

## 7. VEIEN – CULT SITE AND CENTRAL PLACE IN RINGERIKE – A SUMMARY

In the heart of Ringerike, north of the Tyrifjord on a pine-covered sand ridge, lies the ancient burial ground Veien, in the middle of the farming community of Heradsbygd. In the literature, the burial ground is often referred to as Veien/Bråten since it lies within both farms. But since Bråten is an area sectioned out of Veien in more recent times, I use the name Veien here.

The main purpose of this book is to present Veien and the archaeological material discovered there in the last two centuries. This is one of the largest burial grounds in Eastern Norway, originally more than 150 mounds, now reduced to a little over 100. In the 1800s, a total of 90 mounds were excavated, 87 of them by the archaeologist Oluf Rygh. The grave finds are mainly from the Roman Period, a few from the Migration Period and one from the Merovingian Period. In addition, five finds from the Viking Period have been ploughed up. At the end of the 20th century, excavations were undertaken in areas surrounding the burial ground which uncovered 23 flat graves from the Bronze Age and Pre-Roman Iron Age, four longhouses dating to the Early Iron Age, a number of cooking pits and other pits. The finds show that the burial ground was established in the Late Bronze Age, ca. 1000 BC, that the site had a central significance in the Early Iron Age and that burials and other activities have left few traces into the Late Iron Age. The four longhouses follow each other in time within the Early Iron Age. What is special about this place is that it has a notably long continuity, more than 60 generations, that longhouses are built in a distinctive architectural style close by the burial ground, and that it is possible to see parallel changes in burial practice and architecture.

In chapter 1, I have provided a short description of the objectives, problems and methods. My premises for interpreting the grave finds are that these also reflect the social structure. How a grave is formed and what it contains is not random, but rather the result of conscious choices. What we can observe from burials from the past are the material traces of ritual practices, a public occasion that addressed society as much as the deceased. Rituals express an ideology and have the function of maintaining a power structure, legitimating the dominant group's political power. I consider distinct changes in rituals as signs of changes in political power.

Burial rituals are not perceived as a direct reflection of the social structure. They can have the function of masking contradictions. «Poor» graves are not interpreted as a «poor» society. The lack of high-status goods can be an expression of an egalitarian ideology, but is not necessarily interpreted as an egalitarian society; they could be a sign of stable political conditions where power is consolidated. Graves which include objects which must have been rare and from far away, such as imported goods and precious metals, reflect wealth. Such a «ritual squandering» can be interpreted as a sign of social unrest and competition, which necessitate a demonstration from the elite in the form of exposing prestigious objects in the burial ceremony.

Even though I take a materialistic approach to the material, I recognise that the design of the graves and the selected objects that are placed in them have a meaning beyond the purely material, a symbolic content that can reflect gender, role and status.

By reviewing the source material, I wish to illuminate the following topic: why this place was chosen, which changes can be observed over the long term and how they can be interpreted, and why the site lost its significance.

The book is ordered chronologically and thematically. The site is presented, in micro and macro perspectives and in relation to transport routes as these are some of the basis for the site's position of power (ch. 2, see figures 2.1 and 6.1). Veien has a strategic location at a crossroads leading from the outfields and mountains of Hallingdal and Valdres. From these areas come goods from hunting, trapping and iron extraction. Furs, antlers and iron are often mentioned as attractive exchange goods for acquiring exotic objects.

The presentation of the archaeological source material provides a short history from the grave mound investigations of the 1800s to the mechanised exposure of houses and graves at the end of the 20th century by topsoil stripping (ch. 3). In the subsequent chapters (ch. 4), I describe and date the finds more comprehensively in order to be able to see the whole collection in a wider context. I argue that being able to find patterns and changes over time provides a basis for interpreting social relations.

## THE BURIALS

The tradition of cremation burials is consistent, with one exception, the particularly rich grave in «The King's Mound» (*Kongsbaugen*). The graves can be subdivided into two clear main categories: flat graves, where burnt bones lie in a pit, and graves marked by a mound, where the bones lie at the base of the mound.

In chapter 4, the flat graves are described, both those which were uncovered beneath arable land outside the burial ground and those which, based on Oluf Rygh's descriptions, I interpret as burials under mounds, but older than the mounds. An interesting result is that there appears to have been a field of flat graves prior to the mound graves. This is illustrated on a map of 1847, where I have been able to add the burials (fig. 4.1). The burnt bones are crushed, in some graves they are clearly «cleaned», while in others, the bones are mixed with charcoal. In a number of the graves, it is the rings of birch tar that show that the bones have been placed in a container made of organic material, hence the term «urnfield». The only object found was a La Tène fibula (fig. 4.9); in addition, there were some potsherds, most likely the remains of vessels used in the burial ritual. The descriptions from Rygh's excavations show that the flat graves were often covered with stones. That the burials uncovered beneath the arable land were unmarked is not surprising; any stones here would have been removed. The burials share a likeness with the large, flat grave burial grounds in Eastern Sweden and show close contact (fig. 4.11). The large, flat grave burial ground with urn burials, as well as the long La Tène fibula, connects the area to the cultural tradition around the Oslo fjord and further afield to the continent.

Rygh collected burnt bones from some of the graves from the excavation of 1875, and I have interpreted the majority of these as flat graves. The osteological analyses of bones from old and new excavations show that the deceased were mainly adults, with men and women represented almost equally in those cases where sex could be determined; there were just a few adolescents and a single child.

Chapter 4.2 addresses the burials with mounds, where the burnt bones lie at the base of the mound, sometimes in a vessel, some with grave goods, and there is evidence of several burials in the same mound. In 1870 and 1875, Oluf Rygh excavated 87 mounds, a little over half of the burial ground. Even though the excavations were, by our standards, rather hasty, he made good observations and detailed descriptions. The bar chart fig. 4.21 in chapter 4.2.3 illustrates the contents of the mounds. Just thirty-nine mounds contain *artefacts*; of these, seven had only *potsherds*. All

but three of these mounds had burnt bones, all except three had charcoal, and one mound contained neither burnt bones nor charcoal. In the remaining mounds, nineteen had just *burnt bones and charcoal*, six had just *burnt bones* and thirteen only *charcoal*. In nine mounds, there was *nothing*. This shows that twenty-five of the mounds had the same contents as the flat graves, the difference being that the bones and charcoal are not in a pit and that a mound is built over them.

Oluf Rygh documented through words, not drawings. His detailed descriptions made it possible to draw the graves in plan and section, which gives an illustration of how the burial traditions were and how many burials there were in each mound and of the fact that there were flat graves under some of the mounds. This expands the field of flat graves that was uncovered in the 1990s outside the burial ground (drawings in ch. 8). I present all the finds from the burials in catalogues in the form of tables with reference to the literature where the artefacts are documented, which provides a basis for dating and chronology, in order to be able to see burials and buildings in relation (ch. 8).

The graves from the Roman Period dominate with thirty-five burials (table in the appendix to ch. 4.2.3). They are spread relatively evenly between early and late: ca. sixteen burials from the Early Roman Period and ca. nineteen from the Late Roman Period. There are just five burials from the Migration Period, but among these are three with special and rich finds. There are few finds from the Late Iron Age, one burial from the Merovingian Period and five artefacts found via ploughing that may be from Viking Period graves. A brooch found in The King's Mound may be a secondary burial. The otherwise find-rich Viking Period is not well represented at Veien.

The burials in the mounds can be grouped into *categories* based on their artefacts, illustrated by fig. 4.22 in chapter 4.2.3. Most evident are well-known categories such as *weapon burials* and burials with *small tools* (curved knife, sickle, awl and needle). The latter group can also include jewellery and/or a comb. Graves with just *combs* form their own group, as do burials with one piece of *jewellery*, and one group contains just *clay vessels*. When grave finds can be grouped, I assume that they represent a «grouping», the deceased's role in society being marked by artefacts with a symbolic content. This relationship is discussed in chapter 6. The largest groups, those without datable artefacts or with no artefacts at all, are not part of this figure.

In a separate category are three burials with exotic artefacts, «the richly furnished graves», finds which are partly a result of amateur treasure hunting in the 19th century. It is presented in chapter 4.2.2, fig. 4.17,

4.18 and 4.19. A bronze cauldron (*østlandskjele*) with burnt bones and two snake-head finger rings of gold (*ormehoderinger*) were found in 1862. The cauldron was placed in a chamber of four stone slabs with another on the top as a seal. The burial is most likely from the Late Roman Period. «The King's Mound» was the largest burial mound in the field. At an excavation in 1824, finds included among other things gold rings, a sword with silver scabbard mounts, spears, shields, a drinking horn, a set of scales, a millefiori glass bead and remains of fabric dyed purple with cochineal. Besides being the richest find in the burial ground, it is most notable that it is an inhumation, in contrast to all the other graves, which are cremation burials. The burial is dated to ca. AD 400. In 1825, a large mound was excavated in the garden at Bråten. It contained the famous set of scales with ten weights, in addition to a silver attachment for a knife, a drinking horn and pottery of high quality, dating to ca. AD 400.

The rich grave finds are from the Late Roman Period and the transition to the Migration Period, a time when symbols of power flourish and make clear that Veien is a centre of power. In addition, a gold medallion, a double solidus of Constantine the Great from the Late Roman Iron Age and two «currency rings» in gold from the Early Migration Period have been found (fig. 4.20). These finds are not from burials.

After a review of the burial finds, I attempt to systematise the burial traditions based on Rygh's descriptions (ch. 4.2.4.). The aim was to find patterns, but the conclusion is in fact that there was a large variation and a lack of any relation between grave goods and mound size, except that the few especially large mounds that were investigated earlier contained rich grave goods. Other possible conclusions are that long barrows seem to be connected to women, something suggested in other analyses, and that chamber burials are most likely male graves.

In chapter 4.3, I have undertaken some detective work in order to place Rygh's graves on the map from 1847 (fig. 4.23). According to Rygh, the map was misleading, and although he did not make any new drawings, he sometimes refers to the mound number on the 1847 map and sometimes describes the mound's location. I have been able to place some mounds on the map. As mentioned above, they show that there have been flat graves in the area before the mounds were built. Some of the flat graves under mounds have had a larger stone over the pit. They must have been visible at the time the mounds were built. Datings suggest the same, for example Mound 9 from 1875. Mounds with multiple burials are interpreted as family graves by Rygh.

Another result is that the dated mounds that I have been able to identify on the map of 1847 are widely spread. It looks like all of the area with burials was in use at the same time. The especially large mounds are situated at the outer edge of the field, which may mean that it was only here there was available space. The fact that two of these contained particularly rich finds from the Early Migration Period may mean that the other large mounds that have not been investigated – some have been removed – are also from this time.

## THE LONGHOUSES AND THE COOKING PITS

The longhouses and cooking pits are presented in chapter 5. Immediately south of the burial ground, mechanical topsoil stripping was undertaken. As well as various pits, the remains of four longhouses were found. Three of these have a distinctive architecture. After a consideration of the carbon-14 datings, I have created a house chronology. House V is the oldest, built in the Pre-Roman Iron Age, and must have been demolished in order for House I to be built. This is an impressive building almost twice as large as House V, at least 45 m long and 8 m wide, with a slightly concave form. It has a completely different and more advanced architecture in that the two pairs of roof-supporting posts by two of the hearths are set closer to the walls, creating two large post-free rooms. This house is positioned N–S. Found in one of the postholes was a sugar lump-shaped piece of amber, which has been interpreted as an offering (fig. 5.9). House I was in use in the Early Roman Period and burnt down in the transition to the Late Roman Period. After the fire, House II was constructed about 15 m west of House I, no less impressive but with a completely different architectural expression. It is particularly wide, ca. 10 m, and 35–36 m long. This was also placed N–S. In the same period, perhaps at the transition to the Migration Period, the house was pulled down for the building of House IV. This was built on the same plot, in the same architectural style, but with slightly different dimensions – it was not quite so wide. This house possibly stood in the Migration Period, but its period of use is not securely dated. It is likely that these houses followed each other directly.

With the exception of House V, the houses have a special architecture and unusual dimensions. Houses I, II and IV have their parallels at Forsandmoen in Rogaland, where they are referred to as halls, that is buildings connected to power and prestige (Løken 2001). At Forsandmoen, seven houses of the same type as House I at Veien have been uncovered, the eldest dating from the Pre-Roman Iron Age. The

largest has roughly the same dimensions as House I; it is almost 50 m long and about 7 m wide, dating to the Late Roman Period. Løken suggests that the post-free middle room has functioned as a hall.

The parallel to House II at Veien is referred to by Løken as an exceptional house, especially its width of ca. 9 m and its large middle room with two hearths, measuring ca. 54 m<sup>2</sup>. House II at Veien has approximately the same dimensions, but is a little broader, and the middle room is 63 m<sup>2</sup>. Such wide houses are rare and are connected to centres of power. Løken refers to this house as a 'sal', a building which solely functions as a hall. The houses at Forsandmoen that have the same special architecture as those at Veien are interpreted by Løken as buildings with a special function and not as proper farmhouses. There are two types of prestige buildings, one with multiple rooms, of which one functions as a hall. The other type has one room and functions as a hall and is called a 'sal'.

In order to interpret the functional divisions in House I, phosphate analysis and macrofossil analysis was undertaken. Such analyses were not done for the other houses because of too many disturbances. The interpretation of the analyses does not provide the grounds to conclude that House I was a farmhouse with a large barn. The location and place names are other arguments for interpreting the houses as special buildings.

As usual in activity areas and settlements from the Early Iron Age, cooking pits were found. Twenty-two cooking pits have been dated, and there may have been others that have been destroyed by ploughing. The oldest are from the Late Bronze Age and the youngest from the Migration Period, a 1500-year-long tradition, which is normal in Eastern Norway. The tradition of flat graves and the use of cooking pits seem to start at the same time, around 1000 BC. This could suggest that the use of cooking pits is related to rituals connected to funerals. The change of burial practises happened around the transition BC/AD. Even if the ideology changed in the course of the Early Iron Age, the use of cooking pits continued into the burial mound period and ended in the Migration Period.

I consider it reasonable to interpret the cooking pits in this area as traces of cooking. Meals at a holy place must have had a ritual function. The connection with burials in time and space is an argument which supports the view that the use of cooking pits is not for everyday meals. The finds of horse teeth in two of the pits supports this interpretation. The teeth are interpreted as remains of an offering in connection with ritual meals. The horse's position in prehistoric society is well known.

This is an example of cooking pits at a ritual site that shows that the use of cooking pits has a long tradition. Many rituals may have been performed at this site – not just rituals related to funerals, but also other transitional rites and seasonal festivities, for example. Some of them have been connected to the cooking pits.

## THE SOCIETY

In chapter 6, I place the finds from Veien in a larger context and discuss the relationship between the burials and the longhouses.

Changes in burial traditions are considered to begin in the Early Roman Period with the building of mounds over burials. The contents of the mounds in the Roman Period are simple, but the graves can be categorised based on the artefacts they contain. The most striking aspect is that the majority of graves can be connected to women, and the tool burials are especially interesting. The interpretations of the finds associate female graves to religious leadership. This applies to the tool burials and the burials with combs, the majority of which are dated with a varying degree of confidence to the Early Roman Period. These categories seem to disappear in the course of the Late Roman Period, something which suggests changes within the field of religion and female roles. It can be interpreted as a change from a fertility cult to a warrior ideology which, in many contexts, is associated with the cult of Odin, which has been suggested as being established around the transition between the Late Roman Period and the Migration Period (Hedeager 1997; Solberg 2000:172ff.). Gro Steinsland sees this change in relation to the name of the deity Nerthus (the goddess of fertility), who changes gender to the male god Njård, and suggests that this happened in the Late Iron Age as a sign of a more masculine, warlike worship (2005:147f.).

It is in the Late Roman Period and the transition to the Migration Period that exotic artefacts are placed in graves, and mark Veien as an economic centre. The richest burial from the «King's Mound» is the only unburnt grave, from ca. 400, early in the Migration Period. This breaks with a more than 1000-year-long cremation burial tradition in the area and is interpreted as a sign of a power shift and social unrest. It has been necessary to make a statement through «conspicuous consumption». Inhumation burials suggest contact with the south, Vestfold and Denmark. In addition, a series of artefacts found in the burials suggests a broad contact network in many directions.

When I interpret the site's significance, I place great importance on the farm names and O. Rygh's

interpretations in *Norske Gaardnavne*, but also other researchers' interpretations (see also Gustafson 2000). At the centre of the community lie the farms *Ve*, *Vessal* and *Veien*. The name *Ve* is the clearest linguistic indication of a ritual site or holy place (T. Andersson 1992:77 ff.; Brink 1996:261; Helleland 1997:127, 136). The meaning of *Veien* is not established; the name is a combination of *veig* and *vin*, 'a natural meadow or pasture'. *Veig* can mean 'strong drink or moisture', but the basic meaning is 'strength' rather than liquid. *Ve* and *Vessal* lie in the middle of the settlement area, and were according to a map from the 1800s approximately the same size. The forms may suggest that they have constituted one large piece of land that was divided in two lengthways. Based on the name form, *Vessal* should be secondary to *Ve*. *Veien* is also a secondary name, as it is combined with *vin*; it is likely that it is also secondary in relation to *Ve*. *Ve* and *Veien* comprise two similarly sized territories that together form a broad belt across the settlement area (fig. 6.3).

My interpretation of the farm boundaries and names is that *Ve* represents a primary territory that formed the central part of the settlement area. The name *Ve* shows that a holy place lay here, long before any boundaries were made, and that a *shared burial place* was established here. It is unknown when the site acquired the name *Ve*. The other settlements lie around this central area. The farm names which are estimated to derive from the Iron Age or before, based on the naming classes, can be related to *Ve/Veien*. No graves have been found on these farms, with one exception, a mound at Follum.

I do not claim that the farm boundaries existed in the Early Iron Age but that the structure which is evident from the boundaries and names has its roots in the Early Iron Age. The establishment of permanent farm boundaries perhaps first appears in the Late Iron Age or in the Middle Ages.

#### *A shared ritual site and central place*

The burial mound is interpreted as a symbol of the free man/woman and right of ownership and thus right of inheritance of land (Skre 1998:228ff.; 2001:10f.). Maybe the construction of burial mounds, which is here considered to begin in the Early Roman Period, means that the previous shared rights to land are now subdivided to lineages, something that could be due to there being a larger population. At the same time, the shared burial site is maintained as a continued marking of the community.

This is in contrast to the interpretation that the missing burial mounds mean that the inhabitants are unfree, or some sort of serfs, living on an estate.

Dagfinn Skre argues that it is possible to see such a structure in Romerike by the Early Iron Age. He also makes comparisons with Veien (1998:247ff.). From such a position, the Veien burial ground could be interpreted as a farm burial ground, affiliated with the lord of an estate, while the surrounding farms with 'Iron Age names' were inhabited by serfs with no ownership rights to the land. Harald Jacobsen also perceives the burial ground as affiliated with one settlement unit (1984:202–204). I consider such an estate structure in the Early Roman Period to be somewhat unlikely; it should be clear from a more hierarchical burial tradition, which is not expressed here until in the Late Roman Period / Migration Period. I also place emphasis on the long continuity, that the place was chosen as a burial site – and holy place – as early as the Bronze Age, on the landscape, on the farm structure and on names. The large burial ground with long continuity and the place name *Ve* are, in my opinion, strong indicators that this is a shared ritual site, a holy place. When large houses are built with a distinctive architectural style at a ritual site, it has consequences for how one interprets the houses.

A ritual site may have other functions than the purely religious. The word *vebond*, a symbolic enclosure of the meeting place, indicates the holy place's link to legal matters (T. Andersson 1992:79; Vikstrand 2001:323f.). Stefan Brink sees a close connection between religious, economic, political and legal matters in Iron Age society. He has set up a series of criteria for what he calls multifunctional centres (1996:236). All the criteria are in place in the Late Roman Period at Veien. The rich finds have also provided a basis for interpreting the place as a «centre of the third order» connected to centres of the «first order». Thus, here are clear signs of a combination of religious and political power in the Late Roman Period and the transition to the Migration Period.

#### *Burial traditions and architecture*

The oldest period, with its flat graves, expresses political stability, society's sense of community and an ideology of equality (cf. Hedeager 1992:84f.). This does not necessarily mean an equal society. The burials reflect 1000 years of somewhat unchanged tradition and can be interpreted as a consolidation of the power structure. Behind the apparently simple graves lie complicated ritual actions that indicate religious specialists. Power may have been connected to monopolising knowledge regarding the practice of religious rituals.

Contemporary with the flat grave burial ground in the Pre-Roman Iron Age, a longhouse was built, House V, a rather normal house, by no means small,

but featureless. The only characteristic that indicates a ritual aspect is the hearth in the middle room, which contained horse teeth, interpreted as an offering associated with a ritual meal.

In the years around the transition BC/AD, House V was dismantled in order to build House I, which is twice as long and has a distinctive architecture. Around the same time, mounds were built over the burials. Many of the rituals related to the cremation of the deceased were maintained, but new rituals were initiated. This change in burial traditions could be connected to land rights. Through mound construction, the grave receives a visible and long-lasting marker, but the mounds that are contemporary with House I are not dominating; it is rather the house that is the monument. The grave goods do not demonstrate power in the form of «conspicuous consumption» of high-status objects. No graves stick out as «lordly graves»; the burials continue to express an ideology with a flat structure. The finds in the graves that are contemporary with House I, from the Early Roman Period, are small tools and combs, which are likely to be associated with the feminine sphere; in addition, there are three weapon burials with simple equipment: spear and shield. The finds could indicate different roles. The feminine sphere is more visible than the masculine, and the finds are interpreted as evidence for these women having important roles within the rituals and that these may be connected to fertility cults.

House I is oriented north-south, while House V, which was dismantled, was placed diagonally in relation to the cardinal directions. The prevailing wind direction is south-north, from the Tyrifjord. A house which was built east-west would soon lose its roof. But a house would not necessarily have to lie *exactly* north-south. This change in orientation was undoubtedly done for a reason. It was important that the house was directed to the south, towards the sun and the water. The lump of amber found in one of the postholes can be interpreted in the same manner, as a symbol of the sun and fertility. The southernmost part of the house is the ritual part, where withdrawn posts by two mid-hearths form two large rooms. Can the division into two be connected to the Vanir gods Njård-Nerthus, who are interpreted by some as a deity couple, 'twin gods' or a 'hermaphrodite' (Solberg 1999; Solli 2002:116ff.)? Njård occurs in the place name Norderhov (Njård's temple) south of Veien, which became the site of a church in the Middle Ages. The collection of place names related to deities in Ringerike/Hole is dominated by the Vanir gods. The peninsula that sticks out of the northern end of the Tyrifjord (Røyse) has a special concentration of

theophoric place names that include Frøy(-vin or -hov) and Frøya(-hov), Ull(-vin) and Odin(-aker). Frøy, Frøya, Ull and Njård are Vanir gods, but Odin belongs to the Æsir. Frøy and Frøya were siblings and the children of Njård. The dominance of Vanir gods could be a sign that the fertility cult was strong in this landscape (map fig. 6.4).

House I burnt down during the transition to the Late Roman Period. The fire is interpreted as a sign of conflict and a change in power rather than as an accident. A new house, House II, was built 15 m to the west. This is also oriented towards the south but has a new architectural style. House II is especially wide with a large middle room, a new expression of power.

Changes in architecture happen parallel with changes in burial rituals, and these are interpreted as dramatic social changes, changes from a community-based ideology to a hierarchical society with visible demonstrations of power through ritual consumption via grave goods. I have suggested that the shift in ideology can be connected to a transition from a fertility cult with women as ritual leaders to a warrior ideology in the Late Roman Period. At Veien, this can be seen by the ending of the practice of placing tools and combs in the graves. Instead, exotic objects are placed in graves, and houses are built in a new architectural style. The destruction of House II and construction of House IV on the same plot can be interpreted as the establishment of inheritance rights.

These longhouses situated within a ritual site are interpreted as special buildings connected to power and prestige, with political, religious and economic functions. The location is the basis for my interpretation that these are not to be considered farmhouses, not even an estate. The other buildings which one usually finds on estates are not to be found. An estate should have a large barn. This is not evident in these prestigious buildings. But those who lived here were people with economic and religious power. The elite had a need for buildings which expressed status, with large rooms that could be used for gatherings, hosting guests and rituals. Houses I, II and IV can undoubtedly be interpreted as such.

Here are houses and graves; however, as I interpret it, it is not an estate with its own burial ground but a shared holy place with a shared burial ground, and the houses are a gathering place for rituals and ceremonies, for celebrations with gift exchange and the establishment of alliances, where society's power elites were present.

The fading of symbols of power in the course of the Migration Period can be interpreted as competing petty kingdoms being united into one 'kingdom',

Ringerike, and the large mound «Halvdan's Mound» (*Halvdanshaugen*) is built as a uniting symbol. Carbon-14 datings from the Migration Period and the Viking Period from the mound can suggest re-use of this power symbol.

A possible reason for the breakdown of the petty kingdoms could be the climatic problems of 536 and the subsequent years. Bo Gräslund has argued that the stories of the Fimbulwinter have roots in reality, and that it is not about a long harsh winter, but an extremely cold summer, where the sun disappeared, possibly for over two years, with a subsequent colder period (2007). This must have had catastrophic consequences for agricultural societies that were dependent on grain as food and trading resource used to acquire outfield products. As mentioned in a number of contexts, it

is thought that the basis for Veien's position of power in the Late Roman Period / Migration Period was its strategic location at transport routes from the mountains and valleys towards the sea, with control over outfield products which could be used as gifts for the building of alliances. This may have created a vulnerable system which collapsed when the crops failed. Depopulation would provide the surviving elites with the possibilities of gathering larger estates. An increasing stratification and centralisation of power illustrated by large mounds is a visible pattern in a number of places at the end of the Migration Period and Early Merovingian Period, but the reasons remain under discussion (Myhre and Øye 2002; Gräslund 2007; Widgren 2013).

**Table 7.1.** *Summary of finds and longhouses*

PERIOD		YEAR	GRAVE TYPE	«RICHES»		LONGHOUSE
Bronze Age, Late		1000 –500 BC	3 flat graves			
Pre-Roman Iron Age		500 BC–AD 1	28 flat graves			HOUSE V
Early Roman Period	B1, B2	AD 1–150/200	Small mounds, 16 with finds			HOUSE I
Late Roman Period	C1, C2, C3	AD 150/200–400	Small mounds, 19 with finds	Østland cauldron with snake-head rings, gold	Gold solidus	HOUSE II
Migration Period	D1	AD 400–475	5 mounds with finds. Large mounds	«King's Mound» with sword, gold rings and more. Grave with scales		HOUSE IV
	D2	AD 475–575/600			Currency ring, gold	
Late Iron Age		AD 575/600–1030	1 mound, Merovingian. 4–5 finds in fields, graves? Viking Period			



*Sverdslirebeslag fra «Kongshaugen»*  
*Mount from the sword scabbard chape from the «King's Mound»*