on context)
e) If a ship setting is used, this has to be outstandingly large (min. 40 m, dependent on context)

Since the monumental ship burials with ships and with ship settings will be analysed separately at first, this section will use the terms 'monumental ship grave' and 'monumental ship setting' for each of them, respectively.

5.1.2 The Storhaug and Grønhaug ship graves

Unfortunately the Storhaug and Grønhaug graves were unearthed before the Oseberg excavation in 1904 set new standards for burial archaeology in Norway, and the documentation from both is tentative. Nevertheless, a wealth of information is available, and the presentation below will focus primarily on such aspects necessary for a comparison with other monumental ship graves. Detailed descriptions of the burial inventory are referred to above.

Storhaug

Storhaug was situated prominently in the landscape, on a small terrace over a slope falling off towards Karmsundet. It was excavated during two campaigns, first by a local teacher, J. A. Døsseland in 1886, and in the following year by the antiquarian A. Lorange. Before excavation the mound had already been extensively quarried for soil by locals who had dug in from its northern side and destroyed part of its contents. Lorange estimated its original diameter to c. 40 m (Opedal 1998:15).

The mound was built directly on an earlier surface, starting with a layer of heather turf with the topside down. Over it was found horizontal layers of clayey soil and sometimes bog turf, with irregular, but towards the centre of the mound occasionally massive, layers of charcoal. The surface of the mound had apparently been covered with a layer of grass turf (Opedal 2010:261–2).

The burial ship was only fragmentarily preserved. It had been placed in a north–south-oriented depression in the terrain and supported with six stone slabs. The ship had been covered with moss at the time of the burial. Lorange states that the ship's stem was pointing to the south, which is confirmed by a larger fragment of the ship's side, found at a few metres from the southern stem of the ship. It shows a plank joint that indicates the fragment to be from the port side of the ship. Curiously, Lorange repeatedly states in his excavation diary that the fragment was from the starboard side (Christensen 1998:207–8).

Three dry-stone walls were preserved inside the burial mound at the time of excavation (Fig. 5.3). It is unknown if a fourth had been removed during the quarrying of the mound before excavation, or if it never existed. Two of the walls were placed outside the central part of the ship, on either side of it and six metres apart. They were about one metre high and equally wide. A third wall connected their southern end, going across the ship. Large quantities of birch bark probably originate from a roof construction, and a coloured drawing of a section through the mound, made by the

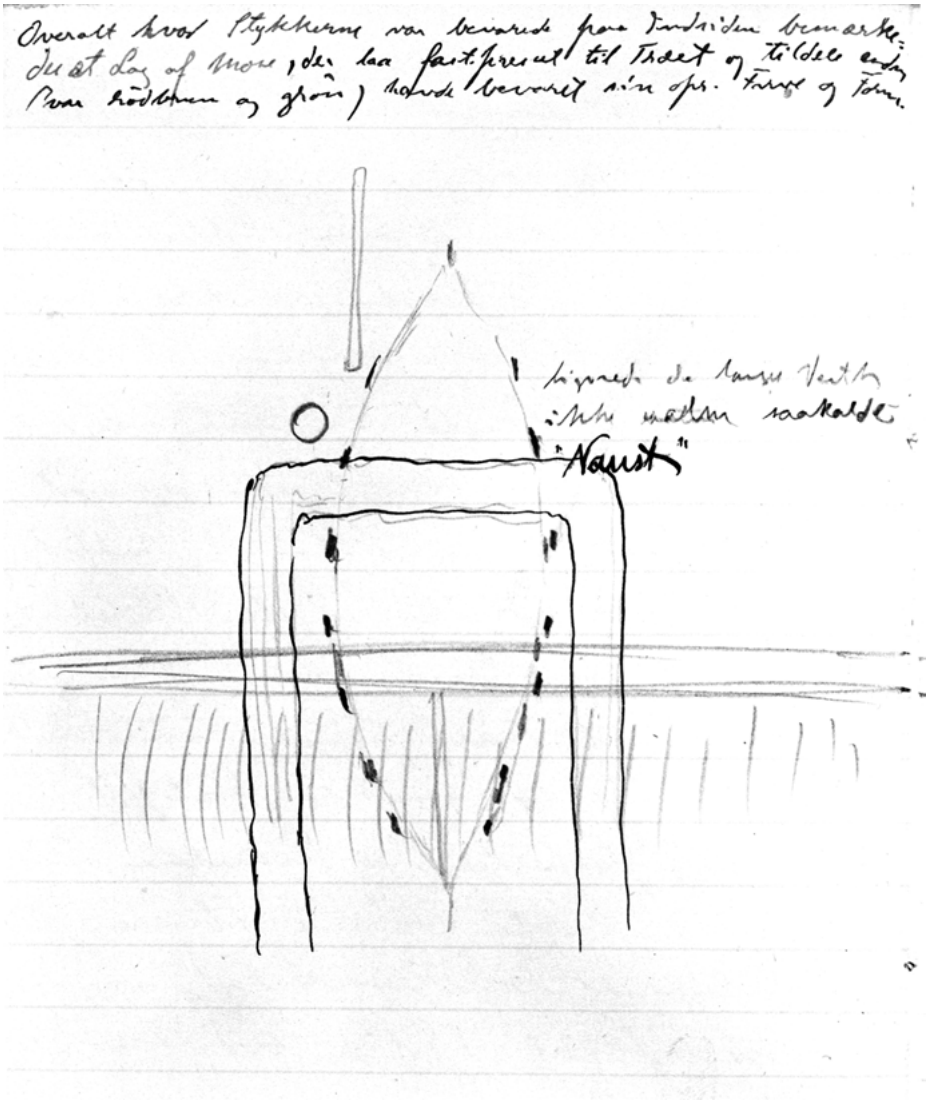

Fig. 5.3: Plan of the stone walls in Storhaug, drawn by A. Lorange in his excavation diary. North is downwards in the drawing. Photo: S. Skare, UMB.

excavator, indicates that the burial chamber was a tent-shaped construction inside the stone walls, rather than a roof resting on the walls (Fig. 5.4). If the stone walls were not part of the chamber, they may have been constructed as a protective measure around it. The soil layers covering the burial chamber were undisturbed and showed that the roof had collapsed, creating a trench-like depression in the surface of the mound. The function of two trenches running alongside the ship and covered with birch bark is unknown, but they may have been intended to drain the area.

Fig. 5.4: Section through Storhaug, seen from the north. From A. Lorange's excavation diary (undated). Owner: private/family. Scan: UMB.

The collection of grave goods was quite extensive, although many objects may have decomposed before excavation, or been lost to the quarrying. At the southern end of the ship, remains of a boat were found together with a massive gangway and parts of two oars – one driven down vertically at the side of the ship, the other laying nearby on the original surface. Remains of a horse were found beneath the above-mentioned larger ship fragment, and must have been placed outside the ship. A large, round stone plate of schist was found placed on smaller stones outside the foreship on the port side. The function is unknown and the find was not brought in to the museum; a similar schist plate, 2–2.18 m in diameter, was found in another mound on the same farm in 1906 (Museum no. B6263). From inside the burial chamber, on a recess in the southern wall, were found two swords, a spear or lance, a quiver with 24 arrows, and a knife. According to Opedal, the weaponry shows clear connections with 8th-century Frankish military traditions (Opedal 1998:44–51). From further north in the burial originates a massive gold arm-ring (Fig. 5.5), a set of 20 amber gaming pieces, and another set made of glass, consisting of 17 pieces, possibly of Frankish origin (Opedal 1998:53–5) (Fig. 5.6). A piece of wax, marked with a possible cross, was found together with the gaming pieces and a soapstone fishing weight. Further, the burial yielded four large glass beads and some blacksmith's tools, including two pairs of tongs, two files, and a tool for the production of nails. Six whetstones and a set of quern stones were found together with an iron cauldron, and finally a small wooden box with a feather, a piece of flint, and a now-lost bronze

Fig. 5.5: Massive arm-ring of gold from the Storhaug grave measuring 8 x 5 cm and weighing 435 g. Photo: unknown, UMB.

ring. Shetelig (1928:75)[1] claimed that a sledge was included in the burial, but there is nothing in the find today to substantiate this assertion.

Whereas this was earlier considered to be a Viking Age grave, Bjørn Myhre was the first to point to a Merovingian date for Storhaug, both based on the artefact assembly and on radiocarbon dates of a ship timber and of birch bark found in the burial (Myhre 1966:255; Opedal 1998:64–5). Dendrochronological analyses of nine timbers from the ship, six timbers from the boat, and three other timbers from the construction of the burial revealed that it had been constructed in 779 or very shortly after that, and that the ship most likely had been about ten years old at the time of the burial. Also, a local provenance was suggested for the vessels, due to the similarity of the growth-pattern in all the analysed timbers (Bonde and Stylegar 2009:159–61, 2016:24).

Grønhaug

Grønhaug was likewise built on a prominent location in the landscape (Fig. 5.7). It formed the eastern end point of a row of monumental Bronze Age mounds on Reheia,

1 Haakon Shetelig used the family name Schetelig before 1919; hence the latter name is used in the bibliography for publications before 1919, but not in the main text.

Fig. 5.6: The two sets of gaming pieces from Storhaug. Photo: Timboe, AM.

a natural ridge running across Karmøy. During the excavation, which was only partial (Fig. 5.8), it was established that the core of the c. 30 m wide mound consisted of an approximately 2 m high cairn, constructed with two layers of stone with a grey sand layer in between (Shetelig 1902). A depression reaching down to about one metre above the base of the mound was cutting through the upper part of the cairn in a north-northeast–south-southwest direction. It had been clad with the same grey sand, with thin lines of charcoal, and contained the remains of a c. 15 m long vessel with its

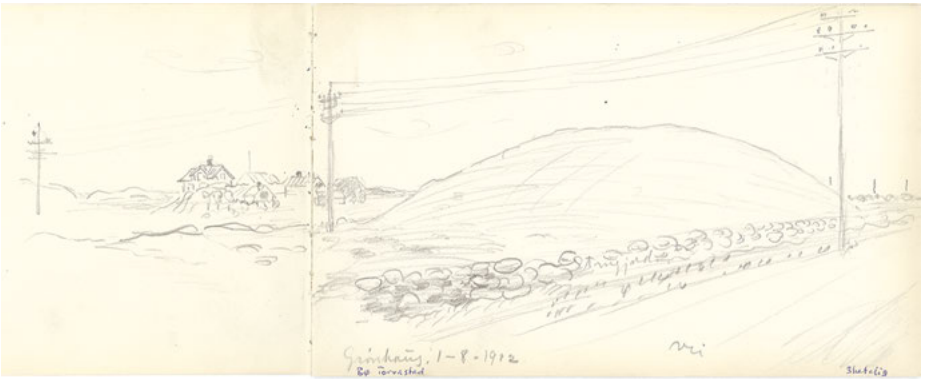

Fig. 5.7: Sketch of Grønhaug, drawn by Shetelig in 1902, prior to the excavation. Photo: UMB.

bow pointing to the south-southwest. The mound covering the cairn was constructed of layers of peat and turf, with occassional inclusions of sand and pebble, and the same filling was found inside the ship. The vessel itself was poorly preserved, and its upper parts had almost completely disintegrated. Preserved fragments showed, however, that the uppermost strake had been decorated on the outside with a pattern of triangles painted with black colour, and that oar holes had been cut in it.

There was clear evidence of an extensive disturbance of the central burial area, making it difficult to reconstruct its original configuration. A dent in the mound's top and down its north-western side visible before excavation proved to be signs of a wide trench that had been dug into the mound from this direction. A plundering layer, formed during the break-in, could be observed over an approximately 5 x 6 m area, encompassing the entire burial area in the central part of the ship and the adjacent cairn surface west of the ship. It consisted of soil mixed with pieces of birch bark, wooden chips, cloth fragments, feathers and down, and various fragments of grave goods (Shetelig 1902:5–7). This mixed find situation may represent remains of a solid roof that had collapsed and partly deteriorated prior to the break-in. Approaching from the west, the intruders would have dug their way through the collapsed chamber roof, mixing in organic remains of the chamber's contents. Shetelig describes a few preserved timbers – a large, facetted pine timber lying on the cairn alongside the western gunwale of the ship at the grave chamber, and a few smaller timbers extending orthogonally from its ends over the ship – which could represent a foundation for the roof construction. A horizontal layer shown in the profile drawing extending to the west from the top of the cairn east of the ship could be traces of such a roof construction, or part of the plundering layer.

Very little was found of the original contents of the burial. Inside the ship a few disarticulated human bones were discovered, originating from an adult, strongly built male (Sellevold 1998). The down material found in the plundering layer was from *anatidae* and may represent goose or eider. It demonstrates the presence of

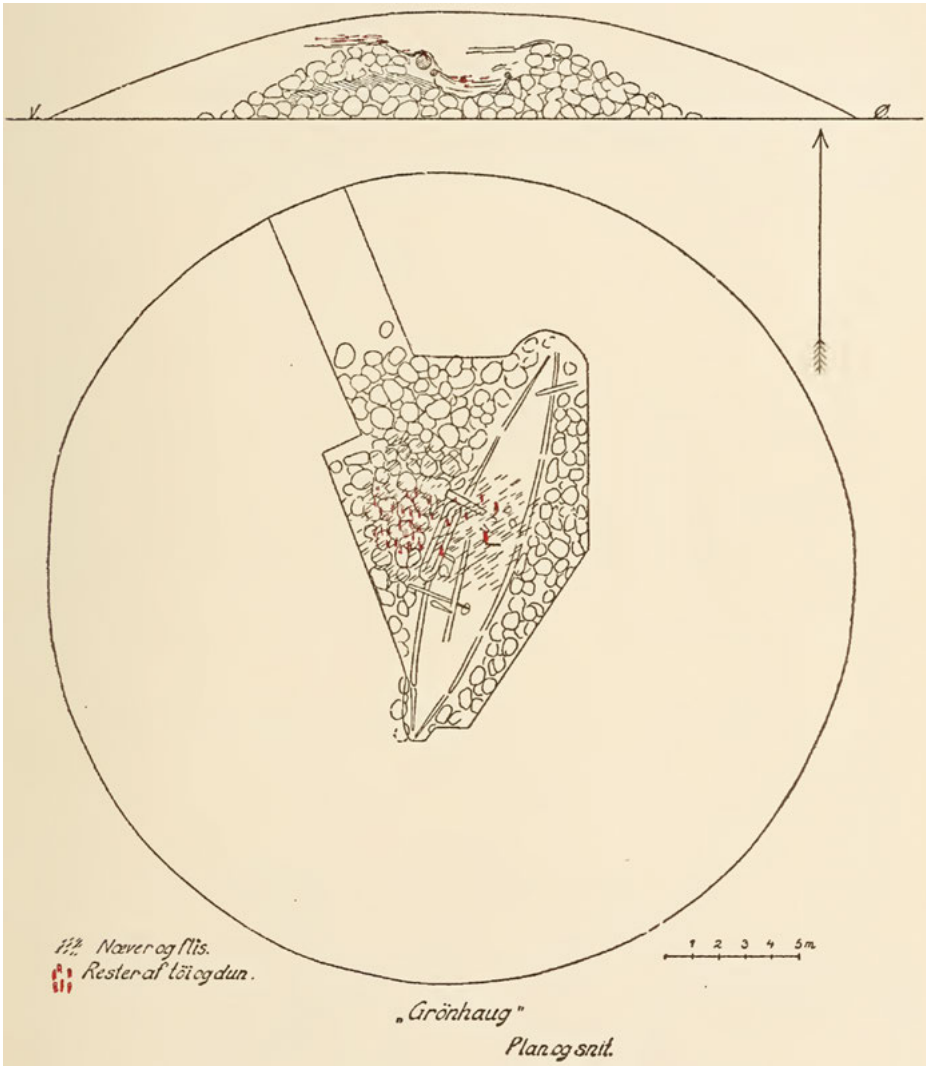

Fig. 5.8: Shetelig's plan and section of the Grønhaug burial. From Schetelig (1902, fig. 1).

cushions or down coverlets on which the deceased was probably placed. The textiles were of three different woollen qualities ranging from very fine to coarse. Further one textile was identified as hemp with a cord attached to it, and one as a picture tapestry. Finally, a sixth textile quality had been used for the cushions or downers. Also found in the plundering layer were several fragments of a wax candle, a sherd of a green glass vessel decorated with a glass thread in the same colour, and two adjoining bronze rings of which one was elongated, 6.5 cm long, and the other round, 2.9 cm in diameter. Further, wood fragments of a 40–50 cm wide and

15 cm high tub, and of another around 20 cm high, were found, as well as pieces of a turned wooden bowl.

The few artefacts in the burial provide no clear indications of its age. The major dating evidence for Grønhaug is therefore the ship and in particular the dendrochronological analyses of five samples from it, one of them with 11 preserved sapwood rings. These produce a felling date within the interval 775–801, most likely around 780; with an estimated lifetime of the vessel prior to interment of ten years, the time of the burial can be set to around 790 (Bonde and Stylegar 2009:161–2; 2016:24–5). This dating, however, is strongly in contrast to a typological dating of the ship remains in the burial, suggested by Christensen in 1998 and in 2017 (Christensen 1998:220, 2017), who argues that constructional features indicate a mid-10th century date. It is necessary briefly to discuss this disagreement.

The constructional features pointed out by Christensen are primarily the design of the decorative mouldings along the plank edges and the use of treenails to fasten floor timbers. The dendrochronological dating is statistically strong, as can be seen from the *t*-values obtained when comparing the growth-ring curve for the Grønhaug ship with the Oseberg ship (4.16), the Storhaug ship (5.19), and the Storhaug boat (4.98) (Bonde and Stylegar 2016:tabs. 1 and 2). The typological argument made by Christensen is based on a rather small number of finds and is not convincing. Precise typological dating of ships is notoriously difficult since different building traits tend to overlap in time and space (Bill 2009). It may also be pointed out that although other early ship finds show more simple profiles than the Grønhaug ship, the Gokstad find is not the first outside Grønhaug to contain complex ones. The Oseberg find has different, but at least as complicated profiles drawn on its oars and rudder, and these date at the latest to 834 (Shetelig 1917b; Christensen 2017:fig. 1). Thus complicated profiles occur significantly earlier than Christensen claim, and the leap back to the proposed 780 date for the Grønhaug ship is not great. Christensen's argument that the use of treenails in floor timbers cannot be found as early as 780 is contradicted by their presence in the mid-7th to mid-9th century Kvalsund 1 and 2 vessels (Shetelig and Johannessen 1929:Plates III, IV).

Two radiocarbon dates, T-3750 and Beta-107574, have been made on birch bark from the burial, but even when combined, they do not favour one of the two dates over the other; with 95.4% probability they date the growth of the bark to between 773 and 984. Given the balance of the evidence, there seems to be no reason to doubt the dendrochronological date of the Grønhaug ship to around 780, and thus the date of the burial to within a short span of years after that.

Dendrochronological connections to other ship graves

The dendrochonological analyses of the Grønhaug and Storhaug vessels in 2009 revealed a strong link between the oak timbers found in these graves and the Oseberg

ship (Bonde and Stylegar 2009:162). The high correlation values (up to 9.40) demonstrate beyond any doubt that the Oseberg ship had been constructed near or within the area that had provided wood for the construction of the Storhaug ship, the Grønhaug ship, the Storhaug boat, and the other dendrochronologically analysed objects from Storhaug. Since some of the Storhaug objects were of a character unlikely for long-distance travel – for example, a stretcher on which to carry soil for the construction of the mound – the source of the oak most likely cannot have been far from Karmøy.

Further, there is a dendrochronological connection between the Karmøy ship graves and Gokstad. Non-destructive dendrochronological measurements of 12 original timbers from 'G3', one of three small boats found in the Gokstad ship, have provided a building date between 887–96 and a strong similarity with measurements of original timbers in the Oseberg ship. The *t*-test value for the synchronisation between curves from the two vessels was 12.55, which is a reliable indication of a common origin, within a 50 km radius, of the timbers used in the two constructions (Daly 2007:66–7; see also Bonde and Stylegar 2011:259, 2011:8–10; Daly in prep.).

The dendrochronology thus demonstrates that boats and ships were transferred from one to the other of two regions both yielding monumental ship burials. This relation becomes visible between 820 when the Oseberg is being built and 834 when it is being buried, and again at some point between 887, the earliest possible construction date for the Gokstad G3 boat, and c. 900, when it is buried in the Gokstad grave. What dendrochronology cannot describe is the character of this relation. It is commonplace for ships to turn up – as wrecks or in sea-route blockages – far from their place of construction. The two Norwegian and the Irish vessel found together with two local ships in the 11th-century Skuldelev sea route blockage is the prime Viking Age example (Crumlin-Pedersen et al. 2002). Of course, 9th-century vessels also could end up in ship graves far from their place of construction. That is true even though the dendrochronological investigations of both the Gokstad and the Tune ship, as well as the two other small boats from Gokstad, demonstrate east-Norwegian provenances and thus the existence of a local shipbuilding industry in the Oslo Fjord region.

5.1.3 Known monumental ship graves in northern Europe

After these brief accounts of the two monumental ship graves on *Kormt*, we shall compare them to other known examples of such burials (Tab. 5.1, Fig. 5.9). Applying strictly the criteria defined above, we can only count 12 certain monumental burials: three in East Anglia, one in northern Germany, one in Denmark, and the rest in Norway. A few additional graves, namely the famous cremation graves from Myklebust in western Norway and Isle de Groix in Brittany together with the relatively small Fosnes burial are plausible candidates and will be included in the study. The recently discovered

Tab. 5.1: Known possible and certain monumental ship burials per August 2018, with details on selected features.

Monumental ship graves	Mound diameter (m)	Ship length(m)	Dating	Selected features
Snape, SE England	22 (large)	14+	550–600	Inhumation. Ship placed in trench and oriented E–W, parallel to riverbank and orthogonal to the distant coast. No organic remains, but nails were well preserved and formed a clear pattern; no indications of further boats, or of numerous shields along the gunwales. The preserved grave furniture in the plundered grave was found inside the boat and included two spearheads, a glass beaker and a golden fingering with an engraved onyx, providing a terminus post quem date of AD 550 (Bruce-Mitford 1952; Filmer-Sankey 1992).
Sutton Hoo 1, SE England	30–35 (large)	27	600–625	Inhumation. Ship placed in trench and oriented E–W with the stem to the E, oblique to the riverbank but pointing towards the more remote sea. Organic materials were only preserved as stains. The deceased had been placed with his head in the W end of central chamber in ship. Attempts to rob the burial had missed the burial chamber, which was undisturbed at the time of the first excavation in 1939. No traces of horses or further boats inside or outside the ship and absence of any horse equipment. The otherwise very richly equipped burial chamber contained a single shield (Carver 1992, 2005).
Sutton Hoo 2, SE England	22.3 (large)	20–24	600–625	Inhumation. Ship placed on surface after turf had been stripped off. Oriented E–W, oblique to river bank and to the distant coast. The burial severely disturbed in the sixteenth century and again in 1860. First excavation in 1938; complete excavation carried out 1984–88. By then no parts of the ship were found in situ, and organic remains were not preserved. The plundered burial chamber was located underneath the centre of the ship; remaining grave furniture included objects of silver and gilded bronze, as well as glass and the tip of a sword. The deceased had been placed with the head towards W, indicating the stem to point E. The ship length proposed by Carver, 24 m, may be too large, considering the size of the mound and the many nails from stem and stern that he supposes to have survived. Possible evidence of one shield in the burial chamber, but no riding gear or indication of horses (Carver 1992a:355–7, 2005:153–77).

Grønhaug, W Norway	*c* 30 (large)	15	*c* 790	Inhumation. Ship placed in trench in stone cairn, above the ground surface. Oriented parallel to shore with the stem towards SSW. Only the ship area and part of the mound excavated. Male skeleton found in chamber in the centre of the ship. The burial was plundered, and only a few artefacts, including a glass fragment from a beaker, were found. The burial included no horses or horse equipment, or remains of shields or extra boats. See main text for references.
Storhaug, W Norway	40 (large)	>19	779	Inhumation. Part of mound and ship removed before excavation. Ship oriented S–N (stem S), parallel to shore; placed in a natural trench. The ship was covered with moss; a chamber found centrally, with drystone walls outside and across ship and interior wooden construction. Horse, gangway and remains of a boat placed outside the ship. No indications of shields along gunwale, although part of it preserved. See main text for references.
Hedeby, N Germany	Min. 27x13 (large) Up to 35–40	17–20	800–850	Inhumation. Ship was oriented E–W, orthogonal to the shore of the nearby Haddebyer Nor. Placed on the surface, either with or without the turf being removed first. Burial chamber found below the ship, holding swords and shields for three persons, orientated with their heads to the N. The grave inventory included riding gear, and three horses were found in a separate pit below the E end of the vessel Müller-Wille 1976. This indicates that the fore were towards the E.
Oseberg, E Norway	40,5 (large)	21.5	834	Inhumation with two females. Ship placed in trench, stem pointing S, towards the fjord; tent-shaped chamber behind the mast; horses and cattle inside and outside the ship. Ship had all equipment for sailing, and some oars placed in rowing positions. Gangway placed in fore, on top of other grave goods. Two female individuals (Shetelig 2017a, 2017b).

(continued)

Tab. 5.1 (continued)

Monumental ship graves	Mound diameter (m)	Ship length(m)	Dating	Selected features
Gokstad, E Norway	50x43 (large)	23.5	896–907	Inhumation. Ship placed in wide trench, with stem S, towards shore; ship covered with moss, clay and hazel branches; a tent–shaped chamber of wood behind the mast and remains of three broken boats in the fore. Closely placed shields along gunwale, two per oar hole (would be 64 in total). A gangway found on the outside, alongside the ship and well below the gunwale; horses and dogs were found outside the ship on both sides, one dog was below the gangway (Nicolaysen 1882; Schetelig 1917a:15.5–20,–222).
Tune, E Norway	50–75 (large)	19	910–920	Inhumation. Stem SSE, parallel to shore; the ship was placed in trench and covered in moss, juniper and clay; chamber built wider than ship, with plank walls and probably flat roof; horse in the burial chamber, two or more outside the ship (Schetelig 1917a: 219; Schetelig 1917c; Bill 2017).
Borre, E Norway	38–40 (large)	15.5–20	900–925	Inhumation, probably male and female. Ship placed on the surface, with the stem towards WSW, oblique/parallel to shore; one horse outside the ship, two inside; possibly mixed in remains of a cremation burial. Only the stem portion and most of the starboard side was professionally excavated. Different suggestions exist concerning the length of the vessel and the diameter of the mound (Nicolaysen 1854; Myhre 2015)
Vinnan, N Norway	20 (small)	17	870–970	Inhumation. Stem S, parallel to shore, burial in cairn inside ship (N-end). Excavator describes it as being “sat down”, thus it was probably in a trench. Upper parts ploughed away, poor preservation conditions and no organic material preserved (Petersen 1928; Müller-Wille 1970:176; dating of H-type sword after Androshchuk 2014:170)

Ladby, Denmark	29–30 (large)	43606	c 925	Inhumation, male equipment. Placed in a trench with the stem towards S, pointing away from the shore; mound delimited by a palisade and built from turf, with some stone heaps on the original surface. The entire ship had been covered with a flat wooden roof. Horses and dogs inside the foreship, the grave with most burial gifts behind the mast, plundered. No indications of further boats or shields along the gunwale (Sørensen 2001).
Fosnes, Jøa, N Norway	12x18 m, eroded (small)	13–14	900–950	Inhumation. Orientated with stem to WSW, the ship being parallel to the shore, placed in a ditch; plundered from N. The fairly well preserved distribution of c. 1000 nails indicates the length of the vessel to be slightly less than the 14 m. Apart from the aft, the vessel was found to be filled with stones; no structural traces of a burial chamber in the only 1.86 m high mound were recorded. 11 shield buckles were found, 10 of them along the gunwales in the better preserved aft, 50 cm apart. Organic remains in the WSW end, together with numerous horse harness fittings, indicate the presence of a horse inside the vessel (Fett 1036).
Myklebustad, W Norway	31 (large)	>15.4?	875–950	Cremation burial, with horse. Nails were found within a 8.4 x 4.2 m area. 44 shield bosses (57 seem unsubstantiated) and remains of one to three horses (Lorange 1875: 153–61; Schetelig 1905; Østigård 2015; Engevik 2011). The number of shield bosses indicate at least 11 pairs of oars, if there were two shields per oar, as in Gokstad and Fosnes. The number of shields thus indicates a minimum length of the Myklebustad ship of 15 m (one metre between oars, plus stem and stern).
Ile de Groix, W France	17–20 (large ?)	?	c 950	Richly equipped cremation burial with remains of two individuals under cairn/mound. Grave furniture includes riding gear, 14–20 shields and a supposed stem/stern decoration of iron (Du Chatellier and Le Pontois 1908; Müller-Wille 1970:94, 1978)

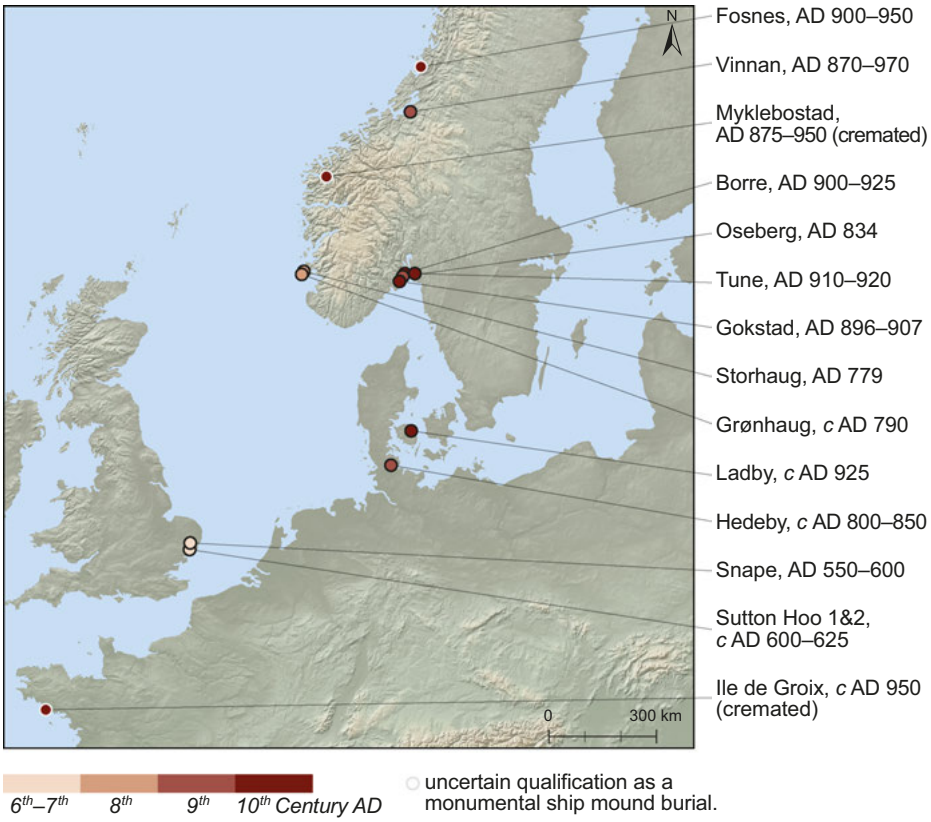

Fig. 5.9: Map of monumental ship mounds discussed in the text. A light-grey stroke indicates that it is uncertain whether the grave in question qualifies as a monumental ship mound. Illustration: J. Bill, I. T. Bøckman, MCH.

ship grave at Gjellestad in eastern Norway[2] almost certainly meets these criteria, but since it has not yet been dated, it cannot be included. Several other finds, for instance the very monumental, but only superficially investigated Herlaugshaug in central Norway (Müller-Wille 1970:90; Stamnes 2015), or the proposed ship graves at Tregde and Grønhaug in southern Norway (Stylegar 2004) lack sufficient evidence to be identified with certainty as ship graves, and are excluded. Three examples of burials with ships but without monumental mounds can also be excluded: the illustrious Salme II burial from Estonia; the unspectacular ship or boat burial K73, apparently without mound, from Tønsberg, eastern Norway; and the small monument with a shortened vessel from Lø in Steinkjer, central Norway. All of these are clearly not constructed to

2 https://niku.no/en/2018/10/georadar-detects-a-viking-ship-in-norway/ (accessed 08.01.2019).

establish an enduring, monumental presence in the landscape and fall outside the scope of this work.

The record of monumental ship burials is small, and its representativeness may be questioned. Were these graves always few? How many have been lost to agriculture or erosion over the centuries, or have simply not been discovered? Excavations in search of ship graves in preserved mounds have been carried out several times in eastern Norway, for example in Jellhaug in 1968–9 (Pedersen et al. 2003:310), in Halvdanshaugen on Stein in 1997 (Larsen and Rolfsen 2004:110), and in a mound on the farm Rom close to Oseberg in 2013 (Schneidhofer et al. 2017); none of these attempts have turned up any ship graves. A recent examination of the find history of the Tune ship burial has demonstrated that the first, private excavation of the Tune ship in c. 1752 remained in public memory long enough to be reported in the first archaeological survey of the area in 1828. It was also conveyed by the farmer of the land to the excavator of the Tune ship, Oluf Rygh, when he excavated there in 1867 (Bill 2017). Although Herlaugshaugen on Leka was never identified as a ship grave, excavations into the mound from around 1750 on did also remain in public memory, and reports made their way into archives, even if the attention never led to a full excavation of the mound. The two examples show that these type of social memories have some resilience, permitting hope that the losses through early excavation within the last few centuries may not have been extensive. By contrast, the find of the Gellestad ship shows that indeed monumental mounds with ships have disappeared, but also that sub-surface parts of them may still be possible to identify and investigate. The 12–15 monumental ship graves are thus with certainty only a sample of what was once there, although perhaps a relatively large one. Denmark, Scania, northern Germany, England, and southern Sweden are all areas where agriculture was earlier and more thoroughly mechanized than in Norway. That may imply that ship graves could be underrepresented in the archaeological record of those regions, compared to Norway.

Distribution patterns in time and space

In spite of the question of representativity, the spatial and chronological pattern formed by the monumental ship burials is interesting. Most of the confirmed examples originate from one of three relatively small regions. The Snape monumental ship burial is situated only 15 km from the two at Sutton Hoo and those three thus form a close-knit East Anglian region. It is also here that we find the few other examples of pre-Viking Age graves with complete boats in Britain (Filmer-Sankey 1990). The two Karmøy burials lies as mentioned only two kilometres apart and far from any other ship burials; Karmøy thus forms a small region on its own. In eastern Norway, Gokstad, Oseberg, Borre, and Tune are all found within a radius of c. 20 km from the entrance of the Oslo Fjord, the mouth of which thereby forms the

third region. Including Gellestad in this group would increase the said radius to 30 km. The Myklebust 1 cremation burial might have been part of a very local cluster too, as there are more monumental mounds on the site, with one showing evidence of a vessel of unknown size (Lorange 1875:153–61). The other ship graves seem all to be solitary. The Ladby and the Hedeby ship graves are positioned 125 km apart, and a similar distance can be found between the small Vinnan ship grave and the possible Fosnes one; Île de Groix is spatially the most isolated, more than a thousand kilometres from its nearest contemporary known ship grave.

The dates of the ship burials confirm the significance of the spatial pattern. The three East Anglian graves can all be dated within, at maximum, a 75-year period from 550 to 625; this interval may span as little as 25 years. The two Karmøy graves both date within 775–801, and most likely they were both constructed close to 780. The dendrochronological date of the Oseberg burial to 834 is the earliest in the east-Norwegian group, probably followed by the Gokstad burial. The dendrochronological date of the Gokstad burial was originally given as 900–905 (Bonde and Christensen 1993), later revised to 893–907 (Bonde 1994, 2010b). A recent, extensive dendrochronological examination of the find strongly indicates that the burial took place shortly after 896 (Daly in prep). A suggestion by Myhre that the Gokstad burial may be as late as 915 is thus highly unlikely (Myhre 2015:55–6). A revision of the dating of the Tune burial, including additional material, now provides a dating of 909–17 for the ship; none of further 10 dated samples, originating from the chamber or being of unknown function, need to be younger than this (Bonde 2010a). The homogeneity of their *TPQ* dates, with eight of them providing felling dates after 889 and two after 864 and 872 respectively, indicates that the burial took place not long after the construction of the ship. Two spades from the Tune mound, used for the construction of the mound, were made from trees felled in 895–909 and 903–17 respectively (Bill and Daly 2012:812) and may further indicate that the burial took place shortly after the construction of the ship. The Borre monument from the east-Norwegian group lacks a dendrochronological date, but Myhre suggests a dating to around 925 on the basis of coin-dated parallels to its Borre-style decorated artwork (Myhre 2015:56–9). The east-Norwegian group of monumental ship graves thus dates to 834–c. 925, but with three of the graves being erected in the last 30 years of this period. The majority of the monumental ship graves are thus characterized by not being solitary, but arranged in close geographical and chronological clusters. Turning to the remaining confirmed and possible examples of monumental ship graves, it is interesting to note that, with the exception of the Hedeby ship grave, these could all be later than any of the grouped ones. However, the quite wide dating ranges for some of them, and for the youngest of the East Norwegian ones, the Borre grave, does allow for chronological overlaps. But the overall spatio-temporal pattern of the ship graves may indicate otherwise.

The pattern of occurrence of monumental ship graves in time and space is noteworthy. Of the three clusters, the oldest one is found in East Anglia, the middle one on Karmøy across the North Sea, and the youngest one further east, in the Oslo

Fjord area. This suggests a dissemination process, as has been advocated previously (Bill 2015; Bonde and Stylegar 2016), and which is not contradicted by the solitary finds, all later than the Karmøy ones. What this dissemination mechanism may have been like will be the topic of the following part of the study.

Ritualization and ritual patterns in the monumental ship mound graves

The study of burial ritual is perhaps the most accessible road to studying the pre-Christian early medieval mind, since a burial is almost entirely a manifestation of ideas, in theory limited only by practicalities such as resources and decay processes. In the cosmology of these societies, death is a liminal phase and funerary rituals are passage rites (Steinsland 2005:337–8). But there are other issues at stake besides the safe exclusion of the deceased from the world of the living – death produces social vacuums that need to be filled, of roles and responsibilities, and of power. Østigård and Goldhahn (2006) have discussed funerals as occasions of renegotiations of power, stressing the utter importance for the early medieval society of recreating the alliances that are broken when a person dies. In a recent work, Østigård (2015) has further discussed the Myklebust ship funeral as such a renegotiation of power through the evocation or invention of tradition. He suggests that much of the burial ritual at Myklebust was negotiable, apart from a core 'death myth' (see also Kristoffersen and Østigård 2006), and that the ship burial was designed as a reaction to unification of Norway under Haraldr inn hárfagri and his sons and the growing influence of Christianity.

Martin Carver (1992b:180–1) investigates similar ideas in his deliberations about another ship grave, Sutton Hoo 1, suggesting that the burial is best understood as an emulation of, rather than an example of, Scandinavian burial ritual. For a new clan of rulers, the purpose behind this emulation was to make a political statement against the expanding Christian Franks through adopting a deeply heathen burial rite. Given the immigration history of the Anglo-Saxons, this link would probably not only orient the clan towards contemporary Scandinavia, but also incorporate an air of tradition by harkening back to the old homelands.

It is, however, another aspect of Carver's understanding of the ship burial that has attracted the most attention: his thesis that the burial should be understood as a heroic text or poem (Carver 1992b:180–1, 2000:37–8). Neil Price has analysed burials through the lens of dramaturgy (Price 2010; 2014 with references), presenting the burial site as encountered by archaeologists as analogous with the final scene of *Hamlet* as the curtain goes down: the action is over, the hero is dead, everything on the stage has played out its role – but attempts can be made to reconstruct the play from what trace have been left behind (Price 2010:137–8). Price suggests that this can be done by focusing on process and sequence – archaeologists should aim to reconstruct the various actions that led to the formation of the grave; Price predicts that

should his approach be adopted, over time it will lead to a shift in interpretations of Viking Age funerals (Price 2014:186–8). This is not an entirely new approach – already in the publications of the Gokstad and Oseberg ship burials, the authors sought to establish the sequence of action and describe the funeral drama (Nicolaysen 1882:68–9; Brøgger 1917:143–6). Understanding the 'how' of a burial undoubtedly helps with understanding the 'why' – but only partway. At some point, meaning will be ascribed to the observed actions, most frequently by ascribing meaning to objects or structures.

Analysing ritual in terms of dramaturgy is not a privilege of archaeologists – it has a long history in social sciences (Bell 2009:137–46). However, the performance approach has been criticised for obscuring more than it clarifies by studying the actions rather than the meaning behind them, and for its imagery of a "sensitive and appreciative participant interpreter, not a coldly detached, analytic scientist" (Bell 2009:45–6). The prospect of acting as a "sensitive and appreciative" interpreter may seem attractive to archaeologists in their role as communicators between the past and the present, but theories developed on the basis of reconstructions of rituals still ultimately require an empirical basis if they are to become more than mere conjecture. In archaeology, the implication is that a theory that can explain similar or connected series of actions – rituals – in different graves is more robust than a theory based on a unique example. The freedom to invent ritual suggested by Østigård (above) may be real, but in and of itself certainly does not make the establishment of broader understanding any easier.

Another challenge for extracting meaning from burial rituals is presented by the bewildering number of actions involved, for example as illustrated by Price (2010). The differentiation by Østigård of ritual actions selected to conform to the core 'death myth' and other narratives that can be invented or chosen with relative freedom works best as a strategy to separate the general and the individual. Grimes (2013:295) emphasizes that rituals are dynamic and consist of a multitude of different types of actions, some of which are supportive ('secondary ritual acts') rather than crucial to the conduct of the ritual ('primary ritual acts'). An even more differentiated approach is suggested by Sørensen (2006:171–6), who seeks to establish a model for the cognitive analysis of magical rituals (Fig. 5.10). His approach focuses on how participants and spectators form their understandings of the ritual – 'the representations of purpose and meaning of ritual action' – and suggests a three-level process. The first level is the 'ritual action/ritualization' akin to Østigård's 'death myths' – the core tradition, without which the ritual would not be regarded as valid. The second level, again in parallel with Østigård, consists of the negotiable or inventible elements – but in contrast to Østigård, Sørensen differentiates types of 'event-frames' or sets of action carried out in prepared settings to convey certain messages: those expressing the core ritual – corresponding to Grimes' primary ritual acts; those explanatory of the ritual – Grimes' secondary acts; and those taking place for non-ritual reasons. The third level in Sørensen's model are the cognitive processes occuring within participants and observers, which incorporate the input from the totality of the ritual into an experience of the ritual and a belief in its effects.

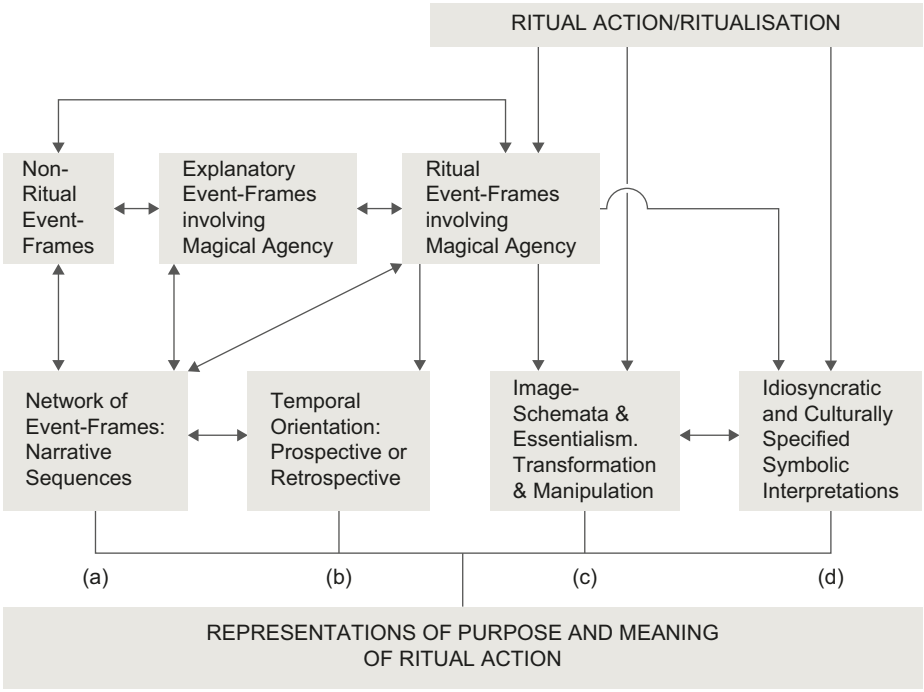

Fig. 5.10: A model for the analysis of ritual action. After Sørensen 2006. Illustration: I. T. Bøckman, MCH.

Sørensen's model of the inner workings of magical rituals is applicable for the study of burial ritual. If burial rituals were more than mere storytelling, they must have been believed to have exercised some kind of effect. The participants and spectators must have expected a change to have taken place after the completion of the ritual. The real effect of a burial ritual is thus a cognitive shift, a changed perception of the situation. According to Sørensen, the ritual accomplishes this through performance – that is, the event-frames. Studying the latter reveals not only the hows – the nuts and bolts of the ritual – but turns them into indicators for the whys.

Returning to the remarks above about funerals as both passage rites and renegotiations of social balance, burial rites can thus be probed in terms of at least two whys. In an earlier work, the present author has discussed rituals that make use of protective magic in two ship burials – the Oseberg burial and the Rus' ship cremation as witnessed by Ibn Fadlan among the Volga Bulgars in 921 (Bill 2016a). Both may serve here as illustrative examples. The actions carried out with objects used for protection against evil spirits during the culmination of the funeral may be seen as rituals alongside those meant to secure the passage out of the world of the living. One event-frame presenting protective magic at the Rus' cremation burial is the undressing of the dead chieftain's heir, and his walk, backwards and naked, with his hand covering

his anus, towards the pyre with a torch to light it (Warmind 1995:137, §91). While no written report of the Oseberg funeral exists, its good preservation condition shows a comparable phenomenon in different media. The distribution in the grave of five animal-head figures together with the same number of rattles and wagons/sledges indicates that these objects were used in combination during the burial procession. In the final phase, as the deceased woman and her companion were brought into the burial chamber, only four of the animal-head figures, with their rattles, were also brought in and placed at the head and foot of a bed for the deceased. The event-frame here thus comprises the use of the animal heads and rattles throughout the funeral. The interpretation of the event-frame as representing an apotropaic ritual requires acceptance of the notion of protective magic as valid in a 9th-century Scandinavian context – the first level in Sørensen's model – and that the use of the items as reconstructed in the analysis of the find situation would have been an appropriate way to communicate to the contemporary audience that this ritual was effectively dispensing protection.

As the example shows, applying event-frames as an analytical tool in the archaeological study of a burial site involves the construction of entities that are interpreted conjointly, and separately from other entities. For the purposes of this chapter and its interest in the use of ship symbolism, it is necessary to look only at event-frames related to the ship in the burial, reducing the risk that irrelevant aspects of the burial ritual might influence the result. Thus, the discussion will look for similarities in the way that the ship has been placed, or how elements have been placed in relation to the ship, with a view to identifying patterns of similarity or differentiation in the use of ship symbolism among the ship graves. The discussion will consider ten variables for possible association with the use of the ship in the burial ritual. Only a few of these, however, can be illuminated for the cremation burials:

1) Is it an inhumation or cremation?
2) How is the grave ship orientated – south–north or east–west?
3) How is the grave ship related to the natural surface: is it placed on it, or in a trench?
4) Where is the dead body placed: inside the ship or in a chamber below it?
5) If there are horses, where are they placed in relation to the ship: inside, outside, both – or are there none at all?
6) Is the ship made ready for departure– that is, does it have oars, mast, sail, etc.?
7) Is there a gangway present?
8) Are other boats present, apart from the grave ship?
9) Are there numerous shields hung on the ship?
10) Has the ship been covered with any material during the ritual, apart from the mound?

The answers to these questions, a subset of the information in Tab. 5.1, are shown in Tab. 5.2. It is arranged intuitively after the graves' similarity to the Storhaug grave. A number of multiple-component analyses (MCA) have been carried out to

provide a statistical input to a discussion of the differences and similarities across the graves; one of the results is shown in Fig. 5.11. The table and the MCAs primarily show that apart from the cremation graves, few very clearly defined groups can be outlined; rather, variation is gradual. The well-preserved and well-documented ship graves from Gokstad, Storhaug, and Oseberg stand out for sharing many similar details – but this may in part be due to lack of information from some of the other burials. The table shows, however, a clear differentiation between Sutton Hoo 1 and 2, Snape, and Hedeby on the one hand and most of the other inhumation graves on the other; but that is not quite so clear-cut in the MCA. Here Borre and Ladby, which both are relatively well illuminated graves, don't separate clearly from the former group, highlighting how the priorities chosen in the intuitive organisation of the table – for example, giving more weight to ship orientation, and less to the presence of shields or horses – influences the interpretation. If a grave such as Grønhaug ends up far from Storhaug in the MCA, this is due to lack of information about Grønhaug, rather to more salient differences.

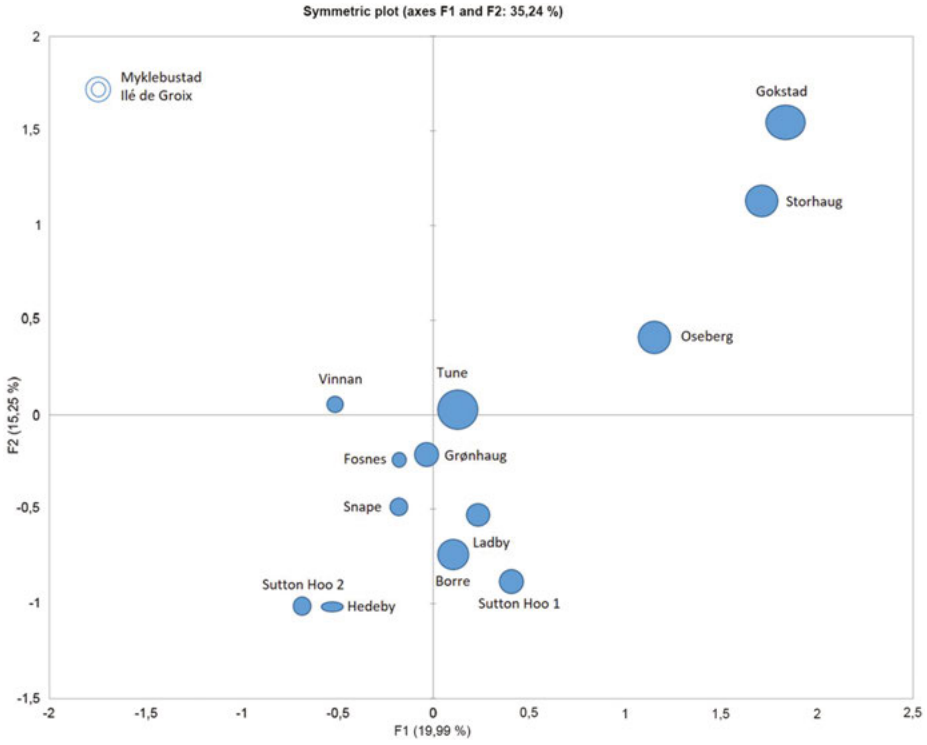

Fig. 5.11: A graphic representation of one of the multiple-component analyses carried out to support the interpretation of Tab. 5.2. The representation accounts for only 35% of the information in the table, meaning that it may not reveal all trends in the data. Marker size reflects mound diameter. Illustration: Jan Bill.

Tab. 5.2: The data used for the comparison of the ship-related event frames in the ship burials.

	Inhumation (Y) or cremation (N)	Orientation N-S (Y) or E–W (N)	Ship in (Y) or on (N) surface	Body in (Y) or below (N) ship	Horses in ship	Horses outside ship	Ship equipped	Addit-ional boats	Many shields	Moss covering of ship	Summary
Gokstad	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	1N 9Y
Storhaug	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	N	Y	1N 8Y
Oseberg	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		N	N	2N 7Y
Ladby	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y			N	N		2N 5Y
Tune	Y	Y	Y	Y						Y	5Y
Grønhaug	Y	Y	Y	Y					N		1N 4Y
Vinnan	Y	Y		Y							3Y
Fosnes	Y	N	Y	Y	Y				Y		1N 5Y
Borre	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y			N		3N 4Y
Snape	Y	N	Y	Y					N		2N 3Y
Hedeby	Y	N	N	N							3N 1Y

Sutton Hoo 2	Y	N	N	N				N	4N 1Y
Sutton Hoo 1	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	5N 3Y
Myklebust	N		N					Y	2N 1Y
Île de Groix	N		N					Y	2N 1Y

For reasons explained above, mound sizes cannot be compared across the entire area where ship burials occurred, but it is possible to compare across graves within Norway. Here, Fig. 5.11 shows that Borre belongs with Tune, Storhaug, Oseberg, and Gokstad in a class above the other burials while Grønhaug is more modest of size and Fosnes and Vinnan clearly very small.

Taking also the chronological and geographical variables into consideration, we can divide the ship graves into groups:

A. An early group, encompassing the East Anglian ship graves and Hedeby, characterised mainly by their east–west orientation and geographical context. The singular position of Sutton Hoo 1 in Fig. 5.11 is due to the possible uniqueness of some of its characteristics.
B. A late group consisting of Gokstad, Storhaug, Oseberg, and Tune, and possibly Ladby and Borre, characterised mainly by very large mounds, but also by staging a ship departure during the burial ritual (as far as can be established given the preservation conditions). Borre's membership in the group is questionable, due to its deviant orientation and because the ship was not dug down into the soil surface, implying that it may not have shared the departure motif.
C. A third group consisting of small ship graves that are emulations of those in group B. It encompasses Vinnan and Fosnes, and could possible also include Grønhaug and Ladby, if these do not belong in group B. Ladby does have, however, a quite monumental mound when considered in a Danish context – but less so if it was culturally of east Norwegian origin.
D. The last group comprises the cremation burials, about which the analysis says very little.

The next step is to consider the messages that event-frames including the more powerful variables may have been communicating. The frames seem to be represented in:

- Inhumation versus cremation
- Orientation of ship
- Placement of the ship in or above the soil surface
- Placement of the deceased in or below the ship
- Maritime equipment

The choice between inhumation and cremation in combination with ships seems to have been a choice between very different eschatological ideas. A burial in a ship in the ground points to soil and water as the elements through which the passage to the afterlife was reached, while cremation prescribes fire and air as media, as expressed by Ibn Fadlan's informant (Warmind 1995:137, §92).

The choice of orientation likewise seems entirely conscious, with the large majority of the Scandinavian examples pointing in southerly directions, and the East Anglian ones towards the east. This implies that the ships were oriented towards

certain destinations, supporting the idea that the funeral was conceptualized as a journey. Notably, the orientation does not seem to be influenced by the direction to navigable water (Tab. 5.1), indicating that the destination was not to be reached across a real sea. Placing the dead in the ship is in line with an interpretation of the ship burial as a preparation for a journey, while the placement below the ship may indicate that no such journey was expected.

The presence of maritime equipment on board, as seen in Oseberg and Gokstad, is a further indication of the grave ship as meant for travel. The presence of boats (Gokstad, Storhaug) and gangways (Gokstad, Storhaug, Oseberg) adds a facet of departure to the scene (Figs. 5.12 and 5.13). Both elements are means to communicate between ship and land, as their presence in the burial situation seems to suggest. The examples of the Oseberg and Gokstad graves are the most illustrative. In Oseberg, the ship was clearly made ready for departure as part of the preparations for the burial. The ship was dug halfway down in a trench and moored to a large stone. It was thus symbolically floating, and oars were ready in the oar-ports to turn the ship once the mooring had been taken. One of the very last items to be brought on board, on top of the wagon, sledges, horses, and other remains from the burial procession, was the gangway. Probably the construction of the mound started immediately thereafter, thereby causing the ship to gradually disappear into the earth.

Fig. 5.12: The ship remains and (below) the gangway from the Storhaug burial. The preserved part of the gangway measures c. 3.10 m. Similar gangways were found in the Oseberg and Gokstad burials (Fig. 5.12). Drawing. Unknown. Photo: S. Skare, UMB.

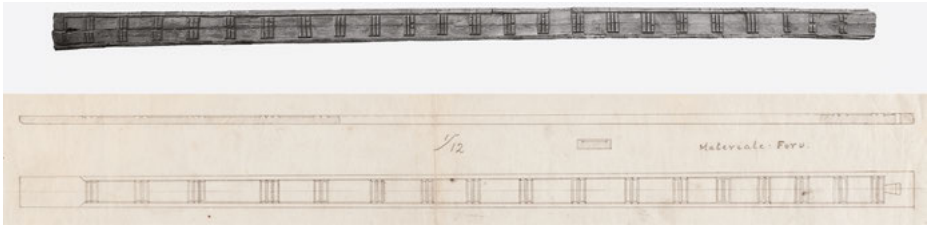

Fig. 5.13: Gangways from Oseberg (top) and Gokstad (below). The Oseberg gangway was found on top of the sledges and other grave goods in the fore of the ship, and measures 6.90 m. The Gokstad gangway was placed outside of the ship, along and well below the gunwale. It measures 7.50 m. Drawing: Fr. Johannesen. Photo: unknown (top) and M. Teigen (bottom), MCH.

In Gokstad the scene is no less telling. Here there are no moorings, but there is an entire sea of clay – as big as the mound later to be built – around the ship (Cannell 2012). On the foredeck were found the broken-up remains of three boats and a sledge, probably the equivalent to the wagon and sledges from in the Oseberg burial and used to bring the ship's last cargo on board. A gangway was found too, lying on the clay outside the ship.

In the light of the observations from the Oseberg and Gokstad burials, it appears that the boat and gangway found in the Storhaug burial may have served a similar purpose. Evident in all three cases is an event-frame that presents a part of the burial as the loading of a ship that is bound to depart with the deceased. In the case of the Storhaug ship that might even explain the oar driven down in the soil next to the ship, as if made ready to punt the ship out from the coast. Part of that event-frame also includes the orientation of the ship, communicating the destination of the voyage, and, in the case of Gokstad and Tune, the clay and soil surrounding it in place of water.

If this reading of some of the event-frames surrounding the ships in the graves is somewhat correct, the ships are part of a ritual core crucial to fulfilling a specific role in the funeral. The present author has elsewhere argued that this post-mortal journey is meant to bring the deceased to the realm of death (Bill 2016b). This does not exclude that the size and standard – the grandeur – of the burial bore an influence on how this journey was understood. So the question still stands: Why the monumental ship graves?

5.1.4 Known monumental ship settings

Much less can be said about the monumental ship settings in comparison to their counterparts with real ships. In the cases where monuments have been excavated, results have often been limited, indicating the elusive character of the monuments' use. Table 5.3 lists the known examples of such stone settings, together with their

Tab. 5.3: Known monumental ship settings.

No.	Ship setting	Length (m)	Orientation	Dating	Remarks and references
1	Anundshög 1, Västmanland	53	ENE-WSW	10th or early 11th century, based on dating of Anundshög which has an "entrance platform".	Anundshög is a monumental burial mound, 64 m in diameter. Its construction postdates a fireplace C14-dated to 210–540. Two ship settings, aligned end to end, extends approximately radially from the mound perimeter; a stone is buried centrally in both. The location is a cemetery with further mounds, small ship settings and a runic stone contemporary to the ship settings (Capelle 1986:45; Bratt 2004).
2	Anundshög 2, Västmanland	51	ENE-WSW	10th or early 11th century.	See above
3	Runsa, Uppland	55	NE-SW	*C* 450–550, based on land upheaval and the date of the associated, fortified settlement.	The monument has a central stone ("mast-stone") (Capelle 1986:42; Risberg 2011).
4	Askeberga (Rane stenar), Västergötland	55	E-W	Typological to Early Medival Period	Built of very large boulders, weighing up to 15 t, but is missing the stem and stern stones (Riksantikvarämbetet, Fornsök: RAÄ-number Vad 10:1. Object ID: 10208000100001; Capelle 1986:44).
5	Nässja, Östergötland	43	N-S	Typological to Early Medival Period	Large stone in centre – higher amidships stones (Riksantikvarämbetet, Fornsök: RAÄ-number Nässja 2:1. Object ID: 10047200020001; Capelle 1986:44).

(continued)

Tab. 5.3 (continued)

No.	Ship setting	Length (m)	Orientation	Dating	Remarks and references
6	Linköping, Östergötland	50	N-S	890 – 1030, based on two C14 analyses.	Excavated in 1989–90 and was found to contain no grave – has been suggested to be a thing site (Ericsson 2005:190)
7	Ullevi 1, Småland	c 50	E-W	Typological to Early Medival Period	(Ohlmarks 1946:55; Capelle 1986:52)
8	Ullevi 2, Småland	c 50	E-W	Typological to Early Medival Period	(Ohlmarks 1946:55; Capelle 1986:50)
9	Sundsholm, Småland	40	–	Typological to Early Medival Period	Mound in centre (Ohlmarks 1946: 28, 55; Capelle 1986:52)
10	Össlöv, Småland	42	N-S	Typological to Early Medival Period	(Riksantikvarämbetet, Fornsök: RAÄ number Berga 152:1 Object ID: 10070201520001)
11	Blomsholm, Bohuslän	42	NNW-SSE	Typological to Early Medival Period	Orientation from Google Earth (Capelle 1986:50)
12	Uppgarde, Gotland	46	WNW-ESE	Typological to Early Medival Period, but uncertain	(Englund 1979; Capelle 1986:49)
13	Sicklinge, Gotland	c 40	NW-SE	Typological to Early Medival Period	(Ohlmarks 1946:50; Capelle 1986:47)
14	Köpings klint, Öland	40	–	Typological to Early Medival Period	(Ohlmarks 1946:56; Capelle 1986:49)

15	Ljungarum, Skåne	60–63	NNW-SSE	Typological to Early Medival Period	(Vestergaard 2007:180–181; Furugård 2011:10)
16	Färlöv 1 (the westernmost), Skåne	50	N-S	700–900, C14 on bone and stratigraphy. A rune stone datable to the period 600–900 has disappeared.	(Vestergaard 2007:179– 80; Furugård 2011:9–10)
17	Färlöv 2, Skåne	74–81	N-S	800–1000, C14 on bone and stratigraphy	(Vestergaard 2007:179–80; Furugård 2011:9–10)
18	Södra Ugglarp, Skåne	39–40	ENE-WSW	Typological to Early Medival Period	(Vestergaard 2007:178; Furugård 2011:11)
19	Torup, Vitaby, Skåne	42	NNW-SSE	Typological, but burials from Late Iron Age and Viking Age on site	(Ohlmarks 1946:58; Vestergaard 2007:179)
20	Stenhed, Skåne	52	NW-SE	Typological to Early Medival Period	(Furugård 2011:10–11)
21	Ängakåsen Skåne	60	WNW-ESE	Typological to Early Medival Period	(Vestergaard 2007:181; Furugård 2011:11)
22	Kabusa, Skåne	70	NNE-SSW	Typological to Early Medival Period	(Furugård 2011:10)
23	Kåseberga (Ales stenar), Skåne	67	NW-SE	600–1000, C14 and stratigraphy	(Vestergaard 2007:178–9; Furugård 2011:9; Riksantikvarämbetet, Fornsök: Valleberga 20:1, Object ID 10113600200001)

(continued)

Tab. 5.3 (continued)

No.	Ship setting	Length (m)	Orientation	Dating	Remarks and references
24	Lejre 1, Sjælland	60–90	NW-SE	900–950, grave goods and stratigraphy	(Andersen 1995; Vestergaard 2007:176–7; Christensen et al. 2015: 34–35)
25	Lejre 2, Sjælland	40–50	NW-SE	Typological to Early Medival Period	(Andersen 1995; Vestergaard 2007:176–7)
26	Lejre 3	45–50	–	Typological to Early Medival Period	(Andersen 1995:91)
27	Lejre 4	45–50	–	Typological to Early Medival Period	(Andersen 1995:91)
28	Tryggevælde, Sjælland	–	–	900–925, runic inscription, contemporary with Glavendrup,	(Vestergaard 2007:177–8)
29	Glavendrup, Fyn	52	WNW-ESE	900–925, runic inscription, contemporary with Tryggevælde	(Vestergaard 2007:174–5)
30	Vejerslev, Jylland	90	N-S	C 600, grave goods	(Vestergaard 2007:174; Holst 2017)
31	Jelling, Jylland	356	NNE-SSW	Shortly before 957/959, dendrochronology, stratigraphy, runic inscription	(Holst et al. 2013a:492; Jessen et al. 2014:Tab. 1)
32	Bække, Jylland	45	WNW-ESE	10th century, possibly AD 960–70, based on runic inscription on stem stone	(Vestergaard 2007:175)

dates when available. Altogether 26 sites with 32 monumental ship settings are listed; only 13 of these have been dated by means other than typology, which is not reliable for separate dates within the early Middle Ages.

Vejerslev is the only ship setting with an unambiguous early date of c. 600, on the basis of artefacts from a centrally placed cremation grave; Runsa in Uppland also can be dated very early. The 'Ale's Stones' site at Kåseberga in Scania provides early dates from around 600, but with continued activities up to c. 1000.

Even if poorly dated, the geographical distribution of the monumental ship settings, seen in combination with their size, is noteworthy (Fig. 5.15). Most prominently, they are complimentary to the monumental ship graves, but with an overlap in Denmark where the ship graves are few. Moreover, the largest monuments, those above 60 m, are all concentrated in Denmark and Scania. Additionally, there is little regularity in the orientation of the ship settings; however, orientations in the compass directions from north-south to east-southeast-west-northwest is more than twice as common as from east-west to north-northeast-south-southwest. The Blomsholm ship setting (Fig. 5.14), with the southern stem stone markedly higher than the northern one, even seems to be indicating that the fore is to the south – a possible tendency towards the same orientation of the stone ships as in the ship graves.

Both the complementarity to the monumental ship graves and the tendency towards a shared alignment point at a shared core between the two rituals – that they are to some extent communicating the same message, although in two very different ways. The pattern is compatible with two regional variants of a shared core ritual. The next step will now be to look to the written sources to see how they resonance with the archaeological ship burials.

5.2 Ship graves in written sources

With 18 different stories that include ship burials – some of them mentioned in several sources – the medieval written heritage that shows explicit use of the ship burial motif is marginally more plentiful than the archaeological ship burial examples (Tab. 5.4). The majority of these sources, however, postdate the actual use of the ship burial ritual by two or more centuries, and were produced in a Christian environment distant in time, space, and beliefs from early medieval Scandinavia. Nevertheless, they are products and parts of the reception history (Holtorf 2001) of the rituals that were manifested through the monumental ship burials. The written sources represent receptions of the rituals and the residual monuments, handed down through memory, as well as oral and written tradition. Crosman (1980) points out that in such chains, each link is formed by the recipient as its meaning for this one person. Thus the literary accounts have, down the chain, an increasing degree of independence from the intended message produced by those designing and

Fig. 5.14: Monumental ship setting at Blomsholm, Bohuslän, 42 m long. The curved sides of the stone setting and the up to 4 m high, inward-sloping stem and stern stones give the stone ship a shape resembling that of many of the Viking Age ship depictions on coins, Gotlandic picture stones, and some rune stones. Photo: Jan Bill.

performing the original ritual – and can contain an increasing number of further meanings, added by former recipients. The information that the written sources may offer on the monumental ship burial rituals is thus reduced, enveloped, and modified, reflecting collective memories that existed regarding these burials later in the Middle Ages and how these were used and transformed to meet new needs. The following section investigates the majority of these sources as a group, seeking similarities and differences between them, before engaging with the two most promising in terms of furthering understanding of the ship burial phenomenon: the *Beowulf* poem and the *Húsdrápa*.

First, it is necessary to point out the solitary character of one of the oldest sources, the unique eyewitness account of a ship cremation burial of a Rus' chieftain in 921–2, recorded by the Muslim theologian and traveller Ahmad Ibn Fadlan. While on a mission for the Caliph in Baghdad to the Yaltawar, the chief of the Volga-Bulgarians, Ibn Fadlan describes a funeral that is generally supposed to have taken place among Scandinavians in the territory of the Volga-Bulgarians near or at Bulgar, their administrative centre at the confluence of the Volga and Kama rivers. This is at

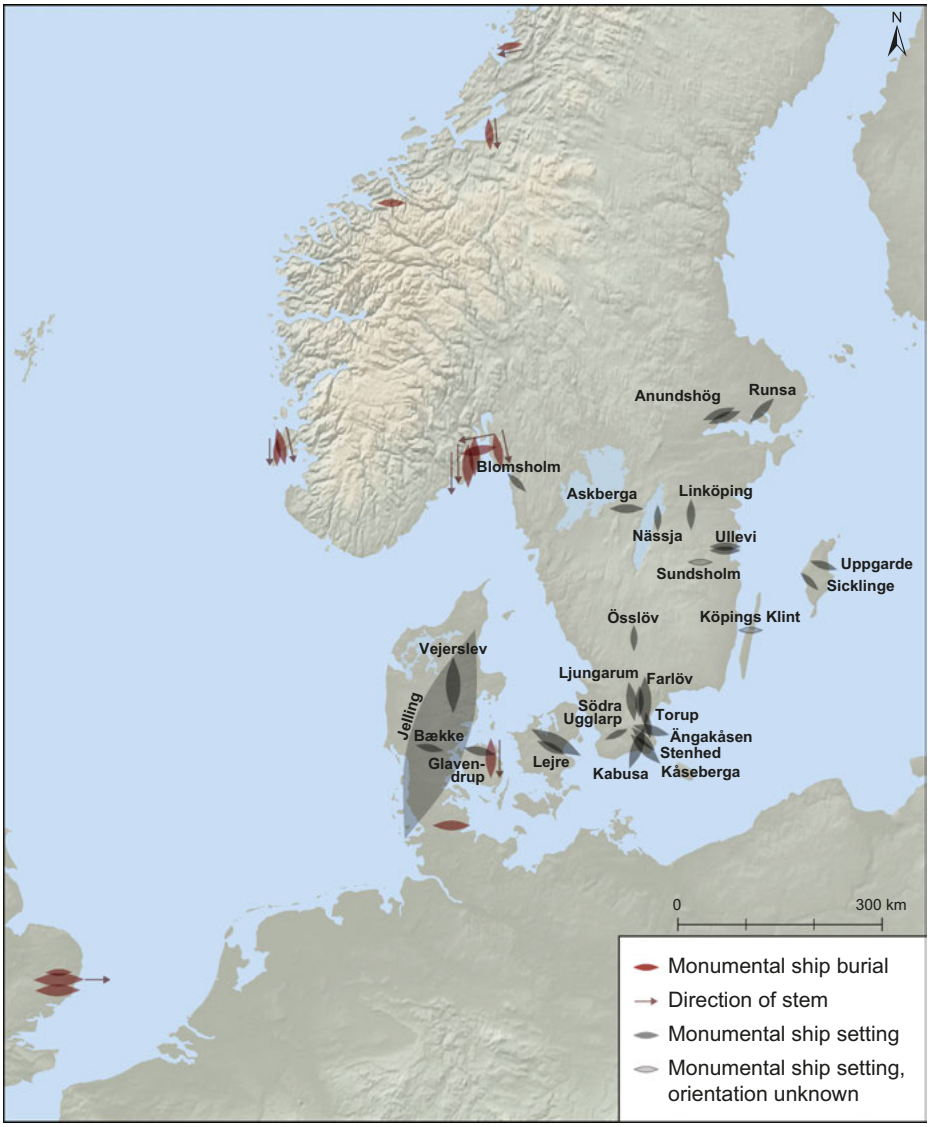

Fig. 5.15: Monumental ship settings and monumental ship mound graves. The length of the signatures reflect the relative lengths of ship settings and the grave ships respectively. Illustration: J. Bill, I. T. Bøckman, MCH.

the middle Volga, well outside the region where Scandinavians settled. Montgomery (2000:13) has suggested that Ibn Fadlan only heard about the funeral while he was in Bulgar, and that he travelled into Rus' territory specifically to attend it. This is an unlikely scenario, considering the 600 km distance from Bulgar to nearest settlement areas of the Rus', and the described 10-day duration of the complete funeral ritual.

Tab. 5.4: Literary examples of ship burials, sorted chronologically after oldest possible date, compiled from Müller-Wille (1970:126–41) and Müller-Wille et al. (1978:281–6). Coloured entries represent burials of Skjǫldungar kings.

	Ship burials in written sources (Person buried/source/date/remark)	God	King	Cleric	Warriors	Chieftains/ magnates	Cause of death	Burial type
1	Scyld / Beowulf / 7th-8th cent. / Slade 2002–2005	Singular					Natural	Floating burial, on sea
2	Gilda / Life of St. Gildas by the monks of Rhuis / 9th – 11th cent. / Cameron 1969			Sing.			Natural	Floating burial, on sea
3	Anonymous chieftain / Ibn Fadlan / 921–922 / Warmind 1995					Sing.	Natural	Cremation, on land
4	Balder / Úlfr Uggason's Húsdrápa /c 985 / Lindow 1997:20 Also in Prose Edda, Gylfaginning chap. 49 / c 1220 / Sturluson [1982]	Sing.					Murder/ war	Cremation, (on sea?)
5	Atli / Atlamál / 1100–1200 / Dronke 1969:107–10					Sing.	Murder	Inhumation
6	Ásmundr Atlason / *Landnámabók* (Sturlubók, Melabók, Hauksbók) / c 1100–1220 / Benediktsson 1969					Sing.	Natural	Inhumation
7	Geirmund Hjörsson heljarskinn (p. 164_{29-31}) / *Landnámabók* (Sturlubók) / 1275–80 / Benediktsson 1969					Sing.	Natural	Inhumation
8	King Sigurd Ring / Skjǫldunga saga / 1180–1220 / Friis-Jensen and Lund 1994:19–20		Multiple				War	Cremation, on sea

9	The Saxon king Gelderus (buried by Hotherus, a Swedish king with inherited rights to the Danish crown, but also Saxo's model of Hǫðr, Baldr's brother)/ Gesta Danorum 3.2.11 / 1185–1219 / Grammaticus 2005:58–9)/	Sing.	Mult.		War	Cremation, on land
10	Kings, jarls and army commanders on one ship each, ten ship commanders on one ship (slain foes buried by the Danish king Frotho at a southern Baltic coast / Gesta Danorum, 5.7.6 / 1185–1229 / Grammaticus 2005:58–9) /	Sing.	Mult.		War	Cremation, on land
11	The Danish king Haraldrus Hyldetan buried by the Swedish king Ringo / Gesta Danorum, 8.5.1 / 1185–1219/ Grammaticus 2005:58–9	Sing.			War	Cremation, on land
12	King Haki / Ynglinga saga ch. 27 / 1220–1230 / Sturluson [1838–39]	Mult.			War	Cremation, on sea
13	Danish(?) warriors/Fagrskina /c 1220 or Egil Ullserkr and warriors / Hákon the Good's saga / 1220–1230 / Sturluson [1838–39]		Mult.		War	Inhumation
14	Thorgrim / Gísli saga Súrssonar / 1240–1250 / *The Sagas of the Icelanders* [2001]			Sing.	Murder	Inhumation
15	Auðr djúpúðga Ketilsdóttir / Laxdæla saga ch. 7 / 13th cent. / *Laxdœla saga* [1934]			Sing.	Natural	Inhumation
16	Karl and the Norwegians / Svarfdæla saga ch. 26 / 13th cent. / *Svarfdæla saga* [1966]			Mult.	War	Inhumation
17	King Ragnar from Helluland / Bárdar saga Snaefellsáss / early 14th cent. / *Bárdar saga Snaefellsáss* [1860]	Mult.			?	Inhumation
18	Þórir from Hrafnistu / Áns saga bogsveigis / 14th cent. / *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda* [1943]			Mult.	Murder	Inhumation
19	Soti / Hardar saga ok Holmverja / first half of the 14th cent. / *Harðar saga ok Hólmverja* [1891]			Sing.	?	Inhumation

It is more likely that the funeral perhaps took place not *in* Bulgar, but within a few days of travel from there. Thus the socio-political context of the funeral that he witnessed was a group of travelling Rus' deep in foreign territory. That is a radically different situation from most of the archaeological ship graves, with the possible exception of the Île de Groix cremation grave. Further, because this record from the Abassid court was not known in western Europe until 1823, it is not part of the Scandinavian perception history in the period of interest here (Warmind 1995:131). While it is thus difficult to evaluate this particular source within the same framework as the others, it nevertheless provides, as pointed out by Price (2010), an outstanding opportunity for insight into the complexity of a Scandinavian mortuary ritual. It therefore is more useful to analyse Ibn Fadlan's account within the same framework as the archaeological finds, with a focus on aspects related to the use of ship symbolism. In that light, discussion turns to Sass' translation and Warmind's 1995 reading (132–7).

The funeral is that of a man whom Ibn Fadlan (§87) describes as a prominent chieftain among the Rus' in Bulgar; he is not a king or prince, but one or several levels below that. He will be cremated, as Ibn Fadlan's (§87) informant claims all Rus' are cremated in boats – poor men in small boats, and chieftains, as in this case, in large vessels.

The first mention of the ship occurs on the day of the funeral, as it stands ready and pulled up from the river (§89). It was thus a real craft, not a symbolic representation of one. The word used for ship is *safina*, which is quite indistinct, simply meaning 'vessel'. It is not a given that it was a Scandinavian-type, clinker-built vessel; nails and timbers from such vessels in Kievan Rus' have been found mainly along Lake Ladoga, Volchov, and at Gnezdovo at the upper Dnepr, that is, in the west. Only two instances are known from the Volga river system, from Timerevo and Rostov 600 km to the north-west from where Ibn Fadlan attends the funeral (Leontev and Nosov 2017:402). The vessel could thus have been a local type, suitable for the conditions on the shallow, broad rivers of the region, rather than one brought in from Scandinavia, or built in the Scandinavian tradition. Flat-bottomed barges and enlarged logboats were used on the Volchov-Dnepr waterway (Sorokin 1997) and undoubtedly also on the Volga.

The account describes how first four supports of birch and other wood were set up, and that "there was also made around it something like great warehouses of wood. Then it was pulled up until it rested on this wood" (§89). Warmind (1995, 132–3) suggests that since the root of the word for 'warehouse', *anbars*, means 'to lift', it could also mean 'scaffolding'. Another possible etymology was perhaps simply 'woodpile', indicating that the vessel was pulled up on a solid quantity of carefully stacked-up fuel, perhaps secured with the four poles. If the boat was Scandinavian, and thus not flat bottomed, the four poles could have served to keep the vessel stable for the ceremony, much as the stones under the Storhaug ship.

After the vessel is placed on the pyre, a *qubba* is constructed on board (§89). A *qubba* is a 'domed tomb structure' but originally meant 'a tent of hides' (Meri 2002:264). Warmind (1995:133) suggests that the word be read as 'tent', which

seems apt for the timeline of the funeral – the entire ritual, from the vessel being placed on the pyre to the conclusion of the cremation transpired within less than a day. That agrees poorly with the construction of any timber structure on board. It is, however, far from certain that this should be a tent with straight, sloping sides as known from the Oseberg and Gokstad ship graves. A yurt, the round, domed tent of the Eurasian steppe, could be considered as well, and if, perhaps initially, only its wooden skeleton were erected but not covered, this could explain why Ibn Fadlan is able to report so vividly on what is happening inside the *qubba*.

The following details from the ritual are informative about the size of the vessel. First a bedstead is brought on board – actually before the tent is mentioned – and prepared with blankets and cushions (§89). The dead man is propped up in a sitting position upon the bed, now inside the tent. His weapons are placed beside him, and food in front of him. Several large animals are then slaughtered and placed in the vessel: a dog, two horses, and two cows, plus some birds. Finally an intoxicated slave girl is brought on board and into the tent by an old woman, followed by six men (§90). The men take turns having intercourse with her while the others hold her down on the bed by her hands and feet. Next two men pull a rope tied around her neck while standing on either side of the bed, while the old woman stabs her with a knife.

Thus, the tent was big enough to hold a bed with two bodies upon it, five more persons along its sides, weapons and food, and still leaving room for the execution of the violent ritual. From that it can be inferred that the tent was sizable; the large bed from Oseberg alone would take up a 2.2 x 1.9 m area inside the tent (Grieg 1928:82). Even if it is presumed that local travelling equipment was used – a yurt-type tent and a barge-like craft with vertical sides – it can be assumed that the vessel must have been well over three metres wide. If a Scandinavian-type vessel was used, it would almost certainly have qualified as a ship as defined in this chapter.

The text also holds some information about the conclusion of the ritual, after the pyre had burned out:

> Then they constructed on the place of the ship – where they had pulled it out of the river – something like a round hill and in the middle they erected a large piece of birch-wood and wrote upon it the name of the man and the name of the king of the Rus. And then they went away.
>
> (Warmind 1995:137, §92)

It is noteworthy that a mound is built on the place of the cremation, and that this mound sits on the river bank, by contrast to the ship graves in Scandinavia and East Anglia, which mostly are placed some distance from navigable water. The memorial also included a runic inscription over the deceased, as seen in some ship settings, but here made in a non-durable medium. Nothing is said about the size of the mound, but the impression is that while the memorial is substantial, it is apparently not monumental on the same scale as the ship inhumation graves in Scandinavia.

The mentioning of the dead chieftain's king is a noteworthy detail, as it informs the social standing of the deceased. The king of the Rus' could be understood as the

Kievan prince, but Stefanovich (2016), on the basis of preserved Byzantine treaties with Kievan Rus', has argued that Kievan Rus' in the first half of the 10th century rather consisted of many relatively autonomous, smaller polities. These, he finds, were headed by mostly Scandinavian petty-kings, who would send their own envoys and merchants in larger delegations to Constantinople. A possible interpretation of Ibn Fadlan's report is that the deceased was such an envoy or merchant, although on a mission to the east rather than to the south. What seems clear is that the inclusion of the name of the king on the burial marker demonstrates that the deceased was not travelling only on his own behalf.

Ibn Fadlan's report is rich in detail but poor in explanation, with little to say about the function of the ship in the ritual. It is clearly described as a standard procedure – any man would be cremated in a boat of some kind – and since Ibn Fadlan is being told that the cremation secures a swift journey to Paradise for the deceased, it can be assumed that the ship plays a role in this voyage (for a contrary viewpoint, see Warmind 1995:135).

There are several similarities, but also clear differences between the burial that Ibn Fadlan attends and the excavated ship burials. In the former, a real vessel is used for the funeral, bigger than what was used in the contemporary Uppland boat graves – if of Scandinavian type, it could have been about the size of the Salme II or the Grønhaug vessel. The cremation burial with a ship has few parallels, but the late date of the burial fits well with both Île de Groix and Myklebustad. The placing of horses and cattle inside the ship is consistent with several of the ship inhumation graves, and likewise the placing of weapon and nourishments inside the burial 'chamber'. The human sacrifice may be paralleled in several of the graves where there are multiple individuals: Île de Groix, Hedeby, Oseberg, and perhaps Borre – but there is no positive evidence of sacrifice in these graves, and Borre is the only grave that may have held a both a male and a female (Myhre 2015:52).

The most important difference lies perhaps with the mound. It is impossible to know how big it was, but since Ibn Fadlan apparently witnessed the departure of the Rus' after they had constructed it, it is unlikely that it took weeks to build. Most of the known ship graves, and indeed all of those with monumental mounds, are placed quite high in the landscape and far from the shore. It is conceivable that the mound of the Rus' chieftain was not supposed to signal any dominance of the landscape, in opposition to the monumental ship graves in homelands.

Attention will now turn to the remaining 18 literary examples in Tab. 5.4. These can be differentiated through four variables for which most of them show evidence: 1) the selected method of disposal of the body (cremation, inhumation, or a 'floating burial', that is, the body is left to drift away on a ship), 2) the status of the deceased (a god, a king, a cleric, a warrior, or a chieftain/magnate), 3) the cause of death (natural, murder, or war), and 4) whether the described burial was for a single individual, possibly accompanied by human sacrifices or dead subordinates, or for several of same social standing. Furthermore, kings considered to be offspring of

Skjǫld by the historiographers have been marked out. The table is sorted chronologically after the oldest likely composition date and shows the variations in these elements against time and against each other. As stated, the analysis will first examine the younger of these sources, nos. 5–19, leaving aside *Beowulf*, the closely related *Life of Saint Gilda*, and *Húsdrápa*.

5.2.1 Late traditions, examples nos. 5–19

No clear-cut patterns emerge out of Tab. 5.4, but some tendencies can be identified, especially among the examples from the 12th–14th centuries. The clearest observation is the relation between mode of disposition and rank. It is chieftains and magnates, not kings, that are inhumed. Out of ten inhumation burials, eight belong to this group, while one inhumation burial is for warriors and one for a king. By contrast, the five cremation burials are all kings, in two instances together with their warriors. The geographical differentiation between cremation and inhumation burials is also striking. The inhumation burial texts are mostly playing out in Iceland or, for *Atlamál*, possibly Greenland (Dronke 1969 107–10). Only two can with certainty be placed elsewhere, namely in Norway. These are Hákon 'the good' Haraldsson's burial of the slain from the battle at Rasterkalv in *Nóregs konungatal* and the burial of Þórir from Hrafnistu i *Áns saga bogsveigis*. One burial on Iceland, in *Svarfdæla saga*, is of Norwegians on Iceland (no. 16). By contrast, those mentioning cremation burials have their geographical focus elsewhere. Snorri, in his *Ynglingar saga*, tells us about the Danish King Haki who is organising his own cremation in a floating ship near Uppsala after being mortally wounded in a battle against the Swedish Ynglingar kings. In Arngrímur Jónsson's Latin paraphrasing of *Skjǫldungar saga* he tells about the Swedish King Sigurðr hringr who also has himself cremated on a drifting ship, perhaps in the outer Oslo Fjord, which was a border zone between the powers in the region. According to Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* Sigurðr hringr had previously arranged another ship burial, that of the Danish King Haraldr hilditǫnn, after having killed him. It is also Saxo who let the Saxon king Gelderus be cremated in a ship on land by the Swedish-Danish King Hotherus, and who let the Danish King Frotho order that slain foes from a vast sea battle on the southern Baltic coast, from kings down to skippers, be cremated on their ships. The literary cremation ship burial phenomenon is thus clearly complimentary to its inhumation counterpart, located as it were in the Danish-Swedish sphere as in contrast to the inhumation burials in the Norwegian-Icelandic-Greenlandic sphere. There might also be a chronological element to the differentiation between these two groups. The mentioning of cremation burials is confined to a brief time horizon from the writing of the now lost *Skjǫldungar saga*, shortly before or after 1200 (Friis-Jensen and Lund 1984:19–20) to Snorri's composition of his *Ynglingar saga* around 1225. It is also limited to a small group of perhaps not more than three authors.

Inhumation burials appeared in earlier texts, if the dating of *Atlamál* is correct. The occurrence of Asmundur Atlason's ship burial in all of the three oldest surviving versions of *Landnamabók* warrants a dating of this motif back to *Styrmisbók* from around 1220, with the possibility of a dating back to the first, early to mid-12th-century version of *Landnamabók* (Benediktsson 1969). What is clear is that the inhumation motif continues to be used in the narratives well into the 14th century, even if in *Bárdar saga Snaefellsáss* and *Hardar saga ok Holmverja* the narratives report the breaking of ancient mounds, not the making of new ones.

The written sources discussed above make clear that the perception histories of the ship burial phenomenon took at least two different directions after the burial rite itself ceased to exist. The first associated them with cremation, with (sometimes Skjǫldungar) kings of a distant past, and with the broader region of Denmark-Sweden, and is found in texts occupied with royal genealogies: the lost Icelandic *Skjǫldungar saga*, Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*, and Snorri's *Ynglingar saga*. The second connected the ship graves to important, but not necessarily royal persons, to inhumation burial, and to a mainly North Atlantic environment. This strand is found in texts that are mainly playing out in Iceland. Indeed, there was some blending between the two, and ship burials of both types could also serve to honour slain warriors, but still the contrast is marked. Why? If Snorri's famous mentioning of the *brunaǫld*, the cremation age, in *Prologus* to *Heimskringla* expresses a more widespread conceptualisation of the past in his time, it is possible that the choice of cremations only should underline the antique quality of the narratives. That would be in contrast to more recent ones such as the warriors from the battle at Rastarkalv (Tab. 5.4, no. 13) or the numerous literary burials situated on Iceland. Bearing the archaeology in mind, however, it is evident that the diversity is instead based on different sets of collective memories. As shown, monumental ship burial symbolism was used differently in the two areas. In Denmark-Sweden, monumental ship settings were erected that harboured, at least in some cases, cremation burials. Oral tradition about these, in poetry as well as among people around the monuments, would have kept memories alive and formed a base upon which Saxo, Snorri, and *Skjǫldungar saga*'s creators would have built.

Corresponding to a dominance of cremation in the Swedish-Danish ship burial memories, the other strand of perception would be grounded on the monumental inhumation burials in Norway. Norwegians did play a dominant role in the colonisation of the North Atlantic and would have brought their tales and traditions with them, just as they brought along the boat grave ritual (Mooney 2016:161–2). This viewpoint finds some support in a closer investigation of who was given ship burials on Iceland in the Icelandic literature. In the above-mentioned *Svarfdæla saga* (no. 16), Karl, a Norwegian immigrant to Iceland, and his group of Norwegian warriors – 'Eastmen' – are honoured with a ship burial, possibly indicating that this was considered suitable *because* they were from Norway. Concerning Auðr djúpúðga Ketilsdóttir (no. 15), the ship burial could be understood in the context of her marriage with King Óláfr 'the white' of Dublin, who is in *Hauksbók* a descendant of Hálfdan hvitbeinn and thus of

the Vestfold kings (*Landnamábók* [1900] 36, 156–7, 268). Although expelled from Dublin upon the death of Óláfr, she was, in the Icelandic narrator's perspective, a queen widow whose children with Óláfr were of a most important royal lineage. Indeed, the importance of an example such as that of Auðr djúpúðga Ketilsdóttir should not be exaggerated. *Landnamábók* and *The sagas of Icelanders* are full of people of noble origin, and it is not surprising that this also accounts for some of those being given a literary ship burial. The last and most compelling example is, however, that of Geirmundr Hjǫrsson Heljarskinn (no. 7) in the early versions of *Landnamábók*. In *Hauksbók* (*Landnamábók* [1900]:38), *Sturlubók* (*Landnamábók* [1900]:161), and *Melabók* (*Landnamábók* [1900]:239) he is from a line of petty-kings from Rogaland, ousted by King Haraldr hárfagri's conquest of western Norway. This line, *Melabók* elaborates, descends from an *Afuallz* at *Afuallz nesi*, the mythological King Avald/Ǫgvaldr from Karmøy. The name Avald means the 'very powerful' or the 'horrifying, powerful' leader or king (Brink 2018; Mundal 2018:46), and in that sense the use of king Avald is similar to the use elsewhere in the invented Icelandic genealogies, for example that of Haraldr hilditǫnn ('wartooth') as ancestor of Rafn hinn heimski from Trondheim (Jónsson 1900:103–4, 216, 235). Nevertheless, it is an odd coincidence that mythological kings from both the areas with the highest concentration of archaeological examples of monumental ship graves, Vestfold and Karmøy, are cited as ancestors for prominent persons who are given ship burials in the Icelandic high medieval tradition. It could be that this tradition still contained some memory of monumental ship burials made for kings and queens in these places. These memories – inserted in a plausible context with accepted mythological figures – were used to connect important Icelanders with the rulers of ancient kingdoms, confirming the high medieval Icelandic audience's conviction of descent from noble origin. In the same light we may also understand the efforts of Snorri's fosterfather, Jón Loptsson, and of Jón's grandfather, Sæmundr the Wise, to trace their clan, the Oddaverjar, back to the Skjǫldungar (Acker 2007:3).

There is a ritual aspect of the two ship burials mentioned in *Skjǫldungar saga* and *Ynglingar saga* (nos. 8 and 12) that has no counterpart in the archaeological record: the cremation of the deceased on a drifting ship. Indeed, remains of a floating, burning Viking ship may survive archaeologically, as demonstrated by the Hedeby 1 longship (Crumlin-Pedersen 1997), but the chance, if it ever happened, that it would be discovered and correctly interpreted as a funeral remains extremely slim. The absence of archaeological evidence thus does not rule out the possibility of real-life events as models for these funerals. However, the lack of control over such a ritual, with the prospect of having the half-burned corpse of the deceased wash up on a nearby shore, is decidedly unpractical; as a poetic ideal, it would work out very well (Newton 1993:50). The burial of a mythological ancestor in this way would not only demonstrate a supernatural presence – which would ensure the successful transformation of the body – but would also explain the absence of any burial mound for the ancestor. The marine cremations of *Skjǫldungar saga* and

Ynglingar saga also bear another common, otherwise unique feature among the late literary ship burial traditions. In both cases the burial is decided upon by the dying king, who in this manner takes control over his own destiny. Both elements can be found in the early literary traditions.

5.2.2 Early traditions

The later written sources suggest that the ship burial rituals in the late Iron Age lived long enough in collective memory to preserve information about ritual differences within the Scandinavian world. It also preserved vague links between the monumental remains of these rituals and the kings and queens of the past. But some of them pointed back to traditions that were mythological, rather than practical, in character, and which indicated a supernatural dimension. Moreover, the later sources give next to no indication – apart from the show of homage – of the meaning behind the rituals. The three remaining sources, to which focus will now turn, may do exactly that. Continuing with the reception history approach, the section will begin with one of the two younger of them, the *Húsdrápa*, and its description of the ship funeral of Baldr in only six preserved half-stanzas.

Húsdrápa

Húsdrápa is partly preserved in *Skáldskaparmál* in Snorri's 'Prose Edda', but the poem is also mentioned in *Laxdæla saga* which dates from 1230–60 (*Laxdœla saga* [1934]:xxv, lxxvii–lxxx). Here it is said that Úlfr Uggason composed the text for Óláfr Hoskuldsson and presented it at the celebration of the marriage of Óláfr's daughter. The *Húsdrápa* is conventionally dated to c. 978–85, although North has argued for a dating as late as c. 995 (North 2007:400–1). The preserved parts mainly describe scenes on the wooden panels of Óláfr's new-built hall, but also include praise of Óláfr. The six half-stanzas on Baldr's funeral are thus a first-hand account of the depictions, but a second- or perhaps rather third-hand account of the mythological beliefs behind them. What were these beliefs? Did they spring from the mind of Óláfr Hoskuldsson, or from the artisans that built his hall for him, thus expressing late 10th-century Icelandic pagan mythology? Or did they come from somewhere else?

Húsdrápa is difficult to interpret due to its fragmentary nature, and because it was not necessarily reproduced by Snorri in the same order as it was originally composed; not even all manuscripts of *Skáldskaparmál* have all its stanzas in the same order. Thus a number of different editions exist, providing different interpretations of the poem. One is North's from 2007, in which he emphasises that the poem originally was above all a poem in praise of Óláfr Hoskuldsson, a fact that should be the

starting point for reconstructing and interpreting it. Based on this precondition, he reads a key fragment of a half-stanza in a radical new way, of particular interest in the context of this chapter; discussion will return to his reading after devoting attention to an important detail in *Laxdæla saga*.

Chapter 29 in the saga explains in some detail how Óláfr went to Norway and spent two winters there to obtain the timbers for the hall from jarl Hákon (*Laxdœla saga* [1934]). As has been noted, the saga was composed much later than the poem and the events surrounding it, but the information that the timbers would be brought in from Norway is likely true, given the state of forests in Iceland. More surprising and therefore also uncertain is the information about the length of the stay; the felling and transport of the timber down to the coast should not take more than one winter. However, if the timbers were not only felled in Norway, but the elements for the hall building also produced and decorated with carvings there, a two-year stay would have been necessary. At the household of jarl Hákon, timbermen and woodcarvers in sufficient numbers and with appropriate skills to produce a spectacular hall building over a short period of time would have been available – as may not quite have been the case in Iceland. Further, a prefabrication would reduce significantly the amount of timber to be transported across the North Atlantic. Indeed *Laxdæla saga* does not mention such a flurry of activities during Óláfr's stay in Norway. Instead, it has him spending the first winter at the farm of Giermund gnýr, a retainer of jarl Hákon who later turns out to become his son-in-law. North (2007:402–3), for a number of reasons, rejects the credibility of the saga when it comes to the story about Giermund gnýr, a viewpoint which of course also would encompass information about the duration of the stay. But then there is his reading of the above-mentioned key fragment of *Húsdrápa*.

The fragment consists of the incomplete sentence *hlaut innan svá minnum,* which occurs twice in the preserved text, as the last lines in the stanzas 6 and 9 in North's numbering. The traditional readings assume that 'the hall' is the missing subject in the sentence, rendering the complete sentence as 'the hall had decorations on the inside'. But pointing to the fact that the poem is dedicated the praise of Óláfr, North (2007:397–9; see also North et al. 2011:585–7) suggests that it is Óláfr who is the subject of the refrain-like sentence. He further points out that *innan* in a maritime context also may have the meaning 'from the east' or 'from Norway'; a more precise interpretation perhaps could be that in/innan would point to the waters inside the skerries and islands along the Norwegian coast, while út/útan would point to the open waters outside these. Following North, *hlaut innan svá minnum* should thus be read 'He [Óláfr] got it [the house] from Norway with images like this' (North 2007:399; North et al. 2011:585–7). If this is indeed the intended meaning, it seems to confirm the hypothesis suggested above: that the carvings in Óláfr's hall actually were produced by jarl Hákon's craftsmen – and thus also a product of his or their thinking. *Húsdrápa* several times emphasises the good relations between Óláfr and Hákon jarl, and North (2007:403–4) suggests that the text's agenda

may not only have been to glorify Óláfr, but also to cast him as Hákon jarl's man in Iceland. If indeed the jarl considered Óláfr in such a role, the decorated hall may also be considered more than an awe-inspiring proof of the friendship. With its heathen pictorial programme it may also have been intended as an export of Hákon's pagan revivalism, which unfolded from the point when he broke his allegiance to the Danish King Haraldr Gormsson blátǫnn in 975 until his death in 995. If so, the carved scene in Óláfr's hall of Baldr's funeral is not illuminating the late 10th-century Icelandic mythology associated with ship burial, but rather that of the elite in central and northern Norway.

Baldr's funeral is also described by Snorri in *Gylfaginning* in somewhat greater detail. Because Snorri himself states that *Húsdrápa* described Baldr extensively, it is likely that the additional material in *Gylfaginning* comes from the former source, given that Snorri had access to a more extensive version of the poem. But at least one stanza in *Gylfaginning* about Baldr's death is from another, unknown poem, possibly older than *Húsdrápa* but also describing his burial. We should thus consider the few stanzas in *Húsdrápa* and Snorri's more extensive text in *Gylfaginning* as expressions of a number of different receptions of the original myth: the one actually depicted in Óláfr's hall; Úlfr Uggason's interpretation of that; Snorri's interpretation of *Húsdrápa*; and possibly Snorri's interpretation of another, now lost poetic source, possibly from before Hákon's pagan renaissance.

In *Húsdrápa* it is made very clear that Baldr's burial was a cremation, as the pyre is mentioned several times. Further crucial pieces of information are found in what is conventionally numbered as stanza 11, which reads that the giantess of the mountains, Hildr, *fram haf-Sleipni þramma*. The phrase *haf-Sleipni* is a play on 'sea-Sleipner', a suitable kenning for a godly ship, but also a very common kenning for longships in other contexts. Therefore, neither Lindow's (1997) suggestion that its use is an allusion to the role of horses as means of post-mortem transport in Norse cosmology, nor the observation that Sleipner is the horse that Hermod used in his futile attempt to rescue Baldr from Hades need to be of great relevance for the interpretation. Of greater interest are the adverb *fram* and the verb *þramma*, because this is what the giant does to the ship; Lindow, following Turville-Petre (1976; Lindow 1997:76), translates *þramma* as 'trudge', while North (2007) uses the word 'trundle'; both translate *fram* as 'forward'. Both thus indicate that the ship is moved forward by the giantess, but also that this requires a certain effort on her part – it is a feat of strength, not a casual act. Since the original order of the stanzas remains unknown, this episode's place in the sequence of *Húsdrápa* is subject to interpretation: either occurring as a preparation for the funeral, bringing the ship in place, or later, during the ceremony. Lindow (1997:81), inspired by Ibn Fadlan's account, suggests that the giantess was moving the ship up onto the funeral pyre. Placing a cremation ship on top of a pyre makes sense, since sufficient room was needed for large quantities of firewood to guarantee a successful cremation and the shipboard space was to be used for the funeral rituals. But this is a controversial reading that

not even Lindow places full stock in, concluding that "Snorri, it seems, thought that the funeral ship was launched" (Lindow 1997:84). North (2007:371) and Turville-Petre (1964:109) are further examples of the conventional understanding of *Húsdrápa* on this point.

As stated, Snorri's description of the burial in *Gylfaginning* is richer in details than in *Húsdrápa*. It is likewise described as a cremation funeral (Sturluson [1982]:46.24, 46.34–7, 47.6). The text has a clear structure, and there is no uncertainty as to the sequence in which the events unfold. First, the gods bring Baldr's corpse to the coast in order to arrange his cremation on his ship (46.22–4). Next, they call for the giantess because they cannot move the ship without her powerful assistance (46.24–32). Only after that is Baldr's corpse carried onto the pyre; his wife Nanna dies and is placed on the pyre too, the fire is lit and Thor blesses it with his hammer, in the process kicking a dwarf into the flames (46.32–7). Here the chronological narrative ends, and in the following part the attendees to the funeral are described in order of rank (46.38–47.4). At this place is found the only contradiction between the two narratives: *Húsdrápa* explicitly states that Freyr is riding first, whereas *Gylfaginning* has Óðinn first (North 2007:391). In the final part of the description of Baldr's funeral, the text lists the grave gifts, namely the golden ring Draupnir and Baldr's horse with gear (47.4–7). It is thus clear that Hyrrokkin's moving of the ship takes place before, and as a part of, the preparations for placing Baldr on the pyre. But as in *Húsdrápa*, there is no clear evidence in *Gylfaginning* that the ship is actually launched. The crucial passage is when the intention of the gods to use Baldr's ship for the cremation is spelled out: *Hann vildu goðin fram setja ok gera Þar á bálfǫr Baldrs*. Lindow suggests that it be read literally, as 'put forward', to allow for his Ibn Fadlan-inspired reading, but he presents the conventional reading of the phrase as meaning 'launch' (Fritzner 1973:216; Lindow 1997:84). However, since *setja* also occurs alone in relation to ships in a number of other Norse texts from around 1000, with the meaning 'directing' or 'steering', Lindow is correct in supposing that *setja fram* is not necessarily a fixed compound and may be read more generally as moving the ship forward. The question can be discussed further on the basis of other acts in the story that relate to the ship, namely Hyrrokkin's moving it, the placing of the corpses of Balder and Nanna, the unfortunate dwarf Litr, the ring Draupnir and Baldr's horse. Table 5.5 shows various translations of *Gylfaginning's* wording at these points. Apparently, only when Baldr is brought onto the pyre is a term is used that could indicate that the ship is in the water, and not on land; Baldr's body is *borit út á skipit*, 'carried out on the ship', while everything else is brought 'on' or 'into'. Considering that Hringhorni is *allra mesta skipa*, 'the greatest of all ships', we may consider if 'out on the ship' could mean that the dead god is being carried out on the vast expanse of Hringhorni's deck, rather than out on the ship in the water? Notably, in contrast to the two marine cremations that Snorri and the author of *Skjǫldungar saga* account for King Haki and King Sigurðr, here there is no description of how the ship sails away. It is further apparent that Hyrrokkin's violent moving of the ship is taking place on land; the consequences

Tab. 5.5: Gylfagynning's wording and various translations of actions related to Baldr's cremation.

	Intention of the god	**Hyrrokkin's act**	**The placing of Baldr**	**The placing of Nanna**	**The placing of Litr**	**The placing of Draupnir**	**The placing of Baldr's horse**
Gylfaginning	"setja fram"	"hratt fram"	"borit út á skipit"	"borin á bálit"	"hratt honum í eldinn"	Lagði á bálit	Leiddr á bálit
Nyerup 1808	"trække ud"	"skjød Skibet ud"	"baaret ud paa Skibet"	"lagt på bålet"	"sparked [. . .] op i Ilden"	"kastede [. . .] på Bålet"	"ført på Bålet"
Cnattingius 1819	"draga det ut"	"sköt skeppet ut"	"utburit på skeppet"	"laggd på bålet"	"upp i elden"	"kastade på bålet"	"lades ock på bålet"
Jessen 1867	"sætte frem"	"drev det frem"	"bares [. . .] ut på Skibet"	"båren på Bålet"	"slyngede ham i Ilden"	"lagde på Bålet"	"ledtes på Bålet"
Sander 1893	Ikke direkte oversetelse						
Jonsson 1902	"skyde ud i Søen"	"stødte det frem"	"baaret ud på Skibet"	"baaret ud på Skibet"	"sparkede ham [. . .] ind I Baalet"	"lagde på Bålet"	"blev ført på Bålet"
Lauridsen 2013	"sætte frem"	"drev det fremad"	"båret ud på skibet"	"blev lagt på bålet"	"sendte ham ind i ilden"	"lagde [. . .] på bålet"	"blev ført på bålet"

are an earthquake and a fire, not a tsunami. The murder of Baldr heralded Ragnarök and thus made him the first victim of the last battle, and fits well with the later tradition of connecting cremation and the warrior-death. But as enumerated above there are a number of reasons to question whether *Húsdrápa*, as well as the original wood carvings in Óláfr's hall and the Baldr-myth behind them, served as inspiration for the later examples of marine cremation burials. Could the idea of the marine burial come from another side, perhaps the one represented in the *Beowulf*?

Beowulf

The *Beowulf* poem is preserved in the Nowell Codex of the Cotton Vitellius A.XV manuscript, now in the British Library. The Codex can be dated on orthographic evidence to the years around 1000, but the *Beowulf* section of it is clearly a transcript, and thus a copy of an older document (Newton 1993:2–10). The debate about the composition date of the poem itself has been raging for decades, with suggestions ranging from the 6th century up to the time of the preserved manuscript's fabrication around 1000 – or even later. The dispute has been productive in leading to a refinement and solidification of the arguments for an early date, while a similar development cannot be found for the opposite (Chase 1981; Frank 2007; Neidorf [ed.] 2014; Damico 2015; Neidorf 2016). A number of indications in the text, especially the lack of Scandinavian loan words, suggests that the composition pre-dated the strong Scandinavian influence on Old English (OE) from the 9th century onward, and Newton (1993:10–17) has suggested a composition date in the 8th century, a proposition that we shall follow here for the OE version.

In a recent book Gräslund has evaluated the poem from an archaeological perspective. He concludes that the poem is set in an early to mid-6th century environment, and that it was composed in south-eastern Scandinavia in the late 6th century (Gräslund 2018:33–42). The new dating and provenance is based on a comparison of the poem's material environment, especially in terms of golden rings and chain mail, with the material culture of England and Scandinavia in the 6th to 11th centuries, which he finds to favour a Scandinavian origin. He further suggests that the poem was brought to East Anglia very early, perhaps already around 600, with a skald accompanying an east-Scandinavian bride travelling to marry an East Anglian prince at Rendlesham, thus bringing with her not only the poem, but also the ship burial custom (Gräslund 2018:178–85). Given the (for Gräslund) uncorrupted descriptions of Scandinavian material culture, he suggests that the poem was written down in its first Anglian version shortly after this time, and thus significantly earlier than within the 685–725 timespan suggested by several English scholars (Gräslund 2018:34).

According to Gräslund, the archaeology is crucial to his dating of the poem, and with that also to the transmittal of the idea of royal ship burials to England:

> The decisive [argument, author's comment] is, however, that there is no archaeological materiality in the poem which does not belong in the Migration Period, and nothing which exclusively belongs in the Vendel Period. (Gräslund 2018:42, author's translation)[3]

Yet, there is something. The poem on several occasions makes references to sailing (lines 36, 1429, 1898, 1905, 1906 in Slade's numeration, Tab. 5.6), very clearly showing that it plays out in an environment where the use of sail was well known and practised. It was thus meaningful to suggest a mast on a grave ship in a burial taking place some generations before the events described in the poem. Gräslund (2018:217) states that it is 'unthinkable' that Scandinavians and Anglo-Saxons should not be familiar with sailing, but there is very little evidence for the use of sail in Scandinavia until the 8th century. Rowed ships without sail are known from the 3rd and 4th centuries from Nydam in south-western Denmark, from the late 7th or 8th century from Kvalsund in western Norway, and with some uncertainty from the Storhaug and Grønhaug ships from the late 8th century. The Salme II ship burial from the mid-8th century has some constructional features that indicate it to be a sailing ship (Peets et al. 2012:44). The Oseberg ship, built c. 820, is the oldest preserved example of a Scandinavian-built sailing ship; considering the elaborate constructions supporting its mast, it is obvious that its construction was preceded by that of other sailing ships.

The Gotlandic picture stones are an indispensable source to Iron Age seafaring in the Baltic, but the datings of the different stones are disputed. They begin to show the use of rowing vessels in the 5th–6th centuries, according to Varenius (1992:82), who has studied those of the stones showing ships. The earliest, simple depictions of ship with sails are in Varenius' group II, which he dates broadly within the 7th–9th centuries. Imer (2004:106), however, included 11 of Varenius' 32 group II stones in her analysis based more broadly on pictures and ornamentation, and rejected datings prior to the second half of the 8th century for these. From around 800 a more widespread use of sailing ship pictures is evident in Scandinavia, mainly on rune stones and famously on the Hedeby coins (Malmer 1966; Varenius 1992).

The old *futhark* inscription on the Eggja runic stone from western Norway has been suggested as early evidence for the use of sail, with a dating to the 7th century grounded on archaeological and art-historical evidence. This is based on one of several suggested interpretations, which sees the text as a commemoration of victims of a shipwreck caused by a failing rig (Grønvik 1985). Although this reading is peculiar in suggesting that *keiper* could be placed in the mast top (Grønvik 2002) – that word is only known to have been used for oar tholes – the terminology used for the

3 In Sweden, the Migration Period constitutes 400–550, the Vendel Period 550–790.

Tab. 5.6: Excerpt of Slade's translation of *Beowulf*, lines 26–63.

Him ðá Scyld gewát tó gescæphwíle	**26**	Then Scyld departed at the destined time,
felahrór féran on fréan waére·		still in his full-strength, to fare in the protection of the Lord Frea;
hí hyne þá ætbaéron tó brimes faroðe		he they carried to the sea's surf,
swaése gesíþas swá hé selfa bæd		his dear comrades, as he himself had bid,
þenden wordum wéold wine Scyldinga	**30**	when he yet wielded words, that friend of the Scyldings,
léof landfruma lange áhte·		beloved ruler of the land, had ruled for a long time;
þaér æt hýðe stód hringedstefna		there at the harbour stood with a ringed-prow,
ísig ond útfús æþelinges fær·		icy and keen to sail, a hero's vessel;
álédon þá léofne þéoden		they then laid down the beloved prince,
béaga bryttan on bearm scipes	**35**	the giver of rings and treasure, in the bosom of the boat,
maérne be mæste· þaér wæs mádma fela		the mighty by the mast; many riches were there,
of feorwegum frætwa gelaéded·		from far-off lands ornate armour and baubles were brought;
ne hýrde ic cýmlícor céol gegyrwan		I have not heard of a comelier keel adorned
hildewaépnum ond heaðowaédum		with weapons of battle and war-dress,
billum ond byrnum· him on bearme læg	**40**	bill-blades and byrnies; there lay on his breast
mádma mænigo þá him mid scoldon		many treasures, which with him must,
on flódes aéht feor gewítan·		in the power of the waves, drift far off;
nalæs hí hine laéssan lácum téodan		in no way had they upon him fewer gifts bestowed
þéodgestréonum þonne þá dydon		with the wealth of a nation, than those did
þe hine æt frumsceafte forð onsendon	**45**	who him in the beginning had sent forth
aénne ofer ýðe umborwesende·		alone upon the waves being but a child;
þá gýt híe him ásetton segen gyldenne		yet then they set up the standard of gold,
héah ofer héafod· léton holm beran·		high over head; they let the sea bear,
géafon on gársecg· him wæs geómor sefa		gave to the ocean, in them were troubled hearts,
murnende mód· men ne cunnon	**50**	mourning minds; men cannot
secgan tó sóðe seleraédenne		say for certain, (neither) court-counsellors
hæleð under heofenum hwá þaém		(nor) heroes under heaven, who received that
hlæste onféng.		cargo.
I		
Ðá wæs on burgum Béowulf Scyldinga		Then was in boroughs, Beowulf the Scylding (Beaw),
léof léodcyning longe þráge		beloved king of the people a long age
folcum gefraége –fæder ellor hwearf	**55**	famed among the folk –his father having gone elsewhere,
aldor of earde– oþ þæt him eft onwóc		elder on earth– until unto him in turn was born
héah Healfdene héold þenden lifde		high Half-Dane, he ruled so long as he lived
gamol ond gúðréouw glæde Scyldingas·		old and battle-fierce, the glad Scyldings;
ðaém féower bearn forðgerímed		to him four sons in succession
in worold wócun weoroda raéswan:	**60**	woke in the world, the leader of the legions:
Heorogár ond Hróðgár ond Hálga til·		Heorogar and Hrothgar and good Halga;
hýrde ic þæt Ýrse wæs Onelan cwén		I heard that Yrse was Onela's queen,
Heaðo-Scilfingas healsgebedda.		the War-Scylfing's belovèd embraced in bed.

mast top itself is precise and convincingly demonstrates the use of sail. The dating, however, is questionable. Spurkland (2005:70–1) has pointed out that historical linguists would balk at dating the text in isolation to before 800, since it is written in Old Norse, not Proto-Scandinavian. The archaeological date was given by Shetelig who excavated the heavily disturbed grave in 1917, and was based on the paucity of the burial (Grønvik 1985:7–8). Indeed, very sparingly equipped graves without mounds can be found from later periods than the 7th century. Shetelig also provided an art-historical dating, based on the partial horse figure incised together with the runes, which he saw as a typical example of early Vendel style, dating to the 7th century (Grønvik 1985:7–8). However, the figure is not very detailed, and close parallels to it can be found in later contexts, for example an 8th-century copper-alloy figurine found in Ultuna (Hulth et al. 2013:39–40, 66), or the Alskog Tjängvida I picture stone from Gotland, dating to as late as the 10th century (Imer 2004). It thus seems more likely that the Eggja-stone is a late example of the old *futhark* than an early example of Old Norse, and may date to the 8th or even 9th century.

The ship burials themselves may also contribute to the discussion. In the cases where we have firm evidence, the 9th- and 10th-century monumental ship burials are made in sailing ships and have burial chambers placed directly behind the mast. These are the Oseberg, Gokstad, Tune, and Ladby burials. In contrast, the 7th- and 8th-century ship burials from Sutton Hoo 1, Grønhaug, and Storhaug all have their burial chambers placed in the centre of the vessel, and all lack evidence of mast and sail. Poor preservation prohibits categorical exclusion of the notion that some of these may have had masts and rigging, but the central placing of the deceased may reflect what is seen on the rowing vessels of the Gotland picture stones: in the rowed ship, it was the central area that was used for tents or chambers (Fig. 5.16). It may also be noted that the 34 skeletons in the presumed sailing vessel from the Salme II vessel were not placed in the centre of the ship, but towards the north-east, in what was presumably the area behind the mast (Peets et al. 2012).

It can be assumed that the adaptation of sail in Scandinavia took place gradually over space and time. The archaeological and pictorial evidence mentioned above indicate that the sail spread first in the southern areas in the 7th or even early 8th century, and were only later adopted further to the north (e.g. Bill 2009 for this pattern in Viking Age to late medieval shipbuilding in the region). In that case, *Beowulf* itself constitutes a very early testimony for the use of sail in Scandinavia. With a philological dating to around 700 for the Old English text from which MS was copied, the Scandinavian poem from which it was translated was probably from the last decades of the 7th century – which would make it tentatively the first indication that sail had been adopted in southern Scandinavia. This chapter will assume this date for the further discussion of *Beowulf*'s place in the reception history of the monumental ship burial ritual.

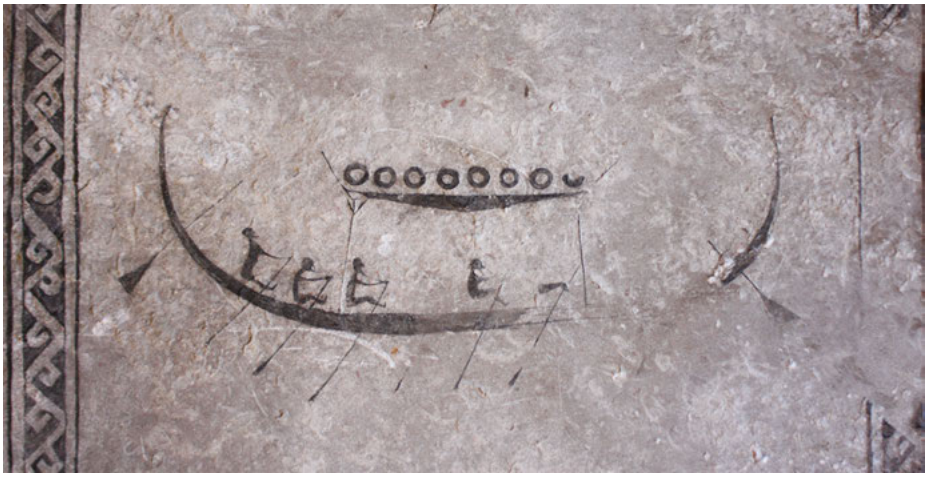

Fig. 5.16: Rowing ship on a picture stone from Sanda church, Gotland. Photo: B. Enderborg.

Beowulf is thus unique to all other written sources on ship graves in that it was not only contemporary with (as Ibn Fadlan's report), but even older than the majority of the archaeological monumental ship burials; only the Snape and Sutton Hoo ones are older than the poem. While the poem well may reflect ideas about older burial rites, it is reasonable to assume that the poem could have an influence on individuals that knew it and were using monumental burials. The *Beowulf* poem, as suggested by Gräslund, must have had the power to inspire the design of ship graves that were built, and is thus not only a reflection of the reception history of the burial rite, but also played a role in its creation. For that reason, the relevant part of the poem, the lines 26–63, deserves to be fully commented upon here, based on the edition and translation by Slade (Tab. 5.6).[4]

The text contains a number of parallels to the later descriptions of ship burials, but also several unique features. No reason is given for Skjǫld's death, only that it arrived at his fated time, and that he was then still a vigorous man (lines 26–7). It is also said, in line 27, that he is going into Frea's protection. Slade notes that Frea can mean both the Christian God and the pagan Freyr, but given the date and the Scandinavian context of the funeral, the latter seems the more likely interpretation. In line 28 Skjǫld, in a parallel to Baldr's burial, is carried to the coast, while lines 29–30 reveal that this was done on his own bidding – Skjǫld himself had, before this death, ordered the format of the burial. This is a parallel found in two other

4 http://www.heorot.dk/beo-intro-rede.html (accessed 28.08.2018).

burials, those of the Skjǫldungar kings Sigurðr hringr and Haki, who also take the arrangement of their funerals into their own hands. Lines 32–3 describe the burial ship as *hringedstefna*, just as Baldr's ship was *hringhorni* in Snorri's account of his burial, and it is ready, even eager, to sail. In this might be discerned another parallel to Sigurðr hringr and Haki's burials. Line 33 states that this is the ship of an "*æþeling*", a prince, something that may relate to it being *hringedstefna*. In 34–6 we learn where Skjǫld is placed in the funeral ship, namely *on bearm scipes* [. . .] *be mæste*, which must mean on the deck of the ship, at the mast, thereby regarding the keel as the back-bone of the ship. This corresponds well with the other written sources, although none of them are as explicit as *Beowulf* on that topic. It also fits well with most of the archaeological burials; a reading where *beærm* was understood as the bow ('breast') of the ship completely lacks archaeological support.

In the following lines 35–41 a description is given of the riches that Skjǫld's followers heap upon him in the ship, a gift list which resamples that of the Sutton Hoo burial. Most of the other archaeological examples of ship burials are either plundered or cremated, but the two that are not – Hedeby and Storhaug – both contain such exotic valuables and weaponry that the poem describes as burial gifts for Beowulf (Wamers 1994; Opedal 1998). Additionally, the rich insular inventory from the Oseberg burial that was left unnoticed by the plunderers of the burial may count as exotic valuables, and perhaps also the peacocks from the Gokstad burial. In lines 41–6 are found two very important pieces of information on the burial. The first is that the burial ship with the corpse and the grave goods will travel out on the sea; in this respect, *Beowulf* can thus have served as an inspiration for the texts describing the funerals of Sigurðr and Haki, and of *Gylfaginning*'s version of Baldr's cremation if it is read as a marine burial. The second piece of information shows that Skjǫld's funeral is not really a disposal of the body – indeed, the entire ritual is explained as an inversion of what happened once upon a time, when Skjǫld first came to the Danes – alone, as a child, sent over the sea, surrounded by rich gifts. It is thus more of a return than a dispatch. This is not a motif that we find in any other descriptions of ship burials apart from the *Life of St. Gildas*, but it is presented in *Æthelweard's Chronicle* from the late 10th century, as discussed below.

It is not said who sent Skjǫld to the Danes; in the closing lines of the prologue, lines 50–3, this question is put centre-stage as something unknowable to man. In this there is a sense of closing a circle, of restoring an order, of Skjǫld going into the protection of Frea. Taken together, this ensures that Skjǫld is embarking on a journey, which is bringing him, in some form, back to the gods who had sent him in the first place. As seen in the archaeological ship burials, the posthumous voyage is also a theme in the physical graves, expressed by the ships 'floating' in the soil and by the presence of by-boats and gangways in Gokstad, Storhaug, and Oseberg.

The lines 53–63 also cited above form the beginning of the *Beowulf* story proper and say nothing about Skjǫld's burial – but they reveal the purpose of the prologue. Over these few lines are described the succession of fathers and sons from Skjǫld to Hrothgar, the king of the Danes at the time in which the poem plays out. Since the *Beowulf* poem in itself is set in bygone times, Skjǫld's mystical occurrence and disappearance after death are rendered as something that happened in the mythical past, thereby establishing a founder of a Danish royal line without actually providing a genealogy up to any king living at the time of the poem's recitation. The poem does give the names of Hrothgar's two sons, Hrethric and Hrothmund, and of his daughter Freawaru, as well as of Hrothgar's siblings and a nephew, Hrotulf, thus offering several openings for expanding on Skjǫld's genealogy, an opportunity which may not have been wasted on contemporary poets, historians, and chroniclers.

Establishing king lists and royal pedigrees leading back to a mythological origin was a widespread but already ancient phenomenon in the medieval world, and the example of *Beowulf* attests to its presence in pre-Viking Age Scandinavia. Generally, such works would point back to ancient heathen gods, mostly Óðinn; to cultural heroes; to figures from the Old Testament; or to combinations thereof. The function of such genealogies has been considered to be primarily ideological, to justify the ruler's claim to power (Scheibelreiter et al. 1998; Sundqvist 2000:155–6), but also as instrumental in forging group identities (Hedeager 2000:40). However, it has been pointed out that as a phenomenon such lists and genealogies are very heterogeneous and that, in spite of the frequent indications towards Scandinavian origins, the majority are probably derived more from Roman and Biblical than from ancient Germanic traditions. In many instances they seem to be products of specific, contemporary needs rather than of inherited lore (Poel 2016). It is in this light that the coexistence of king lists and royal pedigrees should be evaluated *vis-a-vis* monumental ship burials. Before doing so, however, the section below will briefly touch upon the last uncommented example of a ship funeral from Tab. 5.4.

The Vita of St. Gildas

The Latin *Vita of St. Gildas* was composed at some point in the 9th to early 11th century by the monks of St. Gildas-de-Ruys at Morbihan in Brittany. The original is lost, and it is known today from an early 17th-century edition by John à Bosco, *Floriacensis vetus bibliotheca*. Here, the discussion will rely solely upon Cameron's (1969) examination of the relevant parts of the *Vita*. Cameron demonstrates that in the section on St. Gildas' death and burial, the *Vita* shows very close resemblances to the narrative of Skjǫld's funeral in *Beowulf*. During his life, Gildas founded two monasteries, one in Britain and one in Brittany. The *Vita* describes how Gildas, to avoid strife about which

abbey should keep his remains after his death, issues instructions about his funeral. He is to be put in an unmanned ship, his shoulders resting on his tombstone, and the ship shall be pushed out to drift on the sea, thereby placing the choice of his final resting place in the hands of God. Miraculously the ship is found three months later near the abbey at Rhuys, hence this is where his remains are buried. The scene was apparently incorporated into the *Vita* to explain and justify why the remains of St. Gildas are in Rhuys. This circumstance may offer a hint to the dating of the *Vita*, since the remains of the saint were temporarily evacuated from Rhuys to a third monastery, the Abbey of Saint-Gildas of Châteauroux, between 920 and 1008. The *Vita* may thus have been produced to support the return of Gildas' remains to Rhuys, which would place its composition very close in time to the production of the preserved *Beowulf* manuscript, suggesting that the copying of *Beowulf* indicates a wider interest in that particular poem at that time.

5.2.3 King lists and royal pedigrees in the time and region of the monumental ship burials

King lists and royal pedigrees (the latter characterized by information about the family relations between the various kings) are attested in all the regions where monumental ship graves and ship settings were constructed. No other region is as rich in them as the British Isles, where they exist for early medieval Irish and Anglo-Saxon as well as Welsh kings (Poel 2016:252–3 with references). The oldest preserved royal pedigrees in Anglo-Saxon England are those found for the Wessex and Kent royal lines in Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* from the 730s. A royal genealogy from East Anglia, where the monumental ship burials from Snape and Sutton Hoo are located, is first found in the manuscripts of the *Anglian Collection*, in sections that are believed to derive from an original text composed in the 760–70s (Poel 2016:250). It also appears some decades later in the early 9th-century *Historia Brittonum*. In both these early versions, the lineage of the kings begins with Woden (Óðinn), followed by a Caser or Casser (not the usual Baldæg/Baldr as in most of the other Anglo-Saxon pedigrees), but there are no indications of a link to the *Beowulf* genealogy of Skjǫld. Such a connection between Danish and Anglo-Saxon pedigrees is only established much later, between 871 and 892, when it is found in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*'s genealogies of Alfred the Great. It is also included in Asser's *Life of Alfred* from 893, and it has been suggested that its appearance in the context of Alfred is due to his intensive dealings with Danes (Frank 1997:128–9; Poel 2016:251). In *Chronicon Æthelweardi*, a Latin version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* written c. 980 by Æthelweard, a descendant of King Æthelread I of Wessex, a close link is found to the *Beowulf* poem. In the pedigree for King Æthelwulf, Alfred's father, it is told how a child, surrounded by arms in a boat, drifts ashore in Denmark and becomes king

(Æthelweard n.d. [1962]:31–3). In spite of small differences – the child is Scef and becomes father of Skjǫld, and there are differences in the descendants of Beowulf, Skjǫld's son – there can be no doubt that the *Beowulf* poem and *Chronicon Æthelweardi* are referring to the same origin myth. This is lending further support to the theory that this myth was a stable asset at Anglo-Saxon courts throughout the centuries from when it was brought in and first fixed to parchment in Anglo-Saxon language until the surviving *Beowulf* manuscript was penned in the early 11th century. There is, however, no trace that it adjoined the Anglo-Saxon pedigrees, as these came to form a model for the inclusion of Skjǫld in the Icelandic pedigrees from the 12th century (Bruce 2002:55–6).

Turning to Scandinavia, what has been said about the pedigree of the Skjǫldungar in *Beowulf* above has already exhausted the preserved sources of royal lineages in the Danish realm contemporary to the ship burials. From Norway are known the *Ynglingatal* and the *Háleygjatal*. The latter was, according to Snorri in *Skáldatal* and in *Heimskringla*, composed by Eyvindr skáldaspillir Finnsson, who first was skald for the son of Haraldr hárfagri, Hákon góði, then served another Haraldsson, Haraldr Gráfeldr, before finally becoming skald for Hákon jarl Sigurðarson of Hlaðir; Eyvindr is believed to have lived c. 915 to 990 (Whaley 2012:171). *Háleygjatal*, which praises Hákon jarl (*c* 970–*c* 995) and enumerates his ancestors, is preserved in a number of different manuscripts and is always referred to as the work of Eyvindr skáldaspillir. Based on internal evidence, its date can be set to 985 or shortly thereafter (Poole 2012:195). It is thus later than the period of the archaeological ship burials, but it has been composed within a devoted anti-Christian environment, for the man who provided Óláfr Hoskuldsson the hall with the carvings of Baldr's ship burial, described in *Húsdrápa* (above). Importantly for this analysis, the poem expressively underlines the origin of Hakon jarl's lineage as the fruit of a union between Óðinn and the giantess Skaði (st. 2). It thereby demonstrates that at least shortly after the era of the ship graves – and at a time and probably also in an environment in which the myth of a godly ship burial was still being reiterated – the idea of a godly origin of the ruler was being explicitly promoted – but not one with a ship motif.

Central to the topic at hand because of its focus on Vestfold is the king list *Ynglingatal*, which provides the names, death accounts, and sometimes places of burial for 27 generations of kings. The first 21 of these are Swedish, and the last six are rulers of territories in eastern Norway. Relevantly, it names several kings who ostensibly were buried in Vestfold during the era of the monumental ship graves, and provides these kings with an ancestry squarely based in Uppsala. The poem thus provides the region with the highest density of such burials with an origin myth derived from another region with a very different use of ship symbolism in burials. The question is: does this poem provide any information on origin myths possibly associated with the east-Norwegian ship burials? Crucial in this context is of course the date of *Ynglingatal*, and thereby its relevance as a source to royal

burials in 8th and 9th century, as well as the purpose of the poem; how should the information presented therein be regarded?

Ynglingatal is almost exclusively preserved through Snorri's *Ynglingar saga* in *Heimskringla*, which Snorri claims was composed by Þjóðólfr ór Hvíni, a skald who, he writes, served in the retinues of Haraldr hárfagri and other 9th-century kings (Marold et al. 2012:4–6). Þjóðólfr and his biography are known exclusively through Snorri, and there is little corroborating evidence. The poem *Haustlǫng* and a few other works are ascribed to him, but the only one of these that connects him to Haraldr is five stanzas of a praise poem with a quite uncertain attribution (Fulk 2012) and two *lausavísur* from Haraldr's court that Snorri provides in *Haralds saga hins hárfagra*, ch. 26 and 35. Snorri's attribution, if accepted, indicates a date for *Ynglingatal* to the later 9th century or around 900. However, opinions on the date of composition differ, with suggestions ranging from the mid-9th to the early 13th century, and the discussion is ongoing (e.g. Krag 2012; Dusse 2013:76–8). The main proponent for a late date today is Krag (1991, 2012), but the arguments he has put forward for it were quickly met with critique (e.g. Andersson 1992; Fidjestøl 1994; Oskarsdóttir 1994) and have been convincingly refuted on linguistic grounds by Sapp (2000) and more extensively by Skre (2007). In *Poetry from the Kings' Sagas,* Marold et al. (2012:6) conclude that "Overall, then, a convincing case has not been made against the authenticity of the poem as a ninth-century creation", and since 2012 further linguistic and metrical arguments for an early date have been brought forwards, most notably by Myrvoll (2014). A few scholars have suggested a less specific date for the poem, seeing it as an entity that was continuously transformed over time, and thus today is composed of fragments from many different points in time (Norr 1998; Dusse 2013; Myhre 2015:122). It is, however, difficult to see how metrical characteristics, as demonstrated by Sapp and Myrvoll, should survive well in such a process, even in a poem written in *fornyrðislag*. Thus, in the current context, the most challenging scenario, the conventional late 9th-century date or a date around 900, is also the most plausible. In that case, the date of the poem falls in the middle of the chronological range for the dendrochronologically dated ship burials from Østfold and Vestfold. The later of the east-Norwegian royal burials in *Ynglingatal* thus could have taken place around the time of the Oseberg ship burial, and shortly before or at the same time as the Gokstad, Tune, and Borre burials. The question thus arises: is it possible to conceive that both the royal burials in the *Ynglingatal* and the presumed royal burials in the ship graves take place within the same landscape at the same time? That depends on *what* the poem is actually meant to say about its kings.

It is necessary to remark that despite the many attempts to connect the east-Norwegian ship graves to the individual kings and queens mentioned in *Ynglingatal*, these have largely been disproved through dendrochronological dating of the graves in the early 1990s (Myhre 1992c, 1992a, 1992d, 1992b), as well as through new osteological analyses of the Gokstad and Oseberg skeletons in 2009 (Holck 2009a, 2009b). More fundamentally, however, these discussions were all based on an acceptance of

a genealogical link between the king list in *Ynglingatal* and the Hárfagri dynasty that today is understood as entirely a 12th-century construction (Skre 2007:407). The discussion of the identity of the individuals in the ship graves as early members of the Hárfagri' dynasty is thus obsolete. The dates of the individual east-Norwegian kingships mentioned in *Ynglingatal* cannot be calculated based on any historical events associated with Hárfagri or his descendants and occur, as far as they are historical at all, at indistinct times within the early Viking Age and the centuries before.

The poem itself contains some hints to its history. It is clearly divided in two parts, evident through a change in the naming principles between the Swedish and the Norwegian group of kings, but also by rarely naming the burial places of the former, but frequently of the latter. Therefore, it has long being suggested that the first part of the poem includes an older, Swedish king list, which was incorporated in order to provide an ancestry to the east-Norwegian kings listed in the second part of the poem (Myhre 1992d:13; Marold et al. 2012:5–7). Thus, the poem's first part has a history that may extend beyond the 9th century. The divide, however, is transgressed by another characteristic to which several scholars have called attention, even if it has been ignored by many more: the derogatory language of the poem, assigning to many of the kings rather humiliating fates, especially when compared to the ideal of a warrior death. Already Snorri was aware of this characteristic and in the very first lines of his prologue to *Heimskringla*, just before introducing *Ynglingatal*, he makes a specific reference to this kind of poetry as being *sǫguljóð til skemmtanar*, 'historical poems for entertainment' (Birgisson 2008:207, 237). The phenomenon has been commented upon by modern scholars (e.g. Lönnroth 1986:91), but the most strident critique of the understanding of *Ynglingatal* as a genealogical poem on this basis is provided by Birgisson (2008). His understanding of the work is that it is a libel poem, a *nið*, composed not for, but against the kings mentioned in it. Since Þjóðólfr of Hvinir is on Hárfagri's side, the poem must therefore be directed against kings in eastern Norway who are Hárfagri's opponents. Based on the historical sources regarding the political situation in eastern Norway in the 9th century, Birgisson concludes that these were most likely to be the "the Swedish and the Danish neighbours of the newly established Norwegian dynasty" (Birgisson 2008:491).

Critiques against Lönnroth's and Birgisson's readings have been raised in turn, noting that some of the types of deaths claimed as indicative of *nið* are in fact characteristic for legends of kings (Marold et al. 2012:8). As well, other explanations for the unusual character of the poem have been suggested, for example as a grotesquerie that should be understood within a carnivalesque tradition (Oskarsdóttir 1994). Very relevant to the discussion at hand is Goeres' analysis from 2015. Here she sees – partly based on Birgisson – the bizarre deaths of the Swedish kings in the poem as mnemonic devices employed to make these kings memorable to the audience in the absence of any physical monuments, whereas referring to the

mounds in the landscape serves the same function for the east-Norwegian kings (Goeres 2015:46–50).

It thus appears that no authoritative understanding of *Ynglingatal* exists. The indication is that it may well be of late 9th century date, but its affiliation with Haraldr hárfagri rests entirely on Snorri's testimony about the identity and biography of its composer. Even if one accepts that it was written for Haraldr, it is not certain whether it was written to praise his lineage, or rather to ridicule those of his adversaries, and thereby does little to help understand the identity of the rulers it describes. In a wider perspective, written sources from the time of the ship burials and further into the late Viking Age show us that ideas of royal lineage and their elevated origin – whether from gods or cultural heroes – did exist at that time, in multiple different genres and for different needs. Not surprisingly, the few examples that have survived up to the present day are those of the few lineages or kingdoms that continued into or were established in the 12th and 13th centuries, when history-writing began in Scandinavia. The exceptional survival of the Skjǫldungar's genealogy in *Beowulf* shows us that such origin myths also existed in Scandinavia long before the Viking Age, and for kingdoms that had not yet developed into the form about which the later historians would write. It is difficult to imagine that there should not have been many other such origin myths, and the first part of *Ynglingatal* may indeed contain the remnants of one, even if it may be Swedish rather than Norwegian. *Háleygjatal*, on the other hand, created after the jarls of Hlaðir had ascended to the Norwegian throne, demonstrates that the production of origin myths continued throughout the Viking Age. Throughout the era and area within which the monumental ship graves were used, there also existed traditions of using origin myths and royal genealogies to reinforce the ideological foundations for kingship. In at least one case, such a tradition implicates a relationship between ship burials and origin myths. Remembering Warmind's word of caution that archaeology is a better source for the study of early religion than biased texts, this chapter will now let the archaeological ship burials form the basis for a theory of their genesis to see whether it can be developed further in combination with the written sources.

5.3 Towards a synthesis

5.3.1 Monumental ship burial rituals – an interpretation

As shown above, the use of monumental ship symbolism in funeral contexts goes back to the decades before and around 600 for both ship inhumation burials and ship settings, while conclusive evidence for ship cremations is more elusive and possibly not older than the Viking Age. It is evident that all three funeral forms are

monumentalised versions of burial rites that were in use in in Scandinavia during the preceding centuries. Thus, boat inhumation burials have been sporadically attested from the Neolithic, the Bronze Age, and the early parts of the Iron Age before becoming more frequent from the Migration Period onward (Müller-Wille 1970). Burials in boat-shaped stone settings were most common in the Bronze Age and Viking Age, but examples are known from the Neolithic as well as various points of the Iron Age (Capelle 1986). Boat cremation graves are not possible to detect unless the cremated vessel contains iron parts, something that occurs only during the Roman Iron Age. It is thus possible that boat cremations also were in use much earlier, but the oldest attested examples date from the Migration Period (Müller-Wille 1970:Catalogue I:89, 177, 261, 265, 268).

The enduring presence of these main forms of funeral use of boat symbolism before the late 6th century constitute a Scandinavian-wide backdrop of tradition against which the new, monumental use of ship symbolism could be pitted. This backdrop also contained other elements, most notably picture stones with ship motifs as seen on Gotland from perhaps as early as the 5th century (Varenius 1992:82). Already long before the first monumental ship setting or ship grave was envisioned, the boat had thus been established as a medium of communication with the otherworld at the occasion of the funeral. In the late 6th and early 7th centuries this ritual tradition, the content of which is little known, was put to new uses in increasingly hierarchical societies. This played out in different ways. Some of the east-Swedish boat grave cemeteries – notably Valsgärde and Vendel – show how the tradition was adapted to serve an elite probably one step below the high kings of Gamla Uppsala. They did so in an outspokenly non-monumental manner that stood in contrast to the massive burial mounds constructed at the same time in Gamla Uppsala (Ljungkvist 2008a; Ljungkvist and Frölund 2015), and also to the oldest well-dated examples of funerals using ship symbolism on a monumental scale, the 90 m long Vejerslev ship setting in western Denmark and the ship graves from Snape and Sutton Hoo. These are adaptations of the older rituals seemingly designed to top the burial hierarchy of their time and place. In the case of Sutton Hoo, their erection and rapid demise can be seen to run in parallel with pagan royal manifestations, the memory of which is preserved in texts only a few generations younger (Carver 2005:503).

A sticking point in the discussion of the ship grave phenomenon, and of Sutton Hoo in particular, is the relationship between East Anglian and Scandinavian use of boat symbolism. In contrast to Scandinavia, the tradition of using entire boats in burial rites was not widespread in England before 600, although a ritual background has been suggested for the reuse of ship planks in some Kentish 6th-century graves (Brookes 2007). The Snape cemetery is therefore highly unusual in holding two or possibly three graves in logboats besides the ship grave; they are, however, thought to be younger than the ship grave and thus do not represent a first introduction of the ritual into the region (Filmer-Sankey and Pestell 2001).

Several scholars have suggested a direct connection between Scandinavia and East Anglia to explain the short-lived ship-burial phenomenon on the western North Sea coast. Especially eastern Sweden has been posited as a fulcrum for these contacts, and not only due to the shared ritual of high-status burials in boats in the late 6th and early 7th centuries. In this view, the notion of direct contact has been attested through the apparent east-Swedish origin of especially two of the very elaborate examples of war-gear in Sutton Hoo: the splendid crested helmet and the similarly sumptuous shield, both of which have close parallels in finds from the mounds in Gamla Uppsala and the Vendel and Valsgärde boat graves (e.g. Maryon 1946:30; Nerman 1948:90; Bruce-Mitford 1978:208; Gräslund 2018:173–85). However, the apparent direct relationship between East Anglia and eastern Sweden only occurs when the regions in between are deemed void of similar objects around 600 – a claim that it is becoming increasingly difficult to uphold. Indeed, the scarcity of richly equipped 6th- and early 7th-century burials that can be noted in parts of Scandinavia other than eastern Sweden (Nørgård Jørgensen 1999:32–5) serves as sufficient explanation for the apparent emptiness. A growing number of metal detector finds further demonstrate that similar ostentatious military equipment was employed among other Scandinavian elites. A gilded copper-alloy ocular found in 2000 at Gevninge close to Lejre is best understood as a fragment of a 6th- or 7th-century crested helmet (Price and Mortimer 2014:523–4). An eyebrow of a quality that rivals that of the Sutton Hoo helmet, dated to the 7th century, was apparently part of a sacrifice placed outside the cult house in Uppåkra (Helgesson 2004:230–1; Larsson 2011:196). And in 2015, a close parallel to the central mount on the forehead of some of the east-Swedish helmets was found at Næs in Gran, one of the most fertile inland landscapes in eastern Norway.[5] Ljungkvist (2008b:18) dates the Vendel grave XII and Valsgärde graves 8 to his Vendel Period phase 1 (560/70–620/30) and Valsgärde 5 and 6 to phase 3 (660–700/10), while Gräslund and Ljungkvist (2011:125) leave the possibility open for a slightly later date for Valsgärde 5 and 6. These helmets all show mounts very similar to the find from Næs, thus providing a dating range for this in the late 6th to early 8th century (Ljungkvist 2008b:18). As the number of such finds grows, a direct connection to eastern Sweden becomes an increasingly implausible explanation for the presence of these objects in the Sutton Hoo burial.

Nor does the choice of a sea craft as burial container necessarily establish a link between eastern Sweden and East Anglia – or for that matter, between Norway and East Anglia, as suggested by Bonde and Stylegar (2016:9). As demonstrated by Crumlin-Pedersen (1991), a rather rich record exists of Scandinavian boat graves from the 1st to 6th century, and it is still growing (e.g. the 1st-century Hedegård boat grave from Jutland in Madsen 1997). The chronological and spatial centre of gravity for this record is at present in 2nd- to 4th-century Scania and Bornholm, but

5 Acquisition number 2015/641, Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo.

it is notable that 5th- to 6th-century boat graves are found also in Jutland. An important addition to Crumlin-Pedersen's map are the two very well-preserved and richly equipped Saxon boat graves from Fallward in Niedersachsen, dated to the 5th/6th century (Schön 1999). Especially one of these, with its contents of highly decorated wooden furniture, copper-alloy and ceramic vessels, and a high-quality late Roman belt set, undoubtedly should be understood as an elite burial. It is thus clear that there were closer sources to inspire East Anglians to use ship symbolism in burials than present-day Sweden or Norway.

Nevertheless, Snape and Sutton Hoo represent something fundamentally new with their combination of unusually large craft and monumental mounds. What is behind this invention? It has been suggested that the Anglo-Saxon use of mound burials was inspired by Merovingian examples, and indeed the most intensive use of the monument form is found in Kent and Sussex, regions most intensively subject to Frankish influence. But monumental, older burial mounds in the Anglo-Saxon landscape – predominantly from the Bronze Age but with monumental examples from Roman times – were reused for burials over wide parts of England and could well have served as inspiration for the construction of the few new monumental mounds. The least likely region to have offered impulses for the barrows at Snape and Sutton Hoo is perhaps the part of Scandinavia closest to East Anglia, where monumental mounds apparently were not constructed at that time (Hedeager 1992:297). A possible exception is Grydehøj at the royal centre of Lejre, with an exclusive cremation grave which two radiocarbon dates on charcoal only broadly place in the 5th–8th century (Andersen 1995:113). By contrast, many of the largest burial mounds in Norway and Sweden – including some of the largest in northern Europe overall – date to the 5th and 6th centuries (Skre 1997; Pedersen et al. 2003:299–320; Ljungkvist 2008a; Ljungkvist and Frölund 2015).

It is thus evident that when the first monumental ship graves were created in East Anglia, their designers could draw upon existing traditions of boat inhumation burials and of barrow burials from a wider area around the North Sea and into the Baltic. The same area also showed a trend towards the construction of monumental grave memorials for the uppermost elite, but only in smaller subregions had ship symbolism appeared as well. The rich boat burials from eastern Sweden also represent a novelty of the time, but with their humble boats and general lack of mounds, they differ starkly from the monumental ship graves.

What could have led to the idea to bury ships in mounds at Snape and Sutton Hoo in the late 6th to early 7th centuries? By focusing on the use of ship symbolism as the core message of the ritual, and consider the form – ship setting or ship burial – only as a frame for representing this, it appears that indeed ship burials are more useful in that particular landscape than ship settings. Monumental mounds were already established as memorials in the landscape, while ship settings were nowhere around. Boat inhumation burials could be found in places closer than Scandinavia, and may have been a more familiar phenomenon. Furthermore, given the region's sandy soil

type, the boulders necessary to construct a ship setting would need to be transported over long distances. Even if the idea of constructing stone burial ships for funerals was part of the Scandinavian impulse for the ship burials that especially Sutton Hoo 1 seem to reflect, the choice of using real ships could have prevailed for practical as well as symbolic reasons.

What would be the possible link between the ship burial in *Beowulf* and the East Anglian ship burials? The Sutton Hoo ship burials were clearly located on what had already been a high-status burial ground, while dramatically overshadowing any earlier burial there. They also mark the culmination of the site; afterward, burials becomes more modest, and towards the middle of the 7th century, the last high-status burials there are established; in the 8th century the site is taken into use as an execution cemetery (Carver 2005:309–12). The entire development of the Sutton Hoo burial site should be seen in the context of the formative years of the East Anglian kingdom as first a pagan but soon a Christian polity (Carver 2005:502–3). The massive investment in the two ship graves must be understood as a response to an urgent need to make manifest the pagan and, to some extent, also 'Scandinavian' character of the rulership. Indeed, Snape can be included as a precursor in this picture, even if knowledge of this site is much more partial (Filmer-Sankey 1992:50). Both cemeteries had since long been abandoned as elite burial sites at the time when the *Beowulf* poem was translated into OE, and it cannot be assumed *a priori* that its myth explains the ship graves in any way. Independently from the intended message of the Snape and Sutton Hoo ship graves, however, if a social memory of them still existed in the 8th century, presumably it would have contributed to the myth's popularity in later Anglo-Saxon England. The myth would have the power to provide content to a rather hollowed out memory of the ship graves, as indicated by the transformed use of the Sutton Hoo cemetery.

The second round of monumental ship inhumation graves appears in the late 8th century, on Karmøy in western Norway. The dates of the two burials are c. 779 and c. 790, one-and-a-half century after the East Anglian ones, but not long after the translation of *Beowulf* into OE. As shown above, these differ from their East Anglian counterparts in a number of respects: orientation, the use of horses, and probably also the expression of a post-mortem journey. These burials could be understood as an import of the ship burial ritual from East Anglia to Norway (Bill 2015; Bonde and Stylegar 2016). By that time, more than one-and-a half centuries after the East Anglian ship funerals took place and the conversion of East Anglian rulers to Christianity shortly thereafter, it could not be the import of a living ritual; but the west-Norwegians could have been inspired from tales still being told about the ship burials, together with the OE version of the *Beowulf* poem. With these components, they would have the essentials of a new ritual in hand: a re-enactment of Skjǫld's burial, but with the use of a real vessel and inhumation burial, rather than the use of stone ships and cremation, as was the practice further south. Arguably, there is little evidence with regard to a direct route of communication along which

this idea would have travelled, even if Bonde and Stylegar (2016:12) have pointed to the presence of Anglo-Saxon glassware in western Norway as documentation for its existence. But as demonstrated by Baug and Skre (2019), western Norway already at that time was well connected with the trade route along the southern North Sea coast, and thus also with Anglo-Saxon England. It is hardly a leap to suppose that ideas also travelled along this route.

Irrespectively of, where the inspiration came from, in the late 8th century two monumental ship burials were constructed on Karmøy within a few years of each other. Given the strategic position of Karmøy (Skre 2014) and the orientation of the two mounds towards the sound between Karmøy and the mainland, it appears likely that their erection was the outward signal of a political shift in the powers controlling this crucial, centuries-old seafaring lane. Many other monuments around the Karmsund testify to the long history of political focus on this sound, and the island undoubtedly had a history of other petty-kingships before the late 8th century. The two monumental and at that time highly unconventional princely graves, with their associated histories of magnificent burials in ships, are likely to represent the introduction of a new political configuration in tandem with a new origin myth justifying rulership. How that myth was formulated, and to what extent it reiterated that of the Skjǫldungar in *Beowulf* remains unknown. Through archaeology, it appears certain that it did include the sending off of the dead ruler in a richly equipped ship, a scene so vividly re-enacted that it left boat, gangway, and broken oars as abandoned requisites in the Storhaug grave as the drama concluded and the mound was erected over the scene.

In 834 two women, about 50 and 70+ years of age, respectively, were put to rest in the Oseberg ship burial in Vestfold in eastern Norway. As the dendrochronological investigations have demonstrated, the ship had been built 14 years earlier in the same area as the ships from the Karmøy ship graves, not far from Karmøy. The burial closely resembles those of Karmøy, especially the earlier of these, the Storhaug burial. The motif of a ship being prepared for a journey is vividly illustrated by the mooring to the stempost, the gangway pulled aboard, and oars lying ready in the oar holes for turning the ship. The dendrochronological and ritual connections between the Karmøy graves and the one from Oseberg – and later Gokstad – are the best evidence for them sharing not only a burial ritual, but also belonging to the same political network or clan. Moreover, the younger of the two women in Oseberg is old enough to have been born between the two Karmøy burials, while the older woman would have been young at that time. Even if the younger woman is to be considered the main figure of the Oseberg burial, she is not too young to have acted as a conveyor of the new burial ritual from western to eastern Norway. She would probably have participated in the Grønhaug burial herself, and the Storhaug burial would still be in fresh memory among people around her as she grew up. Theoretically, she may even have been a daughter of the man buried in Grønhaug. The idea, suggested by Bonde and

Stylegar, that the Oseberg ship came to eastern Norway as a dowry for one of the women buried in the ship, is a very possible explanation for the presence of a west-Norwegian ship in an east-Norwegian grave – and for the introduction of monumental ship burials in eastern Norway (Bonde and Stylegar 2009).

Is it in concordance with current knowledge about Viking Age Scandinavia to interpret the female Oseberg burial along the same lines as male ship burials when considering them as instrumental in transferring power from one ruler to the next? The evidence of rune stones clearly demonstrates that quite frequently, women of the elite would inherit land after their husbands or sons (Sawyer 2000:111–16), with two famous examples being the Tryggevælde and Glavendrup ship settings (Tab. 5.3). More importantly, they could apparently also play important roles in the formation of new ruler dynasties, as demonstrated by Thyra, the queen consort of Gormr 'the old' and mother of Haraldr Gormsson blátǫnn. Thyra was memorialised by a rune stone raised by Gormr at Jelling, on which she was called *tanmarkaR but*, and again by Haraldr on the large Jelling stone. Here he wrote that 'King Haraldr ordered this monument made in memory of Gormr, his father, and in memory of Thyrvé, his mother; that Haraldr who won for himself all of Denmark and Norway and made the Danes Christian.' The meaning of the phrase *tanmarkaR but* is obscure, but is generally understood as 'the one who mended Denmark' (Sawyer 2000:160). What she did, and how, is unknown, but it might have been something the likes of which is explained in *Ragnarssona þáttr* ch IV in *Hauksbók* (*Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda* [1943]). Here, Thyra is identified as the daughter of Haraldr '*klakk*', and the marriage makes it possible for Gormr to include Haraldr's kingdom in his own after Haraldr's death; it thus seems that it was within her capacity as inheritor of her father's kingdom that she becomes *Danmerkr-bót*, her epithet also in *Ragnarssona þáttr*. Birgit Sawyer (2000:158–66) addresses similar ideas in her interpretation of the Thyra inscriptions in Jelling. *Ragnarssona þáttr* is, according to Finnur Jónsson (1923), a late compilation from around 1300, and the family relation between Thyra and Haraldr '*klakk*' is obviously an anachronism, since Haraldr is mentioned in Frankish sources already in the first half of the 9th century. Nevertheless, it is, together with the epithet, also mentioned in *Saga Hálfdanar svarta* (ch. 5) and thus goes back at least to Snorri.

The monumental mound over the Oseberg ship burial was, as were the rune stones of Gormr and Haraldr, an epitaph over a woman, and the explanation for its construction may be parallel to that of Thyra's. Even the younger of the Oseberg women was around 50–55 years old when she died (Holck 2009b:53). If the Oseberg ship was part of her dowry, she was 35–40 years old at the time of marriage, which indicates that this was probably not her first marriage. Could it be that a strong west-Norwegian clan married off a widowed daughter or daughter-in-law to a weaker counterpart in the east in the hopes of establishing itself there? This is of course speculative, but it is a fact that two generations later, very similar ship funerals are taking place in the same region.

Among the male burials, the Gokstad burial is the best preserved, and best documented, of the three east-Norwegian monumental ship burials from around 900. As discussed above, it bears some striking similarities to Storhaug and Oseberg, especially in the concept of the burial drama representing a ship that is afloat. The knowledge of the Tune and Borre ship graves is too fragmentary to say whether they also had such elements in their ritual. As much is possible for at least the Tune ship, with its extensive clay filling. The close chronological and spatial proximity of the later group of eastern ship graves makes it compelling to see them as a response to a situation requiring a stark reinforcement of the morale of the followers of this group of rulers. It is beyond the goal of this work to discuss what that situation was, but the deterioration of royal power in the 9th century, after the death of King Gudfred in 810, may have loosened Danish control over eastern Norway and allowed a new dynasty to establish itself in the area. A possible acute threat around 900 could be the Swedish King Olof 'the brash', who, according to Adam of Bremen and Svend Estridssen, conquered Denmark at that time (Adam et al. 2002:44).

In Denmark and southern Sweden, the use of monumental ship symbolism took another course. The poor dating of the ship settings hinders discussion, but it clear that the greatest investments were made in Scania and present-day Denmark, that is, in the homeland of *Beowulf's* Skjǫld-figure. It is possible that the ship settings, as did the ship burials, saw intensified use in the 10th century, as indicated by the dated monuments at Lejre and Jelling. If so, this intensification would coincide with the increased construction of ship graves in, especially, eastern Norway.

It seems clear that when Haraldr, or possibly his father, builds the Jelling ship setting around the middle of the 10th century, it is meant to be the final word spoken in the language of the monumental ship burials. At 356 m long, it is more than triple the length of any other such monument and shortly thereafter it is rendered part of a past era by the erection of Haraldr's Christian rune stone as part of the complex monument. During the period when the two mounds were erected in the Jelling stone ship, the Oseberg and Gokstad burials, and possibly also other Norwegian ship burials, were defaced (Bill and Daly 2012). Haraldr, with his conquest of Norway and his use of ship symbolism, had both opportunity and motive to command this action, which would give him a monopoly in his lands on the use of the ship burial ritual and its monuments – and thereby on the use of the Skjǫldungar origin myth. Another, completely different explanation is also possible. While it remains unknown where Haraldr's dynasty originated, Adam of Bremen and *Ragnarssona þáttr* claim that Haraldr's father's father was King Harthacnut – *Hardegon* by Adam of Bremen – whom Adam writes came from *Northmannia* (Adam Bremensis n.d. [2002]:chap. 44). In the context that would mean that Harthacnut came either from Normandy or from Norway – in the latter case he could be from the dynasty erecting the ship graves in eastern Norway, and perhaps also the one at Ladby. The defacing of the Viken ship graves would, in this scenery, rather be the deed of Hákon jarl Sigurðarson after his break with Haraldr Gormsson blátǫnn, than Haraldr's.

However the destruction of the Oseberg and Gokstad monuments came about, the picture that subsequent historiographers have conveyed was that the Skjǫldungar, or ship origin myth, was solely a Danish/south-Swedish phenomenon. The picture was perhaps in part inspired by the visible stone ships scattered in the landscape, since Saxo Grammaticus certainly must have seen the four still standing at Lejre in his time. The Norwegian kings, on the contrary, were equipped with an Ynglingar origin devoid of any ship symbolism and of a somewhat dubious character. One can speculate why Snorri would have needed this Ynglingar background so badly for his 'finehair' kings; apart from establishing a 'finehair' claim on eastern Norway, it could also have been an attempt – successful, even – of erasing the memory of earlier kings in that region who had been using, in Snorri's time, an entirely Danish origin myth, with its magnificent ship burials.

Still, in the Icelandic sources the collective memory of the magnificent ship inhumation graves did survive, albeit now removed from any ideas of origin myths, and rather used solely to enhance the greatness of Icelandic families. The stories about ship burials of descendants of Vestfold and Avaldsnes kings may indicate that some memory of the monumental ship graves as real royal burials had survived into the High Middle Ages.

Several monumental ship graves that have not been specifically addressed in this synthesis merit a brief survey. Most remarkable is the ship-chamber grave from Hedeby, which Wamers (1994) has suggested is the grave of Haraldr '*klakk*'. As demonstrated, in spite of its later date, the grave shares features with the Anglo-Saxon graves, whereas it fits poorly with the Norwegian examples. It can certainly be noted that Hedeby around 850 was not a remote place to receive impulses from Anglo-Saxon England, nor was it an unlikely place to invest in royal burial symbolism, situated as it was directly on the border with the Franks. The double symbolism of a ship burial, to be seen from the north, from Denmark, and an elaborate chamber grave to be seen from the Frankish side, is somehow fitting for this location, and also for a person between the Franks and the Danes, such as Haraldr '*klakk*'.

The other Danish monumental ship burial, from Ladby, clearly follows the Norwegian model, but its vessel is low and slender, apparently built in a south-Scandinavian tradition (Bischoff and Jensen 1998). It may represent an east-Norwegian incursion, diplomatic or military, in a period of political instability in Denmark, or even the expansion of the early Jelling dynasty, if the latter indeed originated in Norway. The burial may also simply represent a Danish imitation of the Norwegian ritual.

Regarding the ship graves north of Karmøy, the Fosnes and Vinnan inhumation burials are small, compared with those from western and eastern Norway, and should be understood as emulations of the large ship burials, created by less important chieftains and petty-kings. The cremation burials at Myklebust and Île de Groix are special cases that can only receive superficial treatment with the

methods employed here. If they are indeed as late as has been suggested, they may be understood (at least the Myklebust grave) as 10th-century reactions against Christianisation (Østigård 2015) and connected with the beliefs evidently expressed in the imagery of Baldr's funeral.

5.3.2 The ship graves on Kormt – harbingers of a new era

As this investigation has shown, the two funerals that took place on Karmøy in the last quarter of the 8th century were anything but ordinary, and carried with them a message that was to echo through archaeological and written sources for centuries to come. As far as can be determined on the basis of the finds and texts extant today, these two burials were the first examples in Norway of a magnificent burial rite thanks to which some of the most fantastic treasures have survived from the Migration Period and the Viking Age in northern Europe. The burials also constitute the oldest finds in Norway that would permit a glimpse into how words and materiality were brought together in order to forge myth and reality into a strong foundation for rulership. This is of course an art as old as rulership itself. But by way of a series of unique, tell-tale sources – the *Nowell Codex of the Cotton Vitellius A.xv* that captured the origin myth of the kings of the Danes in such an early version, the miraculously preserved Sutton Hoo 1 ship grave that illustrates what formidable rituals empowered the earliest social memories of ship burials, and the unique Norwegian ship burial record with its details and dendrochronological links – scholars are at last able to study this process in some detail. The last of the fantastic finds that has made this possible is that of Jelling, a monument which better than any other in Scandinavia highlights the urgency with which Viking Age rulers created a tangible and unforgettable version of the past on which their kingdoms rested. Taken together, supported by other finds and sources, the burials reveal the possible embrace across the North Sea of one particular myth, that of a god-sent king who became the ancestor of the royal lineage, but who had to be returned to the gods through a magnificent ship burial. This myth was celebrated at a point in time that lies just beyond the horizon of what is illuminated by the Scandinavian written sources. With that embrace, taking place centuries earlier in what is today Denmark and southern Sweden, a Norwegian clan also set aim on expanding rulership into kingship. Others may have done so previously, but the spread of the monumental ship burial rite in its Norwegian version seems to indicate that this group was met with greater success than any others so far. Traditional historiography ascribes the uniting of Norway to Haraldr 'finehair', and it has not been the aim of this work to discuss whether the monumental ship graves can be attributed to this dynasty, or to its predecessors. In a general way, it seems reasonable to think of the clan behind the ship graves as aspiring to kingship over large parts of Norway. In this way, the ship graves on Kormt were harbingers of a new era in which political

ambitions were growing and ambitious rulers aimed at establishing kingdoms on the same scale as those they could see among Anglo-Saxons and Danes.

By looking at the ship graves on Kormt in this perspective, it opens up a number of compelling questions. Most profound from a Norwegian perspective is the alternative that it offers to the Ynglingar mythology provided by the early historiographers; perhaps several origin myths were being constructed and employed among the inland and coastal petty-kings of the Merovingian and early Viking periods. Is it possible to identify the presence of such myths through monument types and remains of rituals other than the ship graves? Another question is related to the elusive field of ship symbolism and cremations. Can more be done to understand the rituals of these burials? Particularly of the Baldr burial myth? There are also open research avenues into the degree of connections between the Karmøy and the east-Norwegian ship graves – can more be done to illuminate these? Finally, how did the monumental use of the boat burial tradition impact the boat burial tradition from which it developed? Did the latter transform as a new layer of meaning was imposed on it? Ultimately this brief chapter can serve only as a preliminary attempt towards addressing a complex issue, leaving open many questions that can only be answered through multidisciplinary approaches and international cooperation. If the ideas put forward here on a humble scale stimulate future research, then the Kormt ship graves may take on yet another layer of meaning, as harbingers of new research perspectives.

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