

## The Iron Age

BJØRN MYHRE

### General perspectives

The geographical location of Scandinavia is an important reason why the region has always had cultural contacts in two directions – across Finland and the Baltic to the eastern part of the European continent and across Denmark and the North Sea to central and western parts of Europe. Climatic and geological factors go a long way towards explaining why arable farming gradually came to be the principal economy in southern Scandinavia and in coastal districts of Norway, Sweden and southern Finland, whereas hunting, fishing and pastoral farming were more important in the northern regions and the interior.

In the Bronze and Iron Ages Scandinavia therefore became a meeting place for two contrasting cultural traditions, the north-east European hunting societies in the north and the continental agrarian societies in the south (see Chapter 2). The boundary between these was not permanently fixed, but generally it can be drawn from Viborg in the east through Vaasa and Umeå to southern Troms in the west. The agrarian societies showed a general tendency to expand northwards during the Iron Age, particularly along the coasts of northern Norway, northern Sweden and Finland. On the other hand, the people inhabiting the interior uplands and forests of Norway and Sweden as far south as Trøndelag and Jämtland were strongly influenced by those in the northern area.

As the Iron Age progressed, Scandinavia changed from being a separate region in Europe to becoming a border area, initially to the Roman Empire and then to the Merovingian and Carolingian kingdoms. The history of Scandinavia in the Iron Age is an example of changes of cultural and political relations on the borders of an empire, from egalitarian tribal societies to chiefdoms and petty kingdoms. This development was a consequence of influence and pressure exerted from the major centres of continental Europe

and of the positive action of local political players and entrepreneurs operating in relation both to more distant centres and to their neighbouring societies.

Economic and political developments form the basis for the ethnic and linguistic differences that appear in historic times. As time passed, the dominating culture and language of the warlike Germanic petty kingdoms of southern Scandinavia became increasingly supreme in the northern Scandinavian territories, sometimes oppressing the Sami and sometimes cooperating with them.

The geological and ecological conditions in Scandinavia meant that a wide range of natural resources were available for the local population within short distances. In the early part of the Iron Age comprehensive utilisation of resources and a high level of self-sufficiency were usual, but economic specialisation gradually gained ground and a more intensive exchange of goods developed between central and peripheral areas. This also paved the way for a denser population outside the richest agricultural areas. Many Scandinavian resources were important for the major kingdoms of Europe and political leaders in the Scandinavian centres knew how to take advantage of long-distance trade with such commodities. To understand the political development in Scandinavia during the Iron Age we must therefore take into consideration the resources of the north which were in demand in Europe.

### Tribal societies, 500–1 BC

#### *The earliest iron*

Iron and iron technology were instrumental in laying a new basis for the development of tools, crafts and the economy, but the new metal was also of strategic value as an object of barter and for manufacturing weapons. New research into the oldest history of iron in Scandinavia has led to surprising results as regards both the dating of the earliest iron production and the course of the innovation process.

There is evidence, from about 800–700 BC, for advanced bronze casting at many settlements around Lake Mälaren and in western Sweden. Small quantities of iron were also obtained when iron-bearing copper was smelted in order to manufacture bronze before iron-bearing bog ore was used. The iron was forged into tools and jewellery of the same shapes and types as those which were cast in bronze. Iron, then, had functional significance from the start and its quality was actually better than mass-produced iron a few centuries later.

The datings are up to 200 years older than the oldest known ironworking sites in England, northern Germany and Poland.<sup>1</sup>

On Kjelmøy, a tiny island in Varangerfjord facing the Arctic Ocean north of Kirkenes in east Finnmark, remains of knife blades, arrow points and fish-hook points of iron have been found in the occupation layers. These layers are dated to the middle of the first millennium BC. During the same period iron was also worked at settlement sites on the upland plateau of inner Finnmark, in northern Finland, northern Karelia and near Arkhangelsk in Russia.<sup>2</sup>

These settlements, where iron working took place and iron tools were in use, also contain pottery and tools of quartz and quartzite which testify to contacts and common cultural features all the way from northern Scandinavia through Finland and Karelia to the Volga–Oka–Kama area near Gorki, east of Moscow. Between about 900 and 300 BC the latter area was the centre of an early metal culture based on the production of bronze and iron. Knowledge of iron had been transmitted from the region north of the Black Sea.

Iron objects were also circulating in Denmark in the late Bronze Age but the oldest finds of iron slag and blast ovens are dated to around 500 BC. The same applies to England, northern Germany and Poland. One has to go as far south as central Europe and the southern Hallstatt culture in Austria-Hungary to find traces of iron production as old as those of central Sweden.

When iron production gained ground in southern Scandinavia a different technology was used and production took place on a larger scale. In the north iron was produced for the individual household in small pits in the ground, possibly also in specially made, asbestos-tempered, earthenware bowls; doubts have, however, been raised about the latter method. In southern Scandinavia, on the other hand, shaft furnaces of clay were used and the slag was collected in pits in the ground beneath. Bog ore was plentiful and iron production rapidly increased. Both in the north and south of Scandinavia iron was to become an important factor in the social and political changes of the early Iron Age.

#### *The Metal Age in the north*

A few major settlement sites comprising numerous houses from the earliest Metal Age have been found in Finnmark (for example, at Mortensnes in Varangerfjord). Settlement sites from the last few centuries BC are, however, small and only traces of a few small houses or turf huts have been found on

<sup>1</sup> E. Hjärthner-Holdar, *Järnets och järnmetallurgins introduktion i Sverige* (Uppsala, 1993), p. 160.

<sup>2</sup> T. Edgren, 'Den förhistoriska tiden', in N. Norrbäck (ed.), *Finlands Historia*, 1 (Helsingfors, 1993), pp. 9–270; B. Olsen, *Bosetning og samfunn i Finnmarks forhistorie* (Oslo, 1994), p. 132.

them. Some of these sites are situated on the outermost coast, such as the islands of Kjelmøy and Kjeøy off Kirkenes. They were clearly occupied during the summer season for hundreds of years in connection with hunting and fishing expeditions, and may have been used continuously until recent times when they were the summer residences of the Pasvik and Neiden Sami, respectively.<sup>3</sup>

Recent excavations at Slettnes on the island of Sørøya in western Finnmark indicate that a new tradition of house-building was established within the same period: small, round houses resembling the historically known Sami dwellings of the so-called *gamme* type were used along the coast.

Small settlement sites have been investigated in the interior, along the Pasvik valley towards Lake Enari in Finland and along the River Alta on the upland plateau of Finnmarksvidda, and these were probably used during autumn hunting expeditions. People had become far more mobile, and the migration pattern known from the Sami population of Finnmark in historical times may have been introduced as early as the first millennium BC.

In recent centuries each local Sami family group, or *siida*, frequently had a specific territory which stretched from the outermost coast to the interior, though there were also distinctly inland communities. In the first case, the principal settlement of the *siida*, used by the entire group in winter, was located at the head of a fjord whereas individual families moved between small spring, summer and autumn settlements. If a similar pattern existed in the early Iron Age it can be expected that large winter settlements will sooner or later be discovered innermost in the fjords or along the river systems of the interior.

Closer contact with neighbouring societies and a similar material culture developed over large parts of northern Scandinavia. In Swedish Norrland remains of large base settlements have been found in the forests near the coast of the Gulf of Bothnia, and numerous inland and upland settlements testify to the utilisation of resources in the highlands westwards towards what is now Norway. There the hunters from the east met hunters from the coast of the Atlantic Ocean. Remains of settlement sites have also been uncovered along the major rivers of northern Finland, particularly the Ule and the Kemi. Hunting, fishing and gathering were the principal occupations in north-western Norrland and northern Finland whereas in central Norrland and southern Finland fields were tilled and livestock were kept.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Olsen, *Bosetning*, pp. 99, 122; A. Hesjedal et al., *Arkeologi på Slettnes: Dokumentasjon av 11.000 års bosetning* (Tromsø, 1996), pp. 221–39.

<sup>4</sup> E. Baudou, *Norrlands Forntid – ett historiskt perspektiv* (Wiken, 1992), p. 99; Edgren, 'Den förhistoriska tiden', p. 151.

Bronze and iron objects of eastern origin were probably status symbols and prestige goods in the northern Scandinavian culture. They were dispersed by exchange of gifts and barter among population groups with a wide-ranging network of contacts. It has been suggested that the exchange of goods may have included salt and seal oil from the Gulf of Bothnia, the White Sea, and the fjords of northern Norway, and furs and hides from the forests and highlands. The demonstrable exploitation of the interior can be explained by the demand for hunting products to be used as objects for barter.

Kinship alliances and marriages among neighbouring groups were probably common, and would lead to the exchange of objects, ideas and knowledge. Control over prestige goods, metal, iron technology and hunting products as well as the spread of shamanism, led to considerable social differentiation. Contacts with more stratified societies to the south and east sowed the seeds for a new social organisation in northern Scandinavia. The new settlement pattern, the round houses of the *gamme* type and the burial practice are elements characteristic of the historically known Sami culture.

#### *The pre-Roman Iron Age in the south*

The Celtic culture had little impact on Scandinavia in the earliest Iron Age but from the last few centuries BC prestige wares of Celtic, Etruscan and early Roman origin, such as bronze vessels and weapons, have been found in Denmark, southern Sweden and southern Norway. There was a northward shift in the trading network between southern Scandinavia and central Europe which would gradually come to mean much for the transformation of the northern Germanic societies.

During the late Bronze Age and the earliest Iron Age, the climate in northern Europe gradually became cooler and damper (see Chapter 1) and in southern Scandinavia greater effort was probably needed to maintain agricultural production at the same level. At the same time the population was increasing and the external supply of bronze was decreasing. These changes may have led to the breakdown of the stratified Bronze Age chiefdoms before the middle of the first millennium BC. At the onset of the early Iron Age it appears that a more egalitarian tribal society with few traces of social stratification had come into being.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> L. Hedeager, *Danmarks jernalder: Mellom stamme og stat* (Århus, 1990), p. 161; L. Hedeager, *Iron Age Societies: From Tribe to State in Northern Europe* (Oxford, 1992).

The change mentioned can be best studied in Jylland on the basis of settlement development, burial rites and the kinds of objects sacrificed. For the first time there is now evidence of hamlets consisting of several farms. Late Bronze Age settlements were scattered but are assumed to have had some kind of joint organisation. Early Iron Age hamlets and villages, on the other hand, consisted of a number of small, individual farming units. The best investigated village is situated near Grøntoft in western Jylland where a large number of house sites of the period from the fifth to the second centuries BC have been excavated.<sup>6</sup>

Close to each village there were large fields divided into small plots, probably belonging to individual farms. Each production unit seems to have been a family holding with its livestock in its own byre and with separate plots for the growing of barley, oats and a little rye. At the same time the village formed a larger unit to which each family had to relate and this would necessitate a great deal of cooperation and common organisation. With cows in the byre for part of the year it became easier to collect sufficient manure for the fields and it is clear that agricultural production became more intensive and called for a greater work effort than during the Bronze Age.

In the pre-Roman Iron Age ground was cleared for increasing numbers of villages resembling that near Grøntoft. The forest disappeared over large areas and the soil became exhausted, perhaps leading to an ecological crisis where the soil was poorest. Many farms and villages were abandoned, particularly in the sandy districts of western Jylland where house sites and fields have remained undisturbed to the present day. Such conditions may have led to southward migrations. Roman writers tell of battles with the Germanic tribes – the Cimbri, Teutones and Ambrones – which were defeated by the Roman army near Marseilles in southern France and on the Po plain in northern Italy in 101 BC.

The inhabitants were buried in simple, flat cremation graves close to the villages or beneath low earth mounds. The impression left by the graves – as by the houses, farms and fields – is one of equality and uniformity. The finds seem to reflect a simple agricultural society with traits common to each region.

Finds from the pre-Roman Iron Age are much more sparse in southern parts of Norway, Sweden and Finland so that conclusions have to be based

<sup>6</sup> S. Hvass, 'Bebyggelsen', in S. Hvass and B. Storgaard (eds.), *Da klinger i muld... 25 års arkæologi i Danmark* (Århus, 1993), pp. 187–94; M. Rasmussen and C. Adamsen, 'Bebyggelsen', *ibid.*, pp. 136–41.

on a few local, detailed studies and comparisons with Jylland. However, this was everywhere a period of population growth, settlement expansion and a differentiated utilisation of resources.

Modern archaeological and scientific research has refuted the time-honoured view that a deteriorating climate caused economic and social stagnation. Climatic change was slow, and was prevented from having dramatic consequences by technological improvements and an advanced cultural and social organisation. Recent investigations have shown that the difficulties in finding and identifying evidence for early Iron Age communities have been due not to stagnation but to the practice of simple cremation burials, building techniques that left few visible traces above ground level, and a relatively simple material culture.

Large numbers of Bronze Age and early Iron Age house sites have recently been uncovered in Rogaland in south-western Norway and in Skåne. The remains of these dwellings show that the style of the buildings and the form of the settlements closely resembled those of Jylland in the same period.<sup>7</sup>

Evidence of the development of an early Iron Age cultural landscape, which in many ways resembles that of Jylland, has also been found on Gotland. Large, continuous field units divided by banks into smaller plots, called Celtic fields, once covered large parts of the island. A single field unit can measure at least 200–250 ha. A calculation of the population based on the size of the related cemeteries and the assumed grain production implies that each settlement unit may have had between fifty and 100 inhabitants.<sup>8</sup>

A similar settlement pattern was probably common for large parts of southern Scandinavia in the pre-Roman Iron Age. Nevertheless, the settlements may well have been differently organised in the various districts, depending on local natural and cultural conditions, and both villages and separate farms may have been present within the same area. The shape and size of the fields also varied from region to region.<sup>9</sup>

Along the coasts of southern Norrland in Sweden and Nordland in northern Norway animal husbandry and cultivation of grain were widespread but at

7 T. Løken, 'Bygg fra fortiden: Forsand i Rogaland. Bebyggelsessentrum gjennom 2000 år', *Ams-Småtrykk*, 21 (Stavanger, 1988); S. Tesch, *Houses, Farmsteads, and Long-term Change: A Regional Study of Prehistoric Settlements in the Köpings Area, in Skåne, Southern Sweden* (Uppsala, 1993); N. Björhem and V. Säfvestad, *Fosie IV: Bebyggelsen under brons- och järnålder* (Malmö, 1993).

8 S.-O. Lindquist, 'The development of the agrarian landscape on Gotland during the early Iron Age', *Norwegian Archaeological Review*, 7:1 (1974), pp. 6–32.

9 M. Widgren, *Settlement and Farming Systems in the Early Iron Age: A Study of Fossil Agrarian Landscapes in Östergötland, Sweden* (Stockholm, 1983).

the same time fishing, hunting and gathering constituted an important part of the economy. Some groups may have practised seasonal migration from coastal settlements to settlements in inland districts and the highlands, while others may have had a more stable lifestyle in districts where opportunities for cultivation and fishing were good. Clearly, these northern coastal regions were mixing grounds for the southern and northern Scandinavian Iron Age cultures.<sup>10</sup>

In coastal districts of southern and western Finland there is evidence of a population whose material culture differed in several ways from that revealed by inland finds of northern Scandinavian character. Traces of wooden houses with roof supports and daubed walls have been found in the settlements but it has not as yet been possible to determine the shape and size of the buildings. Both cultivation and animal husbandry are well documented. Metal objects of bronze and iron have been found in a few settlements together with evidence of iron production. A wide range of jewellery, weapons and tools of bronze and iron have been found in graves, hoards and sacrificial sites; they are of types known from the Mälars district of Sweden as well as Estonia and elsewhere in the Baltic region. The finds reflect a well-established agrarian culture going back to the Bronze Age within a region where the climatic and geological conditions were most favourable for growing crops.<sup>11</sup>

#### *A meeting of three traditions*

Great differences in pre-Roman Iron Age material culture have thus been documented in various regions of Scandinavia. The contrast is particularly striking when the village society in Jylland is compared to the hunter and fisherman culture in Finnmark. No sharp demarcation can be drawn between the northern and southern cultural areas but the archaeological material shows similar traits within large parts of both the north and the south. The archaeological evidence provides a basis for discussing cultural and social conditions as well as ethnic and linguistic groupings in Scandinavia in the early Iron Age.

The southern Scandinavian agrarian cultures found in Denmark, on Bornholm, Öland and Gotland, on the Swedish mainland as far north as the Mälars valley, and up to Trøndelag in Norway have been found to have a number of features in common. These include a stable settlement pattern consisting of farmsteads and villages and a culture which shares many similarities with

10 R. Bertelsen, *Lofoten og Vesterålens historie fra den eldste tida til ca. 1500 e.Kr.* (Tromsø, 1984); Baudou, *Norrlands Forn tid*, p. 114; B. Wik, *Helgelands historie*, 1 (Mosjøen, 1985).

11 Edgren, 'Den förhistoriska tiden', p. 152.

the area that is now northern Germany. Throughout this northern European region it is possible to demonstrate cultural continuity from the Bronze Age to the Roman Iron Age, and the population can probably be linked to a Germanic culture and an emerging Scandinavian language area (see Chapter 4).

In the coastal districts furthest south and west in Finland there are traces of another agrarian culture that bears many similarities with the material culture around the Gulf of Finland, Estonia and the northern Baltic. Finnish researchers believe that this Iron Age culture belongs to a population that spoke an early form of Baltic Finnic.

The early northern Scandinavian metal culture found in Finland, northern Sweden and northern Norway has many features in common. This was a hunting and fishing culture with contacts eastwards with Karelia and Russia. It may have consisted of groups speaking a proto-Sami language.<sup>12</sup>

The southern Scandinavian culture seems to have gradually gained a foothold in Trøndelag and along the coast of Nordland in Norway and from Uppland northwards along the Baltic coast of Sweden, a tendency which became stronger during the Roman and later Migration (AD 400–600) periods. Influence from the south also made itself felt in the material culture of inland parts of southern Finland. This suggests that the proto-Scandinavian and proto-Finnish cultures and languages gradually spread northwards and were accepted in central Norway and Sweden and in inland districts of Finland, respectively.

Towards the end of the pre-Roman Iron Age comparable cultural and social developments can be recognised in Denmark, southern Norway and southern Sweden. Some graves have a richer selection of goods, including weaponry, jewellery and imported bronze vessels. Villages became larger and some farms and houses stand out on account of their size. Sacrificial remains found in peat bogs sometimes include valuable imported objects manufactured in the Celtic region, Italy and south-eastern Europe. The richer archaeological finds from the final centuries BC foreshadow the dramatic social changes that were to become apparent in the Roman Iron Age when the egalitarian agrarian societies of southern Scandinavia developed into warlike chiefdoms.

<sup>12</sup> Baudou, *Norrlands Forntid*, p. 110; C. Carpelan, 'Samerna', in Norrbäck (ed.), *Finlands historia*, 1, pp. 178–80; C. Carpelan, 'Kvänerna', *ibid.*, pp. 223–4; B. Olsen, 'Comments on Saami (Lapps), Finns and Scandinavians in history and prehistory', *Norwegian Archaeological Review*, 18 (1985), pp. 13–18; P. Sammalhti, 'A linguist looks at Saami prehistory', *Acta Borealia*, 2 (1989), pp. 3–11; L. Liedgren, *Hus och gård i Hälsingland: En studie av agrar bebyggelse och bebyggelsesutveckling i norra Hälsingland Kr.f.–600 e.Kr.* (Umeå, 1992); O. S. Johansen, *Synspunkter på jernalderens jordbrukssamfunn i Nord-Norge* (Tromsø, 1990). cf. Chapter 4 below.

## Chiefdoms, AD 1–500

*On the border of the Roman Empire*

The Roman territorial conquests north of the Alps in the last century BC and the first century AD left Scandinavia bordering an empire which was to exist for almost 500 years.

As a result of major battles in the northern part of the Continent the boundary between the Germanic peoples in the north and the Roman Mediterranean culture in the south came to follow the Rhine. However, this was not a sharp demarcation line. Gradually, Germanic tribes in the border area were Romanised and at the same time close links were established between continental and Scandinavian chieftains and tribal leaders. Alliances, marriages, exchanging of gifts, barter and wars probably helped to build a network of contacts that stretched from the limits of the Roman Empire to northern Scandinavia.

The Romans themselves were interested in improving their relations with the chieftains of Scandinavia, partly to obtain allies against the warlike barbarian tribes on the Continent and partly to gain access to the resources and raw materials of the north. The Romans created their own network of contacts by making gifts to Germanic chieftains, educating their sons in the Roman Empire, and making use of Germanic mercenaries.

The rich Scandinavian archaeological evidence and the descriptions by Roman writers of Germanic tribes show the great extent to which the Scandinavian peoples were influenced by Roman culture. Some elements of Roman culture were incorporated directly but often they were adapted to the native culture and given a new content.

In southern Scandinavia, as in other areas bordering the empire, it appears that the political organisation gradually changed from simple tribal and kinship societies to chiefdoms and kingdoms. Scandinavia was not an area that was isolated from events in the rest of Europe but one where new forms of society grew up as a consequence of close contacts with the empire. Gradually, this would come to have dramatic consequences for both the Roman Empire itself and the peoples of Scandinavia.

*Settlement and economy*

The tendency towards greater social inequality increased during the Roman Iron Age. Burial practices clearly show that the leading families set themselves off by the richness of their grave goods. These comprised Roman products such as weapons, bronze vessels, glass beakers and precious metals, especially gold, as well as indigenous jewellery, gold objects, pottery and utensils of

high quality. Other burials contain grave goods of moderate standard but the majority are just as simple and poor as in the pre-Roman Iron Age. The principle of equality at the threshold of death was no longer practised.

In Denmark, the south of Sweden and Norway, and on the Baltic islands of Bornholm, Öland and Gotland this tendency is apparent already in the early Roman Period. The central and northern parts of the Scandinavian peninsula followed rapidly and in the late Roman period important chiefdoms seem to have been established as far north as Lofoten/Vesterålen in Norway, Medelpad/Ångermanland in Sweden, and parts of Finland.

In the past few decades major excavations of farmsteads and villages have confirmed the great social differences suggested by the grave finds. This is shown by the size of houses and farms, the number of stalls for livestock, and the size of storerooms for animal fodder and food for the people. Presumably, ownership rights to fields and grazing were unequally divided. The carefully investigated settlement of Hodde in south Jylland, dating from around the beginning of the Christian era, is a classic example of how the farmstead of an important person was established in an otherwise uniform village.<sup>13</sup>

There is good evidence in Denmark that the houses of each farm in the village became separately enclosed by fences in the early Roman period. In this way, private ownership can be seen to have replaced the communal system that had previously been practised. This is most clearly shown in the totally excavated village of Vorbasse in central Jylland. Around AD 200 Vorbasse was replanned so that the houses and farmyards of each of the twenty farmsteads were placed on either side of a street.

Farms in southern and central Norway and Sweden had similar buildings and enclosed home fields. The three-aisled longhouse, divided into several living rooms and a byre for the livestock, became common in the south in the early Roman period. After AD 200 this type of construction is found as far north as northern Ångermanland in Sweden and the Tromsø district in Norway. The principal houses on the major farmsteads could be very large (for instance 60 m long at Borg in Lofoten and 40 m long at Gene in Ångermanland). The largest Iron Age house known in Scandinavia is 90–100 m long and is located in Jæren in Rogaland in south-western Norway. After AD 200 each farm had separately enclosed home fields which might contain both arable land and meadow but most frequently only arable land in the form of large, continuous areas,

<sup>13</sup> Hvass, 'Bebyggelsen'.

rectangular or more irregularly shaped. Private ownership of land and farms seems to have become established.

In Rogaland and Skåne farms were in some places parts of villages of the same character as those found in Jylland. However, in Norway and Sweden individual farms are usually found loosely linked together by systems of walls or separated from one another by outlying land.<sup>14</sup>

Everywhere the communal type of village was replaced by family farms which are estimated to have housed five to ten persons. The largest farms had buildings that covered almost 1000 square metres, about half of which was dwelling space and must have housed twenty-five to fifty persons. The largest Danish villages may have had up to 200 inhabitants.

Archaeological evidence, then, reveals a stratified society in which more or less permanent centres of economic and political power gradually became established. Agriculture was the main economic support of the population of southern Scandinavia and settlement on farms or in hamlets and villages was based on private ownership of land and livestock. The conscious planning of villages around AD 200 would seem to indicate the presence of a system of organisation and government that went beyond the village community. The system may have been intended to control and secure economic contributions from a population which probably consisted of freeholders and tenant farmers along with bondsmen and other landless people. The richest finds and sites probably derive from an aristocracy that got its income from land. There was an extensive exchange of goods with the Roman area. Crafts, local production of goods and technological advances seem to reflect increasing specialisation of labour in the principal settlements.

In Norway and Sweden physical and environmental conditions were extremely varied and favoured the exploitation of other resources, too. From the early Roman Period there is archaeological evidence for marked changes in settlement and resource exploitation both on the coasts and in the forests and highlands. In outlying areas, which had shown little trace of earlier people, human activity increased in the centuries prior to AD 500. This took the form of fishing along the coast of western Norway; iron production, and reindeer and elk hunting in the highlands and forests of southern Norway and inner

<sup>14</sup> Bertelsen, *Lofoten og Vesterålens historie*; D. Carlsson, *Kulturlandskapets utveckling på Gotland: En studie av jordbruks- och bebyggelsesförändringar under järnåldern* (Visby, 1979); L. Hedeager, 'Danernes land. Fra ca. år 200 f.Kr. – 700 e.Kr.' (O. Olsen (ed.), *Gyldeendal og Politikens historie*, 2, København, 1988), pp. 1–374; B. Myhre, 'Beregning av folketall på Jæren i yngre romertid og folkevandringstid', in G. Olafsson (ed.), *Hus, gård och bebyggelse* (Reykjavík, 1983), pp. 147–64; Widgren, *Settlement and farming systems*.

Norrland; and animal husbandry and summer dairying in the upland valleys of Norway.<sup>15</sup>

#### Political development

The significant social changes mentioned above should be viewed in the light of local history. The change from a communally-run village to private ownership of land and livestock had probably begun before the Roman period, and would lead to an unequal distribution of the production surplus and the beginnings of social stratification. Heads of villages and other local leaders may quickly have exploited their positions to further establish their power when contacts with the Roman Empire were made in the first centuries AD.

About AD 100 Tacitus wrote in his *Germania* that the central political body among the Germanic tribes was the assembly of the people which, at various levels in the community, elected a chieftain and his retinue of warriors (*comitatus*) among those of noble birth or the aristocracy of the tribe. The chieftain and his retinue formed a fundamental institution in Germanic society, one which had military as well as political and judicial authority. The chieftains were probably also religious leaders. The Romans called the tribal chieftain *rex* and the one in charge of the warriors in a war situation was called *dux*. *Rex* and *dux* could be one and the same person. The Romans had contact with such leaders in both war and peace, sometimes as allies and trading partners, sometimes as foes.

In view of later accounts of the Germanic peoples on the Continent and in Scandinavia it is assumed that their societies were organised in tribes living in specific areas.<sup>16</sup> The leader of the tribe was a chieftain or petty king whom the Goths referred to as a *reiks* ('leader of men') and who was elected by a tribal

<sup>15</sup> T. Bjørge et al., 'Arkeologiske undersøkelser i Nyset-Steggjavassdragene 1981-1987', *Arkeologiske rapporter fra Historisk Museum, Universitetet i Bergen*, 16 (Bergen, 1993); O. Blehr, 'Traditional reindeer hunting and social change in the local communities surrounding Hardangervidda', *Norwegian Archaeological Review*, 6:2 (1973), pp. 102-12; O. Farbrege, L. Gustafson and L. F. Steinvik, 'Undersøkelser på Heglesvollen: Tidlig jernproduksjon i Trøndelag', *Viking*, 48 (1985), pp. 103-29; H. Jacobsen and J. H. Larsen, *Dokkfløys historie: Dokkfløy fra istid til kraftmagasin* (Lillehammer, 1992); A.-K. Lindquist and P. H. Ramqvist, *Gene: En stormannsgård från äldre järnålder i Mellom Norrland* (Umeå, 1993); B. Magnus, 'Fisker eller bonde? Undersøkelser av hustuffer på ytterkysten', *Viking*, 38 (1974), pp. 68-108; B. Magnus, 'Iron Age exploitation and high mountain resources in Sogn', *Norwegian Archaeological Review*, 19:1 (1986), pp. 44-50; G. Magnusson, 'Lågteknisk järnhandtering i Jämtlands län', *Jernkontorets Bergshistoriska Skriftserie*, 22 (Stockholm, 1986); P. H. Ramqvist, *Gene: On the Origin, Function and Development of Sedentary Iron Age Settlement in Northern Sweden* (Umeå, 1983).

<sup>16</sup> B. Myhre, 'Chieftains' graves and chiefdom territories in South Norway in the Migration Period', *Studien zur Sachsenforschung*, 6 (1987), pp. 169-87; P. Sawyer, *När Sverige blev Sverige* (*Occasional Papers on Medieval Topics*, 5, Alingsås, 1991).

council consisting of the aristocracy. The *reiks* would lead judicial proceedings and cult activities, and had a retinue of warriors to back up his decisions and actions. The aristocracy and leading families of the tribe wielded great influence through the tribal council. Under special conditions, such as war or periods of unrest, several tribes might join together in a federation under the leadership of a council consisting of several *reiks* and a war leader whom the Goths called a *kindins*.<sup>17</sup>

The power of the chieftains and the aristocracy was clearly based on their disposal of land and agricultural surpluses. There is also archaeological and written evidence for the exchange of gifts and goods between the Romans and the Germanic peoples, for widespread plundering and attacks by Germanic forces in the border area, and for the payment of tribute to Germanic chieftains.

Special Roman products such as glass beakers, bronze cauldrons, and bronze and silver wine-serving sets were clearly prestige objects which added to the chieftains' power and status. They seem to indicate contacts and alliances with the Romans and must have played a major role in the exchange of gifts and the building of alliances among Germanic dynasties both on the Continent and in Scandinavia. Some of the status wares were obviously manufactured close to the Roman border and intended specifically for the northern Germanic peoples. Most of the finest objects remained in Denmark and were often deposited as grave goods whereas wares of ordinary quality were exchanged once more with the chieftains of northern Scandinavia.<sup>18</sup>

It was important for the Romans to maintain peace with the northern Germanic tribes, and the exchange of gifts and payment of tribute to the Germanic chieftains were part of this strategy. However, trade was also of interest to the Romans. Writers report that slaves, hides, skins, furs, goose feathers, amber, rock crystal (quartz), precious stones, and the blonde hair of women were in great demand. Undoubtedly, the army and the towns along the border (*limes*) were also in great need of raw materials and food and of strategically important products such as iron.

Such wares could partly be produced or manufactured in the Danish area but others had to be brought from northern Scandinavia. The strong position

<sup>17</sup> U. Näsman, 'Analogislutning i nordisk jernalderarkæologi', in P. Mortensen and B. M. Rasmussen (eds.), *Fra stamme til stat i Danmark, 1: Jernalderens stammesamfund* (Århus, 1988), pp. 123-40; P. H. Ramqvist, 'Perspektiv på regional variation och samhälls i Nordens folkvandringstid', in C. Fabech and J. Ringtvedt (eds.), *Samfundsorganisation og regional variation: Norden i romersk jernalder og folkevandringstid* (Århus, 1991).

<sup>18</sup> U. L. Hansen, *Römischer Import im Norden* (København, 1987).

gradually obtained by Danish chiefdoms and petty kingdoms was probably not only based on their own raw materials and production but also to a large extent on their ability to act as middlemen in the exchange of goods between the Roman Empire and northern Scandinavia.

The considerable exploitation of outlying land that can be demonstrated in Norway and Sweden must to some extent have been caused by the needs of the local population in the nearest settlements. Nevertheless, the distribution of iron ingots in the central regions implies that the initiative and driving force came from the need among the chieftains and aristocracy for wares which could be exchanged with the petty kingdoms further south. The overriding objective of the aristocracy was to ensure that the much sought-after outfield resources could be transformed into prestige goods and status objects to be used in gift exchanges, at banquets, and for other acts of generosity.

#### *Military aspects*

Characteristic of the archaeological material of the Roman and Migration periods is that weapons and other war equipment are found as both grave goods and sacrificial offerings. Society was dominated by a martial ideology. The graves richly furnished with status goods, including weapons and imported objects of Roman origin, probably belonged to the chieftains and their retinues of warriors. Military equipment – such as weapons, armour, warships, horses, and the personal articles of soldiers and chieftains – stands out among the many sacrificial finds uncovered in peat bogs in Jylland and Fyn, dating from AD 200 to 500. The composition of the finds makes it possible to reconstruct army detachments of several hundred men, including cavalry, bowmen and leaders. The make-up of the detachments and their equipment, often including Roman weaponry, shows the influence of the Roman army and its fighting methods. In the same period huge defensive constructions were built, including rows of stakes blocking fjords, walls, palisades and fortified villages.<sup>19</sup>

Concentrations of hillforts are found in central areas of south Norway, Sweden and Finland. Walls that have partially collapsed were built to defend the summit plateaus of easily defensible hill tops. Excavations inside

19 C. Fabech, 'Samfundsorganisation, religiøse ceremonier og regional variation', in Fabech and Ringtvedt (eds.), *Samfundsorganisation og regional variation*, pp. 283–304; F. Rieck et al., 'Landets forsvar', in Hvass and Storgaard (eds.), *Da klinger i muld*, pp. 210–13; M. Ørsnes and J. Ilkjær, 'Offerfund', *ibid.*, pp. 215–22; A. Nørgård Jørgensen and B. L. Clausen (eds.), *Military Aspects of Scandinavian Society in a European Perspective, AD 1–1300* (Publications from The National Museum, *Studies in Archaeology & History*, 2, Copenhagen, 1997).

the walls have uncovered small settlements, indicated by houses, structures, hearths and occupation layers. Such hill tops seem to have been settled or used as fortifications during various prehistoric periods but most of those investigated were intensively used in the late Roman and Migration periods. In flat landscapes, such as Öland and Gotland, ring fortresses surrounded by high earthworks or walls were constructed.<sup>20</sup> The fortifications functioned in various ways. Some were built along the limits of densely populated areas, others in their centres. Some obviously guarded lines of communication, others were garrison barracks, and yet others provided refuge for the farming population.<sup>21</sup>

It must have been possible to gather large armies for battles. The largest fortress on Gotland, Torsburgen, is a clear example of military organisation and warlike conditions. It is surrounded by a rampart almost 2 km long, constructed at the beginning of the Christian era and strengthened during the fourth century AD to reach a height of about 7 m. Calculations show that at least 1,000 men were needed to defend the fortress, a high figure considering that the population on Gotland was about 8,000. To be successful a siege would need many more attackers than defenders.<sup>22</sup> The ability to assemble large forces in times of crisis is also reflected by the numerous hillforts and fortified settlements found in central areas of Norway and Sweden. In Jylland huge collections of weapons, sufficient for equipping more than 200 warriors, appear to have been sacrificed on a single occasion. Such sacrifices show that armies of between 500 and 1,000 men may have taken part in battles in eastern Jylland.

Concentrations of large boathouses have been found along the shores of western and northern Norway. They were probably intended for warships that resembled vessels known from discoveries in Danish and Norwegian bogs (for example, the Nydam ship from AD 300–350 and the Kvalsund ship from the seventh century AD). The largest boathouses had sufficient space for ships more than 30 m long with crews numbering around fifty men. The boathouses were generally situated close to important estates and political centres and probably formed part of a conscription system organised by the chieftains. Being narrow and propelled by oars, the ships were unsuitable for battles at sea; rather they were built for rapid transportation of warriors in times of crisis. The

20 K. Borg et al., *Eketorp: Fortification and Settlement on Öland/Sweden. The Monument* (Stockholm, 1976).

21 Myhre, 'Chieftains' graves'.

22 J. Engström, 'Fornborgerna och samhällsutvecklingen under mellersta järnåldern', in Fabech and Ringtvedt (eds.), *Samfundsorganisation og regional variation*, pp. 267–76.



number of men required to man the warships that belonged to the boathouses found in central parts of Rogaland has been estimated at between 600 and 800.<sup>23</sup>

#### *Economic and political centres*

Attempts have been made to identify economic and political centres by mapping richly furnished graves, large villages and settlement areas as well as concentrations of imported prestige articles of bronze, glass and gold. In Denmark Stevns on Sjælland, Gudme on Fyn, Dankirke in Jylland, and Sorte Muld on Bornholm are particularly well-investigated key locations.<sup>24</sup>

In Sweden potentially important regions are Skåne, Öland and Gotland, Götaland, Svealand and central Norrland. In Norway the Oslofjord region, the south-western part of the country from Agder to Hordaland, parts of Møre and Trøndelag in central Norway, and Lofoten/Vesterålen in the north stand out. Each of these regions contains several core areas with rich finds, indicating the possible existence of several centres at the same time. In the light of later and more reliable written evidence a number of these regions emerge as chiefdoms and petty kingdoms which struggled among themselves for more extensive power over people. Clearly their roots go back to the political centres of the Roman and Migration periods.<sup>25</sup>

The political leaders in the regions mentioned – the petty kings, the chieftains and the aristocracy – probably wielded power through political institutions such as the tribal council and the council of federated tribes, and in their capacity as leaders of retinues, public assemblies ('things' < ONþing) and cult activities. In this fashion they would control settled areas, resource exploitation and production, and organise the exchange of goods, raids and defence. Prestige articles and other goods, ideas and knowledge were exchanged between the Continent and Scandinavia through a wide-ranging network of contacts and a system of alliances among tribal leaders.

Political conditions were probably unstable with shifting alliances and struggles for power between persons and families both within the chiefdoms and petty kingdoms and externally among tribal areas and 'folklands'. Expansive,

<sup>23</sup> B. Myhre, 'Boathouses as indicators of political organization', *Norwegian Archaeological Review*, 18:1-2 (1985), pp. 36-60.

<sup>24</sup> L. Jørgensen, 'The warrior aristocracy of Gudme: The emergence of a landed aristocracy in Late Iron Age Denmark?', in H. Gjøstein Resi (ed.), *Produksjon og samfunn: Om erverv, spesialisering og bosetning i Norden i 1. årtusen e.Kr.* (Oslo, 1995), pp. 205-20.

<sup>25</sup> Ramqvist, 'Perspektiv'.

competing societies appear to have struggled for control over people and resources in adjacent territories. Wars, plundering expeditions and the taking of slaves were important sources of income for those in power. The evident importance of weapons, military equipment and forts reflects the warfaring spirit and ideology that characterised these societies.

Fundamental conditions for the political development described above were the technological and social changes that occurred at the transition from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age. It has been suggested that a kin-based society slowly disintegrated and opportunities arose for enterprising people to operate more individually to the advantage of just a few persons or families. A new political arena was created when the Roman Empire established its borders at the edge of the Germanic territories and demand grew for goods, services and resources. Such conditions were of great significance for the tribes in the area that is now Denmark.<sup>26</sup> At first they took advantage of the resources available in southern Scandinavia, but increasing demand drew ever larger areas of northern Scandinavia into the network. Germanic social organisation was well suited to taking advantage of the new opportunities, and political, social and economic changes rapidly occurred as far north as Troms and Ångermanland. The warlike, expansive Germanic societies soon found themselves in conflict with each other and with neighbouring ethnic groups and societies to the north and east.

#### *Finland*

Archaeologists and linguists agree that southern and western Finland – south of a line between Viborg in the east and Vaasa in the north-west – was populated in the pre-Roman Iron Age by people who spoke a Baltic Finnic language (see Chapter 4). During the Roman and Migration periods these simple farming societies changed in a similar way to what has been shown to have taken place in Sweden and Norway. For a long time their burials and grave goods were the most important sources of our knowledge of these people, but recently settlements and forts have also been investigated and scientists have studied the development of vegetation, settlement and occupations. The fertile agricultural districts of Finland proper, Uusimaa (Nyland), Åland, Satakunta, Häme (Tavastland) and southern Österbotten stand out as separate cultural areas with fairly clear boundaries with the forested regions of the interior and the north. Graves and burial practices, settlement sites, types of houses and

<sup>26</sup> Hedeager, *Iron Age Societies*.

building traditions, pottery, and ordinary household articles were of local or general south-west Finnish character. They testify to a culture which differed manifestly from that of the Swedish area.<sup>27</sup>

As in Sweden and Norway the men's graves in the Finnish areas in question were, in the Roman and Migration periods, characterised by weaponry of various kinds, particularly spearheads, shields and a few swords. In most of the Roman Period the weapons were of types that were common in Germanic areas, but in the fifth and sixth centuries local weapons were manufactured for use by both leaders and ordinary farmers.<sup>28</sup> Some articles imported from the Roman area are found in graves dating from both the early and late Roman periods, including bronze vessels, glass and a few coins. Such finds used to be interpreted as evidence of merchants or chieftains from Sweden or Gotland who settled within the Finnish area in order to organise the exchange of goods. Today a better grasp of the greater amount of data available has led to a different interpretation, namely that the richest graves belonged to local chieftains and heads of families who formed a landed, Finnish-speaking élite with extensive external contacts.

The first chiefdoms appeared in the Roman Period in central parts of south-west Finland, Finland proper and Nyland. In the Migration Period southern Österbotten stands out as the dominant area; it had extensive contacts and exchanged goods with the petty kingdoms of Norrland and the Mälars valley in Sweden. Österbotten was called *Kainuu* (Finnish) or *Kvenland* (ON) in the Middle Ages, and may have been the core area of the Finnish-speaking tribe called *Kvens* (ON *kvenir*), mentioned in early accounts as an expansive group in northern Scandinavia.<sup>29</sup> There are, however, other views on this.

The growth of Finnish chiefdoms in Österbotten and south-west Finland must be understood in the light of the need for goods and services within the Roman Empire and the Germanic petty kingdoms on the Continent and in southern Scandinavia. Leading Finnish families exploited their geographical position by acting as middlemen between, on the one hand, the petty kingdoms on the Swedish mainland and the Baltic islands, and, on the other, the Baltic, Finnish and Sami peoples in the north and east. From the central coastal areas there was a gradual expansion along rivers and lakes into the interior of

27 Edgren, 'Den förhistoriska tiden'; Ramqvist, 'Perspektiv'; M. Schaumann-Lönnqvist, 'Skandinavisk og kontinental import som indikatorer på sociala strukturer i Finland under yngre romersk järnålder och folkvandringstid', in Fabech and Ringtvedt (eds.), *Samfundsorganisation og regional variation*, pp. 75–84.

28 S. Pihlman, 'Vapenproduksjon og socialgrupper i Finland under 400- och 500-talet', in Resi (ed.), *Produksjon og samfunn*, pp. 163–74.

29 Carpelan, 'Samerna' and 'Kvänerna'; Edgren, 'Den förhistoriska tiden'.

Finland, rich as it was in elk, reindeer, fur-bearing animals and iron. Bartering developed with the Sami who lived there.

#### The Sami area

Until recently the abundant evidence of a rich metal culture in northern Scandinavia in the centuries preceding the Christian era – involving the use of copper, bronze and iron, and extensive production of iron – seemed to have come to an end in the early Roman Period.<sup>30</sup> In view of the above-mentioned excavations at Slettnes in western Finnmark this interpretation can no longer be upheld. A more mobile settlement pattern, smaller houses and less use of lithic material appear to be the reasons why so few sites have been found by archaeologists. At Slettnes iron production and the use of iron tools continued in the Iron Age.

Settlement sites have been found and investigated along the coasts, beside rivers and lakes in forested areas, and in the highlands. But the finds consist of simple tools of quartz, bone and antler which are still difficult to date other than by scientific methods. Sacrificial sites and graves are known from the Viking Age and the Middle Ages but few have so far been found from the Roman and Migration periods. Nevertheless, continuity in the economy and the settlement pattern can be recognised everywhere. A prominent example of this is the huge Sami burial ground at Mortensnes at Varangerfjord. Here more than 200 graves in a scree seem to span an unbroken period from before the birth of Christ to the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries.<sup>31</sup>

Despite poor preservation conditions on the settlement sites it is clear that hunting and fishing were the dominant means of support in the north. At Slettnes and other sites along the coast of northern Troms and Finnmark pits lined with flagstones have recently been excavated and interpreted as contraptions for rendering the fat of whales and seals. Bones of elk and especially reindeer dominate in inland districts and some semi-domesticated reindeer may have been kept, at least for use as decoy and draught animals. There is general agreement that many aspects of Sami culture known from the early Modern Period appeared and were developing during this phase.<sup>32</sup>

30 Baudou, *Norrlands Forntid*, p. 145; Edgren, 'Den förhistoriska tiden', p. 177; Olsen, *Bosetning*, p. 138; Hesjedal et al., *Arkeologi på Slettnes*, pp. 229–33.

31 E. J. Kleppe, 'Archaeological material and ethnic identification: A study of Lappish material from Varanger, Norway', *Norwegian Archaeological Review*, 10:1–2 (1977), pp. 32–46.

32 Baudou, *Norrlands Forntid*, p. 115; Bertelsen, *Lofotens og Vesterålens historie*, p. 46; I.-M. Mulk, *Sirkas: ett samiskt fångstsamhälle i förändring Kr.f.–1600 e.Kr.* (Umeå, 1994); Ramqvist, 'Perspektiv'.

As mentioned above, a strong agrarian society was established during the Roman and Migration periods along the coasts of Nordland and southern Troms in northern Norway and in southern and central Norrland in Sweden. Place-names, linguistic and archaeological evidence suggest that the dominant language was Germanic. According to earlier research this was a consequence of extensive immigration from western Norway and the Mälars region, respectively. The immigrants were believed to have gradually driven a Sami-speaking population towards the interior and the north. In more recent research this explanation has been rejected as too simplistic. An internal transformation is thought to have taken place in response to contacts and interactions with communities to the south, furthered by the exchange of goods, social relations and wars, or by small-scale migrations.<sup>33</sup>

Could it be that these coastal settlements of Nordland and Norrland already had a Germanic-speaking population which changed its culture and social character to comply with the pattern dominant in the adjacent regions to the south? Another hypothesis is that in the pre-Roman Iron Age the coast was populated by people with a mixed economy who spoke proto-Sami. Some of them changed their ethnicity and culture in response to contact with the Germanic peoples further south, and built farms in the areas that were best suited for agriculture. Others maintained their contact with the Sami-speaking peoples and evolved into the Sami hunting and fishing societies that are later known in the fjord districts, the inland regions and the highlands of central and northern Scandinavia. A variant of this hypothesis is that the population of central Scandinavia prior to the Roman Iron Age spoke an unknown language and that the ethnic and linguistic divisions into proto-Sami and proto-Scandinavian took place in the early Roman Iron Age as a consequence of contacts to the north and south, respectively.<sup>34</sup>

A development similar to that which occurred in the northern Scandinavian coastal regions may have taken place in the forested interior further south, in the Swedish-Norwegian border area between Norrland and Trysil/Värmland. Graves and settlement sites dating from the start of the Christian era have been found to show both Sami and Scandinavian features. It is possible that

<sup>33</sup> B. Magnus and B. Myhre, 'The concept "Immigration" in archaeological contexts illustrated by examples from west Norwegian and north Norwegian early Iron Age', *Norwegian Archaeological Review*, 5:1 (1972), pp. 45-60; Bertelsen, *Lofotens og Vesterålens historie*, pp. 46-50; Ramqvist, 'Perspektiv', p. 199; Baudou, *Norrlands Forntid*, p. 115.

<sup>34</sup> K. Odner, 'Finner og Terfinner: Etniske prosesser i nordre Fenno-Scandinavia', *Occasional Papers in Social Anthropology*, 9 (Oslo, 1983); K. Odner, 'Ethnicity and traditions in northern Fenno-Scandinavia', *Acta Borealia*, 2 (1992), pp. 21-36; I. Storli, *Stallo-boplasser: Spor etter de første fjellsamer?* (Oslo, 1993).

an originally proto-Sami population either took up elements of Germanic culture or that it changed its ethnic affinity as a consequence of external contacts.<sup>35</sup>

During the Roman Period inland resources were exploited more intensively by the chiefdoms of northern Norway, Trøndelag, northern Sweden and Finland. As time went by, they came into conflict with each other in the border zones and clashes of interests must have arisen with the Sami people. The conflicts may have been resolved by war and suppression but also by agreements, alliances and cooperation. For instance, there are indications of agreeable relations between northern Norwegian chieftains and the Sami in the Viking Age and the early Scandinavian Middle Ages. Both groups appear to have benefited from the exchange of goods that went on within a redistributive economic system.

### Petty kingdoms, AD 500-800

#### *Scandinavia as part of Germanic Europe*

Shortly after the fall of the western Roman Empire in 476 Germanic tribes established kingdoms which comprised most of southern and western Europe. At the beginning of the sixth century three kingdoms stood out as the strongest: the Ostrogothic kingdom of Theoderic in Italy, the Visigothic kingdom in Spain and southern France, and the Franks under King Clovis.<sup>36</sup>

The Germanic royal families justified their power by using origin myths, tales of tribal history and a common Germanic political ideology. These were handed down orally in the form of legends and poetry and expressed in literature and material culture. According to the traditions of Goths, Lombards and Anglo-Saxons many of the tribes claimed to have originated in Scandinavia whence they migrated to the Continent and England. Their royal families traced their ancestry back to pagan Germanic dynasties and gods.

The collective memory among the Germanic peoples, expressed in contemporaneous written sources, is supported by archaeological evidence, notably weapons, jewellery and decorated objects. The animal ornamentation style I of the Migration Period shows identical features throughout Scandinavia, southern England and the Continent from France to Hungary and the Ukraine.

<sup>35</sup> I. Zachrisson, 'Comments on Saamis (Lapps), Finns and Scandinavians in history and prehistory', *Norwegian Archaeological Review*, 18:1-2 (1985), pp. 19-22.

<sup>36</sup> L. Hedeager and H. Tvarnø, 'Romerne og germanerne', in S. Mørch (ed.), *Det Europæiske Hus*, 2 (København, 1991), pp. 180, 209.

Style II of the sixth and seventh centuries was established as a common Germanic pattern of ornamentation from northern Italy and Spain to northern Scandinavia. Stylistic elements consisting of persons, animals and mythological creatures illustrate heathen gods, such as Odin and Freyr, and legends and tales that were common to all the Germanic peoples. They give expression to an ideology of power that does not vary much from the Scandinavian to the Merovingian, Anglo-Saxon and Lombard kingdoms.<sup>37</sup>

The close contacts between the ruling families of southern Scandinavia and those of the continent are reflected in a few surviving accounts. In his *Getica* from 551, Jordanes, building on the lost history of the Goths (*Historia Gothorum*) written by Cassiodorus at the request of King Theoderic in 525, mentions King Rodwulf who had formerly ruled over a number of tribes in southern Scandinavia but had renounced his kingdom and sought the support of Theoderic. Jordanes also gives the names of twenty-eight Scandinavian tribes in a manner that reveals good geographical knowledge of Scandinavia.

The much later Anglo-Saxon epic poem *Beowulf* may draw on traditions that had their roots in the fifth and sixth centuries when it tells of battles between Danes, Swedes and Goths, of their royal dynasties, and of possible family ties between the ruling dynasties of the Wulfingas in East Anglia and the Wuffingas who lived across the sea north of the Danes, perhaps in western Sweden or south-eastern Norway.<sup>38</sup> In his history of the Franks (*Decem libri historiarum*), written from the mid-570s to 593–4, Gregory of Tours relates that the king of the Danes, Chlochillaich, landed with his fleet in the kingdom of the Franks in the early sixth century but was repulsed and killed.

From the sparse written and rich archaeological material it is evident that the Germanic societies of southern Scandinavia adopted certain cultural elements from the Christian kingdoms on the Continent and in England, and in the sixth and seventh centuries gradually developed a political organisation that was greatly influenced by these kingdoms. This may explain why older layers of the medieval provincial laws of Scandinavia have several features in common

<sup>37</sup> A. Andrén, 'Guld och makt – en tolkning av de skandinaviska guldbakateaternas funktion', in Fabeck and Ringtvedt (eds.), *Samfundsorganisation og regional variation*, pp. 245–58; M. Axboe, 'Guld og guder i folkevandringstiden: Brakteatene som kilde til politisk/religiøse forhold', *ibid.*, pp. 187–202; L. Hedeager, 'Europe in the Migration Period: The formation of a political mentality', in F. Theuvs (ed.), *Ritual and Power from the Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages* (Leiden, 1997).

<sup>38</sup> S. Newton, 'Beowulf and the East Anglian royal pedigree', in M. Carver (ed.), *The Age of Sutton Hoo* (Woodbridge, 1992), pp. 65–74.

with the pan-Germanic legal system that is known from the seventh century onwards.<sup>39</sup>

In the Germanic societies the ability of the king as a war commander and a charismatic and generous leader would determine the support he could muster. Royal power was based on a strong retinue recruited from the upper echelons of society. In a solemn ceremony the retainers swore fealty to the king who, in return, undertook to maintain and support them. Helmets, ring swords and other ornamented status objects found in richly furnished warrior graves from France and southern England to Finland may be symbols of rank that were handed over by the king as part of the rituals of allegiance. These objects probably expressed the same ideas and attitudes in Scandinavia as they did on the Continent. They seem to confirm that the petty Scandinavian and Finnish kingdoms aspired to the ideology and political organisation that was characteristic of the Franks.<sup>40</sup>

#### *The seventh century – a dark age?*

The rich archaeological finds of the Migration Period have provided a basis for detailed interpretations of economic, social and political conditions in Scandinavia. After c. 550 the archaeological material becomes much less spectacular. In many areas richly furnished graves are not to be found any more. The deposition of hoards and sacrificial offerings of gold rings and jewellery appear to have been discontinued and large numbers of farms seem to have been abandoned. For a long time archaeologists were of the opinion that the period from the late sixth century and throughout the seventh century was one of depression in central parts of Scandinavia. An expansive and extrovert society based on a large population and powerful chieftains now went into decline. The economic and political basis of the aristocracy was weakened and there were fewer contacts abroad. The causes of the assumed crisis were sought in external factors such as a poorer climate, migrations and changes in trade routes, and partly also in internal factors such as soil exhaustion, overpopulation, civil wars and societal collapse. The waves of plague epidemics starting with the Justinian plague in 541, which greatly reduced the population of Europe, were also thought to have reached southern Scandinavia and to have contributed to the crisis there.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>39</sup> O. Fenger, 'Fra stammeret til statsbegreb', in P. Mortensen and B. M. Rasmussen (eds.), *Fra stamme til stat i Danmark, 2: Høvdingesamfund og kongemagt* (Århus, 1991), pp. 289–95.

<sup>40</sup> H. Steuer, 'Helm und Ringschwert: Prunkbewaffnung und Rangabzeichen germanischer Krieger', *Studien zur Sachsenforschung*, 6 (1987), pp. 189–236.

<sup>41</sup> U. Näsman and J. Lund (eds.), *Folkevandringstiden i Norden: En krisetid mellem ældre og yngre jernalder* (Århus, 1988).

More recent investigations have led to a rejection of the crisis hypothesis. In Denmark it has been shown that some villages, such as Vorbasse and Nørre Snede in Jylland, were in use continuously from the Migration Period to the Viking Age. The number of farms in such villages may have been reduced in the eighth century but on the other hand buildings and farms occupied larger areas. The large and central Danish settlements of the Migration Period were still in use throughout the seventh and eighth centuries.<sup>42</sup> In Sweden similar settlements have been found at Vä, Uppåkra and Helgå in Skåne and on the island of Helgö in Lake Mälaren. It has been suggested that such places were the principal seats of the aristocracy or kings and functioned as religious, economic and political centres.<sup>43</sup>

On the islands of Öland and Gotland large numbers of Migration Period house sites and entire farms have been preserved but many of these seem to have been abandoned at the end of the sixth century. Recent and detailed investigations show that in the Merovingian Period the population became more concentrated to the best agricultural areas. The changes in the settlement pattern and the cultural landscape have been used as evidence of a decline in the population and of an agrarian crisis at the transition between the Migration and Merovingian periods (c. AD 600). Several Swedish archaeologists are now critical of the crisis theory and claim that changes in settlement pattern and land-use may have taken place for other reasons.<sup>44</sup>

Recent investigations at Borre in Vestfold are an example of how intensive studies of a central agrarian area may lead to a new understanding of the development of settlement in the seventh century. Borre has long been known as a Viking Age cemetery with a number of very large mounds. It has now been shown that the earliest mounds were built in about AD 600 and the others in the following centuries up to about 900. Pollen analyses and landscape studies demonstrate continuity in land-use and settlement in the surrounding area since the early Iron Age.<sup>45</sup>

From about AD 600 cultivation was intensified, large fields came into use, the woodland disappeared, and new kinds of herbs and crops were introduced. Few artefacts, house sites and graves are known from the Borre area. Nevertheless, instead of a dramatic stagnation in the seventh century an expansion

42 Hvass, 'Bebyggelsen'.

43 J. Callmer, 'Hantverksproduktion, samhällsförändringar och bebyggelse: lakttagelser från östra Sydsandinavien ca 600–1100 e.Kr.', in Resi (ed.), *Produksjon og samfunn*, pp. 39–72; Jørgensen, 'The warrior aristocracy'.

44 Carlsson, *Kulturlandskapets utveckling*; Näsman, 'Analogislutning'.

45 B. Myhre, 'The royal cemetery at Borre, Vestfold: A Norwegian centre in a European periphery', in Carver (ed.), *Age of Sutton Hoo*, pp. 301–13.

of settlement and the development of an intensively worked agrarian landscape can now be demonstrated. This transformation of the landscape coincided with the building of the first large mounds, probably over the graves of members of a political élite – chieftains or petty kings.

Intensive studies of settlement sites still remain to be carried out in important agricultural areas of southern and western Norway, and the settlement pattern and farm structure of the early part of the Merovingian Period are still not known. Consequently, the crisis hypothesis involving a decline in the population in response to economic changes or plague cannot be refuted. But recent archaeological excavations on the outermost coast and in highland districts show that fishing, summer dairying and other forms of resource utilisation in marginal areas increased rather than declined in the seventh century. This would seem to suggest the presence of a considerable population in the central agricultural areas, too. The paucity of known occupation sites and farms from the earliest part of the Merovingian Period in southern Norway may therefore be due to lack of research rather than a prehistoric crisis.<sup>46</sup>

Continuity of occupation has been demonstrated on farms and settlement sites in northern Norway and south-western Finland; the settlement pattern of the Migration Period was continued without any trace of a restructuring of the agrarian landscape similar to that suggested in southern Scandinavia. However, in southern and central Norrland (Sweden) the expansive settlement and resource utilisation of the period prior to AD 500 seems to have come to a sudden end. Following intensive archaeological investigations there is agreement that the petty kingdoms of Norrland disintegrated in the seventh century.<sup>47</sup>

Rich grave finds testify to the presence of core areas and centres of power, but it is also possible to view such burials as symbolic expressions of a politically unstable situation in which various families and factions were struggling for power and attempting to legitimise their positions through burials and rituals. An absence of rich graves may therefore sometimes be taken as an indication of political strength. When political stability prevailed, it may no longer have been possible, or necessary, for competing families to try to outdo each other by amassing an abundance of material symbols in their graves. Such conditions may explain changes in burial practices in seventh-century Denmark, southern

46 B. Myhre, 'The beginning of the Viking Age – some current archaeological problems', in A. Faulkes and R. Perkins (eds.), *Viking Revaluations* (London, 1993), pp. 182–216; B. Myhre, 'Rogaland forut for Hafrsfordslaget', in *Rikssamlingen og Harald Hårfagre: Historisk seminar på Karmøy 10. og 11. juni 1993* (Karmøy, 1993), pp. 41–64.

47 Baudou, *Norrlands forntid*; Ramqvist, 'Perspektiv'.

Norway and southern Sweden. The continuation of the old practice of richly furnished graves in northern Norway and Trøndelag, south-west Finland, and on Bornholm may indicate that the political instability of the Migration Period continued on the fringes of Scandinavia. In the stronger kingdoms of southern and central Scandinavia power rested with an élite which, to a greater extent, had freed itself from competition.<sup>48</sup>

It is conceivable that the continuation of the earlier social and settlement conditions in northern Norway and in Finland throughout the seventh and eighth centuries was connected with the political development in southern Scandinavia. Kingdoms of continental Germanic character would here exploit their intermediary position between the kingdoms of the Anglo-Saxons and Franks in the south and the more peripheral petty kingdoms in the north. The chieftains of northern Norway and Finland maintained their redistributive economic structure and continued their expansive exploitation of resources, profiting from contacts and trade southwards along the coasts to Trøndelag and south-west Norway and to Svealand and the Baltic region, respectively. But in Norrland the petty kingdoms or chiefdoms appear to have collapsed. This may have been due to competition for resources from the centres along the Norwegian coast, in Finland and in the Mälars region.

#### Scandinavian centres

Recent excavations in Ribe in Jylland have thrown light on the economic and political development of southern Scandinavia in the Merovingian period. Finds from thick occupation layers testify to the presence of an early centre for extensive craft work as well as local and long-distance trade. Right from its earliest phase the settlement was organised and planned with roads and work plots. Coins in the form of *sceattas* occur from the first half of the eighth century. Imported glass, lava quern stones and wheel-turned pottery bear witness to trade with the Continent; whetstones and soapstone were imported from Norway. In the crafts' quarter were manufactured glass beads, jewellery and brooches of bronze and precious metals, pieces of amber jewellery, and antler combs. On the basis of coin finds and archaeological and dendrochronological dating the oldest phase of the trading centre has been placed at 704–10.

In the first part of the eighth century defensive work was carried out on Danevirke ('fortification of the Danes') at the base of Jylland, west of Hedeby,

<sup>48</sup> U. Näsman, 'Det syvende århundrede – et mørkt tidsrum i en ny belysning', in Mortensen and Rasmussen (eds.), *Fra stamme til stat*, 2, 165–80.

along with major construction projects such as the Kanhave canal on Samsø. As mentioned above, large estates were established and villages reorganised in Jylland and large settlement centres appeared both there and on the Baltic islands. Among these was the estate of a local chieftain at Dankirke, only 7 km south of Ribe. Such archaeological monuments testify to a political and economic organisation that reached beyond the region, and it has been suggested that a Danish kingdom with its centre in Jylland may have exercised territorial power over most of present-day Denmark, Skåne and Bohuslän (see Chapter 8b). Some time prior to 714 the English missionary Willibrord travelled 'to the wild Danish tribes' (*ad ferocissimos Danorum populus*) and their king, Ongendus. He may have met the king who founded Ribe.<sup>49</sup>

The largest group of monumental grave mounds in Scandinavia is the one already mentioned at Borre in Vestfold. Here nine mounds measuring between 32 m and 45 m in diameter and 5 m and 7 m in height lie close to the shore of Oslofjord. A richly furnished ship burial from about 900 was excavated in one of the mounds in 1852, leading to the assumption that the entire burial ground dated from the Viking Age. We have seen that recent studies show the mounds to span a longer period, from c. 600 to c. 900; they may represent one mound per generation. The burial ground is situated at a strategically important spot where it was possible to control traffic in and out of Oslofjord. The Borre mounds may contain the graves of royal dynasties that had their power rooted in Vestfold and based much of their economy on controlling trade between Denmark and the inland valleys and highland areas of southern Norway. Limited investigations carried out in the port of Kaupang in Skiringssal in southern Vestfold, mentioned in Ohthere's account from about 890 (see Chapter 6), have revealed activity from the late eighth century. Older phases may still remain uncovered at Kaupang but a trading centre from the Merovingian Period should perhaps also be sought closer to Borre.

Some unusually large grave mounds were constructed in the inner part of south-eastern Norway in the Merovingian Period. They generally have a central position in the best agricultural districts, close to rivers or important land routes. One of them is Raknehaugen in Romerike, the largest burial mound in Scandinavia, measuring nearly 95 m in diameter and 12 m in height. Such huge monuments probably mark out centres of inland kingdoms. For the rulers on the coast it was important to enter into alliances with these

<sup>49</sup> M. Bencard and L. Bender Jørgensen, *Ribe Excavations 1970–76*, 4 (Esbjerg, 1990); S. Jensen, *Ribes Vikinger* (Ribe, 1991); P. Sawyer, *Da Danmark blev Danmark* (O. Olsen (ed.), *Gyldeandal og Politikens Danmarks Historie*, 3, København, 1988).

kingdoms in order to ensure the flow of wares and raw materials from the valleys and upland settlements.<sup>50</sup>

In the course of the same period many comparable mounds were built in Götaland and Svealand in Sweden; they were generally situated separately in rich agricultural areas. Close to the old church of Uppsala, in the heart of the province of Uppland, three of the largest Swedish grave mounds occupy a central position in a large prehistoric cemetery. Two of them have been excavated and found to contain simple cremation burials from around 500 and the early sixth century, respectively. Old Uppsala was the religious and political centre of the Swedish Viking Age kings, and had probably been so since the Migration Period. The higher sea level at that time made it possible for boats to get close to there from Lake Mälaren along the Fyris valley. Near Old Uppsala the waterways met tracks coming from the interior with its rich resources. Spectacular finds from the Merovingian Period have been made in the immediate vicinity of this old centre, including the very special burial grounds at Vendel and Valsgärde with boat graves and grave goods that can be compared with those of Sutton Hoo in East Anglia. These may be the burials of a landed aristocracy that controlled some of the exchange of goods between inland districts and the Baltic.<sup>51</sup>

A contemporary central settlement and market site has been investigated on the island of Helgö in Lake Mälaren. A dense agglomeration of dwellings, warehouses and workshops was uncovered. The considerable craft activity comprised bronze casting, goldsmith work, and the production of jewellery, glass beads, antler combs and iron objects. The finds reveal a wide-ranging network of contacts, including a Buddha figure from India, objects from the Baltic area, iron bars and schist whetstones from Norrland, a bishop's staff from Ireland, and glass from the Continent and southern England. Relief brooches and clasp buttons decorated in style I, cast in the Helgö workshops, have been found in south-west Finland. Helgö was probably the estate of a local chieftain or a trading and marketing centre under royal control. It should be viewed in the context of the central area around Old Uppsala.<sup>52</sup>

In northern Norway Borg on the island of Vestvågøy in the Lofoten archipelago was a large estate as early as the Migration Period. At some time in the seventh or eighth century the main house was rebuilt as one of the

<sup>50</sup> Myhre, 'The royal cemetery'; D. Skre, 'Raknehaugen', *Viking*, 60 (1997), pp. 7–42.

<sup>51</sup> B. Ambrosiani, 'Background to the boat graves of the Mälaren valley', in J. P. Lamm and H. Å. Nordström (eds.), *Vendel Period Studies (Statens Historiska Museum Studies, 2, Stockholm, 1983)*, pp. 17–22.

<sup>52</sup> A. Lundström (ed.), *Thirteen Studies on Helgö (The Museum of Antiquities, Stockholm Studies, 7, Stockholm, 1988)*.

largest buildings known from Iron Age Scandinavia. It was 83 m long, 9 m wide and perhaps 8–9 m high. It was sub-divided into several rooms, comprising a dwelling area, storage space and a byre for the livestock. One room, containing large hearths and cooking pits, has been interpreted as a hall used for banquets, sacrifices and religious ceremonies. This interpretation is partly based on the finds of ornamented pieces of sheet gold, outstanding pieces of continental pottery, and fragments of fifteen or sixteen glass beakers made in France, southern England and perhaps the Black Sea area. Near the longhouse several large boathouses, grave mounds and farms testify to dense settlement. The finds from Borg are of the same type and quality as those of the same period found in the rich agricultural areas of southern Scandinavia and on Helgö. Borg must have been the estate of a chieftain and an important centre in the region.<sup>53</sup>

The large buildings and the find contexts at Borg give a good impression of the nature of the chiefdoms in northern Norway, particularly their resources and extensive contacts abroad. Between Namdalen on the northern edge of Trøndelag and the archipelago of Vesterålen (north of Lofoten) several economic and political centres are indicated by place-names, special artefacts, and monuments such as grave mounds, boathouses and large farmsteads. A special feature of these centres is the presence of large groups of houses arranged in a circle. They may have functioned as *thing* sites or barracks for the chieftain's boat crews and warriors. Many of the central estates of northern Norway were located near to the mouth of large fjords close to coastal sailing routes. They may have drawn their economic support from resources on the outer coast as well as in the forested and mountainous interior of northern Scandinavia. Several of these centres (for instance, Tjøtta in Nordland and Bjarkøy in Troms) are mentioned in later historical accounts as the seats of chieftains who played an important role in the Viking Age and in the early medieval process of the political unification of Norway.<sup>54</sup>

We have seen that the chiefdoms or petty kingdoms of Norrland in Sweden, at the peak of their power in about AD 500, appear to have lost their influence in the seventh century. They may have lost control of the inland resources of central and northern Scandinavia to other chiefdoms and petty kingdoms, notably those of Trøndelag and northern Norway, and in the south to the Swedish kingdom in the Mälaren valley. In Österbotten and south-west Finland

<sup>53</sup> G. Stamsø Munch, 'Hus og hall: En høvdinggård på Borg i Lofoten', in G. Steinsland (ed.), *Nordisk hedendom: et symposium* (Odense, 1991), pp. 321–34.

<sup>54</sup> O. S. Johansen and T. Søbstad, 'De nordnorske tunanleggene fra jernalderen', *Viking*, 41 (1977), pp. 9–56; Wik, *Helgelands historie*, 1.

agrarian settlement expanded considerably in the Merovingian Period, in former agricultural districts as well as forested areas. Characteristic jewellery and local varieties of weaponry were developed and iron production increased in the interior. Richly furnished graves reveal that the leading local families were still in contact with the Swedish area but at the same time a native Finnish material culture becomes more distinct. The collapse of the power of Norrland's petty kings and chieftains, at the same time as the settlement expansion in Österbotten appears to have been at its strongest, may have given the Finnish chiefdoms greater access to resources in the northern area.

In the Åland archipelago there was a marked expansion of settlement from the seventh century, and numerous house sites and farms have been excavated. Sailing routes between the centres in Finland and the Mälaren region must have touched Åland and made it an important intermediate station for trade and barter across the Baltic. Finds of Baltic and east Finno-Ugrian character indicate that the southern Finnish chiefdoms also had important contacts eastwards with Karelia and what is now western Russia. Ship burials make it clear that large rowing and sailing ships were also built in Finland. Maritime traffic eastwards was probably organised by Finnish chieftains before the Swedish and Gotlandic dominance was established in the Viking Age.<sup>55</sup>

*Conclusion: Scandinavia as part of northern Europe*

Following the collapse of the western Roman Empire Germanic kingdoms were established in western Europe. A more or less common Germanic ideology of power and social organisation gained the upper hand in England and Scandinavia as well as on the Continent. The Frankish kingdom of the Merovingians and subsequently of the Carolingians came to play a leading role in north-west Europe. The Franks gained supremacy over neighbouring kingdoms by military conquest, and their form of economic and political organisation set a standard to be imitated by other Germanic kingdoms including the Scandinavian ones. During their expansion in the seventh and eighth centuries the Franks developed a great need for subsistence and utility wares that had to be fetched not only from the Continent but also from the British Isles, Scandinavia and the Baltic region. In the seventh century early trading centres were established, partly under royal control, along the English Channel and the southern coasts of the North Sea, including Quentowic, Dorestad, Hamwic, London and Ipswich. As time went by, trade and other contacts

<sup>55</sup> J. Callmer, 'Interaction between ethnical groups in the Baltic region in the Late Iron Age', in B. Hårdh and B. Wyszomirska-Werbart (eds.), *Contacts across the Baltic Sea* (Lund, 1992), pp. 99-107; Edgren, 'Den förhistoriska tiden'; Pihlman, 'Vapenproduksjon'.

between the petty kingdoms of Scandinavia and the Franks and Anglo-Saxons were channelled through these centres.<sup>56</sup>

Status goods such as glass beakers, pottery, bronze vessels and precious metals from the south were exchanged for prestige and utility goods such as furs, amber, hides, iron bars, schist for whetstones, soapstone, walrus tusks, antlers, quartz and slaves from the north. Central settlements such as Dankirke, Gudme, Sorte Muld and Helgå were the bases for this exchange. The petty kingdoms of northern Scandinavia were drawn into a wide-ranging network of contacts which embraced the peaceful exchange of gifts, marriage arrangements and the building up of alliances, as well as wars, plundering raids and the payment of tribute. Subsistence and utility goods were collected by local leaders and chieftains by virtue of their key positions in a regional redistributive system. Within the framework of banquets, feasts, religious ceremonies and gatherings, and the king's right to demand food and lodging on his travels, such goods could be converted into prestige wares. The estates of chieftains, such as Borre, Borg, Uppsala and Högom, or market places, such as Helgö, were the centres for such activities.<sup>57</sup>

About AD 700 a Danish king established the trading centre of Ribe in Jylland. Kaupang in Vestfold, Birka in Mälaren and Hedeby at the base of Jylland followed shortly afterwards. The exchange of goods increased throughout northern Europe and gradually came to include larger quantities of subsistence and utility goods. Thus were sown the seeds for a market economy using coins and silver as means of payment. The extensive trading activities of the Viking Age were rooted in the dramatic political events of the Merovingian Period.

This was also the background for the increasingly intensive exploitation of resources in northern Scandinavia and the Baltic region. Settlement expanded in the forested and highland regions, and fishing settlements were established in coastal districts. The Sami came to play a major role in the local redistributive systems; this is indicated by many house sites, settlement sites and hunting contraptions found in inland districts and along the northern coasts. Artefacts found in graves and settlement sites along the coast of northern Norway also include objects from the Finnish and Baltic areas, implying that the exchange of goods now extended across the mountains from the Baltic to the Atlantic. This would open the way for conflicts between the Sami and the Germanic,

<sup>56</sup> Callmer, 'Hantverksproduktion'; A. Christophersen, 'Kjøpe, selge, bytte, gi: Vareutveksling og byoppkomst i Norge ca 800-1000, en modell', in A. Andréén (ed.), *Medeltidens födelse* (Lund, 1989), pp. 109-45.

<sup>57</sup> R. Hodges, 'Charlemagne's elephant and the beginning of commodisation in Europa', *Acta Archaeologica*, 59 (1989), pp. 155-68; U. Näsman, 'Om fjärrhandel i Sydsjaskandnaviens yngre jernalder', *Hikuin*, 16 (1990), pp. 89-118.



Kven and Finnish settlers. Nevertheless, the Sami may have been protected by the chieftains on account of their important role in the redistributive system. What was later called the 'Finn [i.e. Sami] tax', collected by north Norwegian chieftains in the Viking Age and early Middle Ages, may have had its roots in the economic system of the Merovingian Period.<sup>58</sup>

Due to its geographical situation the Danish kingdom was able to play a key role in the exchange of wares and the political development in northern Europe. Maritime traffic along the Norwegian coast in the west, in and out of Oslofjord, and to and from the Baltic had to pass Danish territory on its way to southern England and the Continent. The Danish kingdom must have attained its leading position within Scandinavia at an early date. Further north it appears that power was gradually concentrated in certain central regions, such as Vestfold and Østfold (on opposite sides of Oslofjord). Vestlandet, Trøndelag and Hålogaland in Norway; in Götaland and Svealand in Sweden; and in Österbotten and the south-western districts of Finland. The distribution of political power in the Viking Age and early medieval period, which appears in the earliest written accounts, is supported by eighth-century archaeological evidence.

Contacts were probably established among the ruling élites of Denmark, southern Norway and England in the Migration Period, along the southern coasts of the North Sea as well as across the open water. Seventh-century rowing vessels of considerable size are known from Kvalsund in Sunnmøre in Vestlandet and Sutton Hoo in East Anglia. Picture stones on Gotland may also indicate that sailing ships were known in Scandinavia from the sixth century. As we have seen, the exchange of goods was increasingly channelled through the trading centres on the southern shores of the North Sea, and the Scandinavian chieftains and petty kings grew more and more dependent on the social and political network built up by the Franks. The opening up of direct sailing routes across the Norwegian and North Seas from Norway to Shetland, Orkney and Scotland, and from Jylland to England, made possible trade and alliances between Norwegian, Danish and Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, beyond the control of the Franks. The archaeological material on both sides of the North Sea suggests that such routes may already have been in use in the Merovingian Period.

In the early Merovingian Period there were great similarities in the culture, ideology and social organisation of Scandinavians, Franks and Anglo-Saxons.

<sup>58</sup> Mulk, *Sirkas*; Odner, 'Ethnicity and traditions'; Storli, *Stallo-boplasser*; Zachrisson, 'Comments'.

However, in the later part of the eighth century the distinction between the Christian kingdoms in the south and the pagan kingdoms and chiefdoms of Scandinavia became more pronounced. Anglo-Saxon missionary activity was intensified on the Continent and the Franks conquered Saxon areas in northern Germany up to the Danish border. The southern Scandinavian kingdoms may have felt themselves economically and militarily threatened by the expansion of the Franks. The unrest of the Viking Age, which, according to written accounts, started with attacks on England towards the end of the eighth century, could thus have its roots in economic and political conflicts around the North Sea.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>59</sup> J. Hines, 'Tidlig kontakt over Nordsjøen, og de bakenforliggende årsaker', in J. F. Krøger, and H. R. Naley (eds.), *Nordsjøen: Handel, religion og politikk. Karmøyseminaret 94/95*, (Stavanger, 1996), pp. 18–30; Myhre, 'The beginning of the Viking Age'.