LORD AND LADY – *BRYTI* AND *DEIGJA*

SOME HISTORICAL AND ETYMOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF FAMILY, PATRONAGE AND SLAVERY IN EARLY SCANDINAVIA AND ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND

BY

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SOMETIMES RESEARCH CAN BE SUCH FUN. YOU HAPPEN UPON AN illuminating source, a clever word from a fellow-scholar or a passage in a book or an article. You are faced with a problem that you have to solve. It's like a thriller, or as we say in Swedish, a 'pusseldeckare'; you have the *corpus delictum* or better *delicti*, you have some idea of the *modus* and the plot; now you have to find evidence in order to solve the problem and wrap up the case.

In this particular case I came across the following facts that puzzled me. In all the handbooks and lexica a *bryti* was defined as an unfree servant, steward or bailiff. For example, in *Kulturhistoriskt lexikon (KL)* it is stated that a *bryti* was an attendant among the slaves on a farm, who later on turned into a bailiff and ended up in the late Middle Ages as a tenant, a copyholder. An original function is said to have been that of delivering the food amongst the slaves.[1] In the more recent *Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde (RGA)* Svend Gissel writes that *bryti* 'bezeichnet einen Unfreien oder Freigelassenen, der über die anderen Unfreien eines Hofes die Aufsicht führte, einen Verwalter oder Schaffner',[2] whereas Grethe Authén-Blom, with reference to early Norway, says: 'Ursprünglich war einer der obersten unfreien Knechte mit dieser Aufgabe [to deliver drinks and food] betraut. Ein bryti konnte auch eine Art Hausverwalter oder Schaffner über dem unfreien Gesinde sein.'[3] The original status of the *bryti* is corroborated with citations from provincial laws, such as the Older Västgöta Law, the Östgöta

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[1] Fridlev Skrubbeltrang, Nils Lid and Gerhard Hafström in *KL* 2, 1957, cols 269–73.

[2] *RGA* 4, 1981, 26.

[3] *RGA* 4, 1981, 27.

law, The Frostating Law and the Law of Jutland,[4] which are supposed to show the antiquity of this institution.

This received opinion can be tested against what we know of the *bryti* institution found in the inscriptions on Viking-Age rune stones. Unfortunately there are very few occurrences of the word *bryti* in runic inscriptions, but these rare examples tell a completely different story from that found in the legal sources.

On the famous rune stone at Hovgården (U 11) on the island of Adelsö, opposite the more famous island of Björkö where Birka is located, we can read:

raþu runaʀ ret lit rista toliʀ bry[t]i i roþ kunuki toliʀ auk gyla litu ris . . .þaun hion eftiʀ. . .k merki srni. . .hakun baþ rista

Rað þu runaʀ. Rett let rista Toliʀ bryti i Roð kunungi. Toliʀ ok Gylla letu ris[ta . . .], þaun hion æftiʀ [si]k(?) mærki . . . Hakon bað rista,

which has been translated as

Interpret the runes! Tólir the steward of Roþr had them rightly carved for the King. Tólir and Gylla had [the runes] carved . . . this married couple as a landmark in memory of themselves(?) . . . Hákon ordered (it) be carved.[5]

This very important historical runic inscription from probably the middle of the eleventh century is not easy to interpret.[6] Elias Wessén (in U) assumes that the erection and the carving of the inscription was commissioned by the king, and that that king was the Hákon who is mentioned at the end of the inscription.[7] Wessén, and many with him, have connected the passage 'bryti i Rodh' with the case in the Östgöta Law (Dråpsb. 14) which deals with *iarls bryti i roþzs bo*, and he thinks that *Toliʀ bryti* was the King's ombudsman in the district called *Roden* (i.e. the coastal area). Erland Hjärne argues –

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[4] E.g. Karl Wührer. *RGA* 4,1981, 25.

[5] *Samnordisk runtextdatabas* (http://www.nordiska.uu.se/forskning/samnord.htm).

[6] According to the *Samnordisk runtextdatabas* it is to be dated to 1075–85.

[7] Many, such as Sophus Bugge, Otto von Friesen, Erik Brate and Elias Wessén (see Erland Hjärne, 'Rod och runor', in *Kungl. Humanistiska Vetenskaps-Samfundets i Uppsala Årsbok* 1946, 66 n. 5), have identified the *Hakon* mentioned in the text with King Hakon the Red (*Håkan röde*), who, according to Erik Brate (*Sveriges runinskrifter* (Natur och kultur 11) 2nd ed. Stockholm 1928, 76), supposedly lived *c.* 1066–79 (see also *Samnordisk runtextdatabas*).

in my opinion quite convincingly – against Wessén's interpretation, and instead proposes that *Toliʀ bryti* was a bailiff, a manager on the royal farm Hovgården.[8]

On a very badly damaged rune stone in Gillberga in Västerljung, Hölebo, in the province of Södermanland, we can read **sigualti r[aisti. . .kil br]utia sin** (Sö 42), which is probably to be understood as 'Sigvalde erected . . . (after) . . . (Tor)kel his bryte'. And finally, the last example we have from Denmark, on a rune stone from Randbøl on Jutland dated to the late tenth century we read: **tufi bruti risþi stin þansi aft lika brutia þir stafaʀ munu þurkuni miuk liki lifa** (*DR* 40), i.e. *Tofi bryti resþi sten þænsi æft lika brytia. Þer stafaʀ munu Þorgunni miok længi lifa*, which has been translated as: 'Tófi Steward raised this stone in memory of the steward's helpmate. Very long will these staves live for Þorgunnr.'[9] The Randbøl rune stone has been described by Erik Moltke as 'the ugliest rune stone in Denmark – but its inscription is the most beautiful and touching of all',[10] and it is furthermore one of the few Danish rune stones obviously standing on its original site. In Denmark rune stones have been looked upon as some kind of indication of power in the landscape, alluding to 'aristocrats' and the highest level in society, and this assumption is probably correct in most cases,[11] suggesting that this *Tofi bryti* must have had a rather prominent social position. Erik Moltke hence assumes that the term *bryti* here 'may refer to a king's overseer'.[12]

This runic evidence unambiguously indicates that a *bryti* in the tenth and eleventh centuries was to be found rather high up the

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[8] Erland Hjärne, 'Rod och runor', 25–56; see also Sigurd Rahmqvist, 'Ortnamn påverkade av administration i äldre tid'. In *Ortnamn värda att vårda*. Ed. G. Ulfsparre. Stockholm 1994, 109.

[9] *Samnordisk runtextdatabas.*

[10] Erik Moltke, *Runes and their origin. Denmark and elsewhere*. Trans. Peter Foote. Copenhagen 1981, 296.

[11] See for instance Peter Sawyer, *Da Danmark blev Danmark. Fra ca. 700 til 1050*. Second edition. Copenhagen 2002, 33; recently Gunhild Øeby Nielsen, *Magt og mentalitet, kontinuitet og brud i tiden for religions- og kulturskiftet ca. 950–1200 belyst ud fra runesten og deres fundforhold*. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Århus 2004, 106, has qualified this assumption.

[12] Moltke, *Runes and their origin*, 298.

social ladder, in the case of the Hovgården stone (and perhaps also the Randbøl stone) a man in close proximity to the King, probably his bailiff, and hence not a slave, on the very lowest rung. The consensus of the handbooks on the originally unfree status of the *bryti* is actually surprising. There are legal rules in some provincial law codes indicating that a *bryti* was not free, but the runic evidence, older by 200–300 years, tells a different story, although it admittedly makes no explicit reference to whether the legal status of the *bryti* was free or not. The problem of the status of the *bryti* is puzzling.

The word *bryti* (< **brŭtjan*) is a *nomen agentis* derived from the verb ON *brytja* 'to break into pieces',[13] and with the evidence of some provincial laws, together with the fact that the word has been borrowed into Finnish as *ruttio, ruttia* with meanings like 'slave' as well as 'bailiff', it is understandable that *bryti* has been interpreted as denoting a slave and a bound steward, the one in charge of the slaves' household and the one who delivers food to the slaves.

More unambiguous is the ON word *deigja*, found in dialects in Scandinavia as *deja, deje* etc. with meanings like 'milkmaid', 'house-keeper', but also 'concubine', which is a later development.[14] A letter from 1338 places a *deigja* on an equal footing with a *bryti*, as do also the Gulating Law (198), Erik's Zealand Law (3:19), the Older Västgöta Law (Ärvdab. 16) and the Younger Västgöta Law (Ärvdab. 21).[15] In the letter in question, Bishop Haakon of Bergen sacks a priest in Os parish and replaces him with a new one, and in the letter he addresses the former priest's 'hjón', i.e. servants, and he names them 'bryti' and 'deighia' or 'other hjón' (*at stemfnna hiunum sira Peters hwart sem þat er bryti, deighia eðr onnur hiun*)

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[13] See for instance Niels Åge Nielsen, *Dansk etymologisk ordbog*. Fourth edition. Copenhagen 1989, 68.

[14] See for instance Elof Hellquist, *Svensk etymologisk ordbok*. Third edition. Lund 1948, 137; Jan de Vries, *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*. Second edition. Leiden 1962, 75.

[15] *Den eldre Gulatingslova*. Ed. Bjørn Eithun, Magnus Rindal and Tor Ulset. Norrøne tekster 6. Oslo 1994; *Eriks Sjællandske lov*. Ed. Peter Skautrup. Danmarks gamle landskapslove 5. Copenhagen 1936; *Westgöta-Lagen*. Ed. H. S. Collin and C. J. Schlyter. Corpus iuris Sueo-Gotorum antiqui/Samling af Sweriges gamla lagar 1. Stockholm 1827.

(*DN* ix p. 131). The etymology of *deigja* reveals incontrovertibly that it referred originally to a female baker, someone who kneaded the dough and prepared bread. The word is derived from ON *deig* n. 'dough'. The word *deigja* occurs sparsely in early written sources, only once in *Lokasenna* (56),[16] in the Gulating and Frostating Laws and in the above-mentioned letter from 1338. Only in the Norwegian laws is it intimated that the *deigja* was not free; in the Gulating Law this is fairly obvious, in the Frostating Law not so explicit. [17] In *Lokasenna* and in the letter from 1338 there is nothing to indicate whether the maid is of free status.[18] To conclude, in early Scandinavia a *deigja* was a female servant in a household, in later times a *deja* was a milkmaid or a housekeeper, but the etymology confirms that she must originally have been a bread baker. It is notable that the use of *deigja* in the Gulating Law, and perhaps also in the Frostating Law, occurs in an obvious slave context.

This leads us over to England, and the obvious connection is, of course, with the word *lady*, OE *hlāf-dīghe*, *hlāf-dǣghe*, a word compounded of OE *hlāf* 'bread (probably unleavened bread[19])' and OE *dāg* m. 'dough', which makes it clear that an original meaning of *lady* was also 'bread baker'. [20] In medieval texts *lady* often has meanings like 'a mistress in relation to servants or slaves(?); the female head of a household'.

The male equivalent, the *lord*, OE *hlāf-weard*, is a compound of *hlāf* 'bread' and *weard* 'keeper, guardian'.[21] In lexica the word is

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[16] *Edda. Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*. Ed. Gustav Neckel. Fifth edition. Rev. Hans Kuhn. Heidelberg 1983.

[17] *Den eldre Gulatingslova* (198): *Tvær ero hans hinar bezto ambatter, Seta oc deigia, oc tveir þrælar, þionn oc bryti* (*Norges gamle Love indtil 1387* 1. Ed. R. Keyser and P. A. Munch. Kristiania 1846, 70); *Frostatingslova* (11:21): *Haulldr scal taca iij aura talda á bryta sínum oc þióni oc deigiu oc setu, en á öllum öðrum mannsmönnum ij aura. En þræll scal taka ij lutum minna rétt en drottinn hans. En ef þræll lýstr annan þræl þá scal svá hit sömu, en dróttinn á ecki á því* (*Norges gamle Love indtil 1387*, vol. 1. Ed. R. Keyser and P. A. Munch. Kristiania 1846, 234).

[18] Cf. *KLE* 2, 492–93.

[19] Cf. John Granlund in *KL* 1. 1956, cols 307–11 (*bakning*).

[20] *ODEE*, 511–12.

[21] *ODEE*, 537.

normally translated as 'the warden or keeper of bread', and the primary sense is the head of the household, the master of those dependent on him for their daily bread.[22] In the earliest Anglo-Saxon laws *lord* is used for a kind of 'seigneur'. In Ine's law we find the *lord* as the 'lord of the slaves' (3:§1, 24, 74) as well as a lord of freemen (3:§2).[23]

The word *lord* is an exclusively Anglo-Saxon word, not found in other Germanic languages,[24] and it is in the Anglo-Saxon vocabulary that we find some extremely interesting words relating to *lord* and *lady*, and probably alluding to an ancient institution which we get some insight into thanks to these Anglo-Saxon words. I am referring, besides *hlāf-weard* and *hlāf-dīghe*, to *hlāf-ǣta* m., *hlāf-brytta* m. and *hlāf-gang* m.[25] All these compounds have *hlāf* 'bread' as the first element. Whereas the *hlāf-weard* is the keeper or warden of the bread and the *hlāf-dīghe* the bread baker, the *hlāf-brytta* is the one who breaks the bread and probably distributes it, the *hlāf-ǣta* is the one who eats the bread that the lady has baked, the lord has provided and the *hlāf-brytta* has divided and distributed. And finally, we have a term for all the members of the household that the lord had the responsibility for feeding, the whole gang so to speak: namely *hlāf-gang*, hence all of the *hlāf-ǣtan*.

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[22] E.g. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 16, eleventh edition. Cambridge 1911, 992.

[23] *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings*. Ed. and trans. F. L. Attenborough. Cambridge 1922.

[24] However, Otto von Friesen ('Till tolkningen af Tune-stenen'. *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 16, 1900, 197) has made the interesting suggestion that the word also existed in the Old Nordic language. In one of the manuscripts of *Snorra Edda*, the fragmentary Eddu-Brot (AM 748 4to), we have the *hapax legomenon hleifruðr* as a *heiti* for Óðinn (*Snorra Edda* 2 p. 555). von Friesen assumes that this word might be a folk-etymological reinterpretation of an older ON *hleiforðr*, in conjunction with the many *Óðinsheiti* in -uðr (*Dǫrruðr*, *Geiguðr*, *Váfuðr*, *Rǫgnuðr* etc.). On the other hand, since this word is found only here, and other mss of *Snorra Edda* have other forms, *Hlæfǫþr* and *Hlefruðr*, the hypothesis must be looked upon as more or less a shot in the dark.

[25] See J. R. Clark Hall, *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*. Fourth edition. Cambridge 1960, 184–85.

What we find here is an institution, a collective defined on the basis of the bread which was obviously used metaphorically for food very early on, hence a household, a family. As pointed out, the terminology revealing the existence of this institution, at least these compounds with *hlāf-*, is only found in Anglo-Saxon.[26] However, the Scandinavian terms *deigja* and *bryti* must – as I see it – be directly equivalent to the Anglo-Saxon *hlāf-dīghe* and *hlāf-brytta*, the only difference being that we lack the qualifier in the Old Nordic words. We do not have any equivalent of the *lord* or the *hlāf-æta* or *hlāf-gang* in Nordic. All the same, the words *deigja* and *bryti* reveal that in early Scandinavia we probably had the same institution, a kind of household defined on the basis of the bread, as we find in Anglo-Saxon England.

We have thus reached the stage where we have to start to try to explain, where we have to root these words in some kind of historical context, to make the institution we have before our eyes historically understandable.

When I first came across this institution, I thought that the phenomenon was to be explained in the context of the Germanic warrior's household, the retinue or *Gefolgschaft*, the collective around the chieftain or king in his hall, and that the *hlāf*, the bread as a metaphor for food, alluded to the grand meals and banquets that occurred and in a way defined the hall-culture, an institution that later developed into the feudal *hof*-institution. This would place the *hlāf*-institution in roughly the eighth to the eleventh centuries. Today I know better. It must be older than this, and it is not to be placed in a warrior's household, the *Gefolgschaft* or the *comitatus*, which had a different and more developed terminology. It is my opinion today that we have to go back to an archaic Germanic household institution, with obvious roots in the Roman *familia*. To understand this, we have to try to get some insight into the archaic Germanic *familia*.

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[26] If von Friesen's assumption is correct, however, we also had the **hleiforðr* in ON (see above). A semantically similar word must be the *brotherr* 'lord, steward', OHG *brōthērro*, found in German (see e.g. http://drw-www.adw.uni-heidelberg.de/drw/, art. *brotherr*).

In Roman times the basic unit in society was the *familia* or *domus* 'house'. This, of course, is also valid for earlier Greek society, and its *oikos*. Actually, Aristotle defines a State, in his *Politics* (I:2–5),[27] as founded on the *oikos*, the families. The head of the Roman *familia* was the *paterfamilias* or the *dominus* (cf. *dominate*), who had ultimate authority over the members. In ancient Roman times *familia* could refer to both persons and property.[28] The word *familia* is obviously to be derived from *famulus*, a common word for slave.[29] This word, in turn, seems to have been borrowed into early Latin from the Oscan language, the Oscans being a neighbouring people to the Romans.[30] The borrowing hypothesis seems very probable, and has plenty of parallels, where a word for a slave has been borrowed from a neighbouring people, such as the Greek *doûlos*, from some non-Indo-European language in Asia Minor, and Latin *servus*, which seems to be borrowed from Etruscan.[31] The word *familia* thus originally had the meaning of 'a band of slaves'. The Roman novelist Apuleius wrote in the second century: 'Fifteen free men make a people, fifteen slaves make a family, and fifteen prisoners make a jail.'[32] As David Herlihy concludes: 'The word in its original sense thus implied an authoritarian structure and hierarchical order founded on but not limited to relations of marriage and parenthood . . . Authority, in sum, and not consanguinity, not even marriage, was at the core of the ancient concept of family.'[33] The head of the *familia*, the *paterfamilias*, had, according to the Roman law, the

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[27] Aristotle, *The Politics and The Constitution of Athens*. Ed. Stephen Everson. Cambridge 1996, 11–15.

[28] See Ulpian, *Digest* 50.16.195; *Codex Justinianus* 6.38.5.

[29] R. Henrion, 'Des origines du mot *Familia*'. *L'Antiquité classique* 10. 1941, 37–69; 11. 1942, 253–90.

[30] *A Latin Dictionary*. Charlton T. Lewis & Charles Short. Oxford 1879, art. *famulus* [on-line at http://www.perseus.tufts.edu]; David Herlihy, 'Family'. *The American Historical Review* 96:1. 1991, 1–15.

[31] Emile Benveniste, *Indo-European Language and Society*. Trans. E. Palmer. London 1973, 289.

[32] Apuleius, *Pro se de magia liber (apologia)*. Ed. R. Helm. Leipzig 1959, 47.437: 'XV liberi homines populus est, totidem serui familia, totidem uincti ergastulum.'

[33] Herlihy, 'Family', 3.

father's full authority, the *patria potestas*, which was absolute, including even the *ius necis*, the right to put to death members of his family.[34]

In Roman society, and obviously also in early Germanic society, a family did not consist only of the husband and wife and children, as in the modern sense of the word. A *familia* was an extended collective including relatives, servants and slaves, thus the *famuli* were all the people the *paterfamilias* had power over.[35] What is to be noted is that owing to the authority of the *paterfamilias*, his *patria potestas*, the members of a *familia* had a status that was not free, strictly speaking, which, from a legal point of view, in a way equated them with slaves, something that several Roman lawmen comment on.[36] The model for the Roman *familia* clearly was the early Roman 'slave household, band of slaves'.[37] This fact probably has deep implications for understanding the bonds in later co-operative groups, such as the warrior's household of the migration period, and the retinues in the hall-society of the Anglo-Saxon and Vendel/Viking period.

An early *Parochia* or *Dioecesis* in the Roman world, i.e. a Christian congregation in a *Civitas*, also bore the obvious fingerprint of the *familia* model. The *paterfamilias* in this religious *familia* was the bishop and the close members of the family were his deacons and priests; the extended family were the Christian disciples in the city. This 'family' or congregation had their own important –

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[34] Herlihy, 'Family', 3.

[35] See Herman van den Brink, *The Charm of Legal History*. Studia Amstelodamensia ad epigraphicam, ius antiquum et papyrologicam pertinentia 3. Amsterdam 1974, 45–46; David Herlihy, *Medieval Households*. Cambridge, Mass. and London 1985, 3. — See the *Codex Justinianus* (6.38.5), which states: 'we discern that the name of family has the following force: parents and children and all relatives and property, freedmen also and their patrons and likewise slaves are identified by this word' (*Corpus Iuris Civilis* 1–3. Ed. P. Krüger, Th. Mommsen, R. Schoell and W. Kroll. Berlin 1928, vol. 2, 571.

[36] E.g. Ulpian, *Digest*, 50.16.195.

[37] This is noted by Ulpian in the second century AD in his *Digest* 50.16.195: *servitutium quoque solemus appellare familias* 'We are also accustomed to describe slaves as forming a household' (Trans. Alan Watson in Justinian, *Digest*, 950).

constituting – ritual meal, the Holy Communion, where bread and wine were transformed into Christ's flesh and blood.

In the same way the most elementary social group in Europe in the period after the fall of Rome was the family. Before the emergence of such institutions as the state and the parish it represented the basic social group and unit of production in the rural economy. In a society of the kind we are dealing with, food supplies were limited. The threat of famine was acute and always imminent, in a way we cannot possibly understand today. Therefore to be part of a family, and in receipt of the benevolence it could provide, was essential. However, the threat did not hang equally over everyone. The 'Man of Power' showed himself, first of all, as the man who could always eat, and eat as much as he wanted. This figure therefore achieved a very central position, because he was also able to feed his subordinates if he so wished. He was the one who provided the food.

This fact is also reflected among aristocratic families. The essence of Germanic lordship can only be grasped, Otto Brunner emphasises, through the lord's house and household, which was the organisational core and the legal centre of lordship.[38] This field of research – *family*, *kindred*, *clan*, *state* and *lordship* – has been thoroughly studied over a long period by German and Austrian scholars such as Walter Schlesinger, Otto Brunner, Karl Schmid, Karl Bosl and lately Gerd Althoff;[39] outside the German-speaking world important contributions have been produced by the Cambridge scholars Bertha Phillpotts, Jack Goody and D. H. Green and the American historian

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[38] Otto Brunner, *Land and Lordship. Structures of Governance in Medieval Austria*. Trans. H. Kaminsky and J. Van Horn Melton. Philadelphia 1992, 211. [*Land und Herrschaft. Grundfragen der territorialen Verfassungsgeschichte Österreichs im Mittelalter*. Wien 1965.]

[39] Walter Schlesinger, *Beiträge zur deutschen Verfassungsgeschichte des Mittelalters* 1–2. Göttingen 1963; Otto Brunner, *Land and Lordship*; Karl Bosl, *Die Grundlagen der modernen Gesellschaft im Mittelalter* 1–2. Stuttgart 1972; Karl Schmid, *Gebetsgedenken und adliges Selbstverständnis im Mittelalter. Ausgewählte Beiträge. Festgabe zu seinem 60. Geburtstag*. Sigmaringen 1983; Gerd Althoff, *Family, Friends and Followers. Political and Social Bonds in Early Medieval Europe*. Trans. Ch. Carroll. Cambridge 2004. [*Verwandte, Freunde und Getreute. Zum politischen Stellenwert der Gruppenbindungen im früheren Mittelalter*. Darmstadt 1990.]

David Herlihy.[40] From these studies we can conclude that the Germanic family or household was very similar to the Roman *familia*, with obvious roots in the latter. In West Germanic languages words used for such a unit were OHG *hīwon*, OE *hīwan* m. pl., OE *hīwen* n. and *hīrēd* m. 'household, members of a family', and the substantivated adjective *hīwisc* 'household'. The *caput* was called *hêrro*, *truthin* or *frô* in OHG and had a similar role to that of the *paterfamilias* in the Roman *familia*. The power he could exercise was called *mund* m. 'guardianship, protection'; another name for the *hêrro* was therefore OHG *mundboro*, OE *mundbora*.[41] His duty was to protect his family and to put food on the table, which links with the Anglo-Saxon term *lord* (< *hlāf-weard*) for the *caput*, and the semantically identical German *brotherr*.[42]

An important social institution that was fundamental to Germanic culture in this period was the military retinue around a king or chieftain, the *Gefolgschaft* or, in Latin, the *comitatus*. This institution was modelled on the normal family unit. This fact is underlined by the etymology of the word for such a retinue, OE *hīrēd* m. 'retinue, family, household', which is derived from the stem **hīw-* that we find in the aforementioned OHG *hīwon*, OE *hīwan* m. pl., OE *hīwen* n. and also in ON *hjú* n. pl. 'family'. The ON *hirð* f. 'retinue' is obviously a loan from Anglo-Saxon.[43] Therefore it has been assumed

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[40] Bertha Phillpotts, *Kindred and Clan in the Middle Ages and After*. Cambridge 1913; Jack Goody, *The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe*. Cambridge 1983, *The European Family. An Historico-anthropological Essay*. Oxford 2000; D. H. Green, *The Carolingian Lord. Semantic studies on four Old High German words: balder, frô, truhtin, hêrro*. Cambridge 1965 and David Herlihy, *Medieval Households*. 1985, *Women, Family and Society in Medieval Europe. Historical Essays, 1978–1991*. Providence & Oxford 1995. — For critical analyses on especially the earlier of these works, see *On Barbarian Identity. Critical approaches to ethnicity in the early Middle Ages*. Ed. Andrew Gillett. Studies in the Early Middle Ages 4. Turnhout 2002.

[41] See J. E. A. Jolliffe, *The Constitutional History of Medieval England, from the English Settlement to 1485*. London 1937, 17.

[42] For these words, see West Germanic etymological dictionaries; D. H. Green, *The Carolingian Lord*. Cambridge 1965.

[43] Elof Hellquist, *Svensk etymologisk ordbok*. Lund 1948, 354; Jan de Vries, *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*. Leiden 1962, 228–29.

– for excellent reasons – that the Germanic *comitatus* grew out of the family household, with reflexes, for instance, in *Beowulf*, where King Hrothgar's retinue were the members of his household.[44]

The head of the retinue, OHG *truht*, OE *dryht*, ON *drótt* (< PGmc **druhti-*), was called OHG *truhtîn*, OE *dryhten*, ON *dróttinn* (< PGmc **druhtinaz*), and the followers had to subject themselves to his jurisdiction. The bond that tied them to the leader was the oath of fidelity, which gave them the new rank of 'table companion', the right to share the table and bread with the leader and the rest of the retinue. From historical and linguistic evidence, you obviously entered into this kind of retainership as a youngster, a child. Several words for 'retainer' seem to have the earlier meaning 'child', such as OHG *thegan*, OE *ðegn*, ON *þegn* (cf. Greek *téknon* 'child', OI *tákman* 'child'), and maybe also ON *rekkr*,[45] *sveinn* and *drengr*.[46] In eighth-century Anglo-Saxon England, for example, a group of young warriors called *geoguð* 'youth' was found around the king, unmarried men that had not yet settled on landed estates, a very mobile retinue in several respects. A member of the *geoguð* was a vital brick in the power puzzle of that time, in that he could move and offer his services to the highest bidder. The main payment a member of the *geoguð* could expect was a share of tribute and booty.[47] Beside the 'youths' (*geoguð*) stood the 'tried men' (*duguð*),

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[44] Schlesinger, *Beiträge zur deutschen Verfassungsgeschichte . . .* 1 *passim*.

[45] ON *rekkr* m. 'warrior, hero', OSw *rinker*, OE *rinc*, OHG *rinch*, Latinised as *rencus*, has in the Salic laws a semantic component of 'unfree', as well as 'young', according to Gabriele von Oldberg (*Leges Barbarorum*. Arbeiten zur Frühmittelalterforschung 11. Die Volkssprachigen Wörter der Leges Barbarorum 2. Berlin and New York 1991, 236–38). From the textual evidence in the Frankish laws von Oldberg extracts a meaning 'noch nicht erwachsener (schwacher), im Wachstum befindlicher Mann, also im rechtlichen Sinne: "der Unmündige"', 238.

[46] See de Vries, *Altnord. etym. Wörterb. passim* — Cf. also the common Lat. *vassus* 'retainer, servant, slave' found in several Germanic laws, such as *Pactus legis Salicae*, *Lex Alamannorum* and *Lex Baiwariorum*; see von Oldenburg, *Die Bezeichnungen für Soziale Stände . . . in den Leges Barbarorum*, 231–34, which is the base for *vasall* 'servant', and which is assumed to come from a Gallo-Latin *vassus*, originating in a Celtic word for 'child'; compare Cymr. *gwas* 'child, servant' (Kluge, 948).

[47] Thomas Charles-Edwards, ed., *After Rome*. Oxford 2003, 39.

married retainers in a king's following with landed estates. When a member of the *geoguð* had proved himself to his lord's satisfaction, he could receive a suitable endowment from the king, and move out from the lord's household.[48] It has been assumed that in Germanic societies this *comitatus* institution, an early *hirð*, *hīrēd*, consisted of the 'private' household of the leader, an institution that developed into the later *hirð*, *hīrēd* of the king or chieftain in his hall.[49]

An overview of the relevant material in this Germanic word-group shows that we have to assume two Ablaut-related stems: Proto-Germanic **hīwa-* and **hĭwa-*.[50] These two stems evolved from Proto-Nordic to Old Nordic thus: **hīwa- > hȳ-*,[51] **hĭwa- > *hewa- > hē-/hǣ-*, in the same way as **slīwa- >* ON *slý* 'slimy water plant', **slĭwa- > *slew(a) > *slé*, ODa *slǣ* (Danish *slæ* 'a weather between frost and thaw'). This must be the background to the parallels ODa *hǣski*, *hǣskap* 'household, home' (*hǣ < *hĕwa- < *hĭwa-*) and ON *hýski* 'household', *hý* 'family, household', (*hȳ- < *hīwa-*).[52]

Relevant Old Germanic words formed from these stems are: ON *hý* 'family, household', ON *hýski*, OE *hiwisc*, OHG *hīwiski* 'family, household'(*< *hīwiskia*), ODa *hǣski* 'household, home' (*< *hĭwiskia*), *hýbýli*, with the variant form *híbýli*[53] 'house and home', ON *hýrógi* n. 'animosity between members of a household' (*Hávamál* 137), ON *hýi* m. 'slave, servant' (*< *hĭwian* or **hīw(i)an*) probably with an original meaning 'the one who belongs to the family', ON *hý* 'family, household' (*< *hīwa*), OHG *hīwo* m.

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[48] Richard P. Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation in Anglo-Saxon England*. London 1988, 32.

[49] Schlesinger, *Beiträge zur deutschen Verfassungsgeschichte . . .*, vol. 1, 11 and *passim*.

[50] Already assumed by F. Tamm (*Etymologisk svensk ordbok*, vol. 1. 1890–1904, 364), later also by Sigmund Feist (*Vergleichendes Wörterbuch der gotischen Sprache*. Leiden 1939, 253) and J. Brøndum Nielsen (see n. 52).

[51] See Adolf Noreen, *Altisländische und altnorwegische Grammatik*. Halle 1923, §77:6.

[52] For the different sound changes leading up to these stems and words, see Tamm, *Etym. sv. ordb.*, pp. 309–10; J. Brøndum-Nielsen, *Gammeldansk Grammatik*, vol. 1. Copenhagen 1950, §§ 61, 75, 111:2, 117:2, 162.

[53] Noreen, *Altisl. Gram.* §77:6.

'husband', OHG *hīwa* f. 'wife', OSax *hīwa* f. 'wife', ON *hjú(n)*, *hjón* n. 'married couple; household members; servants' (actually dual **hīwōna* n. of a PGmc **hīwan* n.), OE *hīwan*, OHG *hīwon*[54] 'family, household', Gothic *heiwafrauja* 'lord of a household, family', OE *hīrēd* 'household, family', OHG *hīrāt* 'marriage' (< **hīw-ræd*), ON *hýrr* adj. 'mild, friendly, happy' (< **hiurja*, literally something like 'suitable as a household member'), ON *hjúka* 'to care, treat' (< **hjú-kan*), ON *hjá* prep. 'at',[55] actually 'visiting someone's household' (< **hĭwa*), and perhaps also ON *herað,* OSw *hærap* 'administrative district', where one proposal is < **hĭwa-rāða*), although the etymology of this latter word is much disputed.[56]

The two parallel stems have thus resulted in word pairs like ON *hý* (< **hīwa*) : ON *hjá* (< **hĭwa*), ON *hýski* (< **hīwiskia*) : ODa *hǣski* (< **hĭwiskia*), and perhaps ON *herað*, OSw *hærap* (< **hĭwa-rāða*) : *hirð* < OE *hīrēd* (< **hīw-ræd*). The words discussed here are of course related to Lat. *cīvis* 'citizen'.[57] A variant with a short vowel (**cĭvis*) seems to be unknown in Latin.[58] Indeed, since the short-stem variant (**hĭwa-*) is only to be found in North Germanic, exclusive to the Old Scandinavian languages, it is likely to be an innovation.

In Anglo-Saxon England, Bede talks about the land of one family (*terra unius familiae*) as a unit, a tract of land. He states that the region of the south Saxons consists of the land of 7,000 families, and that the measure (*mensura*) of the Isle of Wight is, according to the English mode of reckoning, he states, 1,200 families. The OE term equivalent to Bede's *terra unius familiae* was *hîd*, sometimes *hiwisc* or *hiwscipe* (discussed above). The *hîd* probably refers to the land of one family.[59] Maitland also discusses how large such an

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[54] von Oldberg, *Bezeichnungen für Soziale Stände*, 238–40.

[55] Compare the preposition Swedish *hos* 'at', actually a weakly stressed form of *hus* 'house', in the same way as French *chez* derives from Lat. *casa* 'house'.

[56] See etymological dictionaries of the Germanic languages.

[57] See Hellquist, *Svensk etym. ordb.*, 356.

[58] For this information I thank Prof. Monica Hedlund, Inst. of Linguistics and Philology, Uppsala University.

[59] F. W. Maitland, *Domesday Book and Beyond. Three Essays in the Early History of England.* Cambridge 1897, 353.

early Anglo-Saxon family was: 'we may reasonably guess that the household was much larger in the seventh . . . century. We might expect to find married brothers or even married cousins under one roof.'[60]

The archaic Proto-Nordic word *hīwa-/*hĭwa-* 'family' seems also to be found in a man's name **hiwigaz** nom.,[61] found on an early rune stone from Årstad, Sokndal, Rogaland in Norway, perhaps from the sixth century, and which has been seen as a parallel to the adj. OE *hiwisc*, OHG *hīwiski* and ON *hýski*. On the Hassmyra runestone in Västmanland (Vs 24) we read the touching epitaph for a deceased wife:

buonti × kuþr × hulmkoetr × lit × resa × ufteʀ × oþintisu × kunu × seno × kumbr × hifrya × til × hasuimura × iki betr × þon × byi raþr roþbalir × risti × runi × þisa × sikmuntaʀ × uaʀ. . .sestʀ × kuþ

which has been translated as:

> The good husbandman Holmgautr had (the stone) raised in memory of Óðindísa, his wife.

and then, in poetic form,

> There will not come to Hassmyra a better mistress who holds sway over the farm. Balle the Red cut these runes. To Sigmundr was Óðindísa a good sister.[62]

Here we have the compound (probably) *hefrøya* 'the mistress of the family, household', which has a direct, although male, counterpart in the Gothic *heiwa-frauja* 'the head of the family'.[63] An apparently closer parallel is found on the Malsta runestone according to a new

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[60] Maitland, *Domesday Book and Beyond*, 519.

[61] *Lexikon över urnordiska personnamn*, 11 (on-line at http://www.sofi.se/images/NA/pdf/urnord.pdf), de Vries, *Altnord. etym. Wörterb.*, 229.

[62] Sven B. F. Jansson, *Runes in Sweden*. Trans. Peter Foote. Stockholm 1987, 128.

[63] Sigmund Feist, *Vergleichendes Wörterbuch der gotischen Sprache*. Leiden 1939, 253–54. For a discussion of the possible interpretations of the runic **hi-** in this word and **hikiulf-** (below), see Lena Peterson, 'The Graphemic System of the Staveless Runes'. In *Proceedings of the Third International Symposium on Runes and Runic Inscriptions*. Ed. J. E. Knirk. Runrön 9. Uppsala 1994, 247–49.

reading proposed by Lena Peterson.[64] The famous and historically important inscription goes:

> **hrumunt rit. . .staina þina| |aftiʀ hikiulf- ÷ brisa sun ÷ in brisi uas lina sun : in lini uas unaʀ sun : in un ua. . . . . .faks| |sun i(n) (u)faka þuris| |sun krua uas muþiʀ hikiulf. . . in þa barlaf in þa kuþrun ÷ hrumunt hikiulfa sun faþi runaʀ þisaʀ : uiʀ sutum stin þina nur i balas. . .in : kiulfiʀ uarþ um lanti þisu in þa nur i uika i þrim bium in þa lanakr in þa fiþrasiu**

which can be translated as:

> Hróðmundr erected this/these stone/s in memory of Hé-Gylfir, Bresi's/ Brísi's son. And Bresi/Brísi was Lini's(?) son. And Lini(?) was Unn's son. And Unn was Ófeigr's son. And Ófeigr was Þórir's son. Gróa was Hé-Gylfir's mother. And then <barlaf>. And then Guðrún. Hróðmundr Hé-Gylfir's son coloured these runes. We sought this stone in the north in Balasteinn. Gylfir acquired this land and then in Vika in the north / further north three estates, and then Lønangri and then Feðrasjór.[65]

The **hi-** in the name **hikiulf-** is probably, like the **hi-** 'family' in **hiwigaz** and **hifrya**, to be seen as a qualifier in a by-name for Gylve, the head of an important or large family, who has acquired a lot of land for his household. Peterson, however, hesitates between this possibility and ON *hé-* 'outer appearance, deceptive appearance' which gives the by-name OSw *He-Gylfiʀ* 'the light-haired Gylfiʀ'.[66] I would prefer the former explanation, for semantic reasons. This runic *hi-* could be understood as equivalent to an ON *hý*, PGmc *hīwa-* 'family, house', but according to the considerations set out by Lena Peterson perhaps the short stem *hĭwa-* is more probable, since /y:/ would normally be represented in runes as **iu**, /æ:/ and /æ/ as **a**, while /i:/, /i/, /e:/ and /e/ could all be denoted by **i**.[67] One can also note in the inscription the five-generation rule for claiming legal access to the *hiwa-*, the household and its farms and land, hence this family's *oðal*.[68]

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[64] Peterson, 'The Graphemic System'.

[65] See *Samnordisk runtextdatabas* (http://www.nordiska.uu.se/forskning/ samnord.htm).

[66] Peterson, 'The Graphemic System', 248–49.

[67] Peterson, 'The Graphemic System', 247.

[68] See Stefan Brink, 'Law and Legal Customs in Viking Age Scandinavia'. In *The Scandinavians from the Vendel Period to the Tenth Century: An*

A fundamental aspect when dealing with archaic and medieval society is of course *lordship*, *dependence* and *patronage*. In the Middle Ages there were two essentially different forms of lordship, over the free and over the legally unfree. The former was based on mutual faith between a vassal or a lord, and not on command and obedience. This was the system that became the normal means of government in feudal Europe, beginning in the eighth century and becoming the essential instrument of lordship in Europe from the ninth century onwards. The latter, with roots in Roman society and its *familia*, was exercised over the family (large or small in number) and included all members of a 'household', ranging from family members, through servants, maids, tenants, slaves, to the functionaries who carried out special tasks in relation to administration and military services. There seems to be a consensus today among historians that this kind of lordship over the unfree, the *familia* or household model, was the one used for all medieval lordship.[69]

It was a common custom for young men in the upper social stratum to attach themselves to a lord, a *princeps*, and to be a part of his retinue. The main purpose was of course to win fame in battles and war, and for the *principes* a large following was an honourable acquisition that laid the foundation for power and a grand reputation. At least according to Tacitus, and thus at an early period, the followers were free to leave during peacetime. In German scholarship this early *Gefolgshaft* is considered to have been very much a free man's choice in a partnership which, if not equal, was at least based on free will, in which followers could come and go by their own choice.[70] I am not so sure that this was the case. I assume that fairly early on these retinues were tied to the lord by certain obligations and bonds and also bound by oath-taking,[71] something that of course is also found in the later feudal lordship. This kind of dependence amounted to a personal relationship between a lord and a follower.

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ethnographic perspective. Ed. Judith Jesch. Studies in historical archaeo-ethnology 5. Woodbridge 2002, 103.

[69] Gerd Althoff, *Family, Friends and Followers*, 103.

[70] See for instance Hans Kuhn, 'Die Grenzen der germanischen Gefolgschaft'. *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte*. Germ. Abt. 73. 1956.

[71] Jolliffe, *The Constitutional History of Medieval England*, 8–9.

An example of a man who has sworn an oath to his lord is the ON *væringi* (pl. *væringjar*), in Russian *varjag*, perhaps – according to the traditional explanation – originally a retainer of the *Varangian* guard in Constantinople. This word contains the stem *vār-* 'oath, promise' found in ON *várar* f. pl., OE *wǣr* f., OHG *wāra* f., and it has recently been suggested that it is compounded with Proto-Nordic **-gangian*, giving the word *væringi* the meaning 'one who has taken an oath', 'one who has "walked" into a binding relationship by swearing an oath'.[72]

It is a well known fact that a whole series of bonds emerged in the Middle Ages, imitating the *familia* and the kinship model from the Migration Period and earlier on. Thus the guilds and the military retinue were modelled on the structure of the family. The aim was to reproduce the conditions and obligations existing within the family group. With no functional state or other superior power, every part of medieval life was shaped by personal bonds. This network of personal ties and associations was necessary in a society that was essentially hostile, and that in turn led to a culture where war and fighting were idealised.[73] The bonds between the individuals within these groups, and especially the family, guaranteed security and support in every area of life. Co-operative groups, guilds or *coniurationes*, were thus formed to protect the individual in the local community. They were legal bodies in their own right, just like a retinue. They developed their own leadership arrangements, had their own jurisdiction and had communal funds and property.

The situation regarding the military retinue in early Scandinavia was probably identical to that found in West-Germanic areas. The reason for believing so is that archaeology and early poetry point to

[72] Thorsten Andersson, 'Waräger'. *RGA* 33. 2006.
[73] See for instance Lawrence Keeley, *War before Civilization*. New York 1995; *Military Aspects of Scandinavian Society*. Ed. A. Nørgård Jørgensen and B. L. Clausen. Publications from the National Museum 2. Copenhagen 1997; Neil Price, *The Viking Way. Religion and War in Late Iron Age Scandinavia*. Aun 31. Uppsala 2002; Guy Halsall, *Warfare and Society in the Barbarian West, 450–900*. London 2003; Charlotte Hedenstierna-Jonsson, *The Birka Warrior. The material culture of a martial society*. Theses and Papers in Scientific Archaeology 8. Stockholm 2006.

a more or less pan-Germanic 'aristocratic' culture during this period. The word for an early Scandinavian retinue, as already noted, was *hirð*, obviously a loan from the Anglo-Saxon *hīrēd*. A more genuine term for a Scandinavian retinue was probably *drótt* or *lið* found on the famous runestone from Karlevi on Öland (Öl 1), where the inscription starts with

s-a. . . —(s)- i(a)s * satr * aiftir * si(b)(a) * kuþa * sun * fultars * in hons ** liþi * sati * at * u * -ausa-þ-. . .

This stone is set up in memory of Sibbi Góði/Goði, son of Foldarr, and his retainer (*en hans liði*) set on . . . [74]

These kinds of *hirð*, *drótt* or *lið* – or any kind of co-operative friendship or communal group, such as the ON *gildi*,[75] the *þing* (for instance on Gotland, see below) and the *goðorð* in Iceland, or for that matter an Oxbridge *college* – carried with them an obligation of mutual support and help. When people entered into a bond within a group, they performed some ritual, most likely swearing an oath, to support each other, and in the case of a retinue, to help and defend their lord and leader, literally to lay their lives in the hands of the lord. It was then important, from an ideological point of view, that this group, which was bound by oaths of fidelity and friendship, should take their meals together. The communal meal – with a later reflection in the Oxbridge colleges' *High Table* – strengthened the bonds between the members, and it was a reflection of the *familia*, the basic model these groups were trying to relive.

This leads us to the *hlāf-*, that is, to the fact that we have a terminology focused on the bread and its providers: the baker of bread, the breaker of bread, the bread-eater and the gang that gathered around the table to eat the bread. Obviously this goes back to the institution of the *familia*, the household members who shared the food. Our knowledge of meals and food consumption is unfortunately rather limited for early medieval Europe.

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[74] Cf. *Samnordisk runtextdatabas* (http://www.nordiska.uu.se/forskning/samnord.htm), which however has the translation 'retinue', which must be a mistake for 'retainer'. A *liði* 'retainer' was part of a *lið* 'retinue'.

[75] The word ON *gildi* (< PGmc *gelða-*), a derivation of ON *gjald*, Goth *gild* 'money, payment', is borrowed into English as *guild* (see e.g. *SAOB*, G401).

The well-known French *Annales*-historian, Georges Duby, has written:

> We know very little about the food of early medieval man in western Europe outside the monastic communities. Here is an excellent and urgent subject for research upon which further progress the history of rural economy may well depend.[76]

For Europe in general, however, Duby concludes that 'documents . . . reveal the universal acceptance of bread as a basic foodstuff, even in the least civilized regions of the Christian world'.[77] This fact also has a reflex in early Anglo-Saxon society. An isolated clause in the law of King Ine seems to imply that a normal render in a village had to deliver to a lord in a ten-hide estate in Wessex 10 sheep, 10 geese, 20 chickens, 10 cheeses, 10 measures of honey, 12 'ambers' of clear ale, an 'amber' full of butter, 5 salmon, 2 full-grown oxen or 10 wethers and 100 eels for royal consumption, but first and foremost 300 round loaves.[78] There is no doubt that bread 'was the mainstay of existence' for medieval man in Europe.[79]

Since the everyday struggle for survival was the main occupation of ordinary people – as pointed out above, famine was never far away in medieval society – the meal became a sacrosanct occasion, often conducted with some ritual, with invocations to gods. This continues into the 'hall-culture', where a grand banquet, an ON *veizla*, was a most precious gift to one's subordinates and followers. These kinds of ritual meal have an interesting counterpart in the archaic Old Gotlandic *Guta saga*, in the first chapter of which we can read:

> Firir þan tima ok lengi eptir siþan troþu menn a hult ok a hauga, vi ok stafgarþa ok a haiþin guþ. Blotaþu þair synum ok dytrum sinum ok fileþi miþ mati ok mungati. Þet gierþu þair eptir vantro sinni. Land alt hafþi sir hoystu blotan miþ fulki. Ellar hafþi huer þriþiungr sir. En smeri þing hafþu mindri blotan miþ fileþi, mati ok mungati, sum haita suþnautar, þy et þair suþu allir saman. (*Guta saga* ch. 1)

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[76] Georges Duby, *Rural Economy and Country Life in the Medieval West*. Colombia 1968, 8.

[77] Georges Duby, *Rural Economy*, 9.

[78] F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*. Oxford 1971, 288.

[79] Georges Duby, *Rural Economy*, 9.

Prior to that time, and for a long time afterwards, people believed in groves and grave howes, holy places and ancient sites, and in heathen idols. They sacrificed their sons and daughters, and cattle, together with food and ale. They did that in accordance with their ignorance of the true faith. The whole island held the highest sacrifice on its own account, with human victims, otherwise each third held its own. But smaller assemblies held a lesser sacrifice with cattle, food, and drink. Those involved were called 'boiling-companions', because they all cooked their sacrificial meals together.[80]

Here it is said that the *þing* on Gotland, obviously a small group of people, had collective sacrificial meals, and the members of this group were called *suþnautar*, a *hapax legomenon* in Old Swedish, consisting of the verb *suða* 'to cook' (a word related to ON *seyðir* 'cooking pit' and *sauðr* 'sheep' as well as Old Gotlandic *sauþr* 'well' and to Gothic *sauðs* f. 'sacrifice', hence with a semantic content of something cooked and sacrificed – and eaten),[81] and *nøte*, pl. *nøtar* 'companion', cf. Germ. *Genossen*. We have a synomym in ON *mǫtunautr* 'eating companion'; cf. *mǫtuneyti* 'eating group'.[82]

We have all read about the grand feast during the Middle Ages, the *convivium*, where a lord entertained his followers, but the communal meal – for profane as well as religious purposes – was important at all levels in society, at the *þing*-congregation as on Gotland, at the guild and in the family; friendships were made and strengthened at such meals. Gerd Altoff has stated in his important book *Family, Friends and Followers. Political and Social Bonds in Early Medieval Europe*: 'Meals . . . played a prominent role in many bonds in archaic society. They were a legal ritual and performed an important social function.'[83] And the main metaphor for the ritual meal was 'bread', a widespread usage already found in the Bible.

The importance of bread and the existence of a 'bread-collective' in early Scandinavia are finely illustrated on the famous Tune

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[80] *Guta saga. The History of the Gotlanders*. Ed. and trans. Christine Peel. London 1999, 4.

[81] See for instance Hellquist, *Svensk etym. ordb.*, 916.

[82] *Norrøn ordbok*. Ed. Leiv Heggstad, Finn Hødnebø and Erik Simensen. Oslo 1997, 308; de Vries, *Altnordisches etym. Wörterb.*, 402.

[83] Althoff, *Family, Friends and Followers*, 97.

inscription from Østfold in Norway. This rune stone is to be dated
to as early as around AD 400, and it is the longest and most impor-
tant of the runic inscriptions in the older fuþark.[84] It starts **ek wiwaʀ**
after woduride witadahalaiban worahto, *ek Wiwaʀ after Wodurīdē*
witandahalaiban worahtō [*rūnōʀ*], which can be translated as:
'I, Wiwaʀ, in memory of Woduridaʀ, the lord ('bread-provider'),
made the runes'.[85] Here we have a man (*Wiwaʀ*) in Østfold
who, in memory of Woduridaʀ (his lord?), erected the stone and
carved the runic epitaph. He praises Woduridaʀ with the epithet
witandah(a)laiban, 'the bread-provider', which is certainly a noble
title, an obvious equivalent to OE *lord* (< *hlāf-weard*). The second
element in this compound is, according to Sophus Bugge and other
scholars, a Proto-Nordic equivalent of the Gothic *gahlaiba* 'table
mate, the one you share your bread with', literally a *companion*, Fr
compagnon (< **compāniō* from Lat. *com-* 'together with' and *pānis*
m. 'bread').[86] However, as Otto von Friesen has correctly remarked,
one would expect the prefix *ga-* in the runic form.[87] Instead the
word must be a weak noun related to ON *hleifr* 'bread'. The quali-
fier, *witanda-*, is, according to Otto von Friesen, related to a
Proto-Nordic verb **witan* (< PGmc **witēn-*) 'to care for',[88] with
cognates in OE *witan* 'know, understand', OE (*be-*)*witian* 'to re-
gard, to care for, see to, have charge of, govern, carry out' etc.,
Gothic *witan* 'know', OE *witod* adj. 'decreed', Gothic *witōþ* n.
'law'[89] and OE *wita* m. 'wise man, counsellor', used of those who
made up the *witan*, the Anglo-Saxon king's council (in early Anglo-
Saxon times the King's household or family), and their assembly,
the *witenagemot*. Hence the word is set in a semantic field consist-
ing of meanings such as 'knowledge', 'patronage' and 'family',

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[84] See for instance Ottar Grønvik, *Runene på Tunesteinen*. Oslo 1981; Terje
Spurkland, *I begynnelsen var fuþark. Norske runer og runeinnskrifter*. Oslo
2001, 46–53.

[85] See *Samnordisk runtextdatabas*.

[86] See for instance Harald Bjorvand and Fredrik Otto Lindeman, *Våre
arveord. Etymologisk ordbok*. Oslo 2000, 518.

[87] von Friesen, 'Tune-stenen', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 16, 1900, 193.

[88] von Friesen, 'Tune-stenen', 196; Spurkland, *I begynnelsen*, 49.

[89] Cf. Vladimir E. Orel, *A Handbook of Germanic Etymology*, Leiden 2003,
464, who identifies the *witanda-* with these two words.

important qualities and assets for a chieftain to have in the Migration Period. The chieftain Woduridaʀ was thus to be remembered as a *witandah(a)laiban*, someone who provided his subjects with bread (food).

Bread probably had a significant role not only for the Romans, but also in the early Germanic world (cf. OHG *brōthērro*), even if – as has been assumed for good reasons – it was an early cultural loan from the Romans.[90] As far as Scandinavia is concerned, the so-called Swedish *gravklot* (lit. 'grave globes') have received some attention in this connection. They are small round stones often incised with a cross or other ornaments, and they have been found placed on top of large burial mounds, very often dated to the early Iron Age or the middle of the first millennium. The most common explanation of these *gravklot* is that they represent round bread loaves, or then rather rolls, with the explanation that bread was part of a fertility cult or the death ritual and the cult of the dead.

During the early Iron Age, at least in Sweden, bread very often occurs in places where cultic rituals have been performed (e.g. Helgö, Uppåkra). From the late Iron Age it is not unusual for bread to be placed in graves, as in Birka.[91] During the excavation at *Helgö* 'the Holy Island', at a place where cultic rituals most probably were performed, many items of bread, in the form of 'buns' as well as 'loaves', have been found, as well as fragments of ovens and large quantities of querns. Some of the bread was found in graves, in ovens, but interestingly enough most of it (about 70 pieces) was found below a rock believed to be a cult site.[92] Bread was also the food of the gods. In the famous stanzas in *Hávamál* where Óðinn is retelling his own story, he says (st. 139; cf. *The Poetic Edda*, trans. C. Larrington, Oxford 1999):

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[90] Ellen Anne Pedersen and Mats Widgren, 'Järnålder'. In *Det svenska jordbrukets historia. Jordbrukets första femtusen år*. Ed. Janken Myrdal. Stockholm 1998, 400–01.

[91] Ann-Marie Hansson, 'Bread in Birka and on Björkö'. *Laborativ Arkeologi. Journal of Nordic Archaeological Science* 9, 1996, 61–78.

[92] Torun Zachrisson, 'The holiness of Helgö'. *Excavations at Helgö* 16. *Exotic and Sacral Finds from Helgö*. Stockholm 2004, 153–55.

Við hleifi mik seldo né við hornigi
nýsta ek niðr

No bread did they give me nor a drink from a horn,
downwards I peered

The normal archaeological interpretation of bread in graves and at cult sites is that it has symbolic significance, presumably representing fertility and regeneration.[93]

The PGmc word *hlaiƀa-* 'bread' is found in most Germanic languages, and as a loan in Slavonic (as in Russian *chleb*) and Finno-Ugric (as in Finnish *laipä*). We have already seen an *n*-extension on the Tune rune stone (**hlaiban-*), and interestingly for our discussion we find words such as Gothic *gahlaiba* m. and OHG *gi(h)leibo* m. (< **ga-hlaiƀan-*) meaning 'fellow, friend', originally obviously 'one you share the bread with', thus a direct equivalent of *companion*, Fr *compagnon*.

The importance of the meal and of food in early Scandinavia came to affect Scandinavian ideology deeply. This can be illustrated from many rune stones. The warlike ideal of the Viking[94] is vividly and eloquently expressed on rune stones and in skaldic poetry. In early Scandinavia it was also important to be a 'good' man. The kind of goodness referred to probably had little to do with what we mean by good in our modern world; an important aspect of being 'good' in Viking society was to be generous, and especially generous with food.[95] On the famous Turinge stone (Sö 338) in Södermanland we read:

ketil : auk + biorn + þaiʀ + raistu + stain + þin[a] + at + þourstain : faþur + sin + anuntr + at + bruþur + sin + auk : hu[skar]laʀ + hifiʀ + iafna + ketilau at + buanta sin * ¶ bruþr uaʀu þaʀ bistra mana : a : lanti auk : i liþi : uti : h(i)(l)(t)u sini huska(r)la : ui- + han + fial + i + urustu + austr + i + garþum + lis + furugi + lanmana + bestr

Ketill and Bjorn, they raised this stone in memory of Þorsteinn, their father; Onundr in memory of his brother and the housecarls in memory of the just(?) (and) Ketiley in memory of her husband.

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[93] A.-M. Hansson, 'Bread in Birka and on Björkö', 75.

[94] See for instance Neil Price, *The Viking Way*.

[95] Frands Herschend, *The Idea of the Good in Late Iron Age Society*. Opia 15. Uppsala 1998, *passim*.

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> The brothers were
> among the best of men
> in the land
> and abroad in the retinue,
> treated their
> retainers or housecarls well.
> He fell in battle
> east in Garðar (Russia),
> commander of the retinue,
> the best of landholders.[96]

Generosity was a characteristic of a chieftain that is frequently praised in skaldic poetry and runic inscriptions. And if you were a solid, frequent and generous provider of food, this was worth praising. On the Väppeby stone in Uppland (U 703) we can read: **mantr matar koþr auk mls risia**, *mandr matar goðr ok malsrisinn*, 'a man generous with food and eloquent' and on the Gådi stone, also in Uppland (U 739), Holmbjörn praises himself as **miltr matar auk mals risin**, 'liberal with food and eloquent'. On a couple of runestones we can read that the man commemorated had been *mildan orða ok matar goðan*, kind with words and generous with food. This theme is also found in *Hávamál* (39):

> Fannka ek mildan man
> eða svá matar góðan
>
> I found no man so mild
> nor so generous with food.

Being *matar góðr* defined a 'good' man.

What we are faced with here, in my opinion, is an archaic institution with special rules difficult for us to understand today, a household with a *hlāfweard* or a *witandah(a)laiban* (or for that matter an OHG *brōthērro*) as the *caput*. It has, I think, implications for our understanding of the rather complex and multidimensional network of dependence, patronage and lordship to be found in Scandinavia during the middle of the first millennium and in the late Iron Age (in Scandinavian terms, *c.*600–1050), a point I am trying to make in a new book on slavery in early

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[96] *Samnordisk runtextdatabas* (http://www.nordiska.uu.se/forskning/samnord.htm).

Scandinavia. It would take too long to present the arguments here; suffice to say that dependence and socially and legally unfree status had many facets and levels in society, and that an important root of the institution is to be traced back to Roman society and its *familia*.

To conclude, there is an obvious link between Anglo-Saxon England and early Scandinavia – admittedly partly because both belong to the more or less homogeneous pan-Germanic culture of the period – a link formed by the PGmc **hiwa(n)*, a household institution found all over the Germanic area, including that occupied by the Goths, centred around the communal meal and the sharing of bread, a PGmc **hlaiƀa-gangaz* m. This Germanic 'household' seems to be documented in Scandinavia as early as around AD 400 with the occurrence of *witandah(a)laiban* on the Tune-stone, and it can obviously be traced back to the Roman *familia*. The **hiwa(n)* 'household' was also used as the basis of several kinds of co-operative groups in medieval society, such as the military retinue, the *hirð* or the *lið*, and the guild, an institution which to date has received astonishingly little attention in Scandinavia. I am not talking about the town-guilds from the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries,[97] but an older guild institution, a Viking-Age ON *gildi*, or perhaps a *gild*-institution (a strong noun), that we have reminiscences of in our sources.[98] In all these co-operative groups eating and drinking were of prime importance; it was the glue that bound the members together.

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[97] See for instance Helge Søgaard, Sven Ljung, Grethe Authén Blom and Magnús Már Lárusson, *Kulturhistoriskt lexikon för nordisk medeltid* 5. Copenhagen etc. 1960, cols 299–313. It is however interesting to note that Authén Blom (col. 309) intimates an older institution for Norway (*hvirfingsdrykkjur, samdrykkjur, samburðarǫl, samkoma*) with a supposed pagan origin.

[98] See the interesting discussions of an early *gill(e)*-institution in Scandinavia, especially Norway, by (among others) Alexander Bugge, 'Tingsteder, gilder og andre gamle midtpunkter i de norske bygder'. *Historisk Tidsskrift* 25. Olso 1920, 97–152, 195–252; Harald H. Lindbach, *De norske middelaldergildene: økonomiske, religiøse og sosiale funksjoner ved gildene i Norge, ca. 1250–1550. Hovedoppgave*-thesis in history, University of Tromsø 1997; Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, *Norsk historie 800–1300. Frå høvdingmakt til konge- og kyrkjemakt.* Samlagets Norsk historie 1. Oslo 1999, 146–53.

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Bibliography and Abbreviations

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DN = Diplomatarium Norvegicum 1–. Oslo 1849 ff.

DR = Danmarks runeindskrifter, vols 1–3. Ed. Lis Jacobsen and Erik Moltke. Copenhagen 1941–43. [cited as DR + nr]

Justinian *Digest*. See *The Digest of Justinian*.

KL = Kulturhistoriskt lexikon för nordisk medeltid från vikingatid till reformationstid 1–22. Copenhagen etc. 1956–78.

KLE = Klaus von See, Beatrice La Farge, Eve Picard, Ilona Priebe and Katja Schulz, *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda*, vols 1–. Heidelberg 1997 ff.

Kluge = Fr. Kluge, *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache*. Ed. Elmar Seebold. Berlin and New York 2002.

ODa = Old Danish.

ODEE = The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology. Ed. C. T. Onions. Oxford 1966, repr. with corrections 1969.

OE = Old English.

OHG = Old High German.

ON = Old Norse

OSw = Old Swedish.

PGmc = Proto-Germanic.

RGA = Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde. Ed. Heinrich Beck et al. Berlin and New York 1973 ff.

SAOB = Svenska akademiens ordbok, vols 1–. Lund 1898 ff.

Snorra Edda = Edda Snorra Sturlusonar, vols 1–3. Ed. Jón Sigurðsson et al. Copenhagen 1848–87.

Sö = Södermanlands runinskrifter. Ed. Erik Brate and Elias Wessén. Sveriges runinskrifter 3. Stockholm 1924–36. [Cited as Sö + nr]

U = Upplands runinskrifter 1–4. Ed. Elias Wessén and Sven B. F. Jansson. Sveriges runinskrifter 6–9. Stockholm 1940–58. [Cited as U + nr]

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