

# Understandings - Burial Practice, Identity and Social Ties. The Horvnes Iron Age Burials, a peephole into the farming society of Helgeland, North-Norway

Birgitta Berglund

## Abstract

In the Horvnes cairns in Alstahaug on the coast of Helgeland, North-Norway, people have been buried in the same stone cist or small chamber for hundreds of years in the Iron Age, but in different ways. Why were they buried so differently, and who were these individuals with their partly special equipment? What social ties did the buried individuals have to the farming society? Sandnes, which here represents this society, is a magnate farm in the neighbourhood, known from the Medieval Egils Saga Skalla-Grímssonar. The process of understanding the Horvnes burials and the buried individuals there is here followed from the first impression during the excavations through the understandings given by the investigation of the burial practices in an event-perspective, the results of different analyses and the presentations of the buried individuals. Through this process a new understanding of the burial practice, the identities of the buried individuals and their social ties to the farming society is revealed. Thus, the Horvnes graves function as a peephole into the social life of the coastal farms at Helgeland.

An der Küste von Helgeland wurden in den Grabhügeln von Horvnes, Kommune Alstahaug, Nordnorwegen, über einen langen Zeitraum der skandinavischen Eisenzeit hinweg Verstorbene in derselben Steinkiste oder schmalen Kammer, jedoch in unterschiedlichen Weisen beigesetzt. Warum wurden sie so unterschiedlich bestattet, und wer waren diese Individuen mit ihren teilweise besonderen Grabausstattungen? Welche Beziehungen hatten die Bestatteten zur lokalen bäuerlichen Gesellschaft? Sandnes, das hier diese lokale Gesellschaft repräsentiert, ist ein einflussreiches Gehöft in der Nachbarschaft, welches aus der mittelalterlichen Egils Saga Skalla-Grímssonar bekannt ist. Dieser Beitrag zeichnet Schritt für Schritt nach, wie wir zu unserem Verständnis der Bestattungen von Horvnes gelangt sind, angefangen von den ersten Eindrücken während der Ausgrabung, über die Erkenntnisse, die sich durch die Untersuchung der Bestattungssitten aus einer Ereignisperspektive ergaben, sowie durch die Ergebnisse verschiedener Analysen und die Präsentation der beigesetzten Individuen. Dieser Prozess führte zu einem neuen Verständnis der Bestattungssitten, der Identitäten der beigesetzten Individuen und ihrer sozialen Beziehungen zur lokalen, bäuerlichen Gesellschaft. Somit fungieren die Horvnes-Gräber als „Guckloch“ in das soziale Leben der Küstenfarmen von Helgeland.

## The puzzling Horvnes burials

Two rather small and low burial cairns at Horvnes in Alstahaug municipality in Helgeland, North-Norway, just south of the Arctic Polar Circle have intrigued me since we excavated them several years ago (Bernhardt 2004; Herstad 2008; 2009).<sup>1</sup> During the excavation we formed the opinion that one woman had been buried in the grave that we named *the West grave*. After the first studies of her equipment, it seemed to me that this woman was cremated in the 6<sup>th</sup> century with some equipment indicating that she was skilled in magic (Berglund 2005, 10-14). My impression of the other, *the East grave*, was that a woman and a man were buried unburnt in a big stone cist with an interval of several hundred years. If this interpretation was correct, it meant that people were buried here, in different ways, over a period of several hundred years.

In Norway, most Iron Age graves belong to the farming society. The magnate farm Sandnes, known from *Egils Saga Skalla-Grímssonar* (Jónsson 1945) and partly excavated (Berglund 1995) is situated in the neighbourhood of the Horvnes graves. This is the only known Iron Age farm here. This made me even more interested, since it meant that members of the farming family of Sandnes might have been buried in these graves. Here was an opportunity to study the farm from another perspective than one is able to do through excavations of the farmyard with its houses, hearths, cooking pits, different utensils and remnants of food and so on. In the burials, there are the grave construction, the physical remains of the individuals who lived in the farming society and the equipment which followed each individual to the grave.

In this paper, I explore whether investigations of the burial practice in an event- or practice-based perspective, will change the first impression of the constructions of the graves, and if so what that means for the interpretation of the buried individuals. The religious studies scholar Catherine Bell (1992) introduced the use of practise-theory in connection with studies of rituals and many has followed her (cf. Berggren / Stutz 2010, 175). When using this perspective, I investigate which events had formed the graves, such as they appeared when the use of them as burial places had ended (cf. Glørstad / Wenn 2013).

I shall also explore which consequences a combination of osteological investigations and radiocarbon analyses of the human skeletons will have for interpretations concerning the number of buried individuals, biological sex, age, the treatment of the bodies and when the burials took place. Thereafter, I investigate whether a closer study of the burial equipment gives information of the occupation and skills of the buried individuals as well as their gender. Burial equipment can be interpreted in many different ways (Kaliff 1992, 105; Brück 2004). Here it is studied as presentations of the qualities of the deceased individuals, whether it was for a next life or for the participants in the funeral. The burial customs are studied in a broader geographical perspective. All this gives us an opportunity to study the identity of the buried

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Much of the descriptions of the excavations of the Horvnes burials build on the field reports by Hulda Brastad Bernhardt (2004) and Anne Herstad (2008), but also on my own observations. Part of the Horvnes East grave was excavated in the Conservation Laboratory of NTNU University Museum. The report by Anne Herstad (2009) from this indoor excavation is also important for the understanding of the burials in the grave.

individuals and their social ties to the farm. Thereby we get a peephole into the social life of the farm in another way than excavation in the farmyard itself does.

## The Horvnes burials and the farming society

The two Horvnes cairns were situated close to the shore on opposite sides of a headland called Horvneset, the northern edge of the tongue of land of the island Alsta, which divides the fiord Vefsnfjorden in two (Fig. 1). This fiord is one of the most important connections between the coast and inland of Helgeland. In the immense inland areas to the east, there are woods, mountains, rivers and lakes with important resources, such as fur from wild animals. A well-known range of mountains and navigation mark Sju søstre (Seven sisters), named after its seven peaks, stands out southeast of the tongue of land immediately behind the bay Botnfjorden. Horvneset nearly blocks the northern entrance to the Vefsnfjorden through Leirfjorden, a side fiord to Vefsnfjorden.

**Fig. 1 The Horvnes graves and the Sandnes farmyard at the northern edge of the island Alsta in Helgeland, North-Norway (Illustration: Aud Beverfjord , NTNU University Museum).**

The West grave was situated on the northwest side of the headland Horvneset and the East grave on the southeast side. The headland is rather low and flat and consists mostly of outlying fields with rocks and heaths, but there has been a farm here since at least the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Rygh 1905, 94). So far, no Iron Age farm is known here. Both cairns are situated in outfields. The East grave is clearly orientated towards communication through the mouth of Leirfjorden, while the West grave is more oriented towards communication along the main sea route.

The location of the Horvnes cairns along the coast of the island Alsta is not unique, since there, as in other coastal areas of Norway, are many cairns and mounds from the Iron Age, even some from the Bronze Age. They indicate that this was a farming society. A well-established chronology of Norwegian farm names, showing when different types were productive (Olsen [1926] 1978, 52-198), supports this assumption. Farming in the sense of husbandry and cereal growing was just one aspect of subsistence in these coastal areas to the far north. Maritime resources such as fish, seal, sea birds and mussels were the most important ones, in addition to resources from sheep and perhaps goat. The farmers were “fisher-farmers”, and the harbour with the boathouse was more important than the fields.

Archaeological excavations have revealed longhouses from the Iron Age and farm mounds mainly from the Medieval Age, which often have structures from the Iron Age in the bottom layer, throughout the coast of Helgeland (Berglund 1995, 2007). The farm mounds consist of thick layers of many generations of building constructions and waste (Bertelsen 1989, 178-179; Berglund 1995, 344-357). The North-Norwegian Iron Age farm buildings were longhouses with outer walls of turf. The turf and other organic material decompose slowly in the humid climate with low summer temperatures and give much substance to the farm mounds. Longhouses were still in use in the Late Medieval Age, but were gradually replaced by log houses (cf. Berglund, forthcoming). People did not move from the farm mounds until the land rise after the last glacial epoch made the distance to the harbours too long (Berglund 1995, 121-134).

## The magnate farm Sandnes

The farmyard of the magnate farm Sandnes is located at the head at the west side of the tongue of land where the Horvnes burials are situated (Fig. 1). The farm was protected against the west coast and the main sea route outside by low mountains. The soil of Sandnes consists mainly of sand, as the name of the farm indicates. The sand makes the soil easy to cultivate since it is self-draining and was preferred in early cultivation here. The sand was also important in harbours for shallow-draught boats, since it was easy to land them in a sandy seashore short of stones. Neither the farmyard nor the harbour in the narrow bay, named Sandnesvågen, were visible from the sea, an advantageous location in terms of avoiding attacks from ships along the sea route or the Vefsnfjorden. The inner part of Sandnesvågen was a far better location for a farm than the headland was where the cairns were located.

The remains of Sandnes farm consists of a large farm mound. Small excavations, mainly in the fringe of the farm mound, have revealed activities there since around the birth of Christ (Berglund 1995, 211-222). Between the Sandnes farm and the East grave there is a large bog, named Skarmyra. Pollen analysis of turf from this bog indicates that the clearing of the open birch wood in the area started in the Bronze Age (Selvik 1986; Berglund 1995, 204-205). The first known agricultural activity at the farmyard of Sandnes is cereal cultivation, according to plough marks dated around the birth of Christ, confirmed by pollen analysis (Selvik 1986; Berglund 1995, 201, 206-207).

Many people must have lived and died at Sandnes between the first cultivation and the end of the Iron Age. During this period, people at the coast of Helgeland normally buried their deceased close to the farm, on small islands and along the main sea route in outlying land. Sometimes mounds were located along land routes too. In this perspective, the property owners of Sandnes could have used both the tongue of land with the Horvnes graves, the neighbourhood of the farm, areas along the land route and the sea route for burying people. After the Christianisation in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the burials took place in churchyards, and there was a wooden church with a churchyard at Sandnes in the Late Medieval Age until the 18<sup>th</sup> century (cf. Berglund 1994, 58-59; 1995, 222, 225, 431).

Today, there are no visible pagan barrows at Sandnes. Other Iron Age magnate farms at the coast of Helgeland, as Tjøtta 22 kilometres south of Sandnes, have cemeteries with big barrows. Therefore, it is difficult to trust the Egils Saga (Jónsson 1945), concerning the dignity of Sandnes (cf. Berglund 1995, 484-486). Snorri Sturluson does not mention the farm in his *Kringla heimsins*<sup>2</sup> either. However, the area around Sandnes farm is cultivated and built-up, and there are very few indications of barrows there before the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when intensive cultivation took place (cf. Kraft 1835, 435; Nicolaysen 1862-1866, 678; 184; Rygh 1901, 35).

*Egils Saga Skalla-Grímssonar* (Jónsson 1945) concerns events in Norway and Iceland during the 9<sup>th</sup> century when Sandnes is said to be a *lend maðr* (lendman) farm. A lendman had income from a landed property owned by the king. He had administrative functions for the king in his region and should protect the peace there too. A lendman participated in the *hird*,

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Early 13<sup>th</sup> century history of the Norwegian kings.

the king's bodyguard, and had the second highest rank among the men there, after the earls (Bøe 1965).

Þórólfr Kveld-Úlfsson of Torgar and Sandnes was a lendman of King Haraldr hárfagri (Harold Fairhair) in the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, according to the Egils Saga (Jónsson 1945, 1-41). Þórólfr was the ruler of both estates through inheritance after his friend Bárðr Brynjólfsson and through the marriage with Sigríðr of Sandnes. Torgar is situated 700 kilometres SSW of Sandnes. Þórólfr had the right to demand the *finneskatt* from the Sami people. The finneskatt consisted of valuable Arctic products, which were in high demand. It was indeed very profitable to be a lendman. It is told how Þórólfr went with his men to the inland in the east, not only to collect the finneskatt, but also to trade and not least to carry out robbery. Þórólfr was one of the king's men and participated in the battle at Hafrsfjord in southwestern Norway. After the battle, this part of Norway was integrated in the kingdom and Norway is said to have been united into one kingdom. Þórólfr went on Viking raids as far as to areas east of the Baltic Sea. It is also told that he sent out his men to fish spawning cod and herring. There were seals for blubber, meat and hide, and walrus for strong ship ropes from the thick hide and not at least the valuable walrus tusks. There were also an abundance of nesting places for sea birds with eggs, meat, down and feathers. Þórólfr sent a big ship loaded with commodities such as cod (probably stockfish), hides and furs to England. In return, he got halibut, honey, wine and cloth. When the King visited Sandnes, Þórólfr welcomed him so grandiosely that the King considered Þórólfr a threat, and he fell into disgrace. Afterwards, Þórólfr prepared to move to Iceland, but the King forestalled him and came with nearly 300 men to Sandnes and Þórólfr was killed in a battle at the farm. His father and brother then had to escape to Iceland.

Could the memory of Þórólfr Kveld-Úlfsson still have lived in Iceland when Egils Saga was written down more than 300 years after the events at Sandnes or is he a man invented by the anonymous author of the saga (cf. Berglund 1995, 359-366)? The story is in many aspects rather unrealistic, but genealogy is considered to be among the most reliable in the Icelandic Saga literature (Mundal 1987, 20-21), and I do not think it is unlikely that the Icelanders knew their own genealogy back to the Norse settlement (Berglund 1995, 362-366). The archaeological excavation in the farm mound of Sandnes reveals that it was a magnate farm at least in the Viking Age (AD 800-1030) and in the Medieval Period (AD 1030-1537) (Berglund 1995, 195-227), so I think we can trust the information of Egils Saga regarding the wealth of Sandnes. Therefore, I think it not is impossible that the Sandnes farm dominated the whole headland of Horvneset to claim control with the important sailing route in and out of the mouth of the Vefsnfjorden.

## The Horvnes graves: burial practices, analyses and presentations of the buried individuals

### Exploration of the West grave in an event-based perspective

The West grave, excavated in 2003, was a low, oval shaped cairn of stones mixed with earth, 8.5 x 10.5 m, situated on a ridge of rocks about 10 m above the sea level. The cairn was orientated northeast-southwest like the ridge of rocks, and was up to 0.6 m high. Many of the stones had a characteristic look in shape or colour, which indicates that they were chosen consciously. Some of them were limestones.

The construction of the grave (Fig. 2) seems to have started with the building of a small chamber, 1.5 x 2 m (0.8 x 1 m inside), just west of the centre of the cairn. First, a layer of fine sand was laid to cover the rock. Flagstones were put in the sand in the bottom, which was surrounded by a wall of loosely laid stones. Most of the bones and the burial equipment were found in the chamber. A stone circle, 5 m in diameter, seems to have been part of the original construction of the grave, since the chamber is located close to the centre of the circle.

**Fig. 2 The West grave with the grave chambers and the stone circle marked. Most of the bones and the artefacts were found in chamber I. There were no bones or artefacts in chamber II (Illustration: NTNU University Museum by Lise Loktu and Raymond Sauvage after field drawings by Hulda B. Bernhardt).**

A possible grave chamber II, of the same size as grave chamber I, was identified about 1.35 m northeast of the first chamber. Chamber II was delimited by a circle of stones. The chamber had no remains of a burial, only dark humus. The construction has disturbed the above mentioned stone circle and must therefore be a later burial than the one in chamber I. Stones mixed with earth were placed over both chambers and the stone circle, probably after the last burial, perhaps as a closing of the burial place. The use of a layer of stones to close a place where religious rituals have been performed, has been interpreted as a closing of a construction which is considered as an outcome of a process with several separate events (Kaliff 1992, 129-130; Zachrisson 2004, 355; Glørstad / Wenn 2013, 124-125; Berglund 2014, 172-175). There were also indications of an outer stone circle, probably marking the limitation of the whole cairn. If an individual really was buried in chamber II, there must have been at least two burials in the Horvnes West grave.

## The human bones of the Horvnes West grave

The human bones are very fragmented and some seem to have been crushed intentionally, even pulverized. Most of them were hard-burnt, some were light-burnt and a few had no visible signs of fire at all. Therefore, it was initially assumed that the cremation was done during unfavourable conditions, for example during the winter (Holck 2010). According to the osteological analysis, one young individual and one middle-aged, both without a clear determination of sex, were buried in the grave.

However, radiocarbon analyses of the bones in combination with the osteological analyses have given a new picture of the buried individuals and the treatment of the bones (table 1). Two individuals, one younger and one adult, were buried around AD 400 (table 1, burial AD 400 I and II). The younger individual was cremated. A third, middle-aged individual (table 1, burial AD 400 III) was cremated some decades later. Finally, a fourth individual was inhumed in the same grave chamber around AD 1000 (table 1), which is very late for a pagan burial. Thus, after combining osteological analysis and radiocarbon dating, and although it is obvious that only some of the burnt bones were deposited in the grave and that only a few of the unburnt bones were preserved, we now know that the grave contained four individuals.

The repeated burials in the cairn explain why there were bones also outside chamber I. The unburnt bones indicate that there really was an inhumation burial in chamber II, which lacked remains of the inhumed individual and of grave equipment. Probably, the burial place was closed after this last burial.

There were a few pieces of charcoal in grave chamber I, but nothing indicates that the cremation took place there. The bones were cleaned and the hard-burnt bones are white. It is obvious that they were burnt elsewhere and the bones were picked up, cleaned, and partly crushed before they were buried. The cremation site was looked for, but was not identified.

Table 1: Radiocarbon dating<sup>3</sup> and osteological analysis of human bones from the West grave.<sup>4</sup>

<b>Name of the burial</b>	<b>Lab.nr.<sup>5</sup></b>	<b><sup>14</sup>C BP</b>	<b>Calibration (68,2% probability)</b>	<b>Osteological analysis of age</b>	<b>Burnt/unburnt bones</b>
AD 400 I	TRa-1324	1718±23	AD 335-410	Younger individual	20 small hard-burnt bones, 2.5 g
AD 400 II	TRa-3916	1809±35	AD 325-425	Probably adult	1 unburnt bone, 4 g
AD 400 III	TRa-3917	1716±32	AD 380-470 (53.0% probability)	Middle-aged individual	1 hard-burnt bone, 1 g
AD 1000	TRa-1325	1157±23	AD 980-1025	Not described	25 small, unburnt bones, 1.5 g

### The individuals in the Horvnes West grave

Most of the equipment in the burial is from chamber I or just outside it, especially on the north side. The objects seem to have ended up outside the chamber in connection with disturbances, perhaps caused by new burials. The equipment can mainly be characterized as belongings of female individuals.

In order to find out which equipment belongs to which burial, it is necessary to compare the radiocarbon dating of the skeletal material with the typological dating of the artefacts. Here I try to date the artefacts and to group those belonging to the same burial, and then explore how this corresponds with the radiocarbon dating of the human bones. First, I discuss the artefacts from the Early Iron Age and then artefacts dated to the Late Iron Age.

#### The Early Iron Age (BC 500-AD 570) burial equipment:

There were many small fragments of artefacts of bone. Small hairpins and combs could be identified. The bones are white and clean and probably they were burnt together with their

3 OxCal v3.10 Bronk Ramsey (2005); cub 2:5 sd:12 pro usp(chron). Dating, calibration and adjustment of reservoir effect by The National Laboratory for Age Determination, University Museum, NTNU, Trondheim. Osteological analysis by P. Holck.

4 Museum number T.22926, NTNU University Museum, Trondheim.

5 The National Laboratory for Age Determination, University Museum, NTNU Trondheim, Norway

owner. After the cremation, the bone artefacts were collected and cleaned together with the human bones before they were placed in the grave chamber. One pin with a round profile, five pins with flat profiles and fragments of five or six combs have been identified. At least three of the combs are held together with small iron rivets.

A complete set of hairpins consists of two flat, triangular pins and one pin with a round cross-section (Petersen 1923, 38; Sjøvold 1962, 184). The round pins, and sometimes the flat ones, often had a hole in the middle or upper part for a thread or ribbon used to fasten the hair (Petersen 1923, 40). The complete coiffure set (Fig. 3) consisted also of one or sometimes two small combs of bone (cf. Petersen 1923, 34-40; Sjøvold 1962, 184). Thus the West grave contained at least two or three coiffeur sets.

Fig. 3 There were several badly preserved bone fragments of combs and pins in the West grave. Originally, they could have looked like this well preserved coiffure set of one comb (length 11.8 cm) and three pins (length 16.7-20.8 cm) from an inhumation burial in Føre, Bø, North-Norway. A magical runic formula inscribed on the back (preserved total length 31 mm) of a small bone comb belonging to a coiffure-set of one of the women buried around AD 400 in the West grave (Photo the comb and the pins: Tromsø University Museum; the runes: Per E. Fredriksen, NTNU University Museum).

This coiffeur set was in use in female burials from the late Roman Period (AD 200-400) and the whole Migration Period (AD 400-570) in Scandinavia (Petersen 1923, 37-40). Although men used combs as well (Ilkjær 2003, 38-39), I think the context of the hairpins indicates that the combs belong to the coiffeur sets used by women.

The set is preserved better in the North-Norwegian inhumation burials than in the cremation burials, which dominated further south. Sjøvold (1962, 96) dates three of the North-Norwegian coiffure sets to the 4<sup>th</sup> century and one to the 5<sup>th</sup> century. The coiffeur sets in the West grave are compatible with the three radiocarbon dates of human bones to around AD 400 (table 1). Perhaps three women were buried there around AD 400. If so, two of them, one younger (AD 400 I) and one adult (AD 400 II), could have been buried contemporaneously or almost contemporaneously and the middle-aged (AD 400 III) was buried some years later.

There were runic inscriptions on two of the bone pieces (Fig. 3). The fragments fit together and are probably from the back of a little comb, found together with other comb fragments and burnt human bones. The runes have been interpreted by runologist Jan Ragnar Hagland (2005, 16-17) to **aallu[---** and they probably belong to the older primary Germanic futhark with 24 runes, which was in use until about AD 800. Aallu should be read **alu alu**, probably a magical formula. **Alu** is a Norse word, and the origin of the present Norwegian term *øl* (beer). The word **alu** is mostly known from rune inscriptions from the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> century. According to Hagland, the Horvnes inscription could not be later than the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, the possible comb with the runes fits with all three of the radiocarbon dates of the human bones to the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries (table 1, burials AD 400 I, II, III). The comb probably belongs to a coiffure set, so a dating to around AD 400 as the other combs and pins is likely. The runes probably mean that the deceased owner was considered to have magical skills; in the Edda-poem *Sigerdrivemål* (Holm-Olsen 1985, 229) **al**runes are used as a magical formula.

There were also some small pieces of caulking material used to caulk a wooden vessel. From the size of the material, the vessel must have been small with a flat bottom and curved walls.



It is possible that bones and/or equipment from one of the burials were put into this vessel before it was buried in the grave chamber, in which case it must have been one of the cremation burials AD 400 I or III.

A piece of light greenish cindery mass, 5.8 cm as largest, was also placed in the grave chamber. It could have to do with some type of production. However, it looks neither as iron nor bronze slag, rather like melted glass. It has probably melted on the pyre and been put into the grave chamber together with one of the buried individuals. If so, the glass mass must belong to one of the cremation burials AD 400 I or III.

The presented grave goods fit very well with the radiocarbon dating of the human bones and with the osteological analysis, which indicates that several individuals were buried in the grave around AD 400. The artefacts indicate that the buried individuals in the Early Iron Age were women. However, there were three whetstones in the grave. One is made of quartzite, usually considered to be in use in the Early Iron Age, especially in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> century (Sjøvold 1962, 209). The whetstones could be part of the equipment of a man, but as long as no typical male equipment has been identified, I consider the gender of the buried individuals to be female.

#### The Late Iron Age (AD570-1030) burial equipment:

There were also several fragments of iron brooches and pins in the West grave. The best-preserved one has a rectangular sheet. Ørsnes (1966, 13,136-137) dates such brooches to AD 650-725. In a cemetery in Bornholm this was the most common type of brooch in the women's graves and occurs between AD 630-700 (Jørgensen & Jørgensen 1997, 28, 35, 38, 43-44,156-157).

There were at least seven fragments of brooches and pins of iron in addition to the brooch with the rectangular sheet. Many have remains of textiles, and in one case short hair, probably fur. The textiles and the fur were not damaged by fire, and must therefore belong to inhumation burials. There were also two small knives and many small, unidentified iron fragments in the grave.

A rectangular plate with an interlace pattern covered with thin metal (Fig. 4) has probably been used to produce decorations in sheet metal for harnesses, mountings or brooches. It is possible that the plate is a patrix used to make a matrix for producing sheet metal. This is the first evidence of such production in Central- and North-Norway in the Iron Age. The interlace pattern resembles the ones dated to AD 650-725 by Ørsnes (1966, 56-58, Fig. 5). The pattern was apparently modern just before and after AD 700.

**Fig. 4 Patrix (2.5 x 4.3 x 0.5 cm) for producing rectangular metal sheets, probably of gold or silver. The raised interlace pattern is marked. The patrix is from a female burial around AD 700 in the West grave (Photo: Per E. Fredriksen, NTNU University Museum).**

There were 29 beads in the grave (table 2). One of the transparent monochrome glass beads has red, opaque glass along the hole in the centre. Four cased glass beads probably have remains of gold foil under a cover of light transparent glass. One bead has four segments, two have two segments and one bead has one segment. One of the beads with two segments and the bead with one segment seem to have had now lost segments in one of the ends. None of the beads seems to have been damaged by fire.

Table 2: The beads in the West grave.<sup>6</sup>

<b>Opaque glass beads in orange-red colour shades</b>	<b>Transparent monochrome glass beads in blue and green colour shades</b>	<b>Simple mosaic glass beads</b>	<b>Stone beads</b>	<b>Amber beads</b>	<b>Cased glass beads, probably gold-in-glass beads</b>
5	7	3	8	2	4

I have dated the beads typologically by comparing them with former datings of the same type of beads from North-Norway (Vinsrygg 1979) to find out whether they are contemporary with the rectangular brooch and the plate with the interlace pattern or not. Opaque glass beads were the most common in North-Norway in the 6<sup>th</sup> century (Vinsrygg 1979, 26-28), locally produced stone beads were also usual. Monochrome glass beads with colour shades of blue and green occur in this century as well as simple mosaic beads and amber beads. In the 8<sup>th</sup> century, opaque beads and stone beads still occur as well as simple mosaic beads and amber beads (Vinsrygg 1979, 40-45). There is a change from the warm colours yellow and red in the 7<sup>th</sup> century to the cold colours blue and green in the 8<sup>th</sup> century. The cased glass beads with gold foil do not occur until the 8<sup>th</sup> century (Vinsrygg 1979, 45). This indicates that the beads from the Horvnes West grave are from the Merovingian period, the 8<sup>th</sup> century, since stone beads still occur and there is a change to colder colours. The best-preserved cased glass beads in the West grave are of Callmer type E140 (Callmer 1977, 88-89, plate 16). They occur in the Viking Age, so these beads could perhaps belong to a later burial. However, gold and silver-in-glass beads were produced in the Mediterranean area already in the centuries before the Roman Period (Guido 1999, 78), but there is no evidence that they were imported to Norway that early.

It is possible that the rectangular brooch, the plate with the interlace pattern and the beads belong to the same burial around AD 700 (table 3). This is not compatible with the radiocarbon dating of the human bones (table 1). There are however, problems with radiocarbon dating of bone, especially in coastal areas where people have eaten marine food. Therefore, one has to consider the reservoir effect (Johansen / Gulliksen / Nydal 1986), but this effect is taken into consideration here (table 1, 4). The conclusion must therefore be that the equipment from around AD 700 belongs to a woman from whom no bones are preserved (table 3).

In addition to the cased glass beads, two flat spindle whorls of soapstone can be contemporaneous with the radiocarbon dating of the unburnt bones to Late Viking Age (table 1, 3, AD 1000 burial). The spindle whorls were not only used for spinning, but also for sharpening small edges like needles. It is a possibility that two women, not only one, were buried in the West grave in the Late Iron Age, the one around AD 700 and the other around AD 1000. These women were probably not cremated, since the equipment does not seem to be affected by fire.

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6 Museum number T.22926, NTNU University Museum, Trondheim.

If the buried women had two or three brooches each, the artefacts indicate at least three women. As the brooches, pins and iron fragments were not damaged by fire, they probably belong to the inhumation burials. The brooch with the rectangular sheet is from the AD 700 burial as well as the plate with interlace pattern, but it is possible that some of the iron brooches and pins and some other fragments with textiles belong to the AD 1000 burial or to the probable inhumation burial around AD 400.

Table 3: The buried individuals in the Late Iron Age in the West grave with typologically dated gendered equipment.<sup>7</sup>

<b>Name of the burial</b>	<b>Preserved bones</b>	<b>Typological dated equipment</b>	<b>Gender</b>
AD 700	-	-Rectangular iron brooch  -Rectangular plate with an interlace pattern (patrix)  -25 beads	Female
AD 1000	25 small, unburnt bones	-4 cased glass beads?  -2 spindle whorls?	Female

The individual buried around AD 700 is female, according to the grave goods. As none of the objects can definitely be dated to the Late Viking Age, the gender of the individual buried around AD 1000 is unknown. However, some of the beads and the two spindle whorls could possibly be from the Late Viking Age. If so, the gender of this individual also is female. As long as there is no typical male equipment, it is likely that the Late Iron Age burials as well as the Early Iron Age burials are female.

The investigation of the grave goods has revealed a female burial that was not identified through the osteological analysis, the radiocarbon dating or the event-based exploration of the grave. Thus, the number of individuals buried in the West grave in the Late Iron Age has increased to two. The investigation has also indicated that the Viking Age burial was female.

## The Horvnes East grave: burial practices, analyses and presentations of the buried individuals

### Exploration of the Horvnes East grave in an event-based perspective and the buried individuals

<sup>7</sup> Museum number T.22926, NTNU University Museum, Trondheim.

The East grave, excavated in 2008, was a round, low cairn, 7.5 m in diameter (Fig. 5). It was situated on rocks on a low ridge 11-13 meters above the present sea level west of the Botnfjorden. Between the rocks and the cairn, there was a layer of blown sand.

**Fig. 5 The East grave with the large stone cist where people were buried over a period of a thousand years. Parts of the skeletons are visible *in situ* at the bottom of the cist. The stone (49.5 x 28 x 26 cm) with the cross (13.5 x 20 cm) carved by an iron tool, *in situ* in the East grave. The cross is interpreted as a Christian cross to mark the end of the pagan burials in the cist in the Late Viking Age (Photo: Anne Herstad, NTNU University Museum).**

The preparations for the first burial started with the building of a cist of 11 boulders with the flat side turned inwards. One stone was placed in each of the end walls. The height of the stones was 0.6 metres and they were supported outside by big boulders. It is possible that a surrounding circle of oblong, lying limestones was built contemporaneously with the cist. The inside measurements of the cist were 2.6 x 0.6 metres and it was oriented west-southwest – east-northeast, while the land and Botnfjorden is oriented northeast-southwest. The cist in the East grave is longer than the average measure of stone cists in North-Norway (Sjøvold 1962, 148). After the cist was built, more sand was added, before the bottom was covered with flagstones and some type of organic material.

According to the radiocarbon analysis, the first burial in the cist took place around BC 100 (table 4). The buried individual was, according to the osteological analysis, a woman about 50 years old (Holck 2011). She was buried with her head in the west-southwestern end of the cist. Only the femurs were preserved and they were found *in situ*. If there were previous burials, no bones have been preserved. Certainly several burials took place afterwards. An adult man was buried in the cist around AD 300 (table 4) and a woman around AD 400 (table 4). Some of the bones were lying in disorder. They seem to have been moved in connection with new burials and were probably female, according to osteologist Per Holck.<sup>8</sup>

At the bottom of the west-southwest end of the cist, parts of a human skeleton with the cranium supported by two stones, was preserved *in situ* (Fig. 5). During the excavation, this was considered the primary burial. It was an individual, c. 30 years old, according to the osteological analysis of the cranium (Brødholt 2010). The big teeth indicate according to both the osteological analysis and a dental investigation<sup>9</sup> that it was a man. According to the radiocarbon dating, the man was buried around AD 500 (table 4). He was lying on his back with the left arm bent over his breast. The last burial seems to have happened around AD 900 (table 4). The rock of the headland contains much limestone. This is the reason why parts of the skeletons are preserved, but there may also have been buried individuals in the cist from which no bones are preserved.

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Personal communication by osteologist Per Holck 06.02.2012.

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Personal communication by the dentists Synnøve Arntsberg and Sissel Ohm 05.11.2013.

Both the woman buried around BC 100 and the man buried around AD 500 were looking towards Leirfjorden, which connects to the Vefsnfjorden and the inland areas in the east. In the west-southwest part of the cist, there were also 28-29 teeth from at least two individuals.<sup>10</sup> It is possible that these teeth belong to the individuals already identified. One of the sets of teeth was of the same size as those belonging to the cranium and are probably from a man. Both individuals were over 20 years old when they were buried.<sup>11</sup>

Thereby, at least five individuals were buried in the same large stone cist during a period of more than 1000 years. Such continuity cannot be arbitrary. There must have been people in the community who remembered the burials in the cist, and in this way, the memory may have lived in over 1000 years until the Church demanded the burials to be in consecrated cemeteries. Likewise, the position of the bodies with the heads turned to the mouth of the fiord cannot be accidental. It tells of long burial traditions, symbolic meaning of the mouth of the fiord and common understandings of death. There must also have been a common understanding of what happens after death through 1000 years.

Table 4: Radiocarbon dating<sup>12</sup> and osteological analysis of human bones from the Horvnes East grave<sup>13</sup>.

<b>Name of the burial</b>	<b>Lab.nr.</b>	<b><sup>14</sup>C BP</b>	<b>Calibration (68.2 % probability)</b>	<b>Osteological analysis of sex and age</b>	<b>Unburnt bones</b>
BC 100	TRa-3915	2189±54	BC 180-20	Probably female, age unknown	1 bone, 35 g
AD 300	TRa-3913	1758±45	AD 250-390	Probably masculine, age unknown	1 bone, 6.5 g
AD 400	TRa-3914	1707±30	AD 350-450 (60.9% probability)	Typical female, age unknown	1 bone, 11 g
AD 500*	TRa-1321	1707±36	AD 440-560	Probably a young man (20-34 years).	5 small bones, 0.7 g

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Personal communication by the dentists Synnøve Arntsberg and Sissel Ohm 05.11.2013.

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Personal communication by the dentists Synnøve Arntsberg and Sissel Ohm 05.11.2013.

12 OxCal v3.10 Bronk Ramsey (2005); cub 2:5 sd:12 pro usp(chron). Dating, calibration and adjustment of reservoir effect by The National Laboratory for Age Determination, University Museum, NTNU, Trondheim. Osteological analysis by P. Holck and E.T. Brødholt (the cranium).

13 Museum number T.24129, NTNU University Museum, Trondheim.

AD 500*	Tra- 1322	1702±34	AD 440-540	The same young man as the previous	1 bone, 0.7 g
AD 900	TRa- 1323	1235±25	AD 890-970	Sex and age unknown	17 small bones, 0.9 g

\*The same burial

There were stone layers outside the stone cist and the supporting boulders, and on top of the cist. It seems that the grave originally consisted of the cist with the supporting boulders and perhaps the surrounding circle of limestones and some limestones just inside the circle. It is thus possible that the cairn was built, or in any case was given its present appearance, in connection with the last burial.

A stone with a carved cross (Fig. 5) was lying in the southern part of the cairn, with the cross on the upper side, but hidden by another stone. The cross could perhaps be a runic letter, but in the opinion of runologist Jan Ragnar Hagland<sup>14</sup> it is rather a Christian cross. Since the stone was lying in the lower layer, it was probably placed there when the cairn was built. If this happened over 2000 years ago in connection with the first burial, the cross cannot be a Christian symbol. If the stone was placed in the cairn, or carved in a stone in the cairn, in connection with the Viking Age burial, it may signal Christian belief. If so, the cross stone indicates that the last burial was influenced by Christian ideas and that the cairn was built as a closing of the pagan burial rituals being performed there during more than 1000 years.

The analyses have changed my understanding of the Horvnes East grave. It was not a construction built just for two burials, but a collective grave in use during at least a thousand years for both female and male burials. Five individuals are identified, but there could have been more buried individuals from whom no bones are preserved. The grave cist with the supporting boulders is the originally grave monument, while the cairn is the result of later burials, most likely the closing of the grave in the Viking Age.

## Presentations of the individuals in the Horvnes East grave through the grave goods

Some of the grave goods clearly belonged to the young man with the preserved cranium buried around AD 500 (table 4). During the burial, a white quartzite stone used both as strike-a-light stone and whetstone and a piece of clear rock crystal were arranged on his breast. It is known from the Scandinavian folklore that rock crystal was considered an amulet that protected against illness, thirst and intoxication (Grieg 1971, 86). He had a thin bronze dress pin under the chin to fasten his shirt, and a slightly thicker one in the hip region to fasten his coat. Flagstones covered the body.

A badly preserved head of an iron lance belongs perhaps to this man too. It seems to be 35 cm long, up to 6 cm broad and 2.5 cm thick and must have been rather heavy. It was put upon the flagstones, perhaps to protect the man or to prevent him from haunting the living. It is known

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Personal communication 24.04.2015.

from the later Scandinavian folklore that sharp points in the graves were considered to prevent haunting, something one was very afraid of (Hagberg 1929, 12; Hagberg 2015, 553, 631). The lance was pointed in the direction of the head of the man. There was enough space for a 1.8 m long shaft in the cist.

In addition, the burial equipment in the cist consisted of 1 bronze fragment with engraved line decoration, four bronze beads, 17 glass beads, part of an iron fibula, a pair of scissors, one sickle, one big iron knife, one iron hook, several iron and bronze fragments and one flint flake. Among the iron fragments, six could be from brooches. The bronze fragments are probably from beads or brooches. Most of these artefacts are female equipment from the Late Iron Age.

The bronze fragment with the engraved pattern is in all likelihood from a thin-shelled tortoise brooch, probably one with a crouching four-footed animal seen from above. There are several similar brooches from Helgeland (cf. Vinsrygg 1979, figs. 9-11). This type of brooch is probably from the 8<sup>th</sup> century (Sjøvold 1974, 202-203). According to Vinsrygg (1979, 43) the glass beads in her phase 2 (8<sup>th</sup> century), contemporary with this type of tortoise brooch, have cold colours where blue and green dominate. This fits with the East grave, as all the glass beads there are blue except for two, which are green.

There were also two spiral-shaped beads made of a bronze ribbon and two full-bodied beads. Both types are rather usual in the Nørre Sandegård Vest cemetery from the Merovingian Period at Bornholm, for example in grave 77 (Jørgensen / Jørgensen 1997, 46, 190, plate 34). Two spiral-shaped beads made of a bronze ribbon are known from a burial at Ytre Kvarøy not far from Horvnes. Vinsrygg dates this burial to the 7<sup>th</sup> century (1979, 28). There are, however, also spiral bronze beads made of wire at Ytre Kvarøy from the 8<sup>th</sup> century (Vinsrygg 1979, 41).

The flint flake was produced in a bad technique, which demonstrates that it was done after the heyday of the flint technique, so it could belong to a Late Iron Age burial. It was not suited for cutting wood or bone, just for coarse cutting of soft materials as blubber and for scraping of hides.

The glass beads, the tortoise brooch and the bronze beads could be the equipment of the same individual, probably buried in the 8<sup>th</sup> century. The shears and the sickle may belong to this burial or to the one from the Viking period. The 8<sup>th</sup> century burial does not correspond with the radiocarbon dating of the human bones, thus the number of identified individuals buried in the cist has increased to six.

Table 5: The identified individuals in the Horvnes East grave<sup>15</sup>.

<b>The name of the burial</b>	<b>Preserved bones</b>	<b>Typological dated equipment</b>	<b>Gender/sex</b>
BC 100	x	-	Female sex

<sup>15</sup> Museum number T.24129, NTNU University Museum, Trondheim.

AD 300	x	-	Masculine sex?
AD 400	x	-	Female sex
AD 500	x	-Quartzite strike-a-light stone  -Iron lance	Masculine sex and gender
AD 700	-	-Tortoise brooch  -4 bronze beads  -17 glass beads	Female gender
AD 900	x	-Shears  -Sickle	Female gender

## Towards a new understanding of the Horvnes burials

### Burial practice – tradition or innovation?

The event-based analysis of the cairns has given new insight in their construction. They are not the result of one event, but several events during a long span of time. The last burials gave the grave cairns their appearances, in both cases in the Viking Age, perhaps to mark that a new religion was coming, which prescribed burying in consecrated cemeteries. The cross stone in the Horvnes East grave is here interpreted to accentuate this. The long use of the graves indicates a very stable tradition.

Inhumation burial is considered the normal practice in North-Norway in both the Early and Late Iron Age even if cremation occurred, especially in the Early Iron Age. The archaeologist Thorleif Sjøvold (1962, 142-143) identified only three definite and six dubious Early Iron Age cremation burials in North-Norway among 239 sites. Of these, only one of the dubious cremations was situated in Helgeland. This picture has not changed much.

Nine cremation graves, mainly from the Pre-Roman (BC 500-0) and Roman (AD 0-400) Iron Ages, were recently excavated in Kveøy in Troms county. The burials are broadly characterised as cremation pits and patches (Sommerseth 2010, 61), where the remains of the pyre were deposited together with the burnt bones. As the definite cremation burials that Sjøvold (1962, 142-143) could identify were located in Troms, it is possible that cremation for some reason was a more common practice there than in other parts of North-Norway. It is also possible that cremations often are less visible than inhumation burials and therefore not excavated. In Kveøy, the cremation burials were discovered after the topsoil was removed mechanically. Few such excavations have been carried out in North-Norway until now.



Cremation burials were however, known further south along the coast before this excavation practice started.

Cremation, where the bones were buried clean and white, was the normal burial custom in southwestern Norway in the Early Iron Age (Schetelig 1912, 12). The cremation and the burial were not in the same place. This practice is also known from the Early Iron Age in Trøndelag, the landscape just south of Helgeland, especially through the excavations of 210 burials in Meldal (Petersen 1923). An overview of Early Iron Age burials in Trøndelag show that to bury the bones burnt and cleaned was the dominating burial practice, especially in inland and fiord areas (Johansen 2012, 57-63 esp. tab.1, figs.10,14). Cremation burials were the most common in the Roman and Migration Periods in the inland further south in Norway (Østmo / Hedeager 2005, 137-140).

The cremation burial custom around AD 400 in the West grave thus seems to be an innovation in Helgeland. We have to ask if the buried individuals and those who buried them had immigrated to the coast of Helgeland from areas further south, for example the inland of Trøndelag. Isotope analyses of human remains from the Late Iron Age at the coast of the northern part of Norway indicate that people occasionally moved from inland areas to the coast (Naumann / Price / Richards 2014, 322-331).

Cremation burials are even rarer in the Late Iron Age in North-Norway. Sjøvold (1974, 189) identified just two-three such burials there among 737 sites, mostly burials (Sjøvold 1974, 189). This is hardly accidental, even if the lime-rich ground along the North-Norwegian coast preserves bones better than areas with an acid ground. Both cremation and inhumation burials occur in The Late Iron Age in other parts of Norway (Østmo / Hedeager 2005, 139-140).

The inhumation burial custom practised through more than 1000 years in the East grave and in the West grave in the Late Iron Age dominated in North-Norway through the Iron Age. Stone cists were common especially in the Early Iron Age, less so later (Sjøvold 1974, 189).

## Identity and social ties

The long-time use of both graves indicates, as we have seen, long and very steady traditions, which indicate strong social ties to the farming society. However, according to the treatment of the bones, the burials in the East grave are traditional with especially strong ties to the farming society, while the cremation burials in the West grave seem to have weaker ties. Do the buried individuals and their equipment tell the same story about the social ties to the farming society and the Sandnes farm in particular?

The different analyses of the bones and the equipment have completely changed my interpretation of the Horvnes graves. They were not graves for one or two individuals but collective graves; these were not contemporary burials as they were in use over a period of up to one thousand years. This cannot be accidental, but must have been more common than previously supposed. The combination of the osteological and radiocarbon analyses has generated knowledge regarding age and biological sex for the buried individuals and when the burials took place. The analyses of the grave goods have added information about individuals without preserved bones and of gendered equipment, which characterises the buried individuals. In this way, the knowledge of the identities of the buried individuals has increased.

### The Horvnes West grave: burials for women with special skills?

The construction of the grave, the analyses of the human bones and the grave goods show that this modest cairn was used for at least five burials over a period of 600 years and all seem to be female, a rather unique situation. Women traditionally worked close to the farmyard in these coastal areas, while men were fishing, hunting sea mammals and sea birds, trading, plundering, fighting and going to war. Many women and men were needed for working in the fields, looking after livestock, gathering fodder, eggs and down close to the houses in addition to cooking and other household activities such as caring for children and the old and sick. One also needed crew for the boats. The equipment of the West grave does not reflect these activities directly, although the spindle whorls and the textile remains show that the women had produced textiles. This is not surprising, since textile handicraft is a traditional female skill.

There are three whetstones in the Horvnes West grave, one quartzite and two slate. Quartzite whetstones are considered to have been used in the Early Iron Age, especially in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries (Sjøvold 1962, 209). Having sharp edges was very essential in most types of work and handicraft. Therefore, the whetstones were very important, the big ones were used to sharpen the edges of swords and scythes and the small ones for needles. The fact that sharp edges on knives, scissors, awls and other utensils were important when working with food, textiles, leather and other types of handicraft practised on the farm is often overlooked.

All three whetstones are perfect for sharpening the edges of small metal tools and producing smooth surfaces (Fig. 6). The quartzite whetstone has a narrow depression where for example needles could be sharpened. One of the slate whetstones is especially smooth and was used for the last finish when the finest edges were sharpened. The other slate whetstone is somewhat coarser and has a long, narrow depression after the sharpening of an oblong round tool. Both slate whetstones were broken at one end. The whetstones were perfect for sharpening small knives used in working with bone and with walrus tusk. Therefore, I think the women were skilled in such handicraft and had made the coiffure sets of pins and combs themselves. Several small knives found in the burial were suited for such work.

**Fig. 6 Three whetstones from the West grave. They have smooth surfaces after sharpening very fine edges, for example the edges of small knives found in the grave. Women buried in the grave could have used the knives to make small objects of bone and walrus tusk such as this die from a Viking Age grave at Tjøtta, a magnate Iron Age farm south of Sandnes. Marks from small sharp knife-edges are visible. Skilled women could have worked with walrus tusk at both these farms (Photo the die: Svein Skare, University Museum in Bergen; the whetstones: Åge Hojem, NTNU University Museum).**

The woman who was buried with the comb with the runes could have inscribed the runes herself for magical purposes, perhaps for healing from illness. Alu-runes were previously not known so far north. Until this find, the northernmost known alu-runes were from Vestfold and Rogaland in southern Norway (Hagland 2005, 17). Perhaps the women buried in the West grave were not only skilled in handicraft, but also in runes and healing.

If we trust what Egils Saga tells of all the Arctic resources Þórólfr Kveld-Úlfsson grabbed for himself, it is likely that people on the farm, not least women, were skilled in working with such raw materials. At Tjøtta, another magnate farm at the coast of Helgeland, only 22

kilometres south-southwest of Sandnes, a huge die<sup>16</sup> (Fig. 6) probably made of walrus tusk, for a board game was found in a barrow together with whalebone counters (Christie 1837, 184-185; Sjøvold 1974, 15). Both the dice and the counters are of Viking types (Petersen 1914, 87-88). Dice and counters occur in Scandinavia already in the Late Roman Age (Petersen 1914, 78), so such handicraft could have been practised for a long time at the North-Norwegian coast where there was a good supply of walrus tusk. As late as 1835 some walruses were shot outside Helgeland (Kraft 1835, 267). Analyses of North-Norwegian dice and counters show that several were made of teeth (Skomsvoll 2012, 37-40), probably walrus tusk, and this applied especially to dice.

The plate with the interlace pattern is interpreted as a patrix used in the production of sheet metal around AD 700. If so, this is the first evidence of such a handicraft in Helgeland. It is well known that relief brooches in bronze were cast at the farm Gene in Ångermanland in the northern part of Sweden in the Migration Period (Rahmqvist 1983, 97-106). It is probable that finer metal production took place at the coast of Helgeland, close to the main sea route of Scandinavia. The patrix indicates that the woman buried around AD 700 was skilled in the production of sheet metal.

My interpretation is that the West grave was reserved for women with special skills in crafts, especially bone, walrus tusk, metal and textiles. Some of them had magical and healing skills since they used runic letters, even as magic formulas. This burial tradition was maintained over several hundreds of years. During this time, the burial tradition changed from cremation to inhumation. Perhaps the first cremation was for a woman who had moved to the coast of Helgeland from the inland of Trøndelag or from southwestern Norway? The women buried here were part of the farming society because of their skills and did not belong to the families who owned the farms. Therefore, their burial customs were not of the local tradition. We can also note that the metal used in brooches and pins in this grave was iron and not bronze, which one would expect for a woman who belonged to the noble family who ruled the Sandnes farm.

It is hardly accidental that these skilled women were buried in the neighbourhood of the farmyard of the wealthy farm Sandnes, since the rulers of the farm were able to employ people with special skills. They had big houses and enough food to feed artisans. The location of the West grave facing the main sea route indicates perhaps that other wealthy farmers also used the skills of these women and that they were early ambulating artisans. The sea route was the highway to other wealthy coastal farms where they could find work.

#### The Horvnes East grave: Burials for the rulers of the farms?

Both females and males are buried in the cist, so there was no preference in terms of the sex or gender of the individuals buried there. The grave goods is rather traditional for a farming society. The bronze pins of the young man buried around AD 500 show that he was well dressed and the strike-a-light that he was well equipped. The piece of rock crystal gave him protection. The lance gives evidence of a man that could fight from the horseback. The tortoise brooch and the bronze beads belonged to a woman in the farming society. The sickle gives evidence of grain cultivation and the pair of scissors to sheep farming.

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16 Museum number B114, University Museum of Bergen.

The cist, the inhumation burials and the burial equipment indicate in my opinion that the buried individuals had strong ties to the farming society; they probably belonged to the families who ruled the farms. The direction of the bodies in the cist towards the Leirfjorden, which connects to both inland and coastal areas with their resources, is not accidental. One could compare with what Egil's Saga says about the travels of Þórólfr Kveld-Úlfsson to both the east and west to collect commodities for trade, not least through robbery. Members of the dominating farming society, probably the rulers of Sandnes, must have been buried in the cist. The tradition of burying in the same cist over a thousand years, long after such burials normally had ended, can be compared to the continuation of building longhouses with turf walls until the 13<sup>th</sup> century at the magnate farm Sandnes (Berglund 1995, 215-217; Berglund forthcoming). There are other examples in Norway where the old traditional chieftain families continued to build their houses in the 11-13<sup>th</sup> centuries as their forerunners did (Berglund forthcoming). Magnate farms probably strengthened their position by stressing their long traditions concerning both houses and burials, and had therefore no need to change to new customs.

## New perspectives of the Iron Age farming society and burial customs at the coast of Helgeland

The analyses of the Horvnes burials have provided a peephole into the farming society bringing us closer to the individuals living there, both the property owners and a special group of women. In this way, the burials have provided us an insight into the social arena of a coastal farm, here represented by the wealthy Sandnes farm situated not far from the burials covering the same thousand years. The farm and inhabitants there even have a role in Egil's Saga.

The burial practice of collective graves reflects a traditional society where individuals were together also in death. The first known burial in the stone cist in the East grave is almost contemporary with the first activity in the farmyard of Sandnes.

The different burial practices with traditional inhumation burials in one grave, while the second grave contained several cremations in addition to inhumation burials, inform about the social ties to the farming society. The cremation burials with their cleaned bones are unfamiliar in North-Norway, but common further south. This perhaps reflects immigration from areas further south, for example inland areas of Trøndelag. Therefore, my interpretation is that the individuals in the East grave belonged to the family who ruled the wealthy farm Sandnes, while the women in the West grave were skilled foreign women working on the farm, probably ambulating artisans. Such ambulating artisans are well known in the farming society of the last centuries in Scandinavia, but are not much discussed in connection with the Iron Age farming society in northern Norway. The investigations of the two Horvnes graves have revealed that there existed two groups of people at the farm, members of the family of the property owners and ambulating artisans, who were buried in two different collective graves; one grave over a period of 1000 years and the other grave over a period of 600 years.

The closing of both graves with layers of stone in connection with the last burials in the Late Viking Age, probably reflects the transition to Christianity, like the stone with an incised cross. After the formal introduction of Christianity, the church decreed that burials were to be carried out in Christian consecrated places, but the long use of the old graves shows that these

must have been important ritual places for groups of people. Now the places for the rituals were moved, but people continued to keep together in death.

Further analyses of the human bones and of the burial equipment may change the understanding of the Horvnes burials. So far, the results give new perspectives on the farming society and their burial customs at the coast of Helgeland in the Iron Age. DNA and isotope-analyses are being conducted on the human bones and teeth, as well as further non-destructive analyses of parts of the burial equipment.

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