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Crafting societies in the first millennium CE

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Technologies on display. The Storhaug ship burial

HÅKON REIERSEN

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Ship burials were grand events in Late Iron-age society. Great efforts were invested to make a spectacle in memory of the deceased ruler and to promote the new ones. The Storhaug ship burial (CE 779) near Avaldsnes in south-western Norway is an early example of this royal burial tradition. The article examines the various components in the Storhaug burial to highlight the technologies on display. While many types of technologies in contemporary society seem to be represented, a conscious selection of elements is assumed. In the article, practices related to food production and mound construction are explored as examples of the display and demonstration of technologies. The focus is on how these technologies reflected the social renegotiations of the roles of the king and society. It is suggested that the broad range of food production technologies represented is related to the king's role as guarantor of food security and that the construction of a complex monument mirrored society's ability and willingness to invest great efforts in building structures for its leadership.

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Key words: Kingship, 8th century, burial rituals, food production, mound construction

Renegotiations in high-status burials

When leaders in prehistoric hierarchical societies died, it created a special, intermediary situation, in which relations between the elites, their allies and the community had to be transformed or renegotiated (Oestigaard and Goldhahn 2006). A significant part of this transaction process took place during the funerary rituals. Among the examples used by Terje Oestigaard and Joakim Goldhahn was the "princely" burial at Hochdorf in Germany, a richly furnished burial of the 6th century BCE in a wooden chamber covered by a large mound. The burial assemblage probably was formed in two phases of rituals (Olivier 1999, 128–29, in Oestigaard and Goldhahn 2006, 45). The first of these included feasting and banquets and took several weeks, during which the burial chamber remained open. In the second phase, the large mound was constructed over a longer period. Oestigaard and Goldhahn (2006, 45) assume that the first phase was of greater importance for the social renegotiations, although it is likely that there still was room for this throughout the period of mound construction.

The Scandinavian ship burials of the Merovingian (CE 550–800) and Viking (CE 800–1050) Periods reflect similar intermediary situations after the death of communities' leaders, where funerary rituals of comparable complexity were necessary to legitimise and renegotiate social structures. With regards to the famous Oseberg ship burial (CE 834) in south-eastern Norway, Terje Gansum proposed that half of the ship and the chamber served as an open stage for rituals for a period of time before the mound was raised (Gansum 2004, 171–74). This hypothesis has proven very influential for the "performance turn" in Viking-age mortuary archaeology (Price 2022, 65).

Among recent contributions in this field of research is Grete B. Bukkemoen's (2021) work on how practices related to food serving and food processing were performed in burial rituals throughout the first millennium CE, as well as Rebecca Cannell's (2021) study of how materials in ship burial mounds might have been selected to create connections between the surrounding landscape and the performative scene of the burial.

Inspired by these works, this paper aims to explore how roles and responsibilities between leaders and society might have been performed and renegotiated in the Storhaug ship burial (CE 779) near Avaldsnes in south-western Norway (Figure 1). The grave is interpreted as that of a regional king (Bill 2020; Opedal 2010). While

Figure 1. The location of the Storhaug, Salhushaug and Grønhaug ship burials near Avaldsnes, strategically situated along the Karmsund strait. Areas with fishery station sites and the bone midden at Hemnes are also indicated. Map by Christopher F. Kvæstad, Stavanger Maritime Museum.

it seems unlikely that all activities related to social negotiations left archaeological traces, the large material complex available from this ship burial might provide an opportunity to identify such practices. Approaching the reproduction of social structures partly as material statements traceable in the archaeological record, the focus is on the deposition of food-related objects in the burial chamber and on the mound construction process. The hypothesis is that the display of objects and practices related to the *technologies* of both food production and mound construction were important and interrelated elements in the renegotiation of social relations when leadership changed.

The Storhaug ship burial

Close to 50m in diameter and built on a slope to appear 9m high when seen from the sea (Figure 2), Storhaug was one of the largest known burial mounds in Norway (Nicolaysen 1862–66, 348). Digging in the mound's northern part was reported as early as the first half of the 19th century, and after the sale of the property in 1886, the new landowners decided to remove it (Reiersen et al. 2023, 89). At the centre in the northern half, parts of a ship as well as gaming pieces of glass and amber, glass beads, a gold arm ring and a fishing line sinker were found. The removal work was halted until archaeologist Anders Lorange excavated central parts of the southern half in 1887 (Lorange 1888).

Partly due to previous digging disturbing the mound as well as to the documented collapse of the burial chamber, preservation conditions were poor for several types of organic material. Merely bits of the 20m long burial ship were found, there were few remains of textiles, and a horse jaw was the only osteological find. Nevertheless,

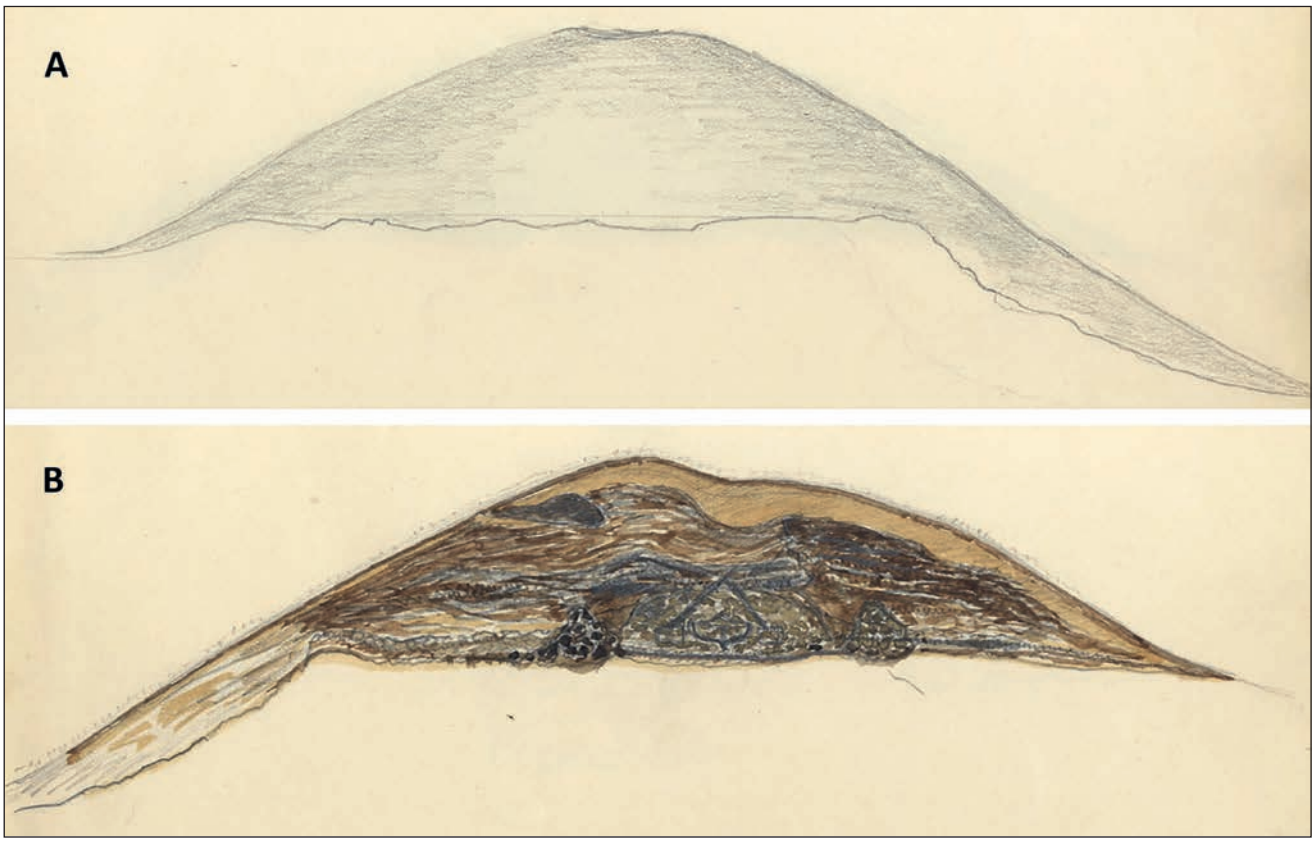

Figure 2. Anders Lorange's drawings of the Storhaug mound before the excavation in 1887. A: mound seen from the south, B: section seen from the north. Built on the edge of a plateau, from the sea the monument appeared twice as tall as it in fact was. The section drawing clearly shows the stratigraphy of the mound. Chamber and ship are, however, sketched with far too small dimensions. The chamber's wooden walls were supported by outer stone walls, and the ship was almost as wide as the room in between. Scanned by the University Museum of Bergen. Used with permission.

the material complex recovered by Lorange (1888) was impressive, as it included weapons, blacksmith tools, kitchen utensils, agricultural implements, a variety of wooden tools, parts of a sled, boats and a large ship. It is the only known ship burial in Norway that had not been reopened in the centuries following the burial and hence the only ship burial in the country from which were recovered status markers such as swords or a gold arm ring (Bill 2020, 366). The latter being the only example to date found in a burial among the thousands of Late Iron-age (CE 550–1050) graves known in Norway.

In relation to the astonishing Oseberg and Gokstad burials (Brøgger et al. 1917; Nicolaysen 1882), preservation was poor. Lorange died only a year after the excavation, leaving the finds only partially catalogued. Consequently, Storhaug never received the same attention as its counterparts in eastern Norway. In recent decades, however, it was re-introduced into the discourse on ship burials (Bill 2020; Bonde and Stylegar 2009, 2016; Cannell 2021; Opedal 1998; 2010). Of special importance were Arnfrid Opedal's (1998, 43–63) re-examination of the burial complex and the dendrochronological datings of the ship to CE 770 and of the burial to CE 779 (Bonde and Stylegar 2009), which established it among the earliest ship burials in Norway (Paasche 2024, tab. 1).

To gain more information about the Storhaug mound, the damaged site was revisited in 2022 with a combination of ground-penetrating radar (GPR) survey and four small excavation trenches (Reiersen et al. 2023, fig. 9). The GPR survey identified a yet unexcavated boat of 5–6m in the periphery of the mound. A well-preserved part of this boat had been found in 1974 during water pipe trenching (Reiersen et al. 2023, 92–94). In addition, the northern outline of the burial ship was determined by GPR, which corresponded closely to a sketch made by Lorange (cf. Reiersen et al. 2023, figs. 4, 11–12). This allowed the georeferencing of old field documentation, making possible the first attempt of a plan drawing of Storhaug that showed the reconstructed structure and object distribution (Figure 3). The plan drawing provides an important key for a new understanding of the burial sequence.

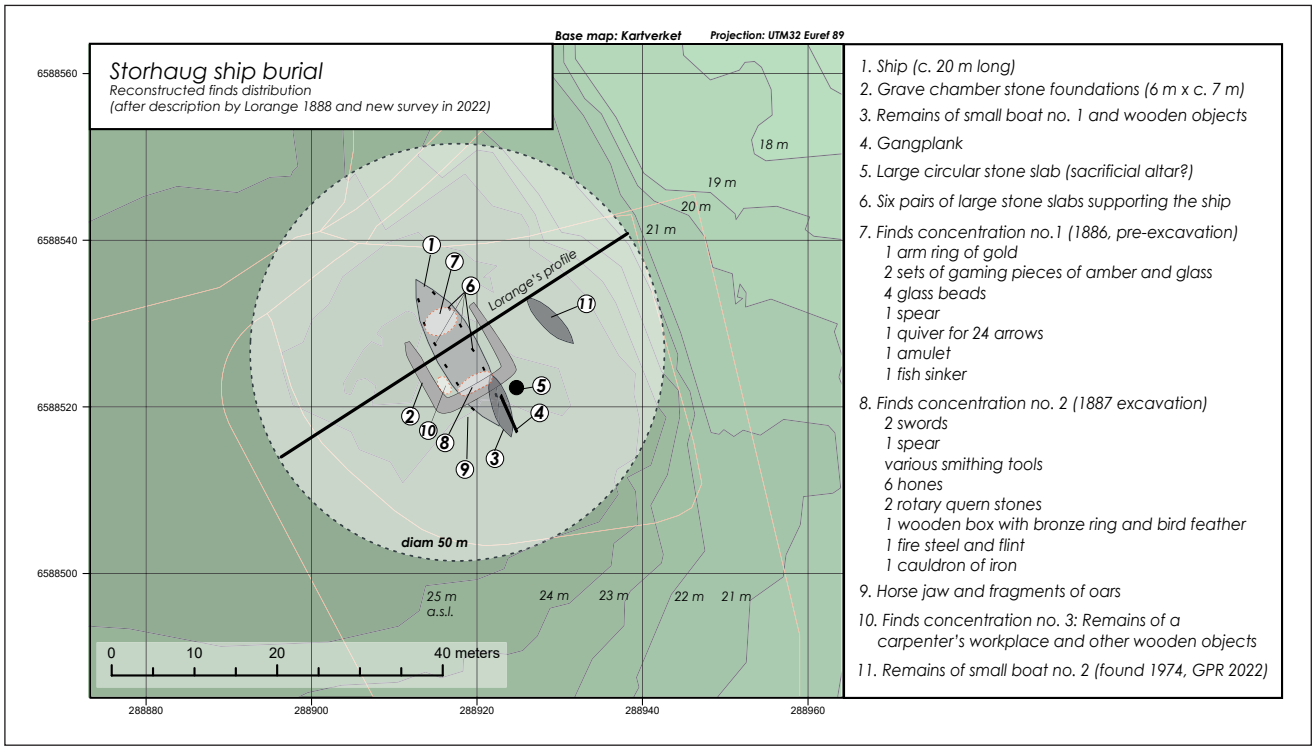

Figure 3. Tentative plan drawing of the Storhaug ship burial, with a reconstructed distribution of most of the objects based on Lorange's (1888) article and field documentation. Few of the wooden objects are specifically mapped here, including the sled parts, stretcher and ard shares mentioned in the text. Modified after an illustration by Theo Gil, Museum of Archaeology, University of Stavanger.

Technologies on display?

An important feature of ship burials like Storhaug, Oseberg and Gokstad is the inclusion not only of the burial ship, personal equipment and animal remains, but the integration of a broader range of means of transport and everyday tools reflecting the technological complex of society (see e.g. the overview in Grieg 1928 of the Oseberg material complex). The term "technology" is derived from Greek *techne*, meaning "knowledge, skill" (Dobres and Hoffman 1994, 232). For the purpose of this article, it is defined as the practical skills needed for human survival by producing food, clothes, houses, and tools, managing to stay safe, move around, communicate and cooperate.

Marcia-Anne Dobres and Christopher R. Hoffman point out that technology and production are intimately linked to social practices: "Through the activities and social relations involved in material production, people create things. These processes of material production and their end products, in turn, become material and symbolic structures through which the world is perceived and responded to" (Dobres and Hoffman 1994, 215, with reference to Moore 1986). In this perspective, ordinary day-to-day technological activities work and might be studied as an integral part of social reproduction (Dobres and Hoffman 1994, 212, 216, 221):

> The creation of technology, the form that it takes, and the manner of its subsequent deployment, serve as a powerful media through which people reproduce some of their basic categories of their social and material world. For that same reason, traditions of making and using might also serve as a point of departure in the negotiation of new relations and new meanings (Edmonds 1990, 56–57, quoted in Dobres and Hoffman 1994, 226).

As stated in the introduction, this article aims to identify material traces of technologies present in the Storhaug ship burial and investigate whether these might be interpreted in the context of social renegotiation between elite groups and society. In the preserved material complex from Storhaug, there are objects that are related to a wide range of technologies (Lorange 1888; Opedal 1998, 40–66; 2010, 260–61), including food production, metallurgy, weaponry, transport, woodcraft and engineering as well as imported and exported resources. It is obvious that transport-related features played a central role in the burial rituals at Storhaug, an aspect which will be discussed in a later article. Here, the focus is on two separate fields of technology: food-related technologies and construction technologies. Following the two-phase division seen in the Hochdorf burial rituals, the first theme brings

us to the open chamber and the display of food production technologies, the second to the complex processes of the overall mound construction. Although the assumed Storhaug king and his successor might have ruled over a larger region in western Norway (Opedal 2010), the primary geographical scope of this article is the landscape surrounding Storhaug with local societies assumed to be intimately linked to the kings (cf. Figure 1). The material complex in the burial is compared to the larger corpus of Late Iron-age artefact types in Norway (Petersen 1951) and especially to that of the slightly later Oseberg ship burial (Brøgger et al. 1917; Grieg 1928).

The display of food production technologies

Although the complete sequence of the construction of the Storhaug mound is presented below, a short introduction to the first part of this process is needed to situate the burial chamber. In what was to be the centre of the mound, a large ship was positioned, with the bow pointing south (Figure 3). In the middle of the ship, a chamber was then raised with three stone walls documented in the 1887 excavation. Lorange (1888, 9) noted that the fourth wall might had been removed by earlier digging in the mound. However, it is just as likely that one side was an open doorway, as is seen in building types from the period, such as boathouses and courtyard sites (Grimm 2006; Iversen 2018). The chamber presumably was made of wood with outer stone walls (Opedal 1998, 42), with the assumed opening towards the north and the ship's stern. If the transport of objects into the open chamber was part of the public ritual, participants would have been able to observe which items were brought to the burial chamber.

Figure 4. Pear-shaped fishing line sinker of soapstone, 11cm long and weighing 650 grams (B4438/e). Photo: Svein Skare, University Museum of Bergen. Photo has been modified. Licence: CC BY-SA 4.0.

Objects for food production were given a prominent place. The fishing line sinker (Figure 4) was found not far from the gold ring and imported gaming pieces (Figure 3, point 7). Further south, the two stones of a rotary quern were found on a shelf in the chamber's southern wall, next to weapons and blacksmith tools (Figure 3, point 8). An iron cauldron for preparing food stood at the foot of the shelf. Although a skeleton did not survive, Lorange assumed that the body had been lying or sitting close to this wall, near these objects (Lorange 1888, 9).

Not far from the shelf, outside the ship yet still inside the chamber, a collection of wooden material was found (cf. Lorange's sketch in Opedal 1998, 20; Figure 3, point 10), among them two dozen wooden nails from a sled, on average 30cm long (Lorange 1888, 8), and two objects of about the same size that in 2023 were identified as ard shares. The sinker, the rotary quern, the cauldron and the ard shares thus probably all were found in the chamber. Opedal (1998, 59–60) wondered what practical objects like the sinker were doing in a royal burial. However, once they are seen as representing the crucial importance of food production technologies in society – of fishing, ploughing, grinding and cooking – "activating" them in a public ritual makes good sense. The question then remains whether this is a special object assemblage related to high-status contexts like ship burials, or if it is found more commonly in burials.

To facilitate a general understanding of how often such objects are found in Late Iron-age burials, a short review is provided here, based on Jan Petersen's (1951) overview of tools in Norwegian Viking-age graves. Though not frequent, sinkers are known from burials, and mainly male graves (Petersen 1951, 275). Representing other types of fishing gear, three fishing hooks were part of the Gokstad find complex (Nicolaysen 1882, 48). Rotary querns are rather rare in graves. The trend is that they are more often found in male than female burials. However, rotary querns were found in female contexts both at Oseberg and Hopperstad. In Petersen's overview, six of twelve rotary quern finds originate from boat and ship burials (Petersen 1951, 439–40). Iron cauldrons are a more common find category, although represented only in 2.7% of the burials examined by Petersen (1951, 378–79). The Oseberg grave is unique in having three preserved iron caldrons (cf. Bukkemoen 2021, appendix, 16–27). The objects related to food production in Storhaug thus seem not to reflect a common find combination, and the similarities with the Oseberg assemblage is interesting.

This also holds true for the two ard shares from Storhaug, which represent an extraordinary find. In Norway, wooden ard shares so far were known only from bog

deposits in the western part of the country, assumed to be of Early Iron-age date (Zachrisson 2018, 692–98). The Storhaug ards (Figure 5a) are of a similar type (cf. Glob 1951, figs. 79, 86), and so is a similar object found among the unclassified material from the plundering of the chamber at Oseberg (Figure 5b) (Grieg 1928, 271). Described as arrow-shaped, it has the same pointy terminal as the Storhaug ards, corresponding to contemporary ard share mounts made of iron (Figure 5c) (Petersen 1951, figs. 98–99), and although the broad shape of the shaft differs from Early Iron-age specimens, it most likely can be interpreted as an ard share (although see Pedersen 2017, 118).

It is possible that a re-examination of wooden tools from other burial finds may produce additional Late Iron-age ards (e.g. C27077/c from Raknehaugen, resembling Glob 1951, fig. 83). Ard share mounts made of iron commonly are found in hoards and in Merovingian- and early Viking-age burials, mainly in eastern Norway (Petersen 1951, 175–80). Chronologically, the wooden ard shares from Storhaug and Oseberg fit this pattern. Although fishing gear is not present in the Oseberg burial, the cauldrons, the rotary quern and the ard share compare well with the objects for food production selected for Storhaug. Sigurd Grieg (1928, 232) noted the peculiarity that the Oseberg burial lacked other agricultural tools commonly found in burials, like scythes and sickles, and the same is also true for Storhaug.

In the Merovingian and Viking Periods, according to Bukkemoen (2021, 199), "food surfaced as a resource for leadership". This is reflected by changes in how culinary practices were performed in burials from the Early (500 BCE–CE 550) to the Late Iron Age (CE 550–1050). While burials from the early phase typically included vessels for the serving of food, in the late Iron Age, there was a shift to items related to cooking and food preparation (Bukkemoen 2021, 108–9, 114). Bukkemoen (2021, 178–82) relates this change to a movement of activities from public open spaces to more private spaces indoors and possibly to the control of food production by the elite. The importance of making food clearly is demonstrated in the Oseberg ship burial, where there was a separate kitchen area (Bukkemoen 2021, 113). Skaldic poems often portray the king as patron of food production and fertility (Opedal 1998, 100–1). Hákon Jarl's first year as king (CE 976), for instance, was remembered as a time of great prosperity, exemplified by successful crops and good herring fishery (Enoksen and Sørensen 2020, 17). The display of objects for food production that were brought to the burial chamber might have symbolically celebrated the king as a guarantor of food.

In the regional context of south-western Norway, it is reasonable to suppose that food safety had special significance after the severe impact of the 6th-century climate crisis and the following cooling period (Westling 2024). Pollen analyses from the closest surroundings of Storhaug indicate a reorganisation of food production strategies after the crisis (Prøsch-Danielsen et al. 2024, 15). While the analyses from the bottom stratigraphy in Storhaug show that crops still were harvested nearby, the analysis of the wider area suggests that the percentage of grassland increased, and crop plants decreased, possibly as the agriculture began to rely more on animal husbandry. At Hemnes, 20km south of Storhaug (Figure 1), a contemporary bone midden found near a possible trading site (Nærøy and Hemdorff 2018), suggests that alongside livestock (cattle, sheep, pig), fish resources were important (cod, common ling, saithe, wolf fish, herring) (Perdicaris 2000). Specialised Late Iron-age fishery stations (Norw. *fjæremannstufter*) in western Norway indicate organised fisheries in this period (Johannessen 1998). Similar sites are clustered in the district around Storhaug (Figure 1), on the islands of Karmøy, Utsira, Røvær and Bokn (Enoksen and Sørensen 2020). It seems likely that this extensive activity was organised by kings. For the people gathering to mourn the dead king in an unstable political situation and waiting for new rulership and order, it might thus have been a stabilising and calming experience to witness objects of food production being brought into the chamber.

Technologies for constructing chamber and mound

If the objects brought into the burial chamber expressed some of the roles of kingship and obligations associated with the deceased king and his successor, it is possible that the complex building of the monument was something that in turn reflected the obligations of society. It was the most labour- and resource-intensive part of the burial rituals and made a lasting visual impression in the landscape. It involved a range of different skills that might be considered construction technologies, including coordination, material logistics, stone masonry, carpentry and engineering. Following Lorange and Opedal, several researchers have investigated how Storhaug was constructed (Cannell 2021, 372–74; Gansum 2004, 175–76; Prøsch-Danielsen et al. 2024, 12–15; Reiersen et al. 2023, 101–3). The recovered section drawing by Lorange (Figure 2), the reconstructed plan drawing (Figure 3), stratigraphic observations and pollen analyses contribute to our understanding of the construction sequence, but several scenarios are possible.

Figure 5. A: Arrow-shaped ard share from Storhaug, ca. 45cm long, similar to Early Iron-age types (B4468/unnumbered). Photo: Massimiliano Ditta. B: Arrow-shaped wooden object from Oseberg (C55000/55), 42cm long. After Grieg (1928, fig. 166). C: Types of iron mounts of ard shares from eastern Norway (C29517, C22720/m); the right one matches A, the left one corresponds to B but is larger. Photos: Olav Heggø / Maria Malherbes Jensen, Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo. Photos have been modified. Licence: CC BY-SA 4.0.

While the mound construction probably included several unintended and ad hoc features, major parts of the workflow must have been carefully planned. First, the location was determined. The main aim of the choice probably was to make a visual statement to the passersby by placing the mound on a plateau near a strategic point close to the sea traffic. However, such a place might also have been practical due to logistics, as many of the materials, obviously including ship and boats, could have been transported to the site across the water. Based on the section drawing, it appears that the topsoil at the site was removed before the ditch or depression was dug that the ship was to be placed in (Cannell 2021, 374; Opedal 1998, 18–19). The ship, boats and other items would most likely have been transported to the beach and then, in an organised effort by human and animal power, pulled up to the plateau ca. 25m above sea level. Positioned in the ditch in what would be the centre of the mound, the ship was stabilised by large stone slabs standing in pairs on each side of the ship. The two boats also were placed in their appropriate places.

With the ship in place, work on the chamber could begin. As is seen in the plan drawing (Figure 3), the ship seems to have been cut in two by the stone foundations. While carpenters carried out this modification to the ship, other workers started building the one-metre-high stone walls. As is noted by Gansum (2004, 175–76), with the stone chamber outside and across the ship, the ship itself was integrated into the construction of the mound. The stern at this time protruded from the stone walls. Inside the chamber, but outside the ship, near the southern stone wall, Lorange found chips of pine wood. He interpreted this as evidence of the work site of the carpenters while they were raising the chamber, with wooden

planks on the inside of the stone walls (Opedal 1998, 21, 42). This type of timber building with outer stone walls mirrored the main regional house type of the Early Iron Age, surviving into the Late Iron Age in the construction of boathouses (cf. Lorange 1888, 9). This style of house building referred to deep local building traditions and know-how. After the chamber was finished and the ship modified, the outside of the ship was covered with moss (Opedal 1998, 19). While stones for the chamber might have been collected nearby, the large circular stone slab, ca. 1.5m in diameter (Figure 3, point 5), probably was transported from a greater distance. Placed on boulders near the ship's bow, it most likely was prepared to be a kind of altar (Shetelig 1912, 227).

We do not know how long the ship and chamber remained in the open or when the building of the mound was begun. Part of a stretcher, presumably made in connection with the burial, was dendrochronologically dated to May–June in CE 779 (Bonde and Stylegar 2009, 161). From macrofossil analyses, botanist Jens Holmboe suggested that the neighbouring Salhushaug mound and the Oseberg mound both were built in August–September (Holmboe 1917, 205; Reiersen 2024, 24). Based on stratigraphy, Gansum (2004, 171–74) interpreted the construction of the Oseberg mound as a process, with the mound remaining unfinished and available for rituals for a longer period. It is possible that the Storhaug rituals were started in the summer and early autumn during the sailing season, but that the construction of the mound had to wait until after the harvest. A rough estimate of 5000m^3 for the volume of the mound has been made based on a diameter of 40m (Ringstad 1986, tab. 8 no. 31). Applying a work estimate of 1m^3 per day per person, 80 people would have worked here for two months; as the mound was wider, 100 people seem a better guess. This provides some idea of the scale of the work site.

The construction of the mound started with turf blocks. The cutting of turf was an essential technology, as peat probably was an important heat source in this woodless area. Some of the turves were transported from a distance, as pollen analyses show clear differences between the heather turf of the bottom layers and the grass turf layers above (Prøsch-Danielsen et al. 2024, 15). They were placed upside down in horizontal layers. Lorange encountered vertical poles in the mound, probably related to the measuring and planning of dimensions (Opedal 1998, 16). The choice of a site on the slope down from the plateau reflects a conscious, well-planned strategy to make the mound appear larger from the sea.

Once it had achieved a height that covered the chamber, the construction was halted, and a large bonfire was built directly on top of it. This seems ritually motivated, as a part of the collective effort to construct the mound, and perhaps also to ritually seal the chamber. The charcoal layer from the bonfire was up to 1m thick, indicating that a vast amount of wood had been burnt. As pollen analyses show that the area around Storhaug was largely deforested (Prøsch-Danielsen et al. 2024, fig. 10), making such a large bonfire was not straightforward. While firewood might have been transported to the site on sea, the question is if it were brought specifically for the bonfire or whether objects previously used in the burial sequence were used in a ritual burning. After the bonfire, construction was resumed, and various types of soils and materials were brought to the site and integrated in the burial mound (Cannell 2021, 372–74). The finished burial mound was a monument both of the king and of the shared abilities of society to raise such a structure.

Ship burials as negotiations between leaders and society

No other archaeological burial complex has provided such deep and colourful insights into Viking-age society as ship burials. They presumably were the funerals for leaders, where new leaders-to-be were deeply involved in the planning and execution of the different aspects of the associated rituals. Ship burials were grand social events – spectacles that perhaps might be compared to military parades, agricultural fairs and craft exhibitions. Amongst the mourning for the dead leader, these events were collective achievements showcasing the complexity of society and displaying its technological level, among other things. In these events, the social order was presented and renegotiated.

Throughout this article, the Storhaug ship burial has been approached to see how and why various technologies were displayed and integrated into the burial. My point of departure was Oestigaard and Goldhahn's (2006) interpretation of prehistoric elite funerary rituals as transactions. The intentional selection of grave goods and the construction of burial monuments happened within a context of reproducing, or renegotiating, the social order. Seeing this perspective as highly relevant for understanding the inclusion of the various technologies of society in a royal burial like Storhaug, it was assumed that this burial complex had the potential to reveal archaeological traces of such renegotiations. The ship burial rituals were occasions where roles and responsibilities were transferred from the dead king to the next, and where relationships between king and society were renegotiated. Seen in this light, the renegotiations could be reflected in the display and integration of food

production technologies entering the burial chamber and the demonstration of construction technologies in the landscape.

Everyday objects might refer to the socially embedded technological practices they are a product of (Dobres and Hoffman 1994). If a soapstone sinker is a material reference both to the role of the king in organising fisheries and to the importance of fish in the regional diet, it makes sense that such a mundane object is integrated in a royal burial. By burying the dead king with items representing fishing, ploughing, grinding and cooking, the new leaders highlighted the existing link between kingship and successful subsistence. At the same time, the new leaders ensured the populace that they would take on the same responsibilities. The same might also apply to the other types of technologies represented in the burial. Items referring to, for instance, military, metallurgy and transport were actively put on display to underline the vital role of kings in organising these technological building blocks of society.

Whether burial monuments were built for elites or not, they tend to be complicated structures that often are interpreted as great communal achievements (e.g. Sæbø 2024). In the case of Storhaug, it is fair to assume that it was built to commemorate a king, just like the later Oseberg ship burial probably was made for a queen (or queens) (Pedersen 2017).

Through the construction of the chamber and mound and by the integration of the ship in this construction, the society's ability – and commitment – to invest great material and human resources to make large constructions for the leaders were displayed. The grand spectacle that was the Storhaug ship burial then appears to have been a well-orchestrated celebration and renegotiation of the social order. As the theme discussed in this article unlocks only a limited part of the potential of the Storhaug burial, it is hoped that future research will shed more light on the material complex, landscape settings, rituals and the sociopolitical context.

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