FARMERS, MARINERS, AND LORDS OF LONG-AGO
Archaeology and prehistory in the Agder region

By Frans-Arne Stylegar
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THE LANDSCAPE

It is a commonplace of tourist brochures to state that a given region has ‘everything’. But when it comes Agder, Norway’s southernmost region, it is almost true. Even if the two Agder counties are rather small compared to other Norwegian regions, the nature is remarkably varied and so are the ways of life. Just recently I woke up at the Penne farm to a working-day on Lista. It was May, and the sun was shining. Dressed in shorts and t-shirt I went ahead with my business, surveying bronze-age rock-art. If I had cared for it, I’d might have taken a bath in the North Sea. As it were, I didn’t. Instead I drove to Sirdal in the upland region, since I had a meeting there the next day. Half-way up the long Sirdal valley it started snowing. Really snowing! Again, if I had cared for it, I could probably have caught a glimpse of one of the herds of wild reindeer – the last of its kind in Europe – that graze the mountain areas between Sirdal and Setesdal. The total driving length that day was no more than 120 km. Agder is indeed a place of opposites! It is also in a very real sense a border land – between south and north, between east and west, and between rootedness and tradition on the one hand, and entrepreneurship and faraway travels on the other. Moreover it is a landscape where past and present mix in a very peculiar way, and where the signatures of the past are still intensely present in today’s landscape.

Agder is the southernmost region in Norway, comprising the modern-day counties of Aust-Agder and Vest-Agder. It borders on Rogaland in the west and Telemark in the east. A number of long, but mostly narrow valleys runs through the region from north to south. These valleys encompass major river systems – Nidelva, Tovdalselva, Otra, Audna and Sira to name but a few, and the valleys are separated by rather low hilly and mountainous areas. Except for the Lista peninsula in the south-western corner of the region, the major settlement districts in Agder are located near these rivers, and today most of the towns and cities in the region lie at the intersection between river and sea, such as Arendal at the Nidelva and Kristiansand at both the Topdalselva and the Otra.

The great Ra moraine reaches the shore in Fjære near Grimstad after running through Agder in a south-eastern direction. The Ra acts as a natural barrage and several of the major inland lakes in Vest-Agder, like the Mannflåvatn and the Sirdalvatn, owe their existence to the Ra. The moraine soils are rich, and the Ra moraine in Agder has accommodated a number of settlement districts not aligned to the main rivers.
1. The Mollestad oak in Birkenes is a rare example of a giant oak, several centuries old. While most large oak trees in Agder were used for ship building or exported to Holland or England during the 17th-18th centuries, the Mollestad oak was an exception. It was believed to be inhabited by earth spirits (Norw. vetter), and in the 19th century people still offered the spirits food, milk, and ale as gifts. If the oak got damaged it would seriously harm the farm and its inhabitants. Photo: Frans-Arne Stylegar, Vest-Agder County Council.


3. View from the beacon at Mønstremyrvarden, Flekkefjord. Allegedly, one can see seven different parishes from here. Photo: Frans-Arne Stylegar, Vest-Agder County Council.

Lista is a special case. Its elevated, low-lying, and treeless landscape with its soils consisting partly of marine deposits has been compared to Jæren further west, but also to Jutland. Lista has through the times attracted a rather large population, and its many sites from most periods give it a prominent place in the archaeology in Agder.

Through most of historical times, the region was divided into three, sometimes four, administrative districts – Råbyggelag or Setesdal in the upland, mountainous area with its central settlement areas situated on the upper Otra river, and in the coastal region Lista in the west and Nedenes in the east, with Mandal occupying the middle ground. Cape Lindesnes acted as a natural border between east and west, and as a landmark separating western and eastern Norway – in the Viking Period even separating Norway and Denmark. In archaeological respects Lindesnes or the Naze acted as a cultural border at least in some periods, with pronounced differences in the material culture on either side. The upland area centred on Setesdal also stands out as different from the coastal districts when it comes to material culture, especially towards the end of prehistory.
Aerial view of Lista. The Lista peninsula with its characteristic villages is one of the oldest man-made landscapes in Norway. Photo: Tor Kvilja.
Farming landscape on western Lista. Photo: Tor Kveljo.
Moor landscape from Isefjær, Lillesand. Photo: Tor Kviljo.

Oksøy in the Kristiansand skerries. Photo: Tor Kviljo.
Traditionally some of the main land routes between southwestern and eastern Norway passed through Sirdal. A route across the Valevatn lake (left) and down the Hunnedalen valley led to Stavanger and northern Jæren. A Roman period situla rescued from a scree near Valevatn might be connected to this traffic. Another route through Gyadalen (right) led to Egarsund and Dalane. Photo: Tor Kolliø.
Lighthouse in Ryvingen, Mandal. Photo: Tor Kviljo.

From Epledalen, Lyngdal. Photo: Tor Kviljo.
The old harbour at Lyngøysund, Kristiansand. Photo: Erik Pearsen.

Audna river at Snik, Lindesnes. Photo: Tor Kviljo.
From Tovdalselva river, Åmli. Photo: Tor Kvilje.
From Stigsvøra, Birkenes. Photo: Ter Kviljo.
THE FIRST SETTLERS

8,600 years ago a group of people were living in their own island paradise in what is now Søgne in Vest-Agder. They were a robust kind of people, healthy, and probably living in affluence just by spending a few hours each day fishing, hunting sea-mammals, shooting fowl, or gathering edible plants. We have no idea what kind of language they used, but they did speak. Their brains were as big and as functional as ours. They were modern human beings in every physiological sense of the word, and they led a life perfectly atuned to the natural rhythm of their island Garden of Eden. Death, too, however, was part of their life, and it seems that they buried their dead family members close to where they lived. This is where some of them were found by archaeologists in 1994. Skeletal remains of perhaps as many as five individuals have been excavated from a shallow bay at one small island in Søgne. The first individual being found, an adult woman, was baptized ‘Sol’ (Sun) by the people who found her. To this day she is the oldest human skeleton found in Norway.

Over the last Ice Age Agder was, as was Scandinavia as a whole, covered by a thick ice-sheet. Since the melting of the ice-sheet – a process which was not completed until c. 5,500 years ago, the additional weight was gone and the land started to rebound. The pressure exercised by the ice-sheet varied between different regions, and so did the land elevation that followed. Thus, while land elevation since the last Ice Age is no more than 7 m on the Lista peninsula in the south-western part of Agder, it raises progressively further east, reaching 30 m in the Kristiansand area and an impressive 100 m in the area bordering on Telemark. Since rising sea-levels was also part of the equation during the deglaciation, there was a constant interplay between land elevation and sea-level rise. In some regions, notably the coastal areas between Søgne and Stavanger, rising sea-level in the late Mesolithic caused large patches of dry land to be submerged. The significance of this is that on Lista, for instance, archaeologists can expect to find traces of what used to be beach-bound Stone Age sites several hundred meters away from the beach, submerged by as much as 5 meters of sea-water.

2. The bone tool from Hidra is reminiscent of Mesolithic stone adzes, like this one from Gjerstad vicarage in Gjerstad. Photo: Museum of Cultural History, Oslo.

3. The Hidra adze is beautifully carved, with ornaments of a type known from many other Mesolithic objects. Drawing: Tone Strenger.

Submerged turf layers in Kirkehavn, Hidra. The adze might have been deposited in this or similar layers. Photo: Dag Nævestad, Norwegian Maritime Museum, Oslo.
Surveyed Stone Age sites in Sandvikdalen, Kristiansand. As the land gradually rebounded after the last Ice Age, people followed course. These three sites were all situated near the sea shore, but they date from different periods. Thus, the site to the left is Neolithic, while the other, more elevated ones are Mesolithic. Photo: City of Kristiansand.

An artist’s impression of what life might have been like in the coastal areas near Kristiansand towards the end of the Mesolithic. Illustration: Arkikon.
This probably explains the oldest physical evidence of the presence of human beings in Agder. On the island of Hidra near Flekkefjord a nicely decorated adze made of whale bone was salvaged during dredging. The artefact is dated to c. 9,500 years ago. The adze most likely stems from a submerged Mesolithic settlement. While made of bone, it is similar to Mesolithic stone adzes found elsewhere in Agder.
Another interesting collection of finds was salvaged by dredging in Segne near Kristiansand in 1994. Skeletal remains of as many as perhaps five humans, all of them seemingly women, have been dated to c. 8,600 before present. The skeletal remains could be of people buried next to a submerged settlement site. Analysis of the skeletal remains show that as much as 86 percent of the food digested by these Mesolithic people came from the sea, either fish or sea mammals. The importance of sea mammals for the Mesolithic people of Agder should not to be underestimated – the significantly older whale bone adze from Hidra underlines this, as does perhaps a number of finds of whale skeletons in the Kristiansand area, the latter most often interpreted as the remains of beached animals, but perhaps resulting from hunting activities.

1. Late Mesolithic stone axe from Øvre Egeland, Kvinesdal. Photo: Museum of Cultural History, Oslo.

2. Late Mesolithic flint axe from the Otra river, Kristiansand. Photo: Fædrelandsvennen.

3. Stone Age site at Homstølvatn lake, Sirdal. The site was submerged in the 1960s because of hydroelectric power development. Photo: Vest-Agder County Council.
Not all Mesolithic sites were located on the coast, but coastal sites have received much more attention from archaeologists than inland ones. However, a number of Mesolithic sites were excavated in Setesdal in the 170s and 10s.

It was an archaeological find from Lista that first suggested, to the antiquarian Nic. Nicolaysen in 1777, that there had been a pre-Neolithic stone age in Norway. The Sigersvoll find included a long stone axe with an oval cross-section and a flint flake axe, both artefacts distinctive of the Middle Mesolithic in this region.

The Sigersvoll axe is made of greenstone, and the westernmost part of Agder is the eastern border for the distribution of axes made of raw material from the great greenstone quarry at Hespriholmen in Hordaland. Further east, local diabases were used for making tools, and several quarries are known on the coast between Mandal and Kristiansand.

Near Lista is the oldest rock art in Agder, and the only carving of ‘Arctic’ type known from the region. The Forbergodden carving pictures an elk, and it is located on a steep cliff just to the north of Farsund.
1-6. Human skull from Søgne, dated to c. 8,400 years ago. The facial features of ‘Sol’, as the woman was Christianized, was reconstructed by physicians. Photo: Anna Winterthun, NIKU (upper left); University College, London (reconstructions).


Things to see & places to visit:
- Rock art at Forbergodden, Farsund (1)
- Rock shelter at Skjernøy, Mandal (2)
- Mesolithic site at Sigersvoll, Farsund (3)
- Stone Age quarry at Store Sæsøy, Mandal (4)
- Stone Age collections at Aust-Agder centre of cultural history, Arendal (5)
- Stone Age collections at Lista museum, Farsund (6)
- Stone Age collections at Museum of Cultural History, Oslo (the Søgne find)
- Norwegian Maritime Museum, Oslo (the Hidra find)
EARLY FARMING

Travelling from Kristiansand to Denmark by ferry takes approximately two and a half hours, if you are in a hurry. But crossing the short distance across the Skagerrak to Jutland was an option way back in prehistoric times. In some prehistoric periods, the similarities in material culture between Agder and northern Jutland are more pronounced than any similarities between western and eastern Norway. Agriculture seems to have reached Agder directly across this route. The earliest pollen evidence for grain cultivation on Lista is in the Early Neolithic, and the evidence from the Kristiansand area is almost as early. Early evidence for grain cultivation is found in the Oslofjord area as well, but not in the coastal districts between the Oslofjord and Kristiansand. A likely explanation is that agriculture came to Agder directly across the Skagerrak. This happened shortly after agriculture had reached Denmark itself, and perhaps as much as a thousand years before grain cultivation was a fact further west, in Rogaland and the coastal areas of western Norway. The same social and political networks that connected the Limfjord region with Lista and other coastal district in Agder, and through which agricultural technology was spread, became even more pronounced later on in history.
Pollen diagrams from Lista and Kristiansand indicate that the introduction of agriculture took place at a very early date in the coastal areas in Agder, earlier than in the neighbouring regions of Rogaland and Telemark. The neolithic ‘package’ comprising the growing of cereals and animal husbandry was most likely introduced directly from what is now Denmark, i.e. by a sea route crossing the Skagerrak. The very earliest traces of cereals in the Lista pollen diagrams stems from a horizon dated to c. 6,100 years before present.


2. Battle axe found at Løland in Lindesnes. This beautiful artifact was found in a barrow called Torjushaugen, and it was probably part of a burial. This find, and others like it, date from the Middle Neolithic, 4,500 years ago. Photo: Museum of Cultural History, Oslo.
Towards the end of the Neolithic areas like Lista were transformed into farming landscapes. From Hervoll. Photo: Vest-Agder County Council.

However, it is only in the millennium after this that the diagrams indicate forest clearance on Lista. Major clearance does not seem to have taken place until the Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age, 3,500-4,000 years ago. A more established farming system was probably not in place until then.

Archaeology tells the same story. Artefacts recognized as belonging to the early North European funnel beaker culture are concentrated on Lista, while in the rest of Agder only few, isolated finds are known. This strengthens the hypothesis that the Neolithic culture reached Lista as a direct cultural loan from Jutland.

Most of the Neolithic sites that have been excavated further east underline the continued importance of hunting and fishing. Sites like Narestø in Arendal, excavated by Anders Nummedal in 1918-19, and Flosta near Arendal are similar to coastal sites elsewhere on the Skagerrak.
The development in the upland areas differs from the one in the coastal region. Agriculture reached Setesdal and other valleys considerably later, and initially, it seems, only in the form of animal husbandry. But in the Middle and Late Neolithic, the period from c. 5,000 – 4,000 years ago, this begins to change, and from this time onward flint axes and other artefacts paralleled in South Scandinavian agricultural society are known from the upland region, as well. There is unfortunately a common misconception that Setesdal wasn’t settled until the Roman Period. This is a myth with no basis whatsoever in the archaeological source material, although it originated with and was for a long period sustained by archaeologists and historians.

2. Double edged battle axe found at Frestad, Lista. Photo: Bergen Museum.
3. Hunting and fishing was still of great importance in the Neolithic. This bone harpoon was found at Skjernøya near Mandal. Photo: Museum of Cultural History, Oslo.
At the same time – in the Late Neolithic, that is – the number of such artefacts increases dramatically also in other areas. On Lista, as we have seen, this increased and much more more dense distribution of South Scandinavian artefact types is paralleled by large-scale forest clearance, and the beginning of a process that would lead to the tree-less landscape that has characterized Lista from the Bronze Age until today. This picture seems to be rather similar to Jutland, where a major phase of clearance started around 200 BC, giving way to a type of agriculture mainly based on vast, open pastures, but with some cereal growing. The cereal growing is, however, different than in the Early Neolithic, with barley rather than wheat now being the most common type. There might also have been an increased reliance on sheep and goats towards the end of the Neolithic, compared to the dominance of cattle in the preceding period. Major social upheavals probably hide behind the changes in the archaeological material and in the pollen diagrams, but we still know little about what these upheavals were. Migrations, with new people moving in? Or changes within the existing culture? So far, opinions differ.

At the end of the Stone Age, as copper and bronze were becoming popular in Denmark and further south, huge quantas of flint was exported north, across the Skagerakk. In Norway this is a period of large flint hoards, like this one from Tveit in Kristiansand. Photo: Museum of Cultural History, Oslo.

Rock shelter at Kari med steinen, Kollemo in Hægebostad. The name stem from a woman, Kari, who lived there in the 1860s. But poor Kari was by no means the first inhabitant under this rock – several Neolithic artefacts have been found there, as well. Photo: Svein Mjaatvedt, Vest-Agder County Council.


At the end of the Stone Age, as copper and bronze were becoming popular in Denmark and further south, huge quantas of flint was exported north, across the Skagerakk. In Norway this is a period of large flint hoards, like this one from Tveit in Kristiansand. Photo: Museum of Cultural History, Oslo.
The interior of Agder was exploited by farming people already in the Late Stone Age. The pictured axe was found during excavation work at Sosteli in Åseral. Photo: Museum of Cultural History, Oslo.

Cultural landscape on Lista
Settlement sites at Narestø, Arendal (7)
Rock shelter at Æreneset, Hægebostad (8)
Rock shelter Øysteinsshedlaren, Sirdal (9)
Stone Age collections at Aust-Agder centre of cultural history, Arendal (5)
Stone Age collections at Lista museum, Farsund (6)
Stone Age collections at Museum of Cultural History, Oslo

Flint techniques got more and more advanced during the Neolithic. This arrowhead is rather exquisite, but typical of the Late Neolithic. It was found at Eg, Kristiansand. Photo: Museum of Cultural History, Oslo.

Things to see & places to visit
In Agder the metal finds associated with Bronze Age culture are concentrated in two relatively minor regions, the Fjære area near Grimstad in the east and Lista in the west. Lista, in particular, has many bronze finds – swords, knives, axes and personal equipment. Most of the metal artefacts from Lista have close parallels in Jutland, and along with Jæren, Lista has been interpreted as a ‘province of Jutland’ in this period. Some of the Lista finds barely have any equivalents in Norway (excluding Jæren, in most cases), and it is possible that Lista chieftains, partly due to their geographical proximity to Jutland, acted as a ‘filter’ of some kind for precious metal objects from South Scandinavia, keeping some objects and distributing the rest through their elite networks.

Farmers and Mariners

The Bronze Age! Few other periods besides our own are as visible in the Lista landscape as this; large ships and other symbols carved in stone, and dark earthen barrows where waving fields meet the ocean, abound. People are – rightly – often intrigued by the rock-art on Lista, and as an archaeologist I often get the question what the carvings mean? It is a tough one. After all, the last people who really knew what the carvings meant, died more than 2,000 years ago. Even if it’s pretty vague, I usually quote the Danish archaeologist Jørgen Jensen’s answer to the question in response. He writes that the different motifs ‘were linked to the great epic about light and dark, day and night, about the heavenly sphere and the subterranean. It is in the border zone between the two that man is alive.’ As for the monumental barrows that are often situated by the waterside, I think it is appropriate to quote the Odyssey, with its plot from the fall of Troy in the 13th or 12th century BC, halfway through our own Scandinavian Bronze Age. Here is Elpenor’s prayer to his comrade Ulysses – and I like to imagine that similar prayers were uttered on Lista as well:

‘There, then, O prince, I bid thee remember me. Leave me not behind thee unwept and unburied as thou goest thence, and turn not away from me, lest haply I bring the wrath of the gods upon thee. Nay, burn me with my armour, all that is mine, and heap up a mound for me on the shore of the grey sea, in memory of an unhappy man, that men yet to be may learn of me. Fulfil this my prayer, and fix upon the mound my oar wherewith I rowed in life when I was among my comrades.’

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The foreign metal objects must have reached Lista through similar networks. Several of the bronze objects found on Lista have their origins in Continental Europe. A gold arm ring found in Vanse, Lista is made of an alloy similar to gold in the Lower Danube area during the Bronze Age.

While most metal finds on Lista date to the Early Bronze Age (c. 1700-1100 BC), Fjære and the south-western part of Aust-Agder county is characterized by many rich finds from the Late Bronze Age (c. 1000-500 BC). Some of these finds, too, are of continental origins, like a bronze sword from Maglestu near Lillesand. An interesting group of finds are three so-called face-urns from Fjære. These ceramic urns are very rare in Norway, but have parallels in Jutland and Eastern parts of the Continent. However, the face-urns from Fjære were probably produced locally, as no exact parallels to them are known.
Marka

Page 50 - 53: The Marka site on Lista has several monumental barrows from the Bronze Age. Before major damages were done to the monuments during World war II, a number of barrows had diameters up to 40 m. The two top pictures were taken by Jan Petersen in the 1920s, before Engelshaug (top) and Tuptehaug were destroyed (photo: Museum of Cultural History, Oslo). The lower picture is from 1991, showing the sad remains of Trollhaug (photo: Vest-Agder County Council). Marka was one of the major concentrations of large Bronze Age barrows in the whole of Norway. On the small islet Rauna (next pages), a little more than 1 km off shore, a huge cairn dominates the stony landscape. It has never been excavated, and we don’t know how old it is. Today it is ‘adorned’ by a small light house. Photo: Tom Heibreen, Museum of Cultural History, Oslo.
farmers and mariners
Bronze Age (?) hammer from Hananger, Lista. Metallurgical analyses have documented that the hammer is made from pure copper, and it might actually be from the Late Neolithic. Photo: Museum of Cultural History, Oslo.

So-called 'face urns' found at Bringsvær in Fjaere. Fjaere and Lista were both Bronze Age centres, and many metal objects have been recovered from both areas. Photo: Museum of Cultural History, Oslo.
Cairn at Steinodden, Lista. The Obmundsrøysa itself might date from the Bronze Age, but it used to have a Viking Age runic stone placed on top of it. Many of Lista’s Bronze Age monuments were reused in later periods. Note the many stone fences which separated different properties, as well as the number of paths or tracks being cleared in the stony ground. Both testify to the importance of the area for kelp gathering, which was an important business for people on Lista in the late 19th century. Photo: Tom Heibreen, Museum of Cultural History, Oslo.
1. Ship carvings from Lunde (top two) and Kallieberg on Lista.

2. Gold arm ring from a barrow at Klokkhammer, Lista. It is made of an alloy similar to gold in the Lower Danube area during the Bronze Age, and it might have been imported from Continental Europe. Photo: Museum of Cultural History, Oslo.

3. Moulds for making celts. The two parts were found at Bryne, Lista. The moulds are made of soap stone. Photo: Museum of Cultural History, Oslo.

In the Bronze Age, we are dealing with a long established, hierarchical society. The majority of the finds discussed so far are from graves, and the Early Bronze Age graves are radically different from anything seen hitherto. Thus, the big earthen barrows on Lista are still a very characteristic landscape element. The barrows are associated with the upper strata of Bronze Age society, and it is from monuments like these that the imported bronzes have been salvaged. Earthen barrows dating to this period are not common in Norway, and outside of Agder, Rogaland and Hordaland they barely register. In the Oslo fjord area the normal Bronze Age burial monuments are stone cairns. However, in Jutland and Northern Germany barrows similar to the ones on Lista occur regularly.
The barrows are visually spectacular, and so are the many rock art sites on Lista. Well-known sites like Penne and Kviljo display all the motifs known in local Bronze Age art – the ship, the footprint, and the cup mark. The rock art on Lista is an expression of the cosmology of Bronze Age man. The rock art sites were linked to rituals involving Origins (ancestors, gods and ‘others’ in the shape of people from outside one’s own society) and Return (the sun, birth and death, the annual cycle). Sites with cup marks only dominate, and sites with other motifs are relatively rare. It seems that the cup mark sites mark out the contemporary settlements, while more complex sites like Penne are ritual places of a higher level, perhaps belonging to a larger district.

1. Cairn at Stangodden, Kristiansand. The dating of these coastal monuments is still being debated, but at least some of them date to the Bronze Age. Photo: Vest-Agder County Council.

2. Huge ship shaped cairn at Brattestø, Mandal. Photo: Ole Burulf Madsen.

1. Left: This beautifully formed dagger is evidence of the level of perfection reached by flint makers in the Early Bronze Age. The partially damaged dagger was found at Flekkerøya near Kristiansand. Photo: Frans-Arne Stylke, Vest-Agder County Council.


1. Lunderhaug near Vanse church on Lista is shrouded in mystery. At times it has been interpreted as a hill fort, and at times as a barrow. This sketch, made by Lieutenant E. Lund in 1859, shows Lunderhaug before it was damaged during World War II. The cairn surrounded by concentric stone walls on top of a natural mound is reminiscent of Swedish sites that has recently been explained as Bronze Age cult sites. Photo: Vest-Agder County Council.

2. Flint dagger found at Oddernes, Kristiansand. Photo: Arne Lunde.
Archaological excavations at Penne started in 2007, and will continue over the next years.

Recently a walking route on the western part of Lista was opened. It gives an excellent view of the Bronze Age monuments on Lista, both barrows and rock art.

Finds dating to the Late Neolithic and the Bronze Age and indicating agricultural activities are known from the whole Agder region, and new finds reach the museums every year. In some areas—Lista, of course, but also Kristiansand—the number of flint and stone tools (sickles, daggers, shaft-hole axes) is quite overwhelming, and finds are known from almost each and everyone of the present-day farms, thus underlining that this was a major phase of intensified agriculture and farm establishment.

Farm-houses in the Early Bronze Age were long, two-aisled buildings. As yet, only one Early Bronze Age house has been excavated in Agder (in Søgne near Kristiansand). The remains of a three-aisled farm-house from the Late Bronze Age was excavated at Vanse on Lista in 1999. Two large-scale research projects partly initiated by Vest-Agder county council will no doubt change this picture over the next few years. A programme for satellite monitoring is likely to pin-point many early farms on Lista, while a ‘Lista project’ at Oslo University is designed to study the emergence of social hierarchies in the region.

1. Sverreshaug, the biggest Bronze Age barrow in Agder. It was excavated by Anders Loranger in 1877 and dated to the Early Bronze Age. Photo: Tom Heibreen, Museum of Cultural History, Oslo.


3. Large plain battle axe found at Korsvik, Kristiansand. Complete axes like this hardly represent lost specimens, but are much more likely to have been consciously deposited either in graves or as ritual offerings. Photo: Vest-Agder County Council.
Things to see & places to visit

- Rock art at Penne, Farsund (10)
- Rock art at Kviljo, Farsund (11)
- Rock art at Timenes, Kristiansand (12)
- Sverreshaug barrow, Farsund (13)
- Burial cairns on Tromøy, Arendal (14)
- Burial cairns on Merde, Arendal (15)
- Coastal path, Lista, Farsund
- Bronze Age collections at Aust-Agder centre of cultural history, Arendal (5)
- Bronze Age collections at Lista museum, Farsund (6)
- Bronze Age collections at Museum of Cultural History, Oslo
- Reconstructed Bronze Age long-house at Bronseplassen, Lillesand (16)


2. Cup marks at Berhus in Kristiansand. Outside Lista cup marks are the only type of rock art motif found in Agder. This site was recently discovered. Photo: Frans-Arne Styllogar, Vest-Agder County Council.

3. Satellite monitoring is about to revolutionize the way we practice archaeology in Agder. A research project utilising satellite data is ongoing in Spangervåg and Lista. Photo: IKONOS/GeoEye.
A burial with a very peculiar content was recovered at Vestre Hauge on Lista in the 19th century. It was a man’s grave, and among the objects that had accompanied the deceased was a rare Roman gold medallion, a triple solidus from the reign of Valentinian (364-375). This particular medallion was issued in Trier in present-day Germany when the Emperor resided there in the years 367-75. Medallions like this was undoubtedly struck to be presented by the emperor as gifts in commemoration of a particular occasion. How the medallion, which shows few traces of wear, ended up in a barrow in far-away Lista we can only speculate. But it cannot be ruled out that its owner had performed military services for the Emperor, or was his ally. Archaeological finds from Agder, east and west, show that relations between the northern ‘barbarians’ and the Romans were quite close and direct at times.

The Pre-Roman or ‘Celtic’ Iron Age (c. 500–1 BC) is an enigmatic period in Agder, mainly because of the low number of known grave finds. Only a handful of graves from these centuries is known in Vest-Agder. These finds cluster early in the period. Even fewer finds are known from Aust-Agder. The most common grave type in the region seems to be urned cremations in small stone cists, either as unmarked graves or as secondary interments in older barrows.
Lunde

The Late Roman and Migration Period finds from Lunde are indeed impressive. Continental import finds like gold rings, glass beakers and glass drinking horns, and bronze vessels abound. This bronze bucket is particularly well preserved. Photo: Bergen Museum.
Reconstruction drawing of the Pre-Roman period settlement at Kongsgård near Kristiansand. Illustration: Arkikon.
Small cists like the one pictured here from Sødal in Kristiansand and containing simple cremation burials represent a widespread mortuary custom in the centuries around the birth of Christ. Photo: Arne Skjølsvold, Museum of Cultural History, Oslo.

There are only a small number of surveyed and excavated settlements from the Pre-Roman Iron Age in Norway as a whole. A village-like settlement excavated at Oddernes near Kristiansand in the 1980s is the only settlement from the period known in Agder. This village-like settlement was established in the early Pre-Roman Iron Age, at a sandy stretch of land just outside of where Kristiansand is located nowadays. The settlement was composed of several farms complete with long-houses and pit-houses. The different buildings seem to have been placed in two parallel rows with an open space separating them. Traces of fences dividing the different farms were found, as were remains of stall boxes inside some of the houses. These are the oldest stalls known so far in Norway. The multi-farm, village-like settlement at Oddernes is remarkable, and there are no real parallels in Norway. The Oddernes settlement has, however, been compared to villages like Hodde in Jutland. The settlement at Oddernes was probably moved to a site 2-300 m away at the beginning of the Roman Period.


Small cists like the one pictured here from Sødal in Kristiansand and containing simple cremation burials represent a widespread mortuary custom in the centuries around the birth of Christ. Photo: Arne Skjølsvold, Museum of Cultural History, Oslo.
Excavations at Augland in 1975. More than 55,000 sherd of pottery were salvaged, although the excavated area covered no more than a quarter of an acre. Photo: Fædrelandsvenninn.

Fjære near Grimstad is the primary agricultural district in Aust-Agder. Grave finds from Fjære indicate that there was an important centre in the area already at the transition between the Early (AD 1-150) and the Late (AD 150-400) Roman Period. The Early Roman Period finds in Aust-Agder are concentrated in the Fjære area. Continental imports – glass beakers, jewellery, weapons and bronze cauldrons - are known primarily from the Late Roman Period and later, and these too cluster in this area.

The high-status milieu in Fjære seems to have acted as redistributor of the Roman imports, which mainly reached the area from a centre on Zealand. The connections between Fjære and East Denmark is made clear through a couple of special items from the extensive Iron Age cemetery at Bringsvær. Two female burials, both from the 3rd century, contained a so-called rosette fibula. This is a very rare type of women’s dress accessory, with only a small number of specimens known from Norway, and the two specimens are the only finds between Østfold and Northern Rogaland. Another artefact type associated with Zealand, golden snake’s head finger rings, are also known from Fjære, and along the waterways further north.
Gold snake’s head finger ring from Bringsvær, Fjære. Photo: Museum of Cultural History, Oslo.

Bronze Rosette fibula from a woman’s grave at Bringsvær. Photo: Museum of Cultural History, Oslo.

Monuments at Bringsvær, as sketched by Lieutenant E. Lund in 1859. Photo: Vest-Agder County Council.
Triangular stone-setting at Dømmesmoen, Grimstad. There is an ongoing debate regarding the function and symbolism of these monuments. While they occur on many cemeteries and often have cremation remains deposited inside them, it is being suggested that they might have served some ritual purpose in connection with burials taking place at the cemeteries. Typically, there is only one or two triangular stone-settings on each cemetery, as is the case not only on Dømmesmoen, but at Lunde, Spangereid, Penna etc. Photo: Frans-Arne Stylégar, Vest-Agder County Council.

Exquisite artefacts with a political and ideological symbolism are known in these inland areas later in the Iron Age too, and both these and the Late Roman finds has been interpreted as emanating from a conscious strategy by the Fjære milieu of trying to control larger areas through local chieftains. We have a Late Roman Period burial find with a swastika fibula from as far away as Gangså in Marnardal. These fibulae are indicative of the same south eastern connections as the rosette fibulae and snake’s head rings. The Gangså find could indicate that the influence of the Fjære milieu reached well into Vest-Agder, but is more likely explained by the Marnardal area’s relative closeness to another political centre, either at Oddernes or further to the west.

Iron Age Barrow encircled by standing stones at Harkmark church near Mandal. Until the 1860s the vicinity of this church was allegedly packed with standing stones. Photo: Frans-Arne Stylégar, Vest-Agder County Council.

Late Roman period gold finger ring found in a barrow near Spangereid church. Photo: Museum of Cultural History, Oslo.
Barrow with standing stone at Hestebakken, Eiken church, Hægebostad. Another barrow lying next to this one was excavated in 1963. It contained a woman’s grave from the Late Roman period. Photo: Frans Arne Stylegar, Vest-Agder County Council.

Cairn on a small island in Framvaren lake, Lista. Photo: Dag Naustdal, Norwegian Maritime Museum, Oslo.

Beads from a woman’s grave excavated at Moi, Kvinesdal. Photo: Museum of Cultural History, Oslo.
The monumental and aristocratic barrow cemetery at Oddernes in Kristiansand, as shown on a map from c. 1750. Photo: Norwegian Mapping and Cadastre Authority, Hønefoss.

A western parallel to Fjære is situated at Lunde on Lista. Like Fjære, and like another Lista centre much earlier, Lunde seems to have been able to pose as a 'filter' for Roman exports in the Late Roman and Migration Periods. The remaining large barrows at Lunde date to both these periods, and the size and monumentality of the barrows point to the (continued) importance of the area in the first centuries AD. Near the Lunde barrows a Late Roman Period hall building was excavated a few years ago.

Pottery was a regional speciality in Agder in the Roman and Migration Periods. The pottery material is extensive and varied. Some of the locally produced pottery copies Frankish bronze cauldrons (a find from Fjære) and Roman glass beakers (a find from Galteeland in Evje og Hornnes). Some of the undecorated vessels seem to be related to pottery in the Gothic areas on the Continent (Oder – Vistula), while other types show similarities with pottery in Jutland. Pottery is known mainly from grave finds, and in some graves urns occur in large numbers. Sherds belonging to at least 15 different vessels were found in one large barrow at Dømmesmoen in Fjære.
So far we know only one Roman Period centre of pottery-making in Agder – or in Scandinavia, for that matter. A specialised pottery-making settlement was excavated at Augaland near Kristiansand in the 170s. The settlement was located at a sandy plateau overlooking the Otra river, and near a natural clay deposit. Traces of intensive pottery-making were found at Augaland, including more than 55,000 sherds of pottery, buildings specially designed for the drying of pots, storage-pits for raw clay and so on.

Analyses of the clay used in pots found in different areas of Agder indicate that pots made from the fine quality clay at Augland were widely distributed. The area of distribution incorporates both Fjære and the Oddernes area close to Augland. It seems likely that the production of pottery at Augland was controlled by chieftains residing at Oddernes, an area that in some ways emulates Fjære.

At Eg in Kristianssand an iron extraction site was excavated some years ago. The technology used for making iron at Eg is noteworthy for being of ‘Continental’ type, i.e. a kind of technology that is widely distributed in Northern Germany and Jutland. Sites using the same technology are known from a handful of other sites in southernmost Norway, including at Straume in Valle, Setesdal. Elsewhere in Norway other technologies were used.
Detail of the Valevatn situla. Photo: Archaeological museum, Stavanger.

Bronze situla found at Valevatn, Sirdal. Photo: Archaeological museum, Stavanger.

Houses and graves under excavation at Ørrebø church in Vennesla. On the right hand side is a long-house dated to the Roman period. Renewed research activity over the last few years are turning up Roman period settlements in many areas. Photo: Frans-Arne Stylégår, Vest-Agder County Council.
A so-called ‘court site’ – a number of houses placed radially around an open space – has been excavated at Oddernes. Furthermore, a heavily damaged structure that may represent a similar site has been detected at Spangereid in Lindesnes. The Spangereid site was partly excavated by Oluf Rygh in 1879. He, however, assumed that the house walls were long barrows lying side by side. There is an ongoing debate about what sort of functions were associated with the court sites. Assembly sites, places for ritual gatherings, and military barracks are some suggestions. As for Oddernes, the court site was surrounded by several hundreds cooking pits, and it has been suggested that the court site as well as the pits were used in ritual gatherings.

Both the Oddernes and the Spangereid sites are situated within extensive and time-honoured monumental complexes. Spangereid has the largest intact Iron Age barrow cemetery in Agder with c. 150 barrows. So far, only vague traces of the settlements which used the cemetery have surfaced. Things are just the opposite at Oddernes. We know of extensive settlement remains from the Roman Period, while the huge barrow cemetery that once stretched from today’s University campus and all the way down to the southern one of the two bridges crossing the Øtra river in Kristiansand city, is almost completely destroyed and mainly known from older written and cartographic sources.

Both these cemeteries have much in common with the cemetery at Bringsvær in Fjære. Most of the Early Roman Period finds from Agder stem from these and other coastal cemeteries like them. These cemeteries seem to be used regularly at least from the Early Roman Period and all the way through pagan times, a period of c. 1,000 years.
Spangereid is a narrow isthmus (Norw. eid) that connects the Lindesnes peninsula to the mainland. The special topography made Spangereid an important place throughout the Iron Age, starting in the Roman period. It is however in the Migration period that Spangereid’s central position is most visible. Photo: Tom Heibreen, Museum of Cultural History, Oslo.

Things to see & places to visit

- Stone-settings at Dømmesmoen, Grimstad (17)
- Stone-setting at Harkmark church, Mandal (18)
- Reconstructed stone-settings at Holt church, Tvedestrand (19)
- Large barrows at Lunde, Farsund (20)
- Barrows and other monuments at Spangereid, Lindesnes (21)
- Roman Period pottery-making site at Augland, Kristiansand (22)
- Roman Period settlements site and cemetery at Oddernes church, Kristiansand (23)
- Iron Age collections at Aust-Agder centre of cultural history, Arendal (5)
- Iron Age collections at Museum of Cultural History, Oslo
- Iron Age collections at Vest-Agder museum, Kristiansand
- Hunnedal find at Archaeological museum, Stavanger
The monumental barrows at Lunde were restored during the 1980s. Photo: Tom Heibreen, Museum of Cultural History, Oslo.
ARISTOCRATS OF THE MIGRATION PERIOD

Agder, at least its western districts, is a central area when it comes to gold hoards from the Migration period. The region literally had a golden age in the period around AD 500. In 133 a local man was logging at Nese near the lake Byglandsfjord in Setesdal, when he stumbled upon a great treasure, a Migration period gold hoard consisting of more than 30 rings with a total weight of half a pound. The objects were handed over to the local bailiff, who allegedly cheated him of his finder’s fee! Hoards like the one from Nese were for a long time explained as resulting from war and crises. People were burying their money and valuables, and in some instances the treasures were not recovered, either because their owners had been killed or abducted. It is however more likely that the hoards are an expression of a type of economy different from our own. Gold in the Migration period was not money in the modern sense. Gold in the shape of rings were status symbols, and such rings were ‘traded’ between leading men and their allies as visible signs of the special relationship between them. The ring gold was thus more like personal belongings than means of payment. Neither were the broken up pieces of gold rings that we often meet with in the hoards money in our sense of the word, but were probably used for special kinds of transactions, like the paying of fines. But why put the gold in the ground? Perhaps Snorri Sturluson provides us with the best answer: He writes that the god Odin had decided that what property a man buried while he was alive, he could bring to Valhall when he dies. Religious ideas like this also explains why the hoards were never recovered.

The main phase of import of Roman prestige objects to the region seems to have taken place in the late Roman and Migration Periods (150-550). Only sporadically do archaeologists encounter imported items from the Early Roman Period – the foremost example being a bronze situla from Valevatn in Sirdal, salvaged from a scree slope near an important trail between Jærren and the interior of Agder. The Valevatn situla was made somewhere in Italy at the end of the 1st century.
Above: Brooches, spindle whorls, a belt ring, and a silver object decorated in Style 1 — all from a richly furnished woman’s grave at Åtland, Flekkefjord. Photo: Museum of Cultural History, Oslo.

Left: The Style 1 decorated silver object. Photo: Museum of Cultural History, Oslo.

‘Holy white stone’, a phallos stone, from Tjomsås in Vennesla. It was placed on top of a barrow. Fertility rituals were an aspect of the Roman and Migration period belief systems. Photo: Frans-Arne Stylegar, Vest-Agder County Council.

Axe from Løland, Lindesnes. Photo: Museum of Cultural History, Oslo.
Of Late Roman imports should be mentioned Roman swords in ‘officer’s graves’ at Eiken in Hægebostad, Mollestad in Birkenes and Bringsvær in Grimstad, and a lavishly furnished but poorly preserved male burial at Østre Hauge on Lista. Another male burial from Lista dates from the 5th century. This grave was found at Vestre Hauge in the 19th century, and among the objects that had accompanied the deceased was a rare Roman gold medallion, a triple solidus from the reign of Valentinian (364-375). This particular medallion was issued in Trier in present-day Germany when the Emperor resided there in the years 367-75. Medallions like this was undoubtedly struck to be presented by the emperor as gifts in commemoration of a particular occasion. How the medallion, which shows few traces of wear, ended up in a barrow in far-away Lista we can only speculate. But it cannot be ruled out that its owner had performed military services for the Emperor, or was his ally. We know that Valentinian forged alliances with several Germanic tribes during his years in Trier.

The largest collection of Continental imports in Vest-Agder is associated with the great barrows and nearby unmarked graves at Lunde on Lista. The cluster of rich finds and imports in the vicinity of the Lundevågen bay long ago gave rise to the idea that there had been a trading site in the area. In later years archaeologists have detected thick cultural layers that may be linked to the supposed trading site. Another possible trading site is known at Spangereid, and it seems likely that there was yet another one in Fjære.
Furnished burials occur regularly in the region in the Migration Period (400-550). The aristocracy cultivated a burial custom with inhumation in large stone cists, either below or above ground, and most often covered by an earthen barrow. From graves of this type come some of the most exquisite Migration Period artefacts known in Scandinavia. While we know of a number of richly furnished inhumations in Aust-Agder, like the female graves at Skreros in Birkenes and Myrhus in Froland, it is primarily Vest-Agder that is the central area for this kind of graves.

Wencke Slomann’s ‘Migration Period complex’ consists of lavishly furnished inhumation burials in large stone cists, and with artefacts like cruciform brooches, relief brooches, clasps and precious belt accessories, all of it decorated in the early animal style called ‘Style 1’, as well as double-edged swords, wooden buckets with or without metal mounts, bracteates and finger rings made of gold, glass beads, imported glass beakers, bronze cauldrons and pottery in the shape of jugs and bucket-shaped pots. This complex is characteristic of the upland areas in Vest-Agder. In the 5th century it has a number of representatives in Lyngdal, and after the year 500 it culminates with a horizon of splendid finds like the famous ones from Snartemo in Hægebostad.

Gilded clasp from Gitlevåg, Lyngdal. Objects with decoration similar to this one are found over an extensive area in the Migration period, including East-England and the Oslofjord area. Photo: Bergen Museum.

Glass beaker salvaged from one of the huge barrows at Bringsjord in Lyngdal. Photo: Museum of Cultural History, Oslo.

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Hill forts

Hill forts at Lista, drawn by I. Ross in 1872: Borgåsen at Vigmastad (left) and Borgåsen at Jørstad (right).

Crumbling stone walls on the hill fort Salsløkken, Lista. Salsløkken was partially excavated by Helge Gjessing and dated to the Migration period. Photo: Frans-Arne Stylegar, Vest-Agder County Council.

Artist’s impression of what life might have been like in a hill fort in the Migration period. Illustration: Jan Værp, Ark reklamebyrå.


Right: View from the hill fort Bergjå at Ásustad, Audnedal. Photo: Frans-Arne Stylegar, Vest-Agder County Council.


Right: View from the hill fort Bergjå at Ásustad, Audnedal. Photo: Frans-Arne Stylegar, Vest-Agder County Council.
Plait of human hair from a woman’s grave from Øye, Kvinesdal. A huge barrow called ‘Tinghaugen’ was destroyed in 1833, and a large cist containing many objects was discovered. The plait was found near the head end of the cist. Photo: Bergen Museum.

Migration period bronze brooches from Kvinesdal. The top and middle pictures show cruciform brooches from Øye, while the low image shows atypical brooches from Moi. The latter ones, with their spatulate terminations, might be influenced by brooch types common in the Baltic. Photos: Museum of Cultural History, Oslo.
1. Iron Age house ground at Penne, Lista. Photo: Frans-Arne Stylegar, Vest-Agder County Council.

2. ‘How did they make a living here?’ This is not an uncommon question when it comes to deserted Migration period farms. Sometimes they are found in what appears to be very marginal areas. The answer is that they probably didn’t. Sites like the pictured one at Skjernøy, with only very limited resources available to the people living there, only make sense when one accepts that Migration period society was organized in a redistributive way. Thus, it was possible to have specialized settlements like the Skjernøy one – whether the people here were specialized fishermen or something else, they must have gotten a substantial part of their foodstuffs from elsewhere. Photo: Frans-Arne Stylegar, Vest-Agder County Council.


At Snartemo, c. 40 km from the coast, three exquisite male graves from the Late Migration Period were discovered by chance between 1847 and 1933. At least two of the graves – the ones where we know some details about the circumstances of the finds, and which seems to belong to men of successive generations – appear to have been very similar. Both men had been inhumed in large, subterranean stone cists; they were laid-out on bear furs and their bodies were wrapped in blankets. They were both wearing their best clothes, and each had a precious sword with a golden hilt. Among the furnishings were glass beakers, bronze urns, pottery, gold rings and an extensive selection of weapons. One of the men had a set of scales and weights as well. The sword in the latter grave is outstandingly beautiful and has elements in common with Continental swords of the Migration Period. Recent studies show that the Snartemo sword was rather old when put in the grave, and that its hilt consists of several parts of different origins. It was probably assembled locally.
Iron Age pottery found on Lista. Findspots:
1) Helvik, 2) Vestre Hauge, 3 and 4) Brekke,
5) Kalleberg, 6) Åmdal, and 7) Frøstad.

Gold neck rings found at Øksendal, Sirdal.
Photo: Museum of Cultural History, Oslo.
Sosteli

The abandoned farm at Sosteli in Åseral, situated at 400 m above sea level, was investigated by Anders Hagen between 1947 and 1949.
What do the Snartermo finds represent? The simple answer is that we do not know, but it is probably significant that there is a horizon of similar graves in Hægebostad and the neighbouring districts, although none of them are quite as lavishly furnished as the Snartermo graves. Other rich finds from the area include Ågedal in Audnedal and Trygslund in Marnardal.

Gold hoards are also part of the rich Migration Period complex in the upland areas, even if such treasures are found in the coastal region as well. A find of two neck rings from Øksendal in Sirdal is especially noteworthy, as is a find of ‘ring-money’ from Nese in Bygland. Gold bracteates, which in Denmark and Sweden are usually found in hoards, are in Agder often found in graves, notably female ones.

A number of abandoned Migration Period farmsteads have been excavated in the region. Abandoned Iron Age farms with ruined houses, stone fences, and clearance cairns, all visible above ground, are found in marginal areas all over the region, from off-coast islands to the mountains, and they testify to the great expansion of the settled areas that took place in the Late Roman and Migration Periods. There are hundreds of these abandoned farms, although many of them have left no other trace than their names.

1. Golden mount for a sword scabbard from Åmdal, Lista. Another golden mount was found at Bergsaker in Lyngdal. Photo: Museum of Cultural History, Oslo.


3 & 4. It was not only objects made of precious metals that were ritually hoarded in the Migration period. In May 2007 a well preserved bronze cruciform brooch was found in a remote location near Skarstad, Audnedal. The find spot, under a rock and near running water, is rather typical. Add to this the rumours about the place being haunted, and we have ourselves a perfect ritual site! Photo: Frans-Arne Stykeigar, Vest-Agder County Council.
The first abandoned farms of this kind were excavated on Lista by Helge Gjessing during the First World War, with Krustad and Penne as central sites. The Penne farm is situated immediately below the cliff with the Bronze Age carvings. Judging from the pottery salvaged from these and many other abandoned farms, it seems that many farms that had been established in the Roman Period, were given up during the sixth century.

The near-complete excavation of a ruined Migration Period farm at Sosteli in Åseral in the late 1940s were groundbreaking. Directed by Anders Hagen, the excavations produced quite detailed knowledge of daily life on a farm in the fifth century, as not only the remains of the farm buildings and a number of barrows were investigated, but also clearance cairns and lynchets. While most of the abandoned farms are relatively small, Sosteli was not. The main farm building here is 45 m long, and finds from both the houses and the barrows indicate...
that the people living here were relatively well off. This may be because the Sosteli settlement was situated midway between the central settlement district in Åseral and iron-producing areas in the mountains, and it is indeed likely that the people living at Sosteli played an important role in iron production. While the excavated farm buildings show no sign of having been inhabited beyond the first half of the sixth century, there is little doubt that people continued living at Sosteli well into the Middle Ages, although a temporary abandonment took place at the end of the Migration Period.

Another farm was excavated at the Bossvatn lake in Bykle, 530 m above sea level, in the 170s. The datable artefacts from the long-house at Skarg documents that the farm site had one or several phases of use from the Late Migration Period all the way into the Middle Ages. Two burial mounds that were excavated on the same occasion were dated to the Migration Period as well, and beneath one of them was found iron slag. At a third farmstead site – at Flateland in Åmli – remains of a 25 m long house were partly investigated in 16. Although the finds from the house itself seem to indicate a Viking Period date, sherds of a bucket-shaped urn from a nearby barrow show that the site was settled already in the Migration Period.

The main area of distribution for Iron Age boat-houses stretches eastward to Lindesnes. Several boat-houses have been investigated through the years in Spangereid and Lista. Spangereid in particular is a very central area in these respects. At Kjerkevågen bay in Spangereid are some-where between 20 and 30 boat-houses, all of which probably date from the Iron Age. Several of the boat-houses at Kjerkevågen are huge structures, many large enough to accommodate Migration Period war ships of the Nydam type. The cluster of boat-houses in Spangereid has only one parallel in Scandinavia, located at Hafrsfjord near Stavanger. The boat-houses testify to Spangereid’s status as a maritime centre in the Iron Age.
Huge barrows in the uplands: Hanehaugen (top; photo: May-Lisa Bae Sollund) at Nese in Bygland and Boningshaugen at Bryggeså in Hægebostad (photo: Frans-Arne Stylst, Vest-Agder County Council). The former is part of a group consisting of three (it used to be four) big barrows. According to local tradition, ‘King Hane’ is buried in the Hanehaugen. Supposedly this king was killed fighting St. Olaf. King Hane’s cow, which he worshipped, is buried in one of the other barrows.
1. The Snartemo sword from c. 500 AD is a remarkable artefact, as well being emblematic of power and display. Thus, it was copied by the Nazis and the replica presented to Vidkun Quisling as a gift during World War II. The original sword was contemplated as a gift to SS commander Heinrich Himmler. Photo: Museum of Cultural History, Oslo.


3. The first find from Snartemo - exquisite Migration period comb. Photo: Museum of Cultural History, Oslo.

Stoveland

Selected artefacts from the barrow cemetery at Stoveland, Mandal: Cruciform brooches, a bird shaped pin, a bronze pin, and a pottery vessel. The barrows were investigated by Oluf Rygh in 1878, probably spurred on by a rich find being made in the area earlier that year. Photo: Museum of Cultural History, Oslo.
So does another remarkable monument in Spangereid, a canal across the narrow isthmus where Cape Lindesnes runs into the North Sea. A partial investigation of the canal in 2001 did not allow any certain dating; however, through a combination of archaeology and geology the canal is tentatively dated to the Migration Period, although it may be somewhat younger. Survey work in recent years suggests that the 2–300 m long canal was dug to connect the natural harbour at Kjerkevågen with the fjord system to the north of Spangereid, so as to avoid ships being trapped inside the harbour in case of an attack. Using the canal as a ‘mouse hole’, friendly ships were able to travel from the harbour and westward without having to pass the feared and dangerous Cape Lindesnes. It is likely that the canal was dug to serve naval purposes, and that both it and the harbour were part of an effort to control traffic along Norway’s southern coast. The initiative must have come from either a regional or more likely supra-regional ruler, a king.

Agder has about 100 hillforts. Two of the hillforts on Lista – Salslottet at Salen and Borgefjell at Jåtøg – have been investigated, and are tentatively dated to the Migration Period. Some hillforts, such as Salslottet, may be single-phase structures. It was discussed by Peder Claussøn Friis at the beginning of the 17th century and interpreted by him as the place where the ancient kings of Agder had resided. Others forts, such as Hisåsen near Mandal which according to local tradition was used as a refuge during pirate raids in the 16th century, could easily have seen several phases of use. This is in accordance with results from other regions in Norway, which suggest that many hillforts have been used repeatedly at different times from the Bronze Age and well into the Middle Ages, although most hillforts seem to share a rather intensive use-phase during the Late Roman and Migration Periods.
The distribution of hillforts is not even. Thus, Farsund with Lista alone has 17 hillforts, while large tracts in the eastern districts are seemingly without any forts at all. This could very well be partly explained by the relatively low survey activity in some areas, but the clustering of this type of monuments in areas that we know from other archaeological sources to have been important cannot be coincidental.

There is a small but significant group of Migration Period rune stones in the south-western part of the region. Of these, the Reistad stone from Hidra (now in the Museum of Cultural History, Oslo) deserves special mention. A recent interpretation of the inscription concludes that it describes a land claim. If this interpretation is correct, then the Reistad stone is in fact a very early precursor of a type of runic inscriptions common in the Late Viking Period and Early Middle Ages.

Lesser barrow cemeteries utilised by single farms occur regularly across the region in the Migration Period. The farmstead cemeteries often consist of 2-10 relatively small mounds. Larger cemeteries are also known - some of them, like Bryningsvær, Spangereid and Oddernes have older roots and were mentioned in a preceding chapter. Other large cemeteries include Fevik – Trålum in Grimstad, Gaiteland in Eiå og Hornes, Tjomsås in Vennesla, Stoveland in Mandal, Heddeland in Marnardal, and Vere on Lista. The large cemeteries – as we have seen, some of them have had more than a hundred monuments – must have been used by more than a single farm, perhaps by villages. It may be significant that most of the great cemeteries are situated on large farms that used to be occupied by several families well into historic times.
1-3: Relief brooches found in a barrow at Trygstand in Marnardal. The brooches are ornamented in 'Style 1'. Photo: National Museum, Copenhagen.
Spangereid canal

Map from 1784 showing ‘Groben’, the partially re-filled Iron Age canal. Photo: National Archives, Oslo.

Surveying the canal in 2005. The re-filled canal is visible as a dark belt. Photo: Frans-Arne Stylegar, Vest-Agder County Council.

Huge Late Iron Age mounds of the type known mainly from south-eastern Norway are lacking in Agder. There are several barrows with diameters ranging from 30-40 meters on Lista, but most, if not all, of these barrows date from the Bronze Age – like the largest of them all, the monumental Sver relshaug. Of supposed Iron Age barrows, a destroyed one at Trålum – Fevik was 47 m across, the height is unknown. Another obliterated barrow, Salshaugen in Spangereid, also measured 47 m in diameter, and 5 m in height. However, it is uncertain if the latter was a burial mound or a natural feature. The largest intact mound in Aust-Agder is Nomelandshaugen at Nomeland in Valle. There is a very rich Late Viking Period find from this barrow, but this wasn’t necessarily the primary burial. Nomelandshaugen is 35 m across and 3.5 m high. At Tonstad in Sirdal there is a barrow of comparable dimensions.

Judging from the ones that have been investigated, the largest barrows in Agder often date to the Migration Period; thus Kongshaugen at Galteland was 28 m across and 3 m high, while the Snartemo barrow was c. 30 m in diameter. Mounds with diameters around 20 m or slightly more have a relatively even distribution across the region.

1. Michael Tyrholm led the first excavation at Lunde that we know of, in 1743. He discovered a Migration period woman’s grave, including a glass urn. Sketch in University Library, Oslo.


3. Migration period gilded relief brooch from Lunde, Lista. The brooch is decorated in the so-called Nydam style. Photo: Bergen Museum.
• Visitors’ centre, standing stones and ancient assembly site at Tingvatn, Hægebostad (24)
• Exhibition: ‘Iron Age technology and handicraft’ at Iveland and Vegusdal museum, Iveland (25)
• Abandoned Migration Period farm at Sosteli, Åseral (26)
• Abandoned Migration Period farm at Skjernøy, Mandal (27)
• Ancient hillfort, Stolbakkfjellet, Iveland (28)
• Ancient hillfort, Borgjå, Audnedal (29)
• Ancient hillfort, Salsløtten, Farsund (30)
• Iron Age barrows at Skreros, Birkenes (31)
• Iron Age barrows at Ågedal, Audnedal (32)
• Iron Age barrows at Akland, Risør (33)
• Iron Age barrows at Stoveland, Mandal (34)
• Iron Age barrows at Heddeland, Marnardal (35)
• Iron Age barrows at Skeie, Sirdal (36)
• Iron Age barrows at Tonstad, Sirdal (37)
• Iron Age barrows at Mjølhusmoen, Froland (38)
• Iron Age barrows at Galteland, Evje og Hornnes (39)
• Iron Age barrows at Nese, Bygland (40)
• Iron Age barrows at Stallemo, Vennesla (41)
• Iron Age canal, boat-houses and other monuments at Spangereid, Lindesnes (21)
• Snartemo exhibition at Museum of Cultural History, Oslo
• Migration Period collections at Bergen museum, Bergen
• Migration Period collections at Aust-Agder centre of cultural history, Arendal (5)

Wooden buckets from Risland in Åmli (top) and Holmegård in Mandal.
Large barrow at Torp, Lista. Photo: Frans Arne Stålegrå, Vest-Agder County Council.

aristocrats of the migration period
KINGS AND VIKINGS

A runic inscription on a raised stone at Oddernes church in Kristiansand states that “Eyvind, godson of St. Olaf, built this church on his own lands”. The inscription, dated to around 1050, less than a generation after the death of the famous king cum saint, refers to an older wooden church, and not the Romanesque church which still exists at Oddernes. The Oddernes stone belongs to a small group of similar stones in the western part of Aust-Agder and western part of Vest-Agder. All of them date from between the late 10th century and the mid-11th. It cannot be a coincidence that it is in the transition period between heathendom and Christianity that the tradition of erecting runic stones appears. Missionary efforts in southern Norway are mentioned in saga sources already in the 960s. The Christian missionaries denounced traditional burial customs for the benefit of simple non-furnished inhumation graves on consecrated cemeteries, and they encouraged new ways of remembering the dead. In the transitional period, before churches and churchyards became common, the custom of erecting runic stones supplied Christian families with an opportunity to remember their dead and display the family’s status. The runic stones could be placed at the old, pre-Christian cemetery, in the farmyard, at a thing site, near a trail, or at a river-crossing.

At the transition from the Migration Period to the Merovingian, c. 550, many settlements were abandoned, and few grave finds from the Merovingian Period (550-800) are known from Agder. Early scholars interpreted these two phenomena as resulting from a general social, but it seems more likely that the farm abandonment was related to a reorganization of trading systems and restructuring of settlements that took place all over Europe in this period. The general decrease in furnished burial is likely to have other causes, and is linked to the establishment of a more stable social system in the Merovingian Period, with less need for competitive display than in the preceding period.

One of the most remarkable Late Iron Age finds from Agder is this superbly preserved cobalt blue globular beaker from Laland in Lindesnes. It was made in the 7th century, probably in Anglo-Saxon England. Unfortunately, the find circumstances are not at all clear, since the beaker was found near the Audna river with both older and younger artefacts, which probably stem from several different burials. Photo: Museum of Cultural History, Oslo.

Belt buckle made from tinned bronze, found in a man’s grave at Østensbu, Arendal. The buckle is an Anglo-Saxon import.
No dominant position of Fjære and Lista can be read from the Merovingian Period grave finds. In Setesdal, however, the rich burials characteristic of the Viking Period in this district make their appearance already toward the end of the Merovingian Period. A find from Helle in Valle thus contains two axe-heads, two socketed axes, two bill-hooks, a sickle, two scythes, a plane and a frying-pan, all made of iron, as well as a whetstone. In this particular case, it is difficult to decide whether we are in fact dealing with a burial find, and not a somewhat irregular iron hoard. A female grave from Viki in Valle displays the dress accessories typical of the concluding decades of the period, with two bronze oval brooches and a bronze arm ring, as well as a bronze container, many glass beads, a wooden bucket, two sickles, a weaving batten etc. From Jordkjenn near Tvedestrand we have a tongue-shaped brooch from early in the period; it is probably an import from the Alamannic area on the Continent. The most exquisite of all Merovingian Period artefacts in the region is a beautiful glass beaker from Løland in Lindesnes. This well-preserved beaker is of either Anglo-Saxon or Frankish make, and probably dates from the seventh century. The find circumstances are uncertain, and it is possible that the object was associated with a Viking Period burial.
Over the last few years a great number of hut foundations have been surveyed on the outer coast and in the skerries. Some of these so-called ‘beach-sites’ (Norw. strandtufter) may have use-phases in the Late Iron Age, as have many of the sites in western Norway. The Agder ‘beach-sites’ are widely distributed from Hidra near Flekkefjord to Kristiansand, while so far they are conspicuously absent from the districts further east.

In Norway as a whole there is an increase in the number of furnished burials from the Early Iron Age to the Viking Period, and likewise an increase from the Early to the Late Viking Period. The Agder counties are exceptions from this general picture, as there are fewer finds from the Viking Period than from the Roman and Migration Periods in the region, and fewer from the Late than from the Early Viking Period. However, these relative numbers hide a clear difference between the coast and the upland areas. In the uplands, and particularly in Setesdal, there is actually an increase in finds from the Early Iron Age to the Viking Period.

Three large stone cists were investigated by AW Brøgger at Bringsvær in Fjære in 1922. Two of the cists or coffins were empty, but the third and largest one contained the remains of an adult man. Besides an almost intact skeleton the cist contained a set of scales, a leather purse with six weights, a German silver coin and a plum kernel, a comb, a knife, and an axe. The coin dates the burial to after 983. Photo: Museum of Cultural History, Oslo.
The coastal areas of Agder belong to a South Scandinavian cultural zone in the Viking Period, at least when it comes to burial practices. Unmarked graves are relatively common, especially in Vest-Agder, while primary burials in barrow are rare. Chamber graves are known from a few places. Characteristic for several of the coastal areas that stand out with rich grave finds in earlier periods are boat-graves from the Viking Period. This goes for Fjære, Oddernes and Spangereid, as well as Lista. The oldest boat-graves are Migration Period burials in Fjære.

Lindesnes marks the point of transition between east-Norwegian and west-Norwegian mortuary practices in the Viking Period. In the coastal areas to the east of Lindesnes, swords are a significant element in the weapon graves, while axes dominate further west – to name but one example. The differences are also reflected in the distribution of several artefact types, with some types having an eastern distribution zone ending at Lindesnes, and others having a western zone of distribution, also ending there.

In the coastal areas it seems that pagan burial customs are discontinued during the first half of the 10th century. On the coast of Aust-Agder only three pagan-style graves can with any certainty be dated after 950. These three burials were found in the 1920s; three people had been inhumed in large stone cists near the farm houses at Bringsvær. The largest cist contained the remains of a man in his early 30s. Besides an almost intact skeleton the cist contained a set of scales, a leather purse (with six weights, a German silver coin and a plum kernel), a comb, a knife and an axe. The coin dates the grave to after 950. Except for the axe, all the objects seem to have been suspended from the man’s belt. The two remaining cists were smaller, and one of them contained the bones of a child. All three seemed to be unmarked graves.

Iron extraction site under excavation at Hovden. Bykle in Sørsdal was one of the main iron producing areas in Scandinavia towards the end of the Viking Age. Photo: Tom Bloch-Nakkerud.


Soap stone vessels have been found at several places in Agder in contexts which indicate trade and export. This vessel was found in Frolandselva river in Aust-Agder. It might be part of a lost cargo. Photo: Karl Ragnar Gjertsen, Aust-Agder Centre of Cultural History, Arendal.
Viking Age boat grave under excavation at Spangereid. In the picture: Angela Evans from the British Museum and Arne Emil Christensen from the Museum of Cultural History. Spangereid has one of the most extensive boat grave cemeteries known in Norway. Photos: Jan Henning Larsen, Museum of Cultural History, Oslo.

Top: Trapping pit near Juvatn, Bykle. The trapping pits were deep holes dug down to trap reindeers. In the bottom of the pits were sharp spikes placed in such a way as to pierce the animals when they fell in. The trapping pits were covered over with branches and twigs so that they could not be so easily discovered. The pit near Juvatn has not been archaeologically investigated, but large scale trapping was practiced in many mountain areas in the Viking Age. Photo: Torfinn N. Hågland, Vest-Agder County Council.

Right: The enigmatic ‘strandtufter’, such as this one on Prestøya, Flekkefjord, might date back to the Late Iron Age. Photo: Klaus Olesen, Vest-Agder County Council.
There is an ongoing discussion whether the burial custom exemplified by the Bringsvær graves was pagan or Christian. Stone cists of the Bringsvær type are known from Christian cemeteries from the Early Medieval Period, not least in the British isles. The graves seem to have been oriented north-east – south-west. Two of the cists did not contain any grave goods, and in the man’s grave the axe was the only object that wasn’t directly part of his personal equipment. The question of whether these people were Christians or not cannot be decided without renewed archaeological investigations at Bringsvær. But based on the available evidence, one cannot dismiss the idea that these distinctive graves are part of an early Christian cemetery, or even a churchyard.
Another piece of evidence for early Christianity in the region is a lead funeral cross secondarily (?) deposited in a barrow next to Fjære church. The influence of Christian burial practices is evident also in Vest-Agder, where there are no obvious pagan graves dated to after c. 50 in the coastal areas. The first Christian cemeteries seem to date back to the late 10th century, judging from a partially excavated stratum of burials beneath the present church at Liknes in Kvinesdal.

The upland areas are very different. From Setesdal we have 15 graves dated to the 11th century, including two or three finds which probably belong to the second half of the century. From Setesdal, however, we also have a rune stone from the early 11th century with an inscription that documents early Christian influence in the upland areas too. The inscription on the Galteland stone from Evje og Hornnes is dated to 1016-18, and contain the words ‘God is One’. There is an interesting group of stones from the first half of the 11th century in the Kristiansand area, with the Oddernes stone being the most widely known. Also belonging to this group are the stones from Ryen in Kristiansand, Sogn old church in Sogn, and Bygland church in Bygland, as well as the Galteland stone.

The Oddernes stone has two inscriptions. The younger one, dating to around 1050, is famous for mentioning St. Olaf, the historical king Olav Haraldsson, and a local (?) chieftain who was apparently the king’s godson and protégé.
The great silver and gold hoard found at Slammedal in Grimstad in 1181 consists of four gold arm rings, a gold finger ring, a gold medallion, a gold cross, seven silver neck rings, several silver arm rings, the knobs from a very large silver annular brooch, and a number of coins – including four Kufic dirhams and a Peter’s penny from York. This hoard, dated to around 926 by the coins, strikingly reflects the international contacts of the Fjære milieu in the Viking Period. Photos: Museum of Cultural History, Oslo.

2. Old photograph showing the Oddernes stone in its original place at Oddernes churchyard. Photo: August Abrahamson/Vest-Agder Museum, Kristiansand.

A number of remarkable Viking Period hoards are known from Agder. The Slemmedal hoard from Landvik near Grimstad deserves special mention. The find, which was discovered in 1981, consists of four gold arm rings, a gold finger ring, a gold medallion, a gold cross, seven silver neck rings, several silver arm rings, the knobs from a very large silver annular brooch, and a number of coins – including four Kufic dirhams and a Peter’s penny from York. This hoard, dated to around 26 by the coins, strikingly reflects the international contacts of the Fjære milieu in the Viking Period. Besides coins from the Arabic world and from the Viking kingdoms in the British isles, the find contains Frankish mounts and the small cross has its closest parallels in the Baltic area.

The hoards in the region are of a different composition than in the Oslo fjord area. Especially the finds from Vest-Agder contain a significant element of gold arm and neck rings – with important finds known from Cape Lindesnes and Hidra – that were probably symbols of political authority and alliances. No hack silver has however been found in the region. The number of gold finds is most likely a sign of the strategically important position of the Agder coast during the many conflicts between the kings of Denmark and kings of (western) Norway.

Log boat dating from the Viking Age. The boat is one of several that have been found in Haukhomvatnet lake in Birkness. It is on display at Iveland and Vegusdal Museum. Photo: Frans-Arne Stylogar, Vest-Agder County Council.

Weaving-batten made from whalebone, found in the Skomrak grave. Note the ship graffitti on the batten.

Insular (Celtic) bronze hanging-bowl from a woman’s grave excavated at Skomrak, Lyngdal, in 1871. The Skomrak bowl is the biggest hanging-bowl ever found. Photo: Museum of Cultural History, Oslo.

Escutcheon from an Insular (Celtic) bronze hanging-bowl found at Løland, Lindesnes.
Gold hoard found near Lindesnes lighthouse. Photo: Museum of Cultural History, Oslo.

Silver hoard from Våje near Arendal. The coins were minted in Arabia in the 8th century. Photo: Karl Ragnar Gjertsen, Aust-Agder Centre of Cultural History, Arendal.

2. Collection of beads from a woman’s grave excavated at Kroken, Grimstad. Photo: Museum of Cultural History, Oslo.


1. Iron hoard (or grave find?) from Hella in Valle. Photo: Museum of Cultural History, Oslo.


3-4. Sword and tools from a smith’s grave found at Mollestad in Birkenes. Photo: Frans-Arne Styberg, Vest-Agder County Council.
Equal-armed Early Viking Age brooches from Spangereid (left), Nesland in Froland, and Rosseland in Mandal (right).

Artefacts from an early 9th century woman’s burial excavated at Spangereid in 1879. The grave was dug into a ruined boat house. The large equal-armed brooch in the picture has its closest parallel in the material from Helge in Sweden. There were also five silver coins in the grave – four of them of the Hedsby type, of which only one other specimen has been found in Norway (at Kaupang in Vestfold). Photo: Museum of Cultural History, Oslo.

A well-furnished woman’s grave dating from the middle of the 11th century was found in the large barrow ‘Nomelandshaugen’ in Valle, Setesdal. This is one of the youngest furnished burials known in Agder. This was also the site of the Medieval stave church at Nomeland. Photo: Gisle Midttun, The Norwegian Museum of Cultural History, Oslo.

Finds of scales and/or weights, hoards and imports cluster in two areas in Aust-Agder. One group is centred on Fjære, where most of the finds have surfaced on the farms in the Vikkilen, including Bringsvær. The picture one gets in Fjære has – for good reasons – been compared to the early town of Kaupang in Vestfold. There is also a number of finds of metalworking equipment from the south-western part of Aust-Agder – with smith’s graves from Østensbu in Arendal, Vik in Fjære, and Mollestad in Birkenes. The two known rider graves from Agder are both from this area – from Froland vicarage in Froland and Nedenes in Arendal, respectively. The latter graves probably reflect military leaders, and once again we may suspect the involvement of the Fjære milieu.

A picture resembling the one in Fjære is repeated – on a smaller scale – in Valle in Setesdal. It has been suggested that we here are dealing with a Viking Period trading site here as well.

The production and export of soapstone vessels was most likely part of Fjære’s power base in the Viking Period. Soapstone quarries with certain or suggested phases of use in the Viking Period have been identified in Lillesand, Froland, Vegårhei and Ámli, with Østre Vinme in Ámli and Grytefjellet at Sparsås in Froland being two of the best-known ones. Interestingly, the name of the most important outport in the Fjære area – the Hesnesøyene – are related to the Old Norse word for soapstone, (h)esje. All the known hoards of soapstone vessels in the region have been found in the south-western part of Aust-Agder or the south-eastern part of Vest-Agder.

If soapstone was part of the basis for the concentration of power in Fjære in the Late Iron Age, it seems likely that the exploitation of outland resources, iron extraction to be precise, explains the find concentration around Valle in Setesdal. Iron extraction sites in Aust-Agder are first and foremost known from Hovden and Breiv in Bykle, which was a major iron-producing area in the Viking Period. The methods used for iron production in Setesdal have been reconstructed in a special museum at Hovden.

The old ‘Byklestigen’ pass is a torturous trail up a steep cliff face. From time immemorial until the 1870s it was the only route to reach Bykle from the middle Setesdal valley to the south. While the ‘Byklestigen’ has an unknown date, most traffic from the upland region to the coast, including the traffic in iron products from Bykle, must have followed this route already in the Viking Age, when an organized system of transportation was established in Agder.
• Large barrow at Nomeland, Valle (42)
• Large barrows at Lyngdal church and Bringsjord, Lyngdal (43)
• Hovden museum of iron extraction, Bykle (44)
• Ancient road, Kongevegen, Iveland
• Ancient road, Nordmannsveien, Songdalen
• Ancient road, Ålmannvegen, Bykle
• Iron Age barrows at Feda churchyard, Kvinesdal (45)
• Standing stone at Grindheim churchyard, Audnedal (46)
• Runic stone at Oddernes church, Kristiansand (23)
• Runic stone at Søgne old church, Søgne (47)
• Viking log-boats at Iveland and Vegusdal museum, Iveland (25)
• Viking Period collections at Aust-Agder centre of cultural history, Arendal (5)
• Viking Period collections at Museum of Cultural History, Oslo
• Spangereid Viking centre, Lindesnes (21)
• Annual Viking market at Bronseplassen, Lillesand (16)
Details from the famous Hylestad portal are rendered at the begin-
ing of each chapter in this book. The old stave church at Hylestad, Valle in Setesdal, had a portal with carved figures illustrating the story of Sigurd the dragon slayer. While the stave church at Hyles-
tad was demolished as the last remaining one in Agder in 1838, the portal, dating from c. 1200 AD, is preserved at the Museum of Cul-
tural History in Oslo, where it is on display as part of the museum’s Medieval exhibition.

The Sigurd tale is recited with substantial detail in Snorri’s Prose Edda, in the Icelandic Völsunga saga and Thidrekssaga, and in the German Nibelungenlied.

The stories about Sigurd originated in the Germanic area much ear-
ier, but lived on into Christian times, when motifs from the stories were popular in Scandinavian wood carving. In Agder the Sigurd tales were rendered not only on the Hylestad portal, but also on similar portals from Austad in Bygland and Vegusdal in Birkenes.

Oral traditions from several places in Agder show the popularity of the Sigurd stories for the Medieval popular mind. For instance, stories about Aslaug/Kraka, Sigurd’s daughter with Brynhildr, were still being told in Spangereid in the late 17th century.

In short, the Sigurd story runs as follows:

- Sigurd and Regin, a master smith, plan to kill the dragon Fafnir and take possession of his great treasure.
- Sigurd positions himself in a trench beneath the dragon’s trail, and stabs him from beneath when Fafnir leaves his lair for water.
- Regin asks Sigurd to cook the dragon’s heart and give it to him to eat. While cooking the heart, Sigurd tests its doneness by putting some of its juice into his mouth with his finger.
- Upon tasting the dragon’s blood, Sigurd can understand the language of the nearby birds, who are conversing with one an-
other as to how Regin plans to betray Sigurd.
- Forewarned by the birds, Sigurd kills the treacherous Regin.
- Sigurd then loads Fafnir’s treasure onto his horse Grani and departs for new adventures.
- Sigurd marries Gudrun. Her brothers Gunnar, Hogni, and Guttorm plot to kill Sigurd in order to take possession of Fafnir’s treasure.
- Gunnar sinks the treasure in the Rhine.
- Gudrun marries Atli.
- Atli, in a vain attempt to discover the location of Fafnir’s treasure, throws Gunnar into a snake-pit. Gunnar pacifies the snakes by playing a harp with his toes, but, alas, one of the adders kills him.
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