

Abstract

Forgotten Ideas and Rituals – Burials and Burial Places in Late Iron Age Halland

This thesis is a study of the complex, sacred and profane “meanings” that were expressed in burial rituals in the pagan society of southern Scandinavia in the Late Iron Age. The complexity is revealed by the analysis of the symbolic content and organisational structure of burial tradition involved in an interdisciplinary interpretation of the social and religious “meaning” that was expressed by an ordinary, Hallandic population in the Late Vendel Period and the Viking Age (AD 700–975). “Meaning” in the burial tradition of the Late Iron Age from the local point of view can be defined as the continuous upholding of local ideology and both local and supra-regional cultural identity through ritualised social interaction in relation to the “Holy”, the burial ground and the rituals conducted there. Ideology and identity in this context, on both the individual and the collective social level, derived from concepts and collective memories constructed in relation to past history on two levels of understanding. The burial ground served as the manifestation of a known local history consisting of collective memories that were anchored in the specifics that characterised the cult of the ancestors and the dead in relation to a specific landscape, cultural geography and local set of myths. On another level, the ritual traditions comprised general concepts, recognized by the ninth century in a wide, cultural, northern-Germanic context, of a distant past and mutual mythological history that in its traits was recognized by a large, southern-Scandinavian population in the Late Iron Age. By this combination of a symbolism attached to local history and generally accepted mythology, it was possible to secure, through ritual action and material culture, in the landscape, the survival of a local, a regional Hallandic and a supra-regional Germanic identity. In the thesis, it is argued, by the use of examples, that the burial ground became a certain and particular spot in the landscape, because there the necessary and obvious means of this identification were consistent. The Vendel Period burial ground at Sannagård emanated from a large mound dating from the Late Roman Iron Age, and around the burial ground there still is a large concentration of

monumental, Bronze Age barrows. The ancient monuments served as the concrete means by which this Vendel and Viking Age population could identify territorial claims, cultural identity, memories and myths. This thesis exemplifies how a local Hallandic population in the Viking Age deliberately used the monuments from the Bronze and Roman Iron Ages in their rituals. The central theme revolves around an ordinary population’s concepts of life, time and the world, and how these concepts were manifested in dealings with death.

The thesis is divided into four parts. The first presents the scientific intentions of the study, combined with a discussion of the content and meaning of the central concepts that are elaborated in the thesis, religion, ritual, tradition and ideology. The intention is to formulate, from a definition of these concepts, an interpretation of the content of the social and religious meanings that in action and symbolism in material culture were manifested in the burial rituals. Part II is a description and analysis of the archaeological history attached to Iron Age burial grounds, the formation of Halland in the sociopolitical and ideological senses, and the presentation and analysis of the excavated burials and the burial-ground at Sannagård. In Part III the aim is to put forward a theory concerning, on the one hand, the culturally local specifics and, on the other, the overall sacred and profane meanings that were attached to burials, holy places and ritual traditions in this local Hallandic society. Part IV is a catalogue.

Keywords: Religion, ordinary population, burial, ritual, tradition, place, myth, memory, transcendence, “The Holy”, cosmology, meaning, social organisation/structure, projection, representation, excavation methods, interdisciplinarity, Vendel and Viking period, Halland.

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